

L'Art Vivant of October 10, 1966: Stage Sets and Costumes by Chagall for Mozart's *Magic Flute*

00:00:03

Georges Charensol: Well, we have another great painter. He's of our era. He's our friend. He's Marc Chagall. He's here. He just got in from New York. He went to the opening of the Metropolitan, which is adorned with two immense compositions that he dedicated to music. And I will ask you, my dear Chagall, to say a few words about the inspiration that presided this pair of works, which you made in Paris and which were an American commission, but which nonetheless owe a lot to France because you made them in a studio at Gobelins, which was made available to you by the minister of cultural affairs. When I saw the sketches for these two compositions, dear Chagall, I thought of children. I thought of that spirit of childhood which has never left you. But all the same, I'd like it if you could explain to our listeners what you wanted to express.

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Marc Chagall: When I'm asked to explain, I'd like to answer: ask those children. In their eyes, maybe there you could read the answers to your questions. We want happiness in light colors, unsullied by the tumults of the earth, so that the art will enter into heaven like what happened when Mozart's *Magic Flute* was introduced. I wanted to surround myself with the colors and music of these characters, whose faces are always smiling. Smiling calmly despite the fact that their souls are often covered in clouds of nostalgia. I attempted to express all of that on these walls as best I could. The heroic figures of music are found there: singers, dancers. I don't know how many people will accept my words, my colors, and their rhythms in my paintings.

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Georges Charensol: Marc Chagall, you just mentioned *The Magic Flute* and you're telling us that it inspired you often when you were painting both of these large compositions. But aren't you also making the stage sets and costumes for Mozart's opera for the Metropolitan as well?

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Marc Chagall: *The Magic Flute* will be on the program in February and I'll be there to oversee the execution of the stage sets and costumes.

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Georges Charensol: I believe it's an extremely important work of art. How many costumes did you design?

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Marc Chagall: Oh my goodness! There are maybe a hundred characters. I don't know exactly. There are maybe a dozen stage sets.

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Georges Charensol: And a dozen stage sets. And for each stage set, and each costume, you made a mockup?

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Marc Chagall: Yes, and I also have to color the costumes. Afterwards, it's really embroidery.

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Georges Charensol: You have another project which has nothing to do with America. It's for

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France, which we're all interested in, since our listeners are aware that you've just given something wonderful to our country, to your country, since you're French. It isn't the Biblical Message, is it?

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Marc Chagall: If one day it's on display in Paris, which we'll address later and it might be easier for me, to give you some more concrete information.

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Georges Charensol: Yes, but still, one could say right away that the city of Nice will receive this entire collection of paintings and gouaches, and also, I believe, some extraordinary etchings you made to illustrate the Bible. And the collection will be placed in a monument that the city of Nice is planning to build on Cimiez hill.

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Marc Chagall: The land has been purchased in Nice and we shall see what we shall see.

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Georges Charensol: You're a tireless worker. You never stop, whether it's at your studio in Vence, at your house in Paris, or at your hotel in New York. I know you work nonstop. No one would believe that in May, a vast exhibition will be opening in Zurich to celebrate your eightieth birthday. It seems absolutely incredible when we look at you. Does it seem real to you, Chagall?

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Marc Chagall: That's a question that touches me. Yes, it doesn't feel like it, but I'm sad.

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Georges Charensol: Why?

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Marc Chagall: Especially at night.

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Georges Charensol: But at night you sleep very well!

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Marc Chagall: Not necessarily. You're not so sure. But I'm kind of sad.

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Georges Charensol: You're a bit sad? Even when you're as wonderfully young as yourself, does it really matter that you're 80?

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Marc Chagall: Even when I look at you, I'm jealous. You're younger than me.

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Georges Charensol: A little bit, a little bit. We've known each other for so long I feel like we're contemporaries.

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Marc Chagall: Well ... maybe I work to forget myself.