



STREAMING THE FIRST CENTURY

SESSION 2: Parlez-vous français?

SPANNING THE DECADES: Lighting Edition

Featuring: Thomas Munn (SF Opera former lighting director and lighting and set designer) and Justin Partier (SF Opera lighting director)

(transcript read time ~ 30 minutes; audio run time ~ 32 minutes)

[BEGIN AUDIO]

NARRATOR: Welcome to San Francisco Opera's Centennial celebration.

JUSTIN PARTIER [JP]: I am Justin Partier. I am the current Lighting Director at the San Francisco Opera. I've been here since 2018. And I welcome Tom Munn to the program.

TOM MUNN [TM]: And I'm Tom Munn. I came in 1976. I came in as a lighting designer and lighting supervisor ended up as a semi-resident set designer for the first two years, for sure, and continued with the sets and lights until I think it was, [01:15:00] like, 1980 or '81 is when I gave up the scenery, because the job was getting too big, and I went on just as resident lighting designer until 2001 and then came back as a guest lighting designer. I forgot the title they gave me, something like (laughter) Designer Emeritus, something like that.

JP: So, Tom, (laughter) it's great to see you, great to have you here. How did you first get into theater and opera and lighting as a whole? Like, where did you start?

TM: I got interested in lighting in high school. In Connecticut, we had a new high school with a regular theater with a fly loft and lighting positions, or at least a couple of lighting positions.

The major manufacturing in town was General Electric, and they were making dimmers at that time, as well as lighting control for industry. And so they put in a big light board, an auto transformer board with all the interlocking mechanisms and whatnot. So I got interested in that in high school, and then decided I wanted to pursue it in college, and at that time my parents were not so excited about me going into a theater program initially, so they wanted me to get a, quote, "general education." So I started at St. Michael's College in Winooski, Vermont, and I chose that mainly because I was a skier. (laughter)

JP: That's a good excuse, right?

TM: And managed to get on the ski team, and got a free pass to Stowe, Vermont for the season, so that -- I practically failed my first year of college because I was on the slopes the whole time. (laughter) Did summer-stock that summer, and then transferred to Boston University as a result, and then studied at BU with some greats at the time: Horace Armistead, Raymond Sovey, and various people from New York who were also teaching.

BU had a great program.

JP: Well, they still have a great program.

TM: Their painting program was terrific for scene painting. And as a designer at Boston University, even though I wanted to be a lighting designer, they didn't have a lighting design major at the point, or even a lighting design program, per se, which was a benefit to me, because I got to light everything. You know, I mean, I was the one who was really interested in lighting, and so I got to sort of pick and choose the shows that I could do, or wanted to do, 'cause they wanted me to do everything. (laughs)

JP: Right, and it's a little trial by fire, 'cause you're a kid --

TM: (laughs) Yeah, that's right.

JP: -- you know, learning how to light shows. You get to, like, make the mistakes, right

TM: And it was with great people, you know.

JP: Right.

TM: They had terrific directors, and I got to work with Margaret Webster and all these great old classic actors and directors. And so I did that at Boston University, but one of the things we had to do at BU -- it was a requirement -- was you had to take four years of scene painting if you were in the design department --

JP: Right.

TM: -- and you had to take these other courses. And I took my first set design course, and Horace Armistead, who was the teacher, said, "You know, you should be in set design." He said, "This is where you should be." "You've got the talent for painting and for whatnot." And so that's what I did. I switched over to set design.

JP: And then you moved to New York after that?

TM: Well, first I went to Expo '66. Nineteen sixty-six, Expo Montreal. So I graduated, and I got a job for the Expo '67, as a crew chief on a night crew at the Wilfrid-Pelletier theater, (laughter) in lighting.

After Expo I went to New York, and I was in New York assisting, designing, as I said, mostly in set design: model building, working for Ming Cho Lee, David Mitchell, Doug Schmidt, Martha Eck. I'm trying to think of all the people I've assisted. (laughter)

And, of course, one thing after another, that always led to a design job, because, you know, they were either busy, couldn't do all the shows, and, when I was working for Doug, said, "Oh, you should do this. I can't do it. You wanna do it?" So I got to do a couple of off-Broadway shows.

And then I took a position with Columbia University, 'cause they were starting a department and went in as, actually, teaching technical theater and lighting. Again, they didn't have a specific program, but it was just a general. I just did that part time while I was painting at Lincoln Center, and I got a job as scenic artist for Lincoln Center. And that was with Doug Schmidt, when he was there. And then I painted in studio painting, basically supported myself scene painting, and then assisting, and finally got a break and did a couple of off-Broadway shows and dance shows in New York, and then did a couple of Broadway shows, [*Boo Hoo?*]. Nothing ever succeeded. (laughter)

JP: So how did you get from that to coming to San Francisco?

