

## Inauguration of the New Ceiling at the Garnier Opera House Painted by Marc Chagall – 09/24/1964

00:00:03

*Lambert:* Never has Ravel been so poorly listened to as last night at the Paris Opera House. Musical ecstasy is not what caused most of the spectators to raise their eyes to the sky. Instead, it was the new ceiling, André Malraux's dream come true, through the magic of Chagall's paintbrush. Mr. Malraux presided over the evening's celebration and witnessed the triumph of his project. To his right, a short, white-haired man for whom the spectators—including celebrities such as François Mauriac, Jacques Chaban-Delmas, and Mrs. Georges Pompidou—for whom the spectators gave an enthusiastic standing ovation.

00:00:31

*Lambert:* Well, the production was *Daphnis and Chloe*, but the real show was the ceiling of the Opera House. Don't look at ours! No, no, no! And then, I spent so much time looking at the ceiling throughout the evening that I lowered my head a little. Yes. You see, the evening was presided over by Mr. André Malraux, to present Marc Chagall's ceiling to the audience. We've talked about it a lot already. You know, our group saw the ceiling at a private presentation. And this time, it was a gala that was a little peculiar because the ballet dancers paraded on stage, which is a show in itself. And then there was the *Jupiter* symphony by Mozart. At the very moment when the ceiling was lit, that's when you could truly see it. We didn't really hear the *Jupiter* symphony, because we were looking at the ceiling. And at that moment, something happened that seemed to be rather symbolic and strange: Mozart went back to becoming a composer of background music, if you will. In fact, that's what he was during his lifetime, because, poor man, he was forced to. And here, this music became the background music for looking at that ceiling. Something was missing at that moment, perhaps sorbet. It was an eventful evening in the truest sense of the term. And then finally, finally, in the second half, the ballet *Daphnis and Chloe*, which I spoke to you at length about, about two years ago, I believe. *Daphnis and Chloe* by Maurice Ravel, choreographed by Georges Skibine, with stage sets by Marc Chagall. So it was a Chagall festival that night at the Opera House. And of course, we were able to determine that night whether this new ceiling genuinely had enormous qualities, which is a huge work of art, undeniably everyone recognizes it, even those who were reluctant. There's no doubt that this ceiling by Chagall is a beautiful work of art. Well, we wondered whether it would truly fit with in the context of the building and the productions that would be shown there. Would this ceiling be shocking? Well, I must say that it doesn't shock people. Of course, it isn't shocking because Chagall made the effort required to ensure the colors, whichever they were—much more vibrant than everything else you see in the Opera House—but that the colors could coincide exactly with the Garnier palette, if you will, the overall decor and architecture of the Garnier auditorium. But there is also an advantage to this ceiling: it appears to be heightened. If you want to make the Opera House feel airy, I personally admit that the decor, the former ceiling, well I don't remember it at all even though I went to the opera quite often. Now, I can sort of see what it was, but I admit that this ceiling, I never saw it. The chandelier stood out, whereas now the ceiling itself is illuminated and visible. The spectators still had a slightly curious impression, because it still seems like the Opera House is under renovation, like cleaning a monument, you know, to modernize it and people are expecting something new to be made. But it also seems like if we could refurbish the gilding, clean it because the interior needs to be re-gilded, dusted, and refurbished, because of course, sometimes this is

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done at the Opera House, I think then we could make a clearer judgment. At any rate, this ceiling is very beautiful. It's very beautiful, it is, we saw it quite a bit this evening because it was the focus of attention. We'll see it less on the other evenings because we'll be watching the productions at the Opera House. At any rate, it's an event, an event. There are many reasons to go to the opera. First the show, I hope, the music above all, and the staircase at the Opera House, and the Opera House ceiling. Yes, of course, right? But that said, this is something interesting. Anyway, it was a memorable evening. There was very enthusiastic applause for Marc Chagall, who was there, and enthusiastic applause for the ceiling. Sophie Dumoulin came, and then, dangerously, she walked around a bit with the microphone. She asked questions of the audience members because there were guests, but there were also spectators who paid for their tickets that evening. And it was an open box office. There were a few spots remaining and there were spectators. Sophie Dumoulin, have you finished your stroll?

