

## Marc Chagall's Ninetieth Birthday – 07/08/1977

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*Didier Ades:* The concert last night at the Mediterranean Palace, in Nice, was exceptional. On stage were an improvised choir with singers named Rostropovitch, cellist Isaac Stern, violinist Galina Vichne— I don't think I'll ever be able to pronounce it. Can you help me? No. Well, Vich-nev-ska-ia, thank you! A soprano. In addition to other performances, all of these individuals came together as a choir and we're going to listen to them now. [Applause and "Happy Birthday" music]

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*André Parinaud:* Let's not forget that it's Didier Ades's birthday as well.

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*Didier Ades:* Yes, but all the fanfare wasn't for me, I'm afraid. It was for Marc Chagall's ninetieth birthday. And these sounds were recorded by our friends at FR3 in Nice. I must add that Paul Paray was conducting the orchestra, and Paul Paray is older than Chagall. He's 91. André Parinaud, you know Chagall well. Chagall is probably one of the most famous artists in the world. If you had to introduce him to someone arriving from another planet, if you had to define him, how would you do it?

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*André Parinaud:* Well. First of all, let's remember that he arrived in Paris in 1910. He came to Paris to breathe, and see, what he called "light-freedom." And he hasn't changed. And today, in the last conversation we had with him, he told us—we were talking about the Titian, and he said: "With age, he conquered his freedom." I think that Chagall has conquered his freedom. First, he's someone who is both wonderfully imaginative and an extraordinarily methodical man. For example, he's worked on a regular basis, ever since he started painting, he paints everyday, never missing a single day. And I think this method explains, if I may, both his excellent physical health and also his capacity for renewal. When he's composing a painting, he can stop and then continue with the rest of the painting the next day, exactly like a weaver picks up the stitches in a tapestry. It's rather marvelous to realize you can invent an imaginary repertoire with methodology. Well, he perfected this method. That's his chemistry, his love of color. I think it's also important to say that he loves music and he works while listening to music. For example, Mozart, Monteverdi, Stravinsky, Schoenberg. He also loves modern music and he combines both the wonderful past and Russian folklore. His beloved childhood memories. There's a whole period in his painting where all of the Russia of his childhood explodes in his paintings, is present in his paintings. And he kept his inner child alive. His blue eye, which is a kind of childlike, astonishing eye, is an evocative reflection of this childhood wonder. What else can I tell you? That this method, that this love for music serve an inspiration that is absolutely continuously renewed. Maybe one could still say that for the past few years, he seems to be, for example, a little mystic, a bit religious. His latest creations are stained glass windows entitled "Peace," "Noah's Ark," and "David's Psalms," you see? But at the same time, we'll see at the exhibit taking place at the Louvre in October, sixty paintings he made in the past ten years and that completely renew his inspiration. His themes were as varied as Icarus and Don Quixote. You see? He's a painter and artist who wakes up every morning with a different dream. I believe that defines Marc Chagall.

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*Didier Ades:* Now we know who this character is, the public persona, that imagination. I mean it's rather astonishing to see that, at age 90, every day, every day, every single day, he has a new idea and is able to make something of it. I kind of reminds me of Picasso, but what is the man like now, in private?

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*André Parinaud:* Well, let's say he's an epicurean. He's a man who loves food, but obviously he keeps his appetite under control. The last few times we had lunch together—he's not supposed to eat cured meats—and when I took some, he stole a slice of salami. I mean, he knows how to control his cravings, but I think this is an accurate reflection of that. He's always open to being in awe. He's always open to enjoying food, to laughing. He's someone who is—dare I say—ageless, because he combines childhood with the experience he's gained over 90 years. He goes for a stroll regularly. His studio, for example, is wonderfully tidy. It looks like a chemistry lab or an operating room. Everything is carefully organized and that's one of the most surprising things, I tell you, that this wonderful man of marvels is also methodical at the same time.

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*Didier Ades:* Chagall is a man who is, apparently, comfortably wealthy and yet he has a life, a life, not narrow, but simply *bourgeois*. What's a Chagall worth? A painting?

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*André Parinaud:* A fortune! I mean he's among the four or five most expensive painters in the world. I sort of depends on... It's impossible to determine the value of a Chagall because there might be watercolors, gouaches, there may be canvases, depending on the period, and on the dimensions of the painting. But let's say...

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*Didier Ades:* Points.

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*André Parinaud:* Before, Chagall paintings are no longer sold based on points, right, that's over. He has completely surpassed that notion, but you can't buy a Chagall for less than 50,000 francs and that's something. And some of his works are worth impressive amounts, around 50 million or 100 million old francs, depending on the size and the era. We haven't yet documented any heated battles around Chagall for a good reason: most of Chagall's paintings are in major museums or owned by collectors who aren't selling them. We'll have to wait quite some time before we see what has happened with Picasso, for example, meaning battles between fans.

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*Didier Ades:* It must be said that Chagall, over the course of his life, has traveled a lot. Since 1949, he's been settled in France, in Saint-Paul-de-Vence. I think he'll stay there until the end of his life. But Sampiero Sanguinetti, who is one of our counterparts at FR3 in Nice, asked Marc Chagall why, why Saint-Paul-de-Vence?

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*Marc Chagall:* Destiny willed me here and, for me, destiny is always what guides us. I believe destiny took me here. My wife came here. My second wife came here. I always believe in

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destiny. I live in it. It's also my home country. Without it, I wouldn't be living. Without France, I wouldn't exist.

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*Didier Ades:* So without France, he wouldn't live. Is Chagall the only one? I remember that France was the host country, and then it wasn't any more. Did it become that again?

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*André Parinaud:* Yes. There are many great painters who settle in Paris. I could mention Bacon, for example, who just set up a studio in Paris.

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*Didier Ades:* Is it the light in Paris?

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*André Parinaud:* The light of Paris, and a certain climate amongst the intellectuals, the critics, the poets. There is a swirl of ideas from people we don't find in New York anymore, for example, where life is perhaps too hectic. Paris is regaining its status, I don't mean, of a fashionable city in the art world, but of a livable city you can work in. That's already something.

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*Didier Ades:* Well, we're happy to be in Paris, while others are on vacation right now, in France or abroad. At France Inter, it's a few seconds past 2:00 p.m.