

Inauguration of the Ceiling at the Garnier Opera House Painted by Marc Chagall – 09/21/1964

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Host: In the field of arts, Jean-Albert Cartier, an inauguration this morning at the Paris Opera House.

Jean-Albert Cartier: Indeed, the famous, the very famous ceiling by Chagall at the Opera House. This famous ceiling has finally been unveiled, and it raised so many heated and even contradictory discussions, before anyone even saw it. This morning, while the ceiling was being presented to the press, Mr. Georges Auric first thanked Chagall for this prestigious gift. "I believe," he said, "that Chagall's ceiling is an honor for the Opera House." Then it was Chagall himself who spoke before the journalists, specifying that he wanted to, "like a mirror, reflect the dreams, the creations of the actors and musicians, like a bouquet, singing like a bird without theory or method." But above all, I believe it was useful to ask Chagall what the story of the ceiling was.

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Marc Chagall: Of course, of course, when Malraux suggested it, I was flabbergasted. It's true. I was quite stunned. I felt that it was something quite serious and it lasted several months, you know, before I woke up, before I... there was no way I could touch the colors. I was stunned. But well, my wife again, I must say, she was the one who said enough with the torment, do something, try to make something, draw some sketches, some mockups and you'll see if it's okay.

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Jean-Albert Cartier: Were there a lot of changes between the mockup and the final result?

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Marc Chagall: Oh, you know, the mockups are one thing and the results, that starts another story. Still, and yes, it changes, you work, you change, you change... The mockup is a beginning, but you almost can't compare it with the result.

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Jean-Albert Cartier: What are the different themes?

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Marc Chagall: There's no theme, you know. Are there themes in our lives? In our existence? In this planetary motion, there's always life. It turns into something and after that, it becomes a symbol. It becomes a theme, if you will. But above all, I don't like themes. I don't begin with themes.

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Jean-Albert Cartier: You worked in natural light, but when your ceiling was installed, the auditorium was lit with artificial light. Did the color change?

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Marc Chagall: That's a very interesting question. But you have to think of all of that instinctively. You have to think of everything. I had to think of the light that's over there and there is never any daylight. There never will be. I had to think about the red color of the velvet, the decorative gold. The wonderful Garnier architecture couldn't be left out. It's a wonderful thing. It mustn't feel like 100 years have gone by, right? I had to think about

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working in harmony with this huge masterpiece. I had to think of that. I thought of bringing a kind of bouquet on behalf of all of us, in a tribute to Garnier from our own times.

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Jean-Albert Cartier: Chagall designed his ceiling of more than 200 square meters [2150 sq. ft.] like a multicolored flower with five main colors: blue, yellow, red, white, and green, featuring characters from the most famous ballets and operas: *Giselle*, *Swan Lake*, *Boris Godounov*, *Romeo and Juliette*, *The Magic Flute*, etc. And he wasn't even afraid to include those titles in his own handwriting painted on the ceiling. But in every one of those colored areas there are other hues, such that the overall composition retains its unity and melts into an incandescent symphony of sound. The overall impression, by the way, that this ceiling gives, is that of joy, of movement, of the intensity of life, yet it doesn't clash with the burnished gold of the decor. It's a river of precious colors like no princess will ever wear, not on stage, not in the audience. Faithful to Chagall's style and completely appropriate for theatrical fantasy, we next asked, after he spoke with Mr. Georges Auric, what his personal opinion was.

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Georges Auric: I think it's simply a wonderful gift that Marc Chagall has given to the Opera House. And I also think there might be a big surprise for a lot of our spectators because, in my opinion, it fits in wonderfully with the whole Garnier auditorium. And I imagine with pleasure that many of those who held back their opinions on the subject beforehand will see their feelings change completely on Wednesday night.

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Jean-Albert Cartier: After Georges Auric, we questioned Mr. Biasini, Director of Theater, Music, and Cultural Action.

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Emile Biasini: The Opera House now has a ceiling. You see it: a ceiling at the Opera House. It's hard to imagine what was there before. And I think this splash of color, that joy that filled the building through this ceiling, isn't out of place here. This is absolutely where it belongs. And one can say that the Opera House was truly waiting for this ceiling. It seems like everyone was rather surprised by the harmony that exists between this joy of colors, this appearance of twirling, exalted colors, and the building with which it fits so well.

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Jean-Albert Cartier: Do you think that art lovers will come to the opera now, in addition to music lovers?

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Emile Biasini: I hope so. It would be an additional and happy result of this manifestation. And it could create an exchange of new currents between art lovers and music lovers. The sounds and colors speak to one another, as I believe Baudelaire said. And here, they must come together, to the delight of our eyes, minds, and hearts. And today the celebration at the Opera House is gaining a truly new feature of exceptional quality, which should draw many additional audiences to the Opera House.

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Jean-Albert Cartier: To finish, I'll add that on Wednesday night at the Opera House, of course, an exceptional celebration that those familiar with it have named the "ceiling gala." We don't know whether the spectators will keep their noses in the air all night long. Whatever happens, they'll be given the option to watch the ballet dancers parade on stage, and of course *Daphnis and Chloe* with the stage sets and costumes designed by Chagall.