

Chagall designs the stage sets for New York's Metropolitan Opera – 02/25/1967

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Host: Ever since the old Metropolitan has been under the wrecking ball, the new opera house of New York, also known as the Lincoln Center, has been attempting to rejuvenate the lyric theatre repertoire. This is how it came about that, for the new production of Mozart's Magic Flute, Marc Chagall was called upon to design the set and costumes.

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Journalist: As you've seen, Mr. Chagall, on the poster you are dubbed a beginner. This isn't the first time you've designed stage sets, is it?

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Marc Chagall: Oh, I like being considered a beginner at my age.

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Journalist: Does it make you feel younger?

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Marc Chagall: It makes me feel younger. But deep down, here, it's being accustomed to starting out. This is the first time for the opera house. You see, over there, there are orchestra directors, and this is known as their "debut." Other dancers: "debut." So I am a beginner.

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Journalist: This isn't the first time you've designed opera sets?

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Marc Chagall: For the opera, it's the first time. I did the dramatic theatres in Moscow. That was in 1919. I did ballets. I did two in America, Stravinsky's Aleko and Firebird. I did Daphnis and Chloe for the Paris Opera House, by Ravel. The splendid Ravel, the music of Ravel.

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Journalist: And do you enjoy designing stage sets and costumes for the opera? Of all your activities, which is your favorite?

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Marc Chagall: To be honest, I'm telling you I'd like to do paintings at my house, in Saint-Paul-de-Vence. Yes. Do paintings for myself. But I like people. They ask me to do this and that, make stained glass windows, murals. And I can't turn them down. Even though my wife isn't very happy about it.

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Journalist: She doesn't like New York.

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Marc Chagall: She loves it. I really love New York, but I'd like to be in my studio in Saint-Paul, making paintings.

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Journalist: Haven't you ever thought of designing stage sets for the Paris Opera House?

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Marc Chagall: Listen, honestly, no one has asked me to. But it would be nice if someone would. It's your place to say.

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Journalist: I'm the one who should say so. But I did say it.

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Marc Chagall: To move it to Paris, because it's thanks to Paris and thanks to France that I'm serving Mozart these days.

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Journalist: Is it fun to be working for Mozart?

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Marc Chagall: Yes, it must be said... I did the Bible and I did Mozart. The two are similar, you could say.

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Host: Chagall's curtains, sets, costumes, and backdrops turned into, here in the United States, a huge controversy the day after the premiere, which was a great success, both from an artistic standpoint and in high society. Opera aficionados found that Chagall distracted them from listening to Mozart's music. You can't look and listen at the same time, they said. The others, those who sometimes tend to nod off at the opera, really loved the designs, and their interest in lyric works was reawakened. It's been a heated debate since last Sunday. And the debate will undoubtedly cross the borders of the United States. What we know for sure is that thanks to Chagall, *The Magic Flute* will sell out for months and months at New York's Lincoln Center, and that Mozart might win over some new fans. This proves that, in the end, bringing Chagall and Mozart together maybe wasn't such a bad idea.