TM: I was doing a lot of industrial shows. I got into the industrial shows. I was doing a lot of industrial shows, pretty much all over. Every resort both in Europe and America, Hawaii, etc., etc. And so I had a studio in New York, where I was designing, and I had my own studio, and I had three people working for me, assisting, at the time.

And did a couple shows, and then I did a show in Europe. I'd been working with Bob Israel at the time, and Bob was working in Amsterdam, and said, "Oh, you gotta come to Amsterdam and do something in Amsterdam," he said. So something came up, and I went to Amsterdam, did the first show there, and that was '77. I think it was. Was it '74 or '77? I cannot remember now. But I did a musical for the 700th anniversary of the city of Amsterdam, and [Roy Levin?] was the director. Hans De Roe was the head of the Opera, and the Opera had a 50 percent stake in producing the production. And then Hans DeRoe, as a result of that, asked me to design several productions for Amsterdam –

JP: That's amazing.

TM: -- for the Netherlands Opera –

JP: Right.

TM: -- and I had designed a production of *Macbeth*, which was an early multimedia production, and somebody -- I can't remember whether it was Nancy Adler or Kurt Adler or somebody who was traveling in Europe, evidently seeing the production, and San Francisco Opera is

looking to replace the current lighting designer, and they had only had a lighting designer for -
- much like the Met. You know, it was the master electrician for years, up until just two years
or three years before I came. George Pantages had done the lighting with the director, you
know, and it was based on, -- he would do the rep plot. They still had a lot of the old ... the
resistant board was still heavily used when I first came in, up until I came in. And he
recommended me to come to the Opera, and so I interviewed with Kurt Adler and with
several people and got the job. Thought I was crazy.

JP: (laughs) I mean, you had done some opera, but had you...?

TM: I'd only done two operas.

I came in thinking... Well, they had asked me, first of all, to do *Tosca*. And they had mentioned
Tosca and one other opera. And I didn't realize when we first began talking, they were talking
about a whole season. And then the first interview I had, then they said, no, it would be for
the season. It would be from June till December. And I said, "I don't know." (laughter)
Because I really didn't know any of the operas. I knew *Tosca*, and *Barber of Seville*. I had done
a *Barber of Seville*. That was one. And I had done the *Macbeth*. And when I came here, that
was '76. So ...

JP: How was that first season, comparatively, to what you'd done prior? Was it a lot of big
learning curve, or you...?

TM: Well, it was. The first season was a big learning curve, there was no question. I discovered
there was a lot of things that I felt were just totally inefficient, if we were gonna be in rep, that
we could improve.

JP: Right.

TM: And getting around the politics of making any change, you know, no matter where you work,
even today, the same thing happens, you know.

JP: Right.

TM: Getting people to get out of their routine was a challenge. Adler really embraced that, 'cause
he loved to stir things up, anyway, you know. (laughs) So they would have to tear down
scenery on a daily basis. A rehearsal schedule might look like morning you'd have act one of
whatever opera, you know, was in the rep at the time that you were teching and preparing,
and then in the afternoon you would do a changeover, and there was times when we would
actually do a rehearsal, 'cause it was left over from the night before, of, say, the third act, or
whatever needed to be done, hadn't been done. On the morning, change over, do another
rehearsal of another opera in the afternoon, and then change over and do an opera that night.

JP: Jeez.

TM: I remember one time coming down (laughter) to the production desk, and it was for *Tosca*, and I came down, and I set out all my paperwork, and it wasn't *Tosca*. (laughter) It was, like, *Die Walküre* or something or other. And I heard the first chords of the orchestra. I said, "Oh, shit." (laughter)

"I don't have the right paperwork."

JP: Right. Especially, I mean, comparatively, how much you were doing then to how much we do now is substantial.

TM: Yeah, it was a... It was a 14-16-hour day.

JP: Yeah.

TM: Sometimes... There were days where we went round the clock. We had a night crew come in. That was not infrequent, where we would have a night crew. As the operas got bigger, and heavier -- because in those days there was still a lot of drops, a lot of flattage and lightweight scenery. It had to, because they had to break it down and store it.

JP: Right.

TM: When we got the Patch, we started to get a lot more built scenery.

