**COGNITIVE THEATER**

**An Evening with Peter Gelb, Bartlett Sher, Patrice Chéreau, and Luc Bondy,**

**instigated by Paul Holdengräber**

**October 8, 2009**

**South Court Auditorium**

**LIVE from the New York Public Library**

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**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: [already in progress]** . . . hear William Forsythe discuss and debate with Alva Noë, one of the great philosophers and a neuroscientist. They will be talking about movement and dance and God knows what else.

Tonight, as you probably saw, the title we've given to the evening is Cognitive Theater. The simple reason is that I think that Peter Gelb in some ways is trying to inspire that at the New York Public Library. I know, for my part, when I arrived at the Library, I was asked by a reporter to define my mission statement in two words—whenever you know, whenever you hear people talking about "mission statements" you know how religious this country is—and the only way I could define what I do is by talking about cognitive theater. Another way of talking about what we might be talking about tonight is to refer to Werner Herzog's definition of culture. He talks about it as a "collective agitation of the mind."

I encourage you to join the New York Public Library, become a Friend of the New York Public Library. If you do, you support us and you get discounts on these LIVE programs, so please join and become a Friend of the Library. I also encourage you very warmly, since I'm trying to create a two-way street and not a dead end, but a two-way street, between the New York Public Library and the Metropolitan Opera, I encourage you all to become ticket holders, sponsors of the Metropolitan Opera as well.

It is a pleasure to welcome to this stage three extremely distinguished directors and the president, director of the Metropolitan. It is a pleasure to welcome to this stage Bartlett

Sher, I think I pronounced your name right, I'm not quite sure. With some French names interspersed here, I don't know anymore how to speak correctly, I'm kind of a linguistic monster—who returns to the Met with a new production of Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* and I believe is working with the great Nico Muhly on an opera as well. A current revival of *South Pacific* is playing at Lincoln Center, which I saw and which I love. I really encourage you to go and see that. Bartlett Sher.

**(applause)**

Patrice Chéreau is one of the greatest directors working today, known for his *Ring Cycle*, among many things, conducted by Pierre Boulez. And new to the Met this season will be Janáček's *The House of the Dead*, conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen, one of my very favorite conductors. Patrice Chéreau.

**(applause)**

Director Luc Bondy studied pantomine? No, you didn't? And made his debut at the Paris Théâtre Universitaire International. Acclaimed for his opera interpretations, Bondy has directed, among many operas, *Woyzeck*, *Così fan tutte*, and now, unless you don't know, he has opened to great acclaim of one sort or another **(laughter)** but it is acclaim, nevertheless, and we will talk about that, the Met's 2009–2010 season with his *Tosca*. Luc Bondy.

**(applause)**

And last but not least, since taking over as general manager of the Metropolitan Opera in 2006, Peter Gelb has launched a host of initiatives to revitalize opera and connect it to a wider audience. Under his leadership, the company has recruited increased numbers of world great theater directors—some of them are on our stage today—secured more performances for top singers, and launched The Met Live in HD, which presents live performance transmissions in movie theaters around the world. This 2009–2010 season has him presenting more than half a dozen, I believe, new productions of his choosing. It is a pleasure to welcome him tonight, as well as to extend a warm welcome to his parents in the audience.

**(applause)**

Peter Gelb would like us to see some clips from the performances that are happening now, but before we do, I would like to ask you one question—if you—and any of you can take it, in no particular order—if you since we do have somewhat of a French contingent here, would you agree, in fact, with La Rochefoucauld that we would all rather be spoken of ill than not spoken at all?

**(laughter)**

**PETER GELB:** I would be happy to comment on that. I—although I was once a young publicist and learned that the—the expression that press agents were always taught, and I was seventeen or eighteen when I was one, was that as long as your name is spelled right, that's all that counts, when your name is in the newspaper. I would say that what's—it's really not ultimately relevant whether you are spoken of in a good way or a bad way if the work that you are doing is good and is accepted by enough people to warrant it to continue, and I think that all of the work that the directors on this podium represent is good work that has won them great fans and acclaim and that has inspired them to do more work and inspired audiences to wish to see it. And, you know, I'm always mindful as the head of a theater which has four thousand seats that we are running a public art form and that it is necessary to have the public with you in order to continue, and that is what's most important, than the words, whether they are ill or not.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Very sage reply. [Translates the question in French.]

**LUC BONDY:** Depends. **(laughter)** Depends for what, you know. We are—both are true, you know, when you do so—, you make something, you hope—you don't make—when you are very young, very young, you hope you make a scandal or something like this. When you are older, you don't—it's not so important. You want to communicate something and not to think about—and not to think too much about—I didn't thought about reaction before, I don't know, the problem is the context where you're coming, you don't know. For me it is strange to be here after. But I think it's both, you want to be completely quiet sometimes, sometimes you want to talk, both, to say something.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** So with age your desire for scandal diminishes?

**(laughter)**

**LUC BONDY:** My desire to—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** For scandal.

**LUC BONDY:** I don't have in my life really desire to be—I must tell you never, really. I never really had the desire of this. And I thought, I think that I've tried to express what I'm feeling and not think about the scandal and I'm very surprised when the people are scandalized, because then I don't understand why, really.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Does that mean that you're not thinking of the public?

**LUC BONDY:** No, because at the moment you do it, you think about the thing you do, you have no, you're not thinking, "they are going to say this," because how I don't know—I didn't I didn't if you ask me, I didn't know that *Tosca* was like the bible in New York.

**(laughter)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Now you do. Now you definitely do.

**(laughter)**

**LUC BONDY:** Now, yeah. I understand then—when Patrice, when I was very young, not so much younger than Patrice, I was in Bayreuth and I understand that in Bayreuth, I was lucky to be—I was accepted, not anymore the church. That it was like this, a set designer, a set designer told me it was like this in Bayreuth with Wagner. What I can't understand, though, is a bit more, and without being against Puccini, I don't understand why a story is naughty and so worse, and a terrible story, I like it—it is thrilling, but I cannot understand then intelligent people they are scandalized how you make an opera, but if they listen what is written in the opera, in the same times you have a guy he's torturing another guy in another room, trying to make love with a woman, and this it's wonderful because it's sung and it's a beautiful voice. So.

It was terrible because it remind me that George Steiner, the philosophe told, the guy who leaded Auschwitz, the famous guy who was leading Auschwitz, he was always listening in the morning Schubert and in the afternoon put the people in—so it is like this, I am surprised that the people are scandalized. If they are scandalized, I couldn't understand why they didn't say, "stop this shit music" if they think it, or "stop this horrible scene," but problem with the guy has three women, the man come to me at the general and says to me, get rid of this, this disgusting prostitute, I say why? —they are not disgusting, they are pretty women on the stage, what's happening? He says and he tells, they don't know -

and they're shocked I don't know why and it's very, very strange. It was surprising. More I cannot say.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Well, you have started by saying quite a lot. Bart.

**BARTLETT SHER:** Well, I have an eight-month-old daughter and when she wakes up in the morning and smiles at me beautifully, looking for mirroring, I boo her very loudly.

**(laughter)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** That is very helpful.

**BARTLETT SHER:** So I think that our natural tendency is not to wish—to expect ill, we don't expect it. In our normal pattern of growing and developing, we want to make something that people, of course, respond to, whether in a good way or a bad way, so I always think when booing or something like that is going on, that there is another level at which the experience is happening that seems extra or outside of the normal thing, so there's often some weird thing that can be happening, that's interesting, but it's never something that I would, that any normal artist that I know is eliciting or trying to demand. They might try to shock, they might try to, I don't know, but that's usually a very young thing in your career.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** But none of us is sufficiently young on this stage to wish that.

**BARTLETT SHER:** There you are.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Yeah.

**BARTLETT SHER:** So I don't think it's a natural inclination to try to provoke it or wish ill or seek illness in others, but I don't know.

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** What is the question?

