

American MASTERS

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WNET NEW YORK

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press information



AMERICAN MASTERS
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THIRTEEN/WNET NEW YORK'S *AMERICAN MASTERS* CAPTURES AN ARTIST AT WORK IN A RACE AGAINST TIME WITH *DAVID HOCKNEY: THE COLORS OF MUSIC*, PREMIERING JULY 18 ON PBS

Features Excerpts From Operas By Ravel, Satie, Poulenc, Wagner, Stravinsky, Mozart, Puccini, And Strauss; And Interviews With Max Charruyer, John Cox, Ronald Freeman, Franz Grundheber, Gwyneth Jones, And Ken Silvers

The world-class opera sets artist David Hockney designed over a 30-year period sometimes brought to mind three-dimensional paintings: gorgeous and surreal, with purple forests, spacey blues, giant blocks and mad silhouettes acting as perfect complements to the music. Gradually, though, a congenital hearing problem stole his ability to do the work he loved, a decline documented in *AMERICAN MASTERS David Hockney: The Colors of Music*. "You lose the desire to hear," says Hockney in the film. "If you still had that, it would be painful." In the same offhand way, Hockney, one of the most popular and influential artists of the 20th century, describes himself as "just an artist who happens occasionally to work in the theater."

That work has included sets and costumes for 11 operas over the past three decades for opera houses from Paris, London and Glyndbourne, to New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. *AMERICAN MASTERS* presents a rare and intimate portrait of Hockney and his artwork when *David Hockney: The Colors of Music* premieres Wednesday, July 18 at 9 p.m. (ET) on PBS (check local listings). The 60-minute film is co-directed by Maryte Kavaliauskas and Seth Schneidman and is a production of DUNE in Paris.

"Imagine walking through the Metropolitan Museum of Art and seeing the paintings leap off

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the walls and spring to life. That's the feeling I get watching this film. It allows us to enter David Hockney's life at its most critical juncture," says Susan Lacy, creator and executive producer of *AMERICAN MASTERS*, which recently won its eighth Peabody Award. "His keen awareness that each production may be his last invests this footage with an immediacy and passion that can be felt palpably."

Filmmaker Maryte Kavaliauskas says of Hockney, "Not since Picasso has a painter directed his creative energy into stage design with such dedication and impact. To observe an artist at the very peak of his career as he so beautifully melds a love of music with a passion for art was a rare privilege."

The Colors of Music takes viewers inside Hockney's private passion and creative process. Knowing the importance of lighting in the theater, Hockney constructs large-scale models of each opera in his studio, working on them until he's satisfied with the fusion of color and light, and then oversees their life-size construction.

The documentary, which *Village Voice* film critic Andrew Sarris named as #3 in his Top Ten Documentaries of 2005, garnered critical acclaim and several prizes during a two-year tour of film festivals before opening in New York in 2005. In its review, *Variety* said Hockney's "humor, inventiveness and dedication to how the smallest detail informs the eventual spectacle are touching and entertaining." *The New York Sun* said the film is "bursting with joie de vivre and bonhomie, as exuberantly colorful as a Fauvist candy shop." *The New York Times* noted that "the popular, revered painter acknowledges that he doesn't hear so well anymore, and his radiant backdrops suddenly seem more than just stylized shapes and shadows. Clearly, he is using his eyes to make up for what his ears have lost."

"I have always said how a hearing loss makes you aware of space – visually. Meaning sound will help locate you in space," says Hockney. "You know generally the direction it's coming from. I became aware of that... I am more aware."

Granted intimate access, the filmmakers shadowed Hockney from 1991 to 1993, capturing him at his California home and studio, at the Grand Canyon and Monument Valley, in Paris and his boyhood home in England, and on stage and behind the scenes at world-class opera houses. The passing landscapes – scored with glorious music – show up time and again in his set designs for such operas as *Parsifal* and *The Magic Flute*.

With his oversized spectacles, Beatle-like blonde hair and whimsical clothes, the British-born Hockney looks as if he stepped out of one of his own sets. During numerous conversations with directors, actors, friends and studio assistants, his infectious passion becomes clear. There is also abundant evidence of his playful and inventive nature, as he uses everything from styrofoam balls to tortellini in fashioning colorful new worlds on stage.

In the film, Hockney makes us keenly aware of the visceral connection between what we see and what we hear. As his imagination takes flight – and his sets go from studio to stage – viewers see how his artful blends of color, music and lighting can effect and enhance the opera-going experience.

Shortly after filming ended, Hockney's deafness progressed to the point where he could no longer design new projects. His last opera was Richard Strauss's *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*. In ensuing years, Hockney has turned his attention to the study of the history of painting and the use of optical devices in the development of perspective.

"The world is actually very beautiful," Hockney says in *The Colors of Music*. "That's why artists are here, I always thought, to show us new kinds of beauty."

AMERICAN MASTERS David Hockney: The Colors of Music is co-directed by Maryte Kavaliauskas and Seth Schneidman. Susan Lacy is creator and executive producer of *AMERICAN MASTERS*.

To take *AMERICAN MASTERS* beyond the television broadcast and further explore the themes, stories, and personalities of masters past and present, the companion Web site

(www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters), created by Thirteen/WNET New York, offers interviews, essays, photographs, outtakes, and other resources.

AMERICAN MASTERS is produced for PBS by Thirteen/WNET New York. This acclaimed series, now celebrating its 21st season, has become a cultural legacy in its own right. The *AMERICAN MASTERS* film library is one of the most highly honored in television history with profiles of more than 140 artistic giants. In addition to eight Peabodys, an Oscar, a duPont-Columbia and two Grammys, *AMERICAN MASTERS* has won 17 Emmys, including Outstanding Primetime Non-Fiction Series for 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003, and 2004.

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