JP: Well, and that's the thing for me that is a big change from coming from a theater background, and now in this opera position, is the grandiose opera design, right?

TM: Yeah.

JP: Yeah, I tell this story about, like, my first opera growing up in San Francisco and New York was seeing the *Bohème* in I think it was '93 -- walking in and seeing this grandiose set. And I'd done small theater in high school and college. Seeing that, totally changes your perspective of what you can do scenically and lighting, to really improve upon the art form.

And I just remember sitting there watching and being completely in awe of, you can turn on one light and it can completely change the way the set looks --

TM: Right.

JP: -- right? And that blew my mind, and I --

TM: Or from what direction or whatever, yeah.

JP: What direction, or what color, or if it --

TM: Right.

JP: -- if it somehow skims a scenery in a beautiful way to do a sunrise, it looks beautiful, whereas in theater you're like, oh... It's much more, like, challenging of yourself.

TM: And so, that first year was really... When I say early years, from my standpoint, from '76, '77, the Opera was really going through a transition, in terms of their growth and development. By '81, we had added a full-time orchestra? I think it was. Or '79, we added a full-time orchestra. The chorus was soon to follow. By '81, I think, pretty much everybody, all the major departments were full-time. And the productions, if you look at some of the productions, like from '79, they were big productions, and we were doing, you know, five and six new productions in the fall that were new.

JP: Right. And you had to work with George Pantages really closely on getting all of that sorted out and how you make the changes.

TM: Right.

JP: You know, we're spoiled now with computers and being able to do it –

TM: Right.

JP: -- but at the time it was all done by hand.

TM: It was all done paperwork, yeah.

The old, old charts, you know, before Lightwright. (laughter)

JP: Yeah, exactly.

TM: In fact, that was one of the things that I have to credit Dave Tindall, who was the electrician that followed George. Did a terrific job. Between Dave and several of the other crew members, who were really savvy with computers early on, we developed our own database, and so we had our own version of Lightwright before Lightwright was even around.

JP: And, comparatively, now we all do it all in Vectorworks, and we can, like, color code everything, and everyone looks at the light plot now and they're like, the blue light does this and the yellow light does that –

TM: Right.

JP: But going back to your scenic painting, some of the things that I really enjoy about your designs is the early use of media, specifically the Ponti projectors and the Ponti slides. So a lot of those early ones were hand-painted. How was that process for you?

When I got here, going through all the paperwork and things, I kept finding these slides, and every single one of them that you painted, whether it was painted or, later on, photographed, were absolutely stunning. I mean, even if you don't see the pictures of the show, you could see how they could transform the show in a new way that I think was sort of ahead of its time, in some ways.

TM: It certainly was here, although as I mentioned to you, I think, earlier on, back in the '50s they were using these old 5K Century projectors.

And they had these old Kliegl projectors, the Kliegl projectors from the '40s, slide projectors, with these two-by-three slides. Amazing, to me, and it had to be incredibly dim, (laughter) because I got them out, and we turned them on with a lightbulb that was this big, (laughter) that you'd see in a lighthouse.

JP: Right, right.

TM: (laughs) So they had a lot of experience. George had experience with projectors and projection, and they used a lot of special effects, moving clouds and all that kind of thing, from the balcony rails. So that existed, and so it wasn't such a big change. What was a change was the equipment and the technology that allowed us to do a lot more -- and the Ponti projectors came in with me for *Káťa Kabanová*, I think? I think it was a *Káťa* production. And that was the first time we used the Pontis.

A Ponti projector, it's basically just a high-intensity projector.

JP: You would slide a --

TM: Seven-by-seven slide --

JP: -- in front of this lamp, and it would project that image.

TM: But it was a high-intensity.

JP: At the time -- in this time period, they were pretty common, but we were one of the first companies, I think, in the United --

TM: In the United States --

JP: -- States to use them.

TM: -- and Chicago –

JP: Yeah.

TM: -- about the same time, and the Met. Well, it's because the set designers, you know, were going from company to company, and they were demanding this kind of equipment –

JP: Right.

TM: -- because they wanted the backgrounds and whatnot to be projected.

JP: Or not to be a painted drop and be something different.

TM: What the Ponti projection did was give us a lot of flexibility in terms of not having a stationary backdrop. And up until this time, they had experimented with it, and it was a very weak version of it. And the lighting all had to be very subdued or minimal intensity in order to be able to even see the images, especially on a large scale, like the opera house, with a, 60-foot screen.