**(laughter)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Well, to some extent, let me rephrase or move on, as it were, to some extent what has happened in the recent weeks at the Metropolitan is that you have elicited a lot of passions, profound passions, one might even talk about—I mean, one of the things that your production has elicited is a passion for opera. Is that true?

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** Do I have to answer for him?

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Yes.

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** Well, I don't know. I knew a very long time ago, thirty years ago, more than thirty years ago, I knew, a huge—I provoked a huge scandal in Bayreuth, you know, and I think, first of all, I remember that my reaction at that time was, "first of all, I'm not making this job for that people are talking about me," where, that is not a purpose, the purpose is you want to create something onstage, you want to tell stories and to let the people, to allow the people to think about the story and to be to have emotions and that and so on and so on. Then, we, Luc and I we are not exactly operagoers, you know, we are coming from the theater, and we are coming from the films, that means that we are interested in making opera not because we like opera, I must say, but only because we're interested in telling a story with the music and telling a story with two texts, you know, the text of the libretto and the text of the music.

We're interesting—I was interesting in a long time ago when I started to make my first opera, thinking that I could build, could follow, or find a utopia—utopia, a utopia, you say? A utopia. That a theater could be more theatrical because of the music, could be more responsible, because it's always interesting, when we come from the theater, it's always interesting to work on the music with the conductor, because suddenly the time is measured, suddenly you have—you are not—in the absence, apparent absence of freedom, you have a lot of freedom because suddenly you have—I wasn't interested in making an opera. I was interested with the *Ring* in working with Pierre Boulez, for example, interested in analyzing the work with Pierre Boulez, and finding the things that Wagner gave me and that the theater, for example, from Shakespeare couldn't give me

because we don't have the music, so I was interested in going forward, further, more than the theater I was doing.

You cannot have a desire of scandal, you know. I was surprised. Thirty years ago, now it's not a scandal anymore, because the DVD is re-given and given and given, but I was really surprised myself about this scandal from Bayreuth, totally surprised, and quite calm because the fight of the difficulty was—on the day of the premiere when the people discovered the *Ring*, the fight was behind me, I finished to fight, to do battle. The battle was to convince the singers, and they were convinced, and to try a way of telling the story and to try a way, the honest, the most honest way to tell the story, and I was so surprised, because then I discovered three years later that somebody told me, "but, you know, there is so much theater in your production that we cannot hear the—listen the music anymore." And I think it was good, it was exactly what it was about, I tried just to rediscover something that Wagner asked me to do, that to make theater with his drama, that's it.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** And what is booed, we may come back to this later, but what is booed one season, take productions of Robert Wilson and others is loved the next season, and what is booed on opening night might be loved a week later. I mean, I saw your production yesterday on a DVD, because I wasn't able to go to the production last week, and I will come to that, but I just can't quite understand all the fuss.

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** I think there is also an audio and a linguistic problem. If you make "boo," if you are ten people or fifty, or a hundred make "boo," and you have ten who make "bravo," you never hear "bravo," because bravo has the air, you know, "bravo," but "boo" is extraordinary.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** This is very interesting—

**(crosstalk)**

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** You don't have this, so I remember when I was a very young assistant in Hamburg, and very much years and I remember there was a play who was shocking an old woman and everybody clapped and the old woman make "boo," and everybody stopped to clap because this boo was more important. So this you must think about it.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** I am thinking next season of doing an event here at the library on applause, on applause and clapping, because my father in 1933 in Vienna was a claquer at the opera, I don't know how you call that, so I can clap very loudly, but maybe the boo is even louder than the clap. I am thinking—

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** He was getting paid for doing that.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** It was a job. There were about ten or twelve, and he's ninety-one years old now, and he still can clap pretty loudly. I clap louder than he does—that's a good clap, huh? If ever you need me **(laughter)**—if ever you need me—for, you know, just Peter—

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** Peter has to hire—Peter had to pay people for this, and it was not happened, so I was really unhappy.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** So I'm available. What I would like to do is invert things a little bit. I would like to start by showing a clip of the opera that's forthcoming here at the Metropolitan, the Janáček *House of the Dead*, and have both of you say something about it. We can watch it on this monitor. Can we bring down the lights? Is that possible? No, we can't. Okay.

**(clip plays)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Perhaps you could—

**(applause)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Perhaps you could tell us a little—

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** To all these people you have given the most effective—the most important effect of the whole play—production.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Not my choice. There are other good moments. But let's—

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** I know.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Maybe you could say something about what drew you to—since theater is the origin of your passions and not opera. What drew you to this particular opera? And perhaps you could contextualize a little bit what we just saw.

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** Well, first of all it's, you know, you never really choose your opera. You get an offer. The offer came from Luc and the Vienna Festival, and they asked me if I accept to do *House of the Dead* by Janáček with Pierre Boulez at that time, and I accepted, of course, because I wanted to work again with Pierre, and I was interesting—interested by that Pierre wanted to do this one, he never did Janáček, and for his last opera, because he decided not to do another opera anymore, he wanted to analyze, to try to understand what was this music. And I listened the opera and I was so surprised and so, so impressed because it's a beautiful—it's an amazing opera.

First of all, it's an opera based on a book by Dostoevsky, it's very rare, it never happened, a book that Dostoevsky wrote after he was in camp in Siberia for four years, and it's a beautiful book about the prison, it's a beautiful book about a camp, because it's

full—you see, in a camp in Siberia in the winter, so that suddenly it happens exactly the opposite that you can think at the beginning. He is not sad, he is not desperate, it is only full of hope, only full of life, for another life, but sometimes the same that we are living and sometimes with other rules, but sometimes with the same rules that we have in the society, it's a parallel society a prison, full of love, because they are all—all these people are trying to explain for the first time in their lives, trying to explain how they kill, how they become killers, and Janáček is never judging them—Dostoevsky neither—but Janáček is never judging them. He says there is always, he wrote on the first page of the score a beautiful line from Dostoevsky—"In every human soul, a spark of God." That means that even if the worst people, even in the worst person, even in the killer, even in the people who were criminals, there is something that you can love or you can still understand and they are human beings.

That means that it is very simple and with an extremely powerful music, with a huge lot of people because there is many, there is many, many, many stories. Of course, there is no real love story, you know, like in a normal opera. There is not a story, a love story, between the tenor and the soprano, because we don't have soprano, we have only men, almost, in love with a prostitute, but they are telling the story—the love is in there, because they are telling that they killed sometimes, most of the time, for love, and they killed because they wanted to be respected—they wanted to be—so, in other words, it's a totally unusual opera, and that's why I liked to do it.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** And Dostoevsky wrote the book, if I remember right, after being condemned to death.

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** After being condemned to death. Well, it happened, it happened something worse with him. He was condemned to death and then on the day of Christmas of 1859, he went in front of the people who were shooting, the platoon of shooting, and at the last moment they pretend to do it and they stopped, and he went four years in Siberia, and then he went two years more, and he wrote immediately after, he wrote the book immediately after. And he became a writer after this book. All the big books by Dostoevsky are written just afterwards. Just coming back from this humanity, coming back from the description of this beautiful, incredible mankind. And it never happened in opera, it never happened such an incredible and powerful music that you can hear, it's something really totally unusual, that's why. It's an item, so strange item, but beautiful and powerful.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Peter, say something about the clip we saw and also about your relationship in choosing directors for operas.

