



The Metropolitan Opera House



IT'S ALWAYS STRUCK ME HOW innately feminine the Metropolitan Opera House is. It's surprising because the same architect, Wallace K. Harrison, was known for his rigorously modern office buildings and for the United Nations headquarters, which is austere and masculine. But the Met has an organic undulating ceiling, a curvy staircase and a wonderful vista at the top of the stairs of Wilhelm Lehmbruck's statue of a kneeling nude woman. The sconces and the

chandeliers look like huge baubles, and with the red walls and gold ceiling, it feels as if you're in a jewelry box.

I love going on the opening night of an opera and seeing everyone dressed up. My first time going to the Met, I got tickets to *La Traviata* not even realizing it was opening night. I was 21 or 22, and I still remember being swept into the glamour of it.

To this day, there's always such a buzz in the air. It starts outside as you approach that travertine façade, which

could be a stage set itself. It's as if the glass wall behind the arches has cut open an elevation of the space, and you can see people moving in a kind of swirling motion on all the floors and up the grand staircase.

Inside the theater you have that woven damask curtain—supposedly the largest tab curtain in the world—hanging in the enormous proscenium. There's a whole other world behind that curtain, and you can feel it. You can sense the audience waiting for it to go up. There's a hush when those jewel-like Lohmeyr chandeliers rise to the ceiling and the lights dim. And then everyone catches their breath as they see a fantasy begin to unfold before them. It's amazing how the sets can create any environment—from the Egypt of *Aida* to a Roman cathedral in *Tosca*.

And then there's the music. The emotions it puts you through! You go from anticipation and excitement to drama, sorrow, joy and sheer awe.

They're epic. The whole experience is larger than life, yet somehow timeless. The building speaks of the 1960s, when it was built, without feeling dated. I suppose any truly magical experience has that suspended-in-time quality, and that's exactly the sensation I get when I go to the opera there. ❧

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