So the Ponti projector allowed us to be able to have a lot more flexibility in terms of the imagery. And, you know, the screens were flexible. Everybody got -- when I say everybody, designers would get into the use of not having just a flatscreen in the back, but let's put 'em on the side, let's put 'em here, and come from all directions.

JP: You could angle them –

TM: -- and change the space, the visual space. And so they got a lot of use, and... Like video projection today.

JP: So, [00:30:00] going back to your first season, (laughter) going way back when, there was one show in particular that sort of stuck out, which was the *Thaïs*. Can you tell me about that production?

TM: Well, the *Thaïs* was in my first season. It was actually the first show that I was doing from scratch here at the Opera. By that I mean that I was actually involved from the beginning, from the conception. Because I was in New York, and Tito Capobianco, the director, was in New York. Who was the set designer on *Thaïs*? I thought it was Carl Toms, but it may not have been.

It was a really challenging design, as I mentioned before, because it was a surround of mirrors that were motorized and articulated and could change position. They were tracked and could make a 180-degree background, mirrors, of which there's a famous... It's called the mirror aria in *Thaïs*. It's probably the most famous piece of music in the piece. [00:32:00] And it was... Who was it? It was Carl Toms. Yeah, okay. And it had two amoeba-shaped platforms

that Tito wanted. They were motorized, and they were kind of amoeba-shaped, and they could change position onstage and rotate. Each one could rotate individually, or they could interlock and become one unit, and they could do all these things. Well, it all had to be done by hand, motorized, and they were not computerized at that point. And so we finally gave up with moving them *a vista*, in front of the audience, and we did them as scene changes, instead of during the production, because they could never get them to be in the position or whatnot. [00:33:00] It was really tricky.

JP: Right.

TM: Not only that but, of course, the director wanted all the various moments in the piece with the lighting isolated to the platforms. Well, if the platforms are constantly moving, and you don't have moving lights, (laughter) and he says, "No, no, it's gotta be three feet to the left" –

JP: Then all of a sudden you have to refocus. (laughter)

TM: -- you know... And, and you know you haven't got the time to refocus –

JP: Right.

TM: -- and so you're nudging him and saying, "Well, why don't we try it there, but maybe let's look at it both ways," you know, kind of, like –

JP: Right.

TM: -- trying to nudge them back to... And I think psychologically you spend half the time just trying to get people to... "Well, you know, if that... singer was just two feet to the right, she'd be in a light." (laughter)

JP: Well, and what was the challenge with the mirrors, right?

TM: Well, the mirrors was, you know, anytime you put mirrors on the stage, whether it's a mirrored floor... A mirrored rake floor was the worst one I've ever worked with, because, of course, you can't do any backlight or anything –

JP: Right.

TM: -- because it bounces back into the audience.

First of all, you can see everything backstage, so you can see the first bridge. And, of course, that is a big head scratcher to me, 'cause that would seem to be a big surprise to the designer and the director, when they said, "Well, why are we seeing all this?" (laughs)

JP: Well, and every time you turn a light on, you see the light come on –

TM: Right. (laughter)

JP: -- in the mirror.

TM: So there was a lot of playing around with the heights of the lights and the equipment and finding the right balance, so that we didn't get those kind of reflections in the mirror. And [00:35:00] the other thing was bouncing the light off the mirrors. I found that because I had limited space to put equipment between the mirrors -- and they were always, again, moving or changing -- that I finally discovered that the mirrors were the one thing that were actually getting in the same position all the time, and so I could just bounce a light off a mirror.

And that worked, and particularly in a bedroom. It takes place in Egypt, and there was a scene with a bed, which had a huge mirror over the bed, and this was, again, completely boxed in, with mirrors around the whole stage, and then a mirror overhead, and the bed is raised off the floor, (laughter) and she's sitting back in the bed, and I said, "There's no way we're going to..." (laughter) And I tried everything to get light in, and finally I just resorted to the balcony rail, and just blasted in from the balcony rail. And it was fine.

JP: Right.

TM: It worked. But it was things like that that were really challenging.

JP: Well, I think sometimes you just embrace whatever you can do.

TM: When you design a production, I always like to separate the difference between lighting director and lighting designer.

JP: Right.

TM: And lighting director, you weren't necessarily the designer on the production. You're supervising the overall thing. And the lighting designer, you're actually creating the lighting for the production.

JP: Which is still the case now. I mean, that's part of my job now is the day-to-day stuff –

TM: Right.

JP: -- is separate...the day-to-day stuff of, like, how you get the productions in is one part of your brain, and then the artistry that you can create onstage is another part of your brain –

TM: Right.