**PETER GELB:** Well, you know, in the case of these directors, it's not so much that I am choosing them, they are choosing what they want to do and I am the happy recipient of their work. In the case of Patrice's *House of the Dead*, when I was appointed to my position in the winter, fall of 2004, and I started gearing up for my job in 2005, one of the first things I did, of course, was to look at the future seasons of the Met and think about

how I could revive interest in the Met and draw new audiences, and it begins and ends with what we put on the stage, and that involves a jigsaw puzzle full of pieces, but many of the most important pieces are how to either take masterpieces of the repertory and breathe new life into them—I can't do that, only the directors can. And in the case of *Tosca*, in the case of *Tales of Hoffmann* that Bart is directing, that is what we're hoping to accomplish, and also to expand the repertory. This piece, this brilliant piece of Janáček's, has never been performed at the Metropolitan Opera, and the idea of having Patrice, who had never worked at the Met—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** And Esa-Pekka—

**PETER GELB:** None of these directors had ever worked at the Met before and I've, you know, the biggest challenge I had in trying to convince them to work at the Met, is to persuade them, that the Met, which was known, you know, famous for being the greatest house of musical performances in opera but not a place sympathetic to directors' work in recent decades, and to persuade them that the Met would be a hospitable and supportive institution for their work. So I had a lot of convincing to do back then, and in the case of *House of the Dead*, I actually was approached by—I sort of had an open kind of agenda of what I wanted to do. I wanted to have the greatest directors, I wanted to have new repertory, I wanted to have the greatest stars, I wanted to have, you know, the best of all possible worlds of theater and opera, on the stage one show after another, and so I was open to anything, any good suggestion, and open to—and pursuing things as well. But I remember being approached by Stefan Lissner, who is now the head of La Scala, who at

the time was running the—and still is involved with the Vienna Festival—the music part—I know Luc is the boss, but Stefan Lissner came to me and said to me would you be interested in joining the Vienna Festwochen and the Aix Festival in this production, and I immediately said, if it's directed by Patrice Chéreau, I'm in in this project and then of course it wasn't quite that simple. We had to—

I met with Patrice numerous times, Pierre Boulez, who is going to be eighty-five at the time we're doing this, or he was eighty-five, didn't want to come with the production to New York, he felt that he said to me he was too old to spend such a long period of time here. We had to find somebody who, a conductor who would be up to this task and in Esa-Pekka Salonen we have, you know, the most marvelous choice because he also is making his debut at the Met, is a great champion of twentieth-century work, and I'm sure Pierre himself would agree is probably the best person to conduct it if he can't do it. So I agreed to this production long before it was actually produced, I was happy when I was sitting in the theater in Vienna in 2006 or 7 at the premier and saw this masterpiece in front of me, because even when you have the best plans, and you know with all these great directors and all their—and having all the greatest planning and inspiration, and sometimes things don't always work out the way they want them to.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** That's true.

**PETER GELB:** But this did, certainly, it's a great, it's a real, it's a masterpiece, and what is very exciting I think for us at the Met and I think for Patrice, too, is that it is

being—even though he has presented it now in three different theaters, we're the fourth theater to have it, he really is approaching it as a fresh production.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** What's the difference?

**PETER GELB:** Well, new cast members—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** What's the difference between this production and the three ones that were before.

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** Well, it's always a difference when you start working again, you know. The job is not to repeating exactly what you did, the job is to say, where do I failed? Or where was wrong, or what was wrong, and sometimes for the example, a long time ago, the *Ring* was much better in Bayreuth on the third year, you know, than in the first, so here it's also to—not only to refresh and to change many things, with the help of a new cast, the beautiful cast I have here, and I think it will be a quite different production.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** It has something to do with rereading, but it has also something to do with adapting it for an American audience?

**PETER GELB:** Forgive me for interrupting, We didn't have to do anything with adapting it for an American audience at all—it was nothing to do with that, but I think

each of these directors, having observed their work closely, what they all do is they draw from the talents of their casts to revise and adapt the characterizations that they are putting on the stage. If they have a singer who has something to offer that is special, they incorporate that into the realization on the stage.

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** And change immediately the point of view, you know. I am working these days with Peter Mattei, who had never made the production, and suddenly I have discovered new things, other things in the huge part he has and also we are revisiting everything, we have actors also in this opera, we have twenty actors. And of course working with American actors is totally different than working with Austrian ones, so everything is different. We have another energy on stage and you have also the energy of the theater himself where you are working. And everything changes. You are not the same person and also you miss many things sometimes in the first production.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** You yourself have aged, so in some way you reread—

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** That is a less pleasant side of the revival, you know, yes I'm getting older—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** But it has to do with rereading also.

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** Yes, rereading, but you can also be worse than the first time—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Definitely.

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** We have never to forget that, it is quite possible to make a terrible revival, so you don't have to change for changing, it's just because suddenly you understand that rereading, rereading the book by Dostoevsky, for example, or listening the music in a different tempo, that suddenly you have other options to do, and you said, "Oh, that I didn't understand the first time but now I understand how to do," because, you know, it's not a matter of interpretation, it's just a matter of—this opera is a huge collage of many, many, many stories. You have to find something—it's a strange case. You have to find a bridge, you have to find an arc, you have to build sometimes yourself, as the director, the arc of the opera, and that is just to avoid, to have only vignette, or to have only small images, you know, so you have to create something larger than this opera, and of course it has to do with the tempo of the conductor, so it is an incredibly interesting work. Just remaking again the same production wouldn't be interesting, but working again is interesting.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** The arc of the opera—and you're also very interested, Bart, in the whole notion of interpretation. Say something about interpretation—and why in effect an opera text like *Tosca*, a libretto, might not be comparable to a sacrosanct text like the bible.

**BARTLETT SHER:** There's a question. It's interesting. I saw the *Tosca*, and I have a lot of friends who love *Tosca* very much and I've had very intense conversations with

them, and I couldn't for the life of me—it's one of those weird experiences, because I enjoyed it tremendously. I quite loved it very much, but I couldn't for the life of me reconcile the experience I had without preconceived sensibilities and the experience they were having. There was this big object in the middle, which was the fifty *Tosca*s they knew.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Which you didn't know?

**BARTLETT SHER:** Which I did not know.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** So ignorance is bliss.

**BARTLETT SHER:** So there's a very complex—well, it's not a question of ignorance is bliss, because then I would ask questions about why they were so upset, or what upset them, you know, whether it was the prostitutes in the beginning or how Scarpia is seen or all that and every one of them—it's not a question—there's a weird experience in interpretation, anytime you get to a finality or a Truth-with-a-capital-T about interpretation. Of course, it's the same problem in religion. If you believe your religion is completely the only way and you run into another religion, you're going to have a problem, and so, so I'm not meaning to be oblique or strange, it's just I couldn't reconcile the experience I was having, which was experiencing it as a tremendously beautiful opera and in a really rich and interesting interpretation, against the extra experience somebody was having putting their own impressions between them and the work they were seeing,

and saying, “there aren’t two candles there.” When I was seeing it, I don’t know the opera very well, but I could audibly hear before one moment, the word “candle” many times, **(laughter)** audibly heard the word, and I was, what are they talking about, from over around me, and—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Even before the word “boo,” the word candle.

**BARTLETT SHER:** No, no, yeah, there was no booing the day I saw it at all. I think that’s a self-interested expression of ownership, a boo, so—but I don’t, but it’s just an interesting experience to hear that, so interpretation, so if you see something like *House of the Dead*, which nobody knows very well, they come to it with a kind of openness.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Much harder to see something that is so well known.

**BARTLETT SHER:** The same thing can happen if it’s *South Pacific*. I mean, there are very intense interpreters of those particular musicals as well, and there’s sometimes tension between the two, but it’s just a weird experience. It’s more about the audience than it’s about the interpretation, that experience, I think.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** So how did you—since we can’t see *Hoffmann’s Tales* yet because it isn’t quite ready for showing, we’re going to be showing an extract now of *Barbiere di Siviglia*, so tell us something about—

**BARTLETT SHER:** It's very different than *House of the Dead*, I have to say. **(laughter)** Just so everybody's aware of that.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Let, if you could make some kind of a bridge, an arc between *House of the Dead* and the *Barbiere*

**BARTLETT SHER:** Peter Mattei's in both.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Tell us something about this particular.

**BARTLETT SHER:** *Hoffmann*, I don't know *House of the Dead*, but *Hoffmann* is a series of stories and the problem for me is how to make them connect and often people—that's the bridge—for me the connection

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** That's the storytelling.

