With the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1668), France enjoyed a brief respite from war while Molière and Lully entertained the court of Louis XIV with a succession of ever-grander theatrical divertissements: George Dandin, Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, Les Amants magnifiques, and Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme. Psyché, the Carnaval entertainment for 1671, departed markedly from these earlier comédies-ballets. Molière conceived of this dramatization of the classical fable of Psyche and Cupid as a tragi-comédie et ballet—that is, a play in which the subject and characters are drawn from tragedy but for which the dénouement is happy, and which is intercalated with ballet entrées. Psyché further incorporated the elaborate set-changes and mechanical-effects of the pièce en machines, the most spectacular form of theater in France before the tragédie en musique.

Pressed for time, Molière sought assistance from their rival Quinault, and from the veteran playwright Pierre Corneille—whose Bérénice was then in production at the Théâtre du Palais-Royal. The preface to the first edition of Psyché informs the reader that Molière drew up the plan and organization of the work, while Quinault composed the sung lyrics—with the exception of the plainte italienne, which were probably written by Lully himself. Never had a spectacle been mounted in France with such a collaboration of artistic talent. Voltaire would declare that “Only Racine was missing from this society of great men, in order that all of the most excellent men of the theater that ever were might have been reunited to serve a king who merited being served by such men”.

Psyché was by far the most costly court production of its day. The expense account submitted by Louis-Marie d'Aumont de Rochebaron, “first gentleman of his majesty’s chamber”, reveals that a total of 334,645 livres were spent on this production. In addition to the 21,773 livres paid to the set designer and machinist Vigarani, payments were made to 21 artisans responsible for the fabrication of the sets, decorations, and machinery. Even more costly were the costumes, made by Jean Baraillon and Claude Fortier, “maîtres tailleurs du Roy”. Costume accessories (masks, perruques, feather headdresses, costume jewelry, gloves, silk hose, garters, and shoes) and stage properties (eight vases used in the Second Intermède, the ass ridden by Silenus, the painted devices, the armor, and a wooden horse for the Dernier Intermède) attest to the amount of attention lavished on the details of this production. Other costs included catering,
the security and maintenance of the Salle des Machines, the hiring of Swiss Guards to keep order, and the leasing of carriages. Of special interest are the expenses related to music and dance: 330 livres paid to a boilermaker for trumpets; 200 livres paid to Martin Hotteterre for woodwind instruments; 1400 livres paid to Lully’s copyists; 300, 200, and 150 livres paid respectively to the dancing masters Pierre Beauchamps, Nicolas Delorge, and Antoine Desbrosses; 90 livres paid to the lutenist Leonard Itier; 150 livres paid to the flautist Philbert Rebille; 80 livres paid to Jean-Henry d’Anglebert for the tuning of the harpsichords; and 1156 livres paid for the catering and transport of the acrobats.

Molière and his Troupe du Roy began their 1671-72 season with a gala production of Psyché, complete with “machines, decorations, music, ballet, and generally all the ornaments necessary for this grand spectacle”. During the Lenten break the company resolved to remodel the interior of their playhouse, to have their stage rebuilt in order to accommodate machines, and henceforth to have a permanent theater orchestra of twelve strings. Moreover, the company hired professional singers to perform “on-stage, unmasked, and dressed like the actors”. The first run of 39 performances lasted from 21 July until 25 October of 1671; the second run of 13 performances from 15 January to 6 March 1672; and the third run of 31 performances from 11 November 1672 until 22 January 1673—a grand total of 83 performances. This production utilized significantly fewer singers and approximately half as many dancers. Instead of the 300 singers, dancers, and instrumentalists who appeared in the Dernier Intermède at court, the livret specifies that “a chorus of all the voices and all the instruments, numbering forty, join together in the general dance and end the fête of the wedding of Cupid and Psyche”. The reduced scale of the sets and machine-effects may be attributed to the differences in the performing spaces—for the remodeled stage of the Théâtre du Palais-Royal was neither as wide nor as deep as that of the Salle des Machines.
Excerpts from *Psyché* were also performed during Louis XIV’s extended tour of Flanders in the spring of 1671. Evidently a fully-staged performance of *Psyché* in Lille had been planned, for Carlo Vigarani was to accompany the royal entourage: “The king, who has left Paris for Versailles and Saint-Germain, will go to Flanders; Carlo will accompany him, because his majesty is planning to give this summer at Lille a grand fête with machines”. According to the *Gazette d’Amsterdam*, no fewer than 150 carpenters and workmen, accompanied by numerous painters, left Paris on 13 March “to work on the machines”. While en route to Flanders, Louis and his court were received at Chantilly by the king’s cousin, the Prince de Condé. During the evening of 25 April Condé gave his royal guests a banquet in which excerpts from the *Second Intermède* of *Psyché* were performed in the Cabinet des Peintres. The following day was the fateful *affaire de Vatel*, in which Condé’s maître d’hôtel, despondent that the fish had not arrived for the king’s dinner, did the honorable thing…and took his own life.

For reasons unknown, the Lille performance of *Psyché* was abandoned. Instead, Louis XIV celebrated the near-completion of the fortifications at Dunkerque with a gala production of the Prologue and *Dernier Intermède* of *Psyché*. Vauban hurried the completion of the Royal Bastion so that it could serve as a set for this “bellicose festival” (“fête belliqueuse”)—which the 30,000 soldier-workmen would attend. The strings and chorus were stationed in tents on either side, while trumpets and timpani were positioned in a third tent. Seven hundred drums of the regiment occupied the ramparts, while fifes, oboes, and trumpets occupied the *fosse*, and 80 cannon were placed on the courtine between the basion and the castle. “All of these different sounds and timbres, combined together, created a type of harmony to which the ear had not yet been accustomed, and which gave a pleasure mingled with fright that raised the spirit while entertaining it, and caused one to admire the grandeur and magnificence of the king”.