JP: -- and those are two separate things that, even though they're two separate jobs, there's still a middle ground that you come up with as you're working on one or the other.

TM: And I have to say that I think having a resident designer, or a resident lighting director, when I came in companies were looking to have a resident designer, because of the cost of putting somebody up, of transportation, of change, also consistency and efficiency.

JP: Well, and understanding the space.

TM: Exactly.

JP: You know, that's a big thing.

TM: So that made a lot of sense. Then in the '90s we went through a period where we were getting away from that. We were just having a lighting supervisor kind of person --

JP: Right.

TM: -- and having all outside designers --

JP: Right.

TM: -- multiple designers. And that proved to be interesting, but costly.

I found that, back in the '70s and the '80s, working with designers, people like Beni Montresor, who did quite a few shows here, and Beni was an artist, a brilliant concept guy. I mean, and his use of color and space and whatnot was terrific, but he was a bit neurotic, (laughter) and was not very good at communicating his ideas in terms of his design. And so he liked models, but he was not a good model builder, and he couldn't build a model, so, again, I would end up helping to build a model.

I was kind of a jack of all trades, particularly in those early years. But it just got to be too much for one person. So I ended up with a fairly good-sized staff, because I had somebody for set design, somebody for drafting, somebody as a lighting assistant, 'cause people like [Noel Uzimak?], who came here as an intern, and assisted in scenery, especially when I was designing scenery -- he was my set design assistant -- came through here and then went on to Washington, D.C. and various other places. So we had a lot of people who came through.

JP: You had a lot of lighting assistants, too, that --

TM: I did.

JP: -- had their own careers --

TM: That's right.

JP: -- you know, that are just fascinating to me. Like, you had, like, a little army of assistants who (laughter) you let them go and they all had different careers, but amazing careers in their own rights.

TM: Yeah. Kurt Landisman is one. In the Bay Area, Kurt is a fantastic lighting designer. And Joan Arhelger, of course. Joan was here for a long time.

JP: Well, then end up teaching at SF State.

TM: Joan Sullivan, who was the lighting director and designer for Washington Opera after she left here. Came from Chicago to here. She was an assistant in Chicago, came here, then went to Washington Opera and was there, you know, till the end of her career, basically.

JP: Do you have any favorite productions that you worked on besides those?

TM: Well, the *War and Peace* was one. And the *Lear*. The *King Lear*, which was with Ponnelle. Because I did a lot of the earlier... Ponnelle was early in his career here. He had done a couple productions -- the *Flying Dutchman*, and the *Così fan tutte* -- prior to my coming. He asked me to relight them, specifically, so... What was the first show I did with him? I think it was the *Tosca*. And, I relit the *Tosca*, and from then on, he said, "You know, just... They all need new lighting."

JP: Right.

TM: You know, his productions.

JP: Or an excuse for him to work with you again.

TM: Well, whatever.

JP: (laughs) Yeah, whatever it is.

TM: He was just fantastic to work... I mean, tough, but he was so talented as a director, and a designer. There was just no question about it.

JP: Why was he so tough, do you think?

TM: Well, because he w-- he's very demanding. He knows what he wants, and he doesn't give in. The thing is that a lot of t-- a lot of times you think, well, they -- they're either gonna change their mind or he's not, 'cause, you know... But not with Ponnelle. Ponnelle, he had worked out the productions very carefully, and knew in his mind what it was supposed to look like.

JP: And he would push you to, to make that.

TM: And push you to do that.

JP: Yeah, that's great.

TM: And I really admired him. And he had such a fantastic way with the singers, and they loved him, because all of his productions, if you look at every production that Ponnelle has done, you will notice that everything focuses to the first six feet of the stage. Even his *Flying Dutchman*, the Senta is right down center. Everything radiates out. The singers always ended up into the sweet spots and they loved him for that. And he was so good with the acting. I really admired his ability. He was a world-famous, he was a great director, no question. And I did a lot of productions with him.

JP: Going back to the technology, that's interesting, because we were the first opera house with moving lights, which is a big thing now, because most opera houses are –

TM: Right.

JP: -- entirely moving lights.

TM: Right.

JP: How did that come about?