**BARTLETT SHER:** For me the connection I'm drawing—and I can do this very quickly—is I'm more attracted to Offenbach than I am to Hoffmann, so the question I'm asking is about Offenbach as a Jew, who was an outsider who never felt accepted inside of his own—as an artist. He often—he was a light, kind of musical writer, and he was writing this opera to declare his—to try to find his way into the group. So I'm interested in outsiderness and I'm interested in that in *Hoffmann* as a subconscious understanding of what Offenbach was grappling with whether he was aware of it. So it drew me into the

world of Kafka more to understand and when you go, when you go to make love to somebody, it's often an effort to be accepted—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** I've never thought of it that way.

**BARTLETT SHER:** So if you look at the different women he's trying to find acceptance through, they're outside his group, they're the actress, the whatever, and so it's an exploration of that as a way unfinished to find a line between what is the engine for Hoffmann/Offenbach as a way of exploring why it is that—what it is that he is seeking through these women and through—as an artist and all those things, so the context of Kafka then leads me to the strangeness of the Twenties and also which was an interesting time in writing, because narrative is kind of coming apart then, in any case, in that era of writing, and so that's all the link, that's the simple version.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** And going back in time to *Barbiere di Siviglia*, which is the clip we will see, contextualize a little bit your work with *Barbiere di Siviglia* and what attracted you to that particular opera.

**BARTLETT SHER:** Well, I'm attracted to Beaumarchais and the politics of the opera, which are very, very subtle and were probably declared through space, through the way of looking at the space at the Met differently, as a way of changing the relationship of the audience to the experience in the same way Beaumarchais was trying to change the relationship of the rising bourgeois or the Figaro character. And so there was a way of

trying to intersect the two. It is grounded in some ways in commedia, but even Beaumarchais was pushing past commedia and so it’s a very—it’s a spatial exploration, and it’s very important to have that long aria at the end.

And at the time I did it, we were living in the Bush years—please don’t worry if I say anything that upsets you—and there’s an interesting thing about the aria about psychologically allowing yourself to be free of tyranny, for the count to let himself change his assumptions, and we were in a very complex time around that era, which was only four years ago, where we were trapped between our perceptions and where we were, so that those were all subconscious layers of how I was looking at it.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Let’s look at the clip.

**BARTLETT SHER:** And it’s funny, sort of.

**(Clip plays)**

**(applause)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** What happened at the ending?

**BARTLETT SHER:** You know, the end of that act's pretty crazy. It talks, the text talks about "an anvil's pressing against my brain," so there's an anvil **(laughter)**—and a very big one, and it crushes some pumpkins which are brain-sized. Yeah, it's very big.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Luc, do you know that? Have you seen that production?

**LUC BONDY:** No, but I was coming out from a rehearsal, and it was really late and I was going through the front of the opera and I saw very much people sitting, so I sit a little bit, and I was looking, it was just the end, I was too late, but it was very funny, and I was thinking it was a good way to go out of an opera, and not to go into the very sad street, Amsterdam or what I don't know, but you're coming out on this side, I can see all the people sitting there and looking and listening, it was a very, very extraordinary experience, so it was this opera my experience.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Were you going to say something?

**PETER GELB:** I would just like to say that one of the marvelous things about this production is *Barber of Seville* has been a staple of the repertoire at the Met for many, many years, and this production that Bart created actually had people laughing as if they were seeing a play, a funny play, and that was something, and several members of our board commented to me that they never realized that this piece is actually funny.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Did they say it in an approving way?

**PETER GELB:** That was a good thing, that was a good thing. And I think, you know, what's wonderful about Bart's work, and all of Patrice's and Luc's work, is that they are—you always hear them saying, and they always say to me, "we're just trying to tell a story," and a story, you know, clearly, the way a good theater director approaches a play, and, you know, the difference here is it's much more complicated, because there's singing involved, too, so they have to not only tell a story but also, you know, honor the musical values and difficulties, the challenges that singers have all kinds of technical issues in order to be able to produce their voices, but the idea that *Barber* could actually be funny on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera was somewhat of a revelation and the—even just the way Bart approached it physically, you saw in that video that there was a stage that extends, a passerelle that goes into, into the audience. This is not something so revolutionary, but at the Met, it was. That was the first time in the history of the Metropolitan Opera House that there ever had been a passerelle extending from the stage—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** It doesn't take much to—

**BARTLETT SHER:** That's what I mean by a spatial transformation, and to change the physical relationship in relationship to the politics of the piece. There's a relationship between, sometimes, between space and politics. It's hierarchy, so.

**PETER GELB:** Right, I was just going to say that the idea that the story came alive and across in such a, you know, a vivid, compelling way through this production is not that different than what—although *Tosca* is not a comedy—is what Luc was attempting to do with *Tosca*, which was to, you know, basically a story in a modern, psychological way, psychologically, though, to an audience today that is—that is not, I mean, the problem of the way in which *Tosca* has been produced so often in the past has been really, as was said, sort of honoring the instructions in the libretto as if it was some kind of a religious manuscript that had to be followed, and what Luc has done is to not follow these instructions, which were—I'm sure if Puccini were alive today, would not—he would not want to be followed.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** We can't know, but I'm—

**PETER GELB:** He would just want his piece, though, I think, to be presented in a way that would ring true to a modern audience.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** I'm sure Luc is very eager to speak about *Tosca*, but just before you do, you were talking about staples of the Metropolitan opera, and you were talking about Rossini, *Barbiere*, certainly one of the staples of the Opera house has been for twenty-five years, and let's mention him by name, was Zeffirelli's *Tosca*. Peter Gelb, I mean, what were you thinking? **(laughter)** What were you thinking about by starting your season with more than half a dozen new operas and doing away, as it were, with Zeffirelli? Why do you think that was a good move, and do you regret it now?

**PETER GELB:** I don't regret it. But I can tell you that, you know, just if you do the mathematics, it's impossible to run any theater with the same productions forever, and when I took over the Metropolitan Opera, it was losing its audience, and its audience was aging, and clearly the only way to keep an aging art form and an opera house with many very ancient productions alive and interesting for a public—a new public as well as the older public—is to present new productions. You can't do it any other way, and I'm sure there are many people who believe, who maybe, who think that it's a crime to have replaced the Zeffirelli production but the answer I don't think—I don't know what the answer is for them, so if it didn't happen this year, when would it happen, five years from now, ten years from now, fifty years from now, a hundred years from now? At some point, it would have to go. And you know, what we're trying to do—what I'm trying to with my colleagues at the Met is to keep this theater alive and vibrant and interesting.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** One of the ways of keeping a younger audience coming is to do away with Zeffirelli, is that—no?

**PETER GELB:** I don't think it's a question of doing away with Zeffirelli, it's a question of doing something new and not and not accepting the old.

**LUC BONDY:** Excuse me, I want to say something. I hope you agree, all my colleagues, that I want to say it's important that three, four years for a performance is very old for us. I feel if I don't want it and would not like to imagine that my *Tosca* became twenty-five

years old. I think in four years it's enough, three years, personally, because I don't think—the problem is that things are changing, the feelings are changing. People are changing, way to recept is changing. Everything is changing. So I don't think you have to sit down on something and say it's yours. You know, I didn't talk very much about it because I don't know him and I never saw his *Tosca*—no, Zeffirelli. The idea that I were sitting on something that I did and say to another colleague "why you do this?" it's for me unbelievable, because first, it's Puccini, never Zeffirelli, who write it, so first is the composer who did this and the guy who made it, so how you can sit down on a work, imagine that you are inventing this work for the world, and this is the arrogance was silly, gaga, and I think it's only the newspaper who tried, because today is the day of event, everything has to be an event, over what you do, and I think it's so sad to imagine that the event of a work I did, how many work I did, it was the event of this work is the fight between this guy and me. I don't care about this, I don't want this, and to imagine this how somebody takes over this is completely not really in the head and it doesn't work because the people say you hear, and the other day I was with one of a good friend of me, to somebody and he said, "you know, he's a good friend of Zeffirelli," and I said, "and what?" So, you know, this is stupid, excuse me.

