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Great Performances: The Opera House

*Premieres Friday, May 25 at 9 p.m. on PBS
(check local listings) and will be available to stream the following day on
pbs.org/gperf and PBS apps.*

Synopsis:

Great Performances: The Opera House, the new documentary by multiple Emmy Award-winning documentary filmmaker **Susan Froemke** (*Grey Gardens*; *Lalee's Kin: The Legacy of Cotton*) surveys a remarkable period of the **Metropolitan Opera's** rich history and a time of great change for New York City. Drawing on rarely seen archival footage, stills and recent interviews, the film chronicles the creation of the Met's storied Lincoln Center home of the last 50 years, set against a backdrop of the artists, architects and politicians who shaped the cultural life of New York City in the 1950s and 60s. Amongst the notable figures featured in the film are famed soprano **Leontyne Price**, who opened the Met's present Opera House in 1966 with a starring role in Samuel Barber's *Antony and Cleopatra*; **Rudolf Bing**, the Met's imperious general manager who engineered the move from the old house to the new one; **Robert Moses**, the unstoppable city planner who bulldozed an entire neighborhood to make room for Lincoln Center; and **Wallace Harrison**, whose quest for architectural glory was never fully realized.

Short TV Listing:

Explore the history of the Met Opera's Lincoln Center home and life in 1950s-60s New York City.

Long TV Listing:

Explore the rich history of the Met Opera's Lincoln Center home and the cultural life of 1950s-60s New York City. Features famed soprano Leontyne Price, the Met's general manager Rudolf Bing, city planner Robert Moses and architect Wallace Harrison.

Runtime: 120 minutes

Notable Talent:

- **Leontyne Price**, American soprano
- **Rudolf Bing**, Austrian-born opera impresario
- **Robert Moses**, former New York public official
- **Wallace K. Harrison**, American architect
- **Samuel Barber**, American composer (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 1966)
- **Franco Zeffirelli**, Italian director and producer of operas
- **Susan Froemke**, multiple Emmy Award-winning documentary filmmaker (*Grey Gardens*; *Lalee's Kin: The Legacy of Cotton*)
- **Peter Gelb**, General Manager, The Metropolitan Opera
- **David Horn**, *Great Performances* executive producer

Noteworthy Facts:

- The Metropolitan Opera began planning for a new home in the mid-1950s to provide the company with a cutting-edge, modern theater to complement the golden era of its storied history.
- The perfect political and cultural storm allowed for the construction of the Opera House. City planner **Robert Moses** cleared the way by removing the slums of the Upper West Side; **John D. Rockefeller III** had the money to make his vision of the first modern American cultural campus a reality; and architectural talent **Wallace K. Harrison** (Rockefeller Center, United Nations) was commissioned for the project.
- The Metropolitan Opera House at Lincoln Center opened in 1966 with **Samuel Barber's** *Antony and Cleopatra*, featuring famed American soprano **Leontyne Price**. The A-list audience included First Lady of the United States **Lady Bird Johnson** and her guests **Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos**, as well as leading statesmen: the Vanderbilts, the Whitneys and the Astors.

***Great Performances* executive producer David Horn on *The Opera House*:**

"This film was a natural for us, given our long-standing partnership with the Metropolitan Opera on ***Great Performances at the Met***, which brings opera performances into homes across the country. This fascinating documentary captures not only the epic drama of building a new opera house, but the creative challenges of commissioning and staging the world premiere of Samuel Barber's *Antony and Cleopatra*."

Production Credits:

Great Performances: The Opera House is directed and produced by Susan Froemke. Peter R. Livingston Jr. is editor and co-director. Peter Gelb is producer. For **Great Performances**, Bill O'Donnell is series producer and David Horn is executive producer.

Underwriters:

Major funding for The Opera House was provided by the Lloyd E. Rigler-Lawrence E. Deutsch Foundation. **Great Performances** is funded by The Joseph & Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation, the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Arts Fund, the Irene Diamond Fund, The LuEsther T. Mertz Charitable Trust, The Agnes Varis Trust, The Starr Foundation, the Kate W. Cassidy Foundation, Ellen and James S. Marcus, the Philip and Janice Levin Foundation, the Thea Petschek Iervolino Foundation, The Abra Prentice Foundation and PBS.

Series Overview:

Great Performances is produced by THIRTEEN PRODUCTIONS LLC for WNET.

Throughout its more than 40-year history on public television, **Great Performances** has provided viewers across the country with an unparalleled showcase of the best in all genres of the performing arts, serving as America's most prestigious and enduring broadcaster of cultural programming.

Now in its twelfth season on PBS (check local listings), **Great Performances at The Met** presents nine Metropolitan Opera productions featuring the world's leading stars. Upcoming broadcasts include Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore* (April 29), Puccini's *La Bohème* (May 20) and *Tosca* (June 15), Rossini's *Semiramide* (July 8), Mozart's *Così fan tutte* (July 29), Verdi's *Luisa Miller* (August 12), and Massenet's *Cendrillon* (Sept 9).

Websites:

- <http://pbs.org/gperf>
- <https://facebook.com/GreatPerformances>
- <https://twitter.com/GPerfPBS>
- #GreatPerformancesPBS

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About WNET

WNET is America's flagship PBS station and parent company of [THIRTEEN](#) and [WLIW21](#). WNET also operates [NJTV](#), the statewide public media network in New Jersey. Through its broadcast channels, three cable services (THIRTEEN PBSKids, Create and World) and online streaming sites, WNET brings quality arts, education and public affairs programming to more than five million viewers each week. WNET produces and presents such acclaimed PBS series as [Nature](#), [Great Performances](#), [American Masters](#), [PBS NewsHour Weekend](#) and a range of documentaries, children's programs, and local news and cultural offerings. WNET's groundbreaking series for children and

young adults include [Get the Math](#), [Oh Noah!](#) and [Cyberchase](#) as well as [Mission US](#), the award-winning interactive history game. WNET highlights the tri-state's unique culture and diverse communities through [NYC-ARTS](#), [Theater Close-Up](#), [NJTV News with Mary Alice Williams](#) and [MetroFocus](#), the daily multi-platform news magazine focusing on the New York region. In addition, WNET produces online-only programming including the award-winning series about gender identity, [First Person](#), and an intergenerational look at tech and pop culture, [The Chatterbox with Kevin and Grandma Lill](#). In 2015, THIRTEEN launched Passport, an online streaming service which allows members to see new and archival THIRTEEN and PBS programming anytime, anywhere: www.thirteen.org/passport.