TM: That came about in nineteen ninety... After the earthquake. The earthquake was in '89, and by then much of the wiring in the building was the original wiring. The first bridge, going up and down, all the cables were 40, 50 years old, and were cracking and fraying, and we were losing circuits on the first bridge. But after the earthquake, although nothing was really damaged, what we did discover was that a lot of the cabling infrastructure had been damaged. So we lost some circuits here and there, and the first bridge itself, which is the position over the front of the stage, behind the proscenium, that position had... (laughs) One day we looked up and there were sparks coming down from the first electric, and that's when I said to John Priest, I said, "John," I said, "we gotta replace this." I said, "We can't do a season with this."

JP: Right. John was the electrician at the time.

TM: No, John Priest was the technical director.

JP: Technical director.

TM: By then, it was still Dave Tindall, I think. It might've been Lynn McKee, 'cause it was right in the transition, but... He said, "Well, there's no way we can afford. We can't afford. You're just gonna have to deal with what you've got, because there's no way..." We got some estimates,

and to even replace the feeder cables to the first electric was, like, incredibly prohibitive. So... For that season, at least. It was really bare bones at that point. So that's when I went and I said, "Well, you know, why don't we do some Vari-Lites."

I had been still doing some industrial shows off and on, on the side, over the years, and was familiar with a lot of the rock and roll kind of stuff. And so I went to Dallas, where I was designing in Dallas at the time for Dallas Opera, and I went to Vari-Lite, and I think they were located in Dallas at that time, and negotiated with them. Up until this time, they didn't do long-term packages. They did packages for road shows and things like that, but they didn't want to do any kind of a permanent installation; nor did they want to sell. Anyway, I negotiated with them to come up with a package that we could use for the opera on a trial basis, and they would come up with fixtures that would not make any noise, because noise was a big factor. So we came up with a package of Vari-Lites, the moving PARs, with the interchangeable lenses, and I don't know, it was a dozen or so of the VL6s in the package, and I got them to agree to give it to us for a dollar.

JP: (laughs) On a trial basis –

TM: On a trial basis.

JP: -- I'm sure, but that's amazing.

TM: That season cost us a dollar for the package. Now, there were costs involved, because they gave us the package, but we had to have their technicians come in and install it and –

JP: Well, at the time –

TM: -- work with that group –

JP: -- they had a proprietary system.

TM: Right, it was proprietary, and the deal was that they would do the repair. We couldn't use the equipment for anybody... You know, it was a tight contract in terms of who controlled the equipment.

JP: Right.

TM: I wanted to use it in Spring Opera [Theater], for instance, or send out a package to Spring Opera, but that wasn't in the contract. It couldn't leave the opera house.

So we got this package, and then we ended up with a three-year contract, and eventually they let us purchase the equipment, but that wasn't until three years later. And it was a lifesaver for us, because we could refocus the first bridge and it gave us a lot of specials and flexibility.

JP: Well, and at this point we had moved to computerized consoles, so that's an easier way to –

TM: Right.

JP: -- control all of this.

[FEMALE VOICE]: Tom talked about his most rewarding moment and his most challenging moment.

TM: Oh, yeah, what is yours so far?

JP: Here?

TM: Yeah.

JP: It was the *Fidelio* we just did. I come from a theater background. I'd done plays and musicals, so a big rotating set with mirrors on it is a very challenging show, on top of the storytelling being very challenging. So that was a huge challenge for me is, like I was the co-designer with JAX Messenger, who –

TM: Right.

JP: -- did the design. And we're really good friends, so we did that show together. He couldn't be here, so I ended up lighting. And it was –

TM: And it was spectacular.

JP: Oh, thank you. It was –

TM: It really was. I –

JP: It was really hard. (laughs)

TM: Yeah.

JP: It was... The process was hard because I had never done a show with mirrors as a designer. I'd done it as an assistant, you know, but I'd never done it as a designer, and that first act the curtain goes up and like, oh, you can see everyone, but how do you light it? And we didn't want to hit the mirrors.

TM: Right.

JP: We wanted to keep all the light off of it, and still use follow spots, and, and, and. So that was the most challenging moment. The *Fidelio* was definitely a challenge, just because -- it looked beautiful, but getting there --

TM: Yeah.

JP: -- was really, really hard.

TM: I think my biggest challenge had mirrors that were running up and down stage against a projection screen. So I finally convinced them to cut holes in the mirrors at the bottom and so I could get some kind of side lighting in. But that was a spectacular production. It was really hard. There was a lot of backlight, a lot of lighting scenery in reverse. (laughter)

TM: Right. And... *William Tell*. That's it. It was *William Tell*, on a raked floor --

F: With mirrors.

JP: With mirrors.

TM: With mirrors.

JP: I see a theme happening: challenges with mirrors. (laughter)

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