**PETER GELB:** If I may just add one thing, because I really want to make something clear. Zeffirelli is responsible for some wonderful productions at the Met. I mean, he started, his earliest production at the Met, I guess, is the *Falstaff*, in 1964. He has made fantastic productions, but the point is, this art form has to move along in order to—in order to stay alive. You know, Michael Grandage is directing a new *Hamlet* that just

came here. Nobody is shocked at the idea that there's a new *Hamlet*. There has to be a new *Hamlet*. There have to be many new *Hamlet*s, and there have to be many new productions of *Tosca*, and *Aida*, and, you know, these pieces have to be replenished and refreshed, not to say they weren't great in their time.

**BARTLETT SHER:** I think it's a problem of time. You know, it's a lot of people holding on to a memory they have of the Met that's very intense and very personal and I think that time is a complicated thing. I think it would be interesting if you could go back in a time capsule and see the original *Tosca* twenty-five years ago and then see if whatever, four years ago that it was done again and wonder if you're having the same experience, anyway. I mean, these things change so deeply, and there is really no chance, no choice except for the wheel of time is going to keep marching ahead, and we *have* to reinvigorate them, we *have* to rethink them, we *have* to go back to them. It's a requirement of being human, to rethink and move forward. It won't always be a perfect experience, but the idea that they get held in a place, it's mostly hard to let go of time, or to realize time is moving ahead and some people can't do it.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** But it sounds as though they can particularly not do it when it comes to certain works of art, and when it comes to certain forms of art, like opera, and this immediately brings a question to mind that is on many people's mind is you know the relevance of opera altogether, and how to make it come alive. I mean, I certainly battle with this myself here at the Library. I always wonder how much this library weighs, you know, quite literally.

**BARTLETT SHER:** Very, very interesting that people still care. When in fact the other problem is that in the rest of the culture—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** People don't give a damn.

**BARTLETT SHER:** That in the rest of the culture, you can barely hold on to a line of anything and at least the wonderful, fantastic thing about the Met is how deeply people care. You actually feel like there is a line of experience and there is a reaction and a move forward and a move back, and that is that is much more comforting even through booing or through whatever the idea that nobody can remember anything from twenty minutes ago.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** That's why we have Twitter, but do you—kind of a new form of haiku—do you think people care? You seemed to, as Bart was talking, your head was going left and right?

**LUC BONDY:** I think the problem could be a little bit different. The problem is that many years and most of the time the director who makes opera are lazy, so then when they are lazy, they don't touch nothing on the opera and the singer are standing here, and they move, everything you can imagine in the background, the people don't care—the people stand there and they move things and so—and the people don't really care about it and I think what makes the people always strange is when the singer he was trying, the

singer, to make a relation. You cannot— but you Try to make something. And only this case to go out, jump out of a genre, and try to make this genre in another way to live, it's shocking. It's shocking when a singer makes something, which is not shocking years after. I thought I must tell because I learned very much when I was seeing—when I was seeing in Bayreuth the *Ring*, it was the first time you see people, was before in Germany very famous— Felsenstein, try this thing, a way to approach opera and to approach it with humanity and not only with stereotype. And the problem is with music, you know, music is dangerous and wonderful. Because the music in most of the operas, you see the world is a success, you see this, know that the people are always clapping. Because the music has a moment with metaphysical and sensual—until you are very fast completely tired and exhausted. In opera, when you sleep you can hear wonderful music, also, **(laughter)** and it's like this.

And I think that the question is the expression is this certainly in the opera, this disturbs the people and this is the first point, not what kind of interpret—Because I tell you very shortly, this thing about the candles—I tell you the problem. Puccini saw a performance with Sarah Bernhardt, and she was inventing this on the stage, it was perhaps on this night a very good idea, I think it was an awful idea, but of course with Sarah Bernhardt together a good idea, and he wrote it in the score, and then you can imagine this is not a very original invention of the composer. It's a repetition of Sarah Bernhardt, and the people don't know this, they don't know this, from the play from Sardou, the people don't know this, and the guy who say, "Tosca, you make me forget God," and take

Marie, everybody's shocked, because they don't hear, they don't listen anymore what is told in this thing. And this is the problem.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Part of your goal, role, is to make people listen in a new way.

**LUC BONDY:** Yes, and I'm a little bit, I love to read, and I love to—

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** Sometimes to read the word and to see, to see what they are talking about, what they are saying, how they answer to each other, it's just that sometimes.

**PETER GELB:** But I think that's also the danger of having, in the case of the production that was there, being there for twenty-five years, it became more of a decorative presentation of the piece, and really the story suffered as a result.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** But people loved it.

**LUC BONDY:** This is a very perverse thing, excuse me.

**BARTLETT SHER:** It's fantastic that they loved it, but it doesn't prove anything.

**LUC BONDY:** Not only.

**BARTLETT SHER:** Yeah, I mean, not everybody loved it, but it doesn't prove anything.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Most people loved it.

**PETER GELB:** I think people loved it because they were used to it, and it's very beautiful, it is a, it is a—to the most minute detail a representation of actual places in Rome and it looks—it's very beautiful.

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** They don't love it, they don't only love it, they recognize it, they recognize something they knew already. I think that during the *Ring*—they hated my *Ring* in '76, but then they hated the next one, because they wanted mine in '80, **(laughter)** you know, after five years they were getting used to it, and they loved it, and they didn't want to have it away, to take it away.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** So next, if we give four years to your *Tosca* in a year from now people will adore it.

**PETER GELB:** In ten years they'll be missing it.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** They'll be missing it.

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** That would be the time to stop, because I agree with Luc, that after five years you have to get away and make another production.

**LUC BONDY:** The problem is if you have a director you can trust, that if you have another director you can trust, you know the rights, and he'd say, oh, he'd take this production, and you cannot say no, you must say no contractually normally. Because that's the only possibility to stop it you know, because it, you are right, we must stop.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Opera form is so difficult, though, because people do, I mean, this is something that one feels and I think that's probably part of the problem you have with an aging population coming to the Met is people are—the people who saw Zeffirelli's production twenty-five years are still coming to that production today, or until recently, until you took over, and they're holding on to it. In other art forms, I'm thinking particularly, let's say, in jazz, one of the the stories I always loved in Miles Davis—a friend of mine once knew Miles Davis and he went to a concert of Miles Davis and got an extra ticket for a friend of his and Miles said to him, "What else can I do for you but give you a ticket?" And this friend said, you know, "My friend loves 'My Funny Valentine,'" and Miles Davis told him, "Tell your friend to buy the record."

**LUC BONDY:** I think I should tell you that *Tosca* is another problem, the *Tosca* is a double opera, it's a wonderful and an awful opera at the same time. I didn't want it, but I put the awful things in, because it's one thing—opera is crazy, but, I like it, because there are many different reasons, but it's also I know there are moments that are completely

stupid and I did it the way I did perhaps you see the stupid moments. And there's a reason that people discovering what the director is covering years and years, with very much details and very much things to put and cover the opera with too much décor and so, and so you don't see what is happening.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** It's like sauce in certain dishes.

**LUC BONDY:** Yes, you put a church sauce and a sauce like this and—everybody waits when she jumps down, so say, how, when she, how will she jump? And you, as a director you know an actress is going to jump on a mattress and perhaps she jumps again.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** No, I remember Monserrat Caballe jumping up too high.

**PETER GELB:** Actually Caballe walked off.

**LUC BONDY:** This was very modern.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Let's hear a clip from your production.

**(clip plays)**

**(applause)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** What detail did you notice—at one moment you spoke to Peter and saw something.

**LUC BONDY:** Tomorrow they're going to see blood—this is not here because of the frame**,** this is a detail and that's something when you see it in the air [inaudible]

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** But your kill scene is it written in the opera?