00:04:59

*Sophie Dumoulin:* Yes. These spectators, like you, dear Lambert, really admired the ceiling. Some found it perhaps a little anachronistic, meaning they were a bit shocked by so much light. Because while this ceiling, like you just said, appears to raise the cupola of the Opera House, at the same time it reflects a considerable amount of light and the regular opera-goers were used to, might I say, used to perhaps more darkness and shadows. Some were a bit shocked, all while recognizing the great value of Chagall's work. Before joining them, among these regular spectators, among those loyal opera-goers, I first went to the official dressing room and I met the man responsible for the ceiling, the minister André Malraux.

00:05:41

*André Malraux:* It's always the same problem. There are a certain number of people who dislike anything they've never seen before. The people who were here and who just applauded had come unbiased. They recognized the poetry. They clapped. Well, madam, so much the better! I was sure of one thing: Chagall, who boasts both one of the greatest skill sets of our time as a colorist and a rather rare poetic power, would bring, as I said earlier, poetry. That's the first thing. I was also certain that it would match the music. And as for being a good fit for Garnier, it was naturally rather uncertain. But I was pretty sure we'd get confirmation through a kind of opposition. And that's what happened. Because of course, this ceiling doesn't look like Garnier at all. But does a Chagall painting shown in a frame today look that much like its frame? Well this time, at least, the frame is fun. And we were saying it earlier, when there was darkness, well in the end, the works of Pierre Garnier had been transformed into something like a Sicilian cave.

00:06:52

*Marc Chagall:* Thank you very much. Thank you.

00:06:54

*Sophie Dumoulin:* Marc Chagall thanks you. Now, all your friends are coming to greet you after applauding the ceiling.

00:07:00

*Marc Chagall:* But I don't know what to say because you know, I was blinded by...

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00:07:04

*Sophie Dumoulin:* Are you worried?

00:07:06

*Marc Chagall:* Very, very, very worried. But I can't say anything because I'm all wet. I still have a cold. And everybody kept kissing me. I think there's lipstick on my lips. Hello. Hello. What else can I say? Malraux said all there was to say.

00:07:25

*Sophie Dumoulin:* Now, after the official celebrities, after collecting the emotional impressions of the painter, we'll take our microphone to the balconies of the Opera House and ask what the audience thinks, what the regulars think.

00:07:38

*A visitor:* It's too intimidating. I'm sorry, don't blame me.

00:07:43

*A visitor.* Yes, there's a lot of light and really that's very good for our Opera House, which was starting to feel a little darkened.

00:07:49

*A visitor.* It doesn't match at all. It's a very beautiful ceiling indeed, but it doesn't go with the Garnier setting at all. Now, it doesn't matter because since no one looks at the ceiling of the Opera House except for tonight, no one will notice that it's Chagall's, not anymore than we noticed Lenepveu's in the past.

00:08:06

*A visitor:* I think it's a very beautiful Chagall but it doesn't match the ceiling at all. I mean, in my opinion. It would be nice as a stage curtain or something like that, but it's a very nice Chagall, but up there I think it doesn't fit.

00:08:16

*A visitor.* No, I'm sorry, I didn't like it at all. It isn't in the style that I hoped it would be. And I was already surprised when the so-called commission was ordered. In fact I was very disappointed. Despite the fact that I'm very proud he's a Jew, because I'm a Jew myself.

00:08:33

*A visitor.* I loved it and I was surprised too because I saw the newspapers and I think that afterwards, after I saw the ceiling, it's horrible what happened to him with the newspapers, but that's all I can say. I loved it. It's absolutely sensational.

00:08:50

*A visitor.* We're from Australia. Lady Williams of Australia, who came to Paris just to see the ceiling.

00:08:58

*Sophie Dumoulin:* Did you like it, madam?

00:09:02

Lady Williams of Australia: It is just marvelous and wonderful!

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00:09:06

*Lambert:* You understood.