Upon the king’s return musical excerpts from *Psyché* continued to be performed at court. The *Gazette* reported on 8 August that “The same day, their majesties enjoyed in the evening the performance of airs from the ballet of *Psyché*, which were followed with a superb party attended by all of the ladies”. That winter excerpts of *Psyché* were recycled in a *comédie-ballet*, first performed at Saint-Germain en Laye on 2 December.
Molière wrote *La Comtesse d’Escarbagnas* to serve as a dramatic framework for *Le Ballet des Ballets*, a *pastiche* of *intermèdes* borrowed from earlier *comédies-ballets*—which included most of the Prologue, the *Plainte italienne*, the *Second Intermède*, the *Quatrième Intermède*, and the entire *Dernier Intermède*.

After its 1673 production at the Théâtre du Palais-Royal, *Psyché* was not performed by the Troupe du Roy for 11 years. By then the actors of Molière’s troupe had relocated to the Hôtel de Guénégaud, joined with the actors of the Théâtre du Marais and, in 1681, combined with the actors of the Hôtel de Bourgogne to form the Comédie-Française. In October, November, and December of 1684 the company presented a new production of *Psyché*, for which Marc-Antoine Charpentier was engaged to prepare the score. No other details relating to the musical component of these 23 performances survive, and none of Charpentier’s music has so far come to light.

In 1678, Lully converted the 1671 *tragédie-ballet* into a full-fledged *tragédie en musique*. Philippe Quinault, Lully’s usual librettist, was in disgrace at court over his previous opera *Isis*, and so the task fell to Thomas Corneille (Pierre’s younger brother, who was also an accomplished playwright). Unlike the majority of Lully’s operas, *Psyché* was not created at court; rather, the première took place at the Académie Royale de Musique on 19 April 1678. The *Mercure Galant* states that the opera was extremely well received, that audiences were enthralled by Lully’s music as always, and that they would never have guessed that Corneille had composed the libretto in so little time as three weeks. Whereas it was revived only twice at the Académie Royale de Musique (in 1703 and in 1713), it was also performed in Modena (1687), Lyons (1698), Wolffenbüttel (1686, 1719), and Marseilles (1737).

The operatic version of *Psyché* retained all of the music of the earlier *tragédie-ballet*, and concludes with the same spectacular finale. In Act 5, Cupid flies to Psyche’s aid, Venus appears on her flying chariot, and Jupiter arrives flying on his eagle to reconcile Venus and Cupid and thereby end the division among the gods. He then commands Psyche be taken to the heavens to celebrate their marriage. It begins with a series of state-of-the-art machine-effects: the scene changes to Jupiter’s Olympian palace, Cupid and Psyche are borne aloft on a cloud, a troupe of little Amours arrive in five cloud-
machines to testify their joy in the God of Love, Jupiter and Venus cross in flight and come to rest beside Cupid and Psyche, and a host of gods and their followers arrives on clouds for the wedding. Four Olympians preside at the ballet that follows: Apollo (with the Muses and the Arts), Bacchus (and his constant companion Silenus, together with Egyptians and Menades), Momus (with Polichinelles and Mattasins), and Mars (with a band of warriors).

The celebration opens with a sequence of récits delivered by each of the four presiding gods in praise of Cupid, the guest of honor. Apollo announces that Cupid and Venus have reconciled, Cupid is a happy lover, and Venus has regained her natural sweetness (“Unissons-nous, troupe immortelle”). Bacchus proclaims that, whereas the power of wine is temporary, Love’s power is eternal (“Si quelquefois”). Momus spares only Cupid his ridicule, whereas it is Cupid’s right to spare no-one from love’s arrows (“Je cherche à medire”). Mars concedes that Cupid alone can boast of having defeated the god of war (“Mes plus fiers ennemis, vaincus ou pleins d’effroi”).

In Cartesian fashion, successive entrées explore the various themes introduced by the chorus of gods (“Chantons les plaisirs charmants”): the pains and pleasures of love, and the reconciliation of war (symbolized by trumpets and drums) and peace (symbolized by musettes). Apollo, the nine Muses, and the Arts (“travestis en bergers galants”) form the first entrée. Apollo urges would-be lovers to action and give pleasure its due; it is best to end the cares of day with love’s games at night (“Le dieu qui nous engage”). Two Muses, however, caution those who have not experienced love to avoid its pain (“Gardez-vous, beautés sévères”). Bacchus praises the multifaceted effects of wine: it heightens the sweetness of peace, encourages fighting in wartime, and acts as love’s aphrodisiac (“Admirons le jus de la treille”).

Silenus proposes wine as an alternative to love, which will allow the imbiber to sleep peacefully through the night (“Bacchus veut qu’on boive à longs traits”); in trio with two Satyrs, Silenus concludes that love disturbs rest, while wine brings on “perfect pleasures” (“Voulez-vous des douceurs parfaîtes?”). Momus and his clowns
(mattasins) then sing in praise of ridicule, slander, and laughter (“Folâtrons, divertissons-nous”). Finally Mars commands his soldiers to leave the world in peace and use their articles of war as playthings (“Laissons en paix toute la terre”). Universal reconciliation follows as all four groups join to form the final entrée and repeat the chorus (“Chantons les plaisirs charmants”).