**(laughter)**

**LUC BONDY:** But normally she kills him standing, but here she lies, and it's not easy, but she comes in the night. She is like this, and she comes like this. Normally the people expect that she stands and then comes and then she kills, but I thought better that she lies and he comes, and normally it's—.

**PETER GELB:** They don't expect that she has already gotten the knife ahead of time.

**LUC BONDY:** The knife she get it here, you get it two times, but you don't see it. It was this famous aria, "Vissi d'arte," and that say, "you must try to discover the knife before," in "Vissi d'arte," you say how innocent you are, and you the most biggest innocence you never saw, and at the same time you discover the knife and then you must put it away because the idea of the libretto is so stupid, that she finds the knife at the moment she kills him, it's so stupid for storytelling, it's not good, so I preferred it a little bit, it's like

the jump down, it's very much criticized that, I show after the killing, she's on the window and thinking about jumping down and I said because I wanted to—something to prepare and not to make cause it's need now, we need this and we need this, and I know these letters between Puccini and Sardou, it's incredible, because Sardou never agreed, Puccini wanted different things and he never agreed. Sometimes that and sometimes this. It's only when you follow sometimes you discover things, it's not to be better, it's not original. I am very, very angry with the people consider so special. Nothing's special. It's opera, it's only a little bit—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** How do you mean that? Nothing's special, it's only opera?

**LUC BONDY:** You know it's unique. I don't think—that they are difference of level of operas and weight of operas and this is a very trivial story. But it's good, it's a very thrilling story, and the music is thrilling, but it is not Alban Berg. I love Schoenberg. I love Puccini, he was you know, who was discovered, Schoenberg was a fan of Puccini, there was always fight about. I think it's a great thing, but there is like *Salome*, *Tosca*, there are things like this that are very emphatic and they are in a way, opera, how you cannot imagine opera, the top of the idea of opera is *Tosca*. It's kind of a top, but I don't think it's only good. It's very good but not only.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Well, were you? I mean, it's a question one must ask you. Were you surprised at the reaction?

**LUC BONDY:** Stop with the reaction of the audience again.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** But why. Do you not care?

**LUC BONDY:** Not totally. No.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Not totally.

**LUC BONDY:** I can see that they are angry, but I can see when they were like—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Let's forget the audience for a moment.

**LUC BONDY:** We don't forget the audience. We never forget the audience. We never forget the audience. But certainly sometimes we can disagree with her.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** We can disagree with her, but sometimes.

**LUC BONDY:** We can disagree with her.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Of course, of course. I'm just curious, Luc Bondy, about how you felt, and feel about the reaction of the critics, because the critics—

**LUC BONDY:** There was some difference, but I must tell you the truth, that I didn't—I only when somebody told me it's a good critic, I did—

**PETER GELB:** Very wise policy.

**LUC BONDY:** And I didn't **-** Because you must imagine, you come on the stage, and you have a thousand people again, then you don't care anymore. I was so—I was pleased it was finished. And I was pleased. It was a big work, it was very hard work. I was pleased it's finished, you know, and then direction I was scandalized that they are so scandalized.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** This reminds me of that wonderful Lessing line—

**LUC BONDY:** If this is an opera to scandalize, I don't know what's happened.

**PETER GELB:** But I think one thing—one must not forget, though, is that, and Luc said this earlier. The fact that there is a contingent of people in the audience booing, it does not mean that many people did not enjoy this opera very, very much. And since I've been at the Met, this is the only production which prompts people come up to me on the street and say they liked it so much. So many people love this production, and so the fact that it's got bad reviews in New York is unfortunate, but the public is coming. It's completely sold out, the fall performances, and they like it, and they don't you know they don't have him to boo on the stage after the first night, so they applaud.

**LUC BONDY:** I have had people come to me and say **[confidentially]** "I liked it."

**(laughter)**

**PETER GELB:** You know, I think one of the things that's quite interesting, about the—for me, personally, about the reaction to this, in hearing what people say about it, the people who don't like it, it seems that the sin that was committed here was that—for those people who don't like it—is that it is too raw and gritty and real and that's what would have been, I think, accepted for those people who would have accepted anything to replace Zeffirelli, would have been something that would have been very, very symbolic and, you know, kind of not realistic. The realism of this I think is what—combined with the fact that we replaced Zeffirelli, is what is so offensive to those people who don't like it. And it's also exactly—what is why—the reason why those people who do like it like it.

**LUC BONDY:** There's a chance of the *House of Dead*, it have never been done, the great music, and it's very, and I'm very proud because I'm a part of this production as a producer and you see when you see Janáček, the people how they behave onstage, the simplicity of how people are onstage, and this is something, why we don't do this also in the opera of the nineteenth century, you know, the kind of recognize, over the music, but the music helps you to recognize your own people, not that this must be clichéd because they sing. And you know the big problem of the opera is that the people they mixed

tradition with laziness, they are lazy, and tradition and lazy are two different things. That's attitude, and people are lazy normally who makes opera. And if you work and you see singers—in the *House of Dead* you see singers—it allows us to see a singer in the simplicity of the gesture because it's possible. You know, the singer, they love this, normally the singer they are very pleased with you when you say keep away the hand and do that, they are very pleased, they are very pleased about working with them. This is what the people don't know.

**BARTLETT SHER:** Plus it's cultural, you know, it's a little weird, Americans don't boo a lot. I did an opera in Salzburg, and every production I went to, they booed all the time, so, but Americans don't boo a lot. It's a very uncertain time, culturally and politically and humanly, and there's a lot of anxiety, and change is a very complicated thing for people to handle, so the idea of change, because Zeffirelli was something they love or cherished, and the idea that it's being pushed into change, no matter what the nature of it is, particularly now, is very complex for people. And particularly in New York, where it's a very uncertain, you know, time in general, economically and politically, and so the reactionary forces, meaning reacting violently or loudly to something they don't know, are very interesting. I think it's much better when it's loud and when it is voluble than when it's quiet and under the surface, because it's doing a good thing in creating a good conversation about the nature of what we're doing, and people care enough to say something loud. Which is different than when it's secret and complicated, so in the conversational terms, it seems to me a sign of great health and expression in transaction between the audience and the event, so I don't know.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Well, in closing, I'd like to ask you a little bit about a very broad question, but I think an important one. If these plots are somewhat trite, somewhat difficult to follow, somewhat unrealistic at times, if opera is suffering terribly now from an aging population that doesn't necessarily always want change. I mean, perhaps I'll ask the question of you first, Peter. You know, what can you do? I mean, I know what I do, what I did just very recently is bring my seven-year-old son to see *Zauberflöte* and he was enchanted and said to me that we must go and see or take him to see *The House of the Dead*, but we must go and see—why not? I mean, you know, if I put five dollars aside every day there will be enough money for the shrink later on, **(laughter)** but I'm just, I'm just, you know, because I read to him—

**PETER GELB:** We'll set up a service in the opera.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** I'm going to take him to see *The Nose* because he loves the story.

**PETER GELB:** That should really mess him up.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** That will really mess him up, you know. But what are you doing and what can you do and even my seven-year-old might totally rebel against this early impression of his Papa taking him to the opera, though he went quite willingly,

what can you do to attract a younger audience? Go ahead. It's a question you've been asked a hundred times.

**PETER GELB:** What we're doing is trying to attract a younger audience. We're also trying, in the face of change, to not alienate the older audience, and that's really why this was not a happy experience for me in the sense, in the case of *Tosca*, because to seek controversy, or to disturb audience members, is the last thing somebody running an opera house wants to do. On the other hand—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Is that necessarily true? Because it gave a lot of attention.

**PETER GELB:** It is true, believe me it's true. I am not—you know, I am not interested in courting controversy. What I'm interested in is putting on productions at the Met that will draw new audiences into the theater and make it a magical experience for young people and to make it so that somebody who is both an opera lover and wants to hear the great tradition of great voices preserved at the Met will hear that in this *Tosca* production because we have a wonderful cast and the acoustics of the set that were designed by Richard Peduzzi honors and supports the voices of the Metropolitan. The glory of the Metropolitan Opera orchestra, it's all there, and all the musical values and strengths of the Met that have been there for decades are in full glory in this production. At the same time, for somebody who goes to this who maybe has never seen *Tosca* and who is interested in theatrical realism will be thrilled by the fact that this, that an opera production like this can actually be an exciting, revelatory experience for them. And I'm

convinced that this opera is doing that and I—it's not enough to do that with one opera, we have to do it with every opera and we have actually *eight* new productions this season, not six—

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** More than half a dozen, I said.

**PETER GELB:** And each one of these new productions is an opportunity to captivate and excite new audiences for opera and at the same time hopefully not alienate the audience that we already have. So far, I've been pretty lucky. This one is the first one that I think divided the public so strongly, and we're certainly not looking to divide the public. But on the other hand we're not interested in compromising this necessary mission to make this opera form alive and fresh, because there's no other answer. The only other way is to passively watch it slowly fade away.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Disintegrate and so many opera houses closing.

**BARTLETT SHER:** You have to understand—and Peter wouldn't necessarily say this, but, you know, America is a complex country and it often comes in for a lot of criticism, you know, because the stereotype of Americans is that they're ignorant, they're not aware of things, they're not aware of the rest of the world, but the Met just as an institution is the most extraordinary artistic institution absolutely without question in America, the largest, and it's also one of the most extraordinary ones in the world. It's producing *The House of the Dead*, *The Nose*, a new *Tosca*, these new productions and maintaining

enormous budgets for audiences to come in very large numbers to see this form which everyone has declared dead and then having the temerity to pump them into forty-two different countries eight times a year, and they're seeing these incredible broadcasts, which is changing and creating whole new audiences. And so thank God people are going at least on the level that it's there, but it's a very, very extraordinary artistic accomplishment which, having worked in Europe, they're not accomplishing in Europe in the same way, as much as they will tell us how stupid we are a lot.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** So are we—so Patrice are we not that stupid then, here?

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** I'm sorry?

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Are we not that stupid here in America?

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** I never thought that.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** In Europe, what Bart was describing is not happening in opera houses?

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** You shouldn't ask me, because I'm doing very few operas. And I'm working, I work a lot in festivals, where the standard and the way of working is always different than in a stable opera house, you know, so I don't know what to say to your question.

**BARTLETT SHER:** I'm not trying to suggest that, it's just that I think people forget—I think Americans particularly forget, because we are by our nature a little bit insecure, I think. **(laughter)** Actually how good the thing is that we're—there's some good in what's being accomplished that's pretty different than we—than people might expect.

**LUC BONDY:** I want to tell you in Europe we have completely other problems. The problem is the people would in Europe would find this *Tosca* the most conventional and boring thing. It's because in Europe, the problem is different. The people, the directors, we have many of this, they try to find how to deconstruct and make completely that we don't understand the story anymore, and next time they are going to change the score also, because in the plays they change the texts. So the suggestion that we can't understand is for us is very astonishing because we don't think in this way. I'm always scandalized when I go in an opera and I see it's a bad work, I'm very angry because I see so much money for shit. And it's true, it happened. But this is on both sides—there's very much money for shit, conventional shit, there's very much money also for completely stupid progressive shit, you have both side, you know. It is a problem.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** It's a very good place on this note on conventional and progressive shit—I think you've wrapped it up beautifully in those last, **(laughter)** so I would like to open it to the public. What I would like to encourage—we can pass around the mic. We have written questions, and you can read them if you'd like, what I'd like to encourage you to do is to wait for the mic to come around to ask a question and in my

experience though I'm not a firm proponent of doing that myself, questions can be asked in about fifty seconds or less.

**Q:** Hi. It seems to me that when you use words like new and unconventional to attract new people, they haven't seen the original, so it seems to me that those might appeal most to people who had already been familiar. When I started going to operas about five years ago, I wanted to see all the classical ones, I wanted to know what's the big deal? I'm very glad I got to see the Zeffirelli *Tosca*, so I mean when you say that in order to attract new audiences you need to have new productions, I don't feel that at all. Also, I love the production of *The Barber of Seville*, it seems to me it leads directly into Gilbert and Sullivan patter songs.

**PETER GELB:** Yeah, I understand, I understand.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** So let's let the next one be a question. Here.

**Q:** Good evening. I just have a question for Mr. Gelb quickly. Just kind of how are you feeling about possibly having a new production for *Bohème*, which is an older, more like grander, more, it's basically sold out every season since '81, so I was wondering how management is kind of thinking about having a new production for that, which is kind of like the—I would even say it's more holy than *Tosca*, so I was just curious about that.

**PETER GELB:** The answer to that question is there is no production at the Met that eventually will not be redone.

**(applause)**

**Q:** Why do contemporary opera productions so often transpose things into modern dress and settings? Is there a fear that audiences won't get it unless it's literally presented in the terms of our own time?

**LUC BONDY:** For me it's a question not because we did it in the nineteenth century and not today. So the question is I don't understand.

**Q:** Not about yours in particular, but many directors resort to that.

**BARTLETT SHER:** They have an impulse, they see it, they see the story, the essence of the story in contemporary terms, and they try to find associations and connections with it and put it in that, I don't know.

**LUC BONDY:** I'll tell you something—you know, Shakespeare when he wrote a play like *Timon of Athens* or *Macbeth* or plays like this, he never thought, he thought of England when he lived and not about Rome, he didn't—he didn't care, really, so you cannot make today, people try to say *Macbeth* is static, it's normal, it's normal, you can understand this.

**PATRICE CHÉREAU:** It's an interesting question because when I made the *Ring*, I'm sorry again with the *Ring*, but I made the *Ring* one of the scandals was that the gods were in nineteenth-century costumes. So I said but why you shouldn't do, you should not do as it is written, like "they are gods," so how they wear, what they wear, what do they wear, the gods? So I should do, put some contemporary costume of the time of Wagner, you know. So also another question I had *The House of the Dead* is normally, normally, it is in a Siberian camp in 1860, but the opera was written in 1928, and then, since that time, since '28, we knew a lot of prisons, a lot of camps, we knew the Soviet Union, we knew the Nazi camps, and then what does it mean to go back to the czar's time, you know? I mean, I hope to put onstage something you can tell everything, you can speak about, talk about *all* the prisons, *all* the camps of the twentieth century. It would be a mistake, a fault, an error, to go back to the nineteenth century, because now the camps we invented in the twentieth century were much worse than the czarist Russia, you know, so in other words, it was an impossibility to make everybody in orange and to describe Guantanamo, you know, but between Guantanamo and between the Russia of the nineteenth century, you have a possibility of describing something that could be related to you and not necessarily today but not necessarily in the one century soon before, you know. So we tried to find something that was not an obstacle to read exactly the story and the story can talk to us today.

**BARTLETT SHER:** I mean, Shakespeare's a good example. The only drawing they have an actual Shakespeare, what they believe to be a Shakespeare production, is *Titus*

*Andronicus*, and if you look at the drawing, aside from the fact that it doesn't describe any scene in it, they think of time very differently, it has togas next to contemporary at the time Elizabethan costumes. Now if I did a production of *Titus Andronicus* and put Elizabethan costumes in next to the togas, they'd say I was completely out of my mind. So the idea of this sense that there's this period that has to be observed and followed, it's the response of the artist inside of that to sort of make sense of it. Time is very complicated.

**LUC BONDY:** You can also say, why a person came to me and said, thought to say, I don't tell him, but he is very famous, and you have Guantanamo today and Scarpia, it's like Guantanamo, it's like Guantanamo, and I said, yes, and torture was before Guantanamo, it's going to be after Guantanamo, it's been in Russia, it's everywhere, I don't make a command to put as director torturing in exactly because we know it at the television, you know. This I don't like, this aesthetic of television, everyday real what's happening the world, what happened in Russia, what's happening, I don't know where, Africa or somewhere. It's not the point, you know, to make the people say, "Ahh, it exactly like I saw it yesterday in the television," because then you became silly, and you make only recognizing experiences you had, and not something who changed.

**Q:** First, I want to say thank you for *Tosca*, because the story came through loud and clear. I've probably seen eight or nine productions and I never appreciated it the way I did last week. But the question is why is there such a hue and cry over *Tosca*, when *Sonnambula*, which messed up the story completely, did not get such a hue and cry?

**PETER GELB:** Since Mary Zimmerman is not here, I don't think that's a fair question, but it is true that her production of *Sonnambula* certainly elicited a reaction that was not entirely positive.

**Q:** How did filming change your ideas about how you were going to direct it?

**LUC BONDY:** What?

**Q:** How did filming—how did the idea, the concept of having to create something that was going to be on film—

**LUC BONDY:** We don't think about it before.

**Q:** You don't?

**LUC BONDY:** No, because if you think about it before you cannot stop.

**PETER GELB:** We never discuss the—it's going to be broadcast this Saturday. It was never discussed, there was no adjustments for lighting, makeup, costumes, anything, until the last week, after the show opened, because it's too complicated to put an opera on to begin with to have to think about the filming of it at the same time.

**LUC BONDY:** At the same time I was thinking about this today. I think you can in a theater—You can make in an opera, if you make a live opera, it's always good when you feel when it's a broadcast of a performance, not to make around film. For me it was a terrible experience, Losey's *Don Giovanni*, because you see the broadcast—you see there is a sound who's talking in studio, the guy is walking and you don't sing really and this is horrible. I think it's when-how to you take—how you do it's a way to documentary people who cannot go there and not to try to make a film.

**PETER GELB:** We are not pretending these are films—they are live presentations from the stage.

**Q:** I loved *Tosca*, also. For Peter Gelb, when selecting a new production, do you engage the director or the cast first? What role does the director play in selecting the singers?

**PETER GELB:** Well, it's a very delicate balancing act between the director and the conductor and the person in my position, too, because we're all trying to find a way to work together to find—it's a very difficult process, because we are attempting to find performers who please all three sides, so they have to be musically up to the standards of the Met, they have to be theatrically up to the standards of the director, and we talk back and forth and sometimes you can't do it for a theater like the Met, which is so transparent in terms of sound, only the greatest singers can have success on the stage at the Met, and in certain cases operas can't be done because they can't be cast properly, but, you know, we try to find the right way.

**Q:** One of the new initiatives at the Met is to—I believe you're commissioning some new musical theater writers to work with the Met, and I know, having theatrical experience, can you speak to the inherent difference between musical theater and opera in your eyes and how that is melding together and, you know, what would stop you from considering some musical theater repertory in the Met's program?

**PETER GELB:** The thing about the Met is it's a four-thousand-seat acoustical house, and there are many theaters in New York which put on musical theater amplified, and we are actually very eagerly pursuing new works. We have a a program together with Lincoln Center Theater, in fact it was mentioned earlier that Nico Muhly, who is sitting here in the front row, is composing, has composed an opera which Bart Sher is working on in a workshop right now. They just came from a session, so we're developing new work, which we think will hopefully be on the stage of the Met, and there's so many, there are so many, also, so many major contemporary or recent works that have never been produced as operas that the Met didn't pursue like *House of the Dead*, or *Doctor Atomic*, or *Satyagraha*, or Thomas Adès's *The Tempest*, there are many works that we have planned that will be new experiences for Met audiences. And quite frankly musical theater in that house doesn't really make sense. The only time we have so far used amplification, which is what musical theater of course needs, is when the composer of an opera like John Adams has included it in his composing.

**BARTLETT SHER:** It's not a stage for the spoken voice.

**PETER GELB:** Not a good one.

**BARTLETT SHER:** It's just really not an easy place for the spoken voice to work, because the suddenly the thing just gets so small, and if it's amplified, you can't get any balance between the two things, it's built for a certain kind of experience and the relationship between Lincoln Center Theater and the Met, who knows if Michael John LaChiusa is going to write a musical or an opera, he doesn't know when he gets his commission.

**PETER GELB:** That's a good point. Part of our program is that we leave it up to what the ultimate type of work it is. So it could end up—one of these commission could end up at the Beaumont or—

**Q:** Good evening. I have a question for Peter Gelb regarding the HD production. The question is how the camerawork is planned for these broadcasts, because it seems to be the DVD production is much better than the camerawork when it's broadcast. I don't know why and for what reason it looks, for me at least, more like a soccer game than actually opera production when you see it HD.

**PETER GELB:** I'm not quite sure I follow the question—you're saying it looks more like a soccer game?

**Q:** Yeah, I'm asking about how well the camerawork is planned, the cinematography is planned, for these broadcasts because it's kind of a little bit hectic and doesn't represent like as well as usual DVD production does.

**PETER GELB:** Actually it is live, so because it's live, there is the possibility for sometimes a camera to miss a shot, but that's a small price to pay for the thrill and excitement of being connected to the Met live, and I think the reason why almost two million people watched these transmissions in movie theaters in forty countries last year because the idea of being connected live to the Met and witnessing these great performances is an experience that is almost as good as being in the opera house itself, not quite as good as being there. But the price of live, of being live, just like if you were watching a soccer match, is sometimes the camera is not in the right place. We believe that our cameras are mostly in the right places, and one of the things that we have done with these transmissions is to make them far more, I think, visually interesting than most DVDs in opera houses because we—since the team that produces these live transmissions is also the same producers who run the opera house itself, we take license and liberties with the camerawork that goes beyond what other opera houses have ever done.

For example, in this *Tosca* that we're showing on Saturday, there is a camera that, a remote-controlled camera that just appears over the edge of the stage that's on a rail that can track all the way across the stage back and forth, providing these kind of cinematic dolly shots. No opera house has ever done anything like that. And we also have a camera on an arm that can go up and down on one side of the house and we also have cameras

backstage which provide kind of live reportage, you know, as you know if you've seen them, this Saturday, Susan Graham, who is starring in the revival of *Rosenkavalier* is our behind the scenes reporter and she will be interviewing Karita Mattila as she comes off the stage. And the audiences in the movie theaters love seeing diva reporters at work interviewing their peers. So there certainly are sacrifices, but we think the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** One last question.

**Q:** Since you've become the general manager of the opera, the number of new productions has increased hugely, and this year we're doing eight, and last year we did six, the previous year a similar number. Just statistically speaking we're going to have failures, and tonight we've decided that the failures will not be judged by booing on opening nights and by negative critiques by people writing in the newspapers. How will we know when we have a bad production, since statistically speaking every opera house has—even the Metropolitan Opera House—will eventually have a bad production?

**PETER GELB:** It was interesting hearing Patrice talking about his production of the *Ring* in Bayreuth and how it was first vilified in some quarters and then later on was considered to be an enduring legendary success. I think that the main criteria is the public and I think if the public—you know, I feel very strong, as these directors do, I feel, and I think that's why we're sort of, we get along with each other, is we all have the same goal, which is to lead the public and excite and stimulate the public. And if the public does not

come to the production, then I guess we would consider it not to be as successful as we would have liked, so we have to hope that the public will come. And if it does come and enjoys it, then I think that is an indication that—certainly a good indication—that it was a success. It's no good, certainly, to work in a vacuum where if I think and the director thinks that we've had a great success and nobody else does, that wouldn't—we may be right, but it wouldn't be very convincing.

**LUC BONDY:** I'll tell you only one thing. A little bit I was afraid that people like too much the *Tosca*. **(laughter)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Well, your fear did not come true.

**LUC BONDY:** If most people understand it, it would be a problem. Don't you think so?

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** I do. Thank you very much.

**(applause)**