

*Yes, Saturdee Opry Links is back from the near-dead (knock wood) to inflict on you still more excerpts from great operas, in a relentless, Quixotic lashing out at ugliness and stupidity rampant in the world. In today's new SOL beginning, we examine ten beginnings of operas. Some are fun, some dramatic, some slight, some novel, some delightful. With overture, but, of course. Start ignoring. . .now!*

<https://youtu.be/Wt7eedQCDQY?si=WAZ9H-TDFI0KJkfk>

### **Saturdee Opry Links Overture:**

Schubert (!), "Fierrabras."

Yes, in his short life, Franz Schubert, master of lieder (classical song), also composed eleven(!) operas--- today largely unperformed. Here is the stalwart overture from his 1823 work, "Fierrabras," the adventures of a Moorish knight, and his eventual conversion to Christianity.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mZeTEUSxQ4>

About the opera:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fierrabras\\_\(opera\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fierrabras_(opera))



**Fleming**



**Martyl**



**Tirmont**



**Gagnidze**



**Vatchkov**

### 1.

The first aria in Verdi's "Il Trovatore" ("The Troubadour") is, for my money, right up there with the most compelling openings of any opera. I know, not a potent boast, but. . . You want the beginning of an opera to compel your attention, of course, and this brilliant scene-setter does so with a commanding, fabulously melodic baritone exposition, "Di due figli vivea padre beato" ("There lived a happy father of two sons.") It is not only a background story narrative, but is also chocked full of 90-proof Verdi themes. The gist: Ferrando, an officer in the army of Count di Luna in the 15th century, tells us the basic facts leading to the remarkable tale to come. In this case, it is especially necessary, given the strange, gnarled plot of mixed-up babies, burning witches, star-crossed lovers. It's really a sort of preface, which Verdi wisely knew was necessary for such a tongue-twister plot. Here is baritone Deyan Vatchkov. Note: the aria is preceded by a little prelude of its own, "All'erta," in which Ferrando calls his troops to attention.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3Z\\_cPOD8EA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3Z_cPOD8EA)

Translation: (start at the top)

[https://www.murashev.com/opera/Il\\_trovatore\\_libretto\\_Italian\\_English](https://www.murashev.com/opera/Il_trovatore_libretto_Italian_English)

### 2.



Verdi's big three---"Il Trovatore," "Rigoletto," and "La Traviata"---are usually mentioned as a "big four" with "Aida." Never mind the first three are from 1851-53, and "Aida" was not written until 1871--- these comprise the most frequently performed of his 26 remarkable operas. And "Aida"---yes, the one with the elephants---is probably the most spectacular in terms of staging. Plot: the Egyptians have captured and enslaved Aida, an Ethiopian princess. An Egyptian military commander, Radamès, struggles to choose between his love for her and his loyalty to the King of Egypt. Equally important, Aida must choose between Radames and her love of country. But today's SOL is about opera openings, and there probably is no more challenging such example for a tenor than "Aida." Why? Because the work essentially begins with the well-loved aria, "Celeste Aida." Why is this so challenging, aside from requiring (ideally) a spinto voice capable of excellent legato? Because the tenor has to sing it cold. No warm-up. Here is Luciano.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP1vp\\_G9mLc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP1vp_G9mLc)

Translation: (start at "Se quel guerro.")

[https://www.murashev.com/opera/Aida\\_libretto\\_English\\_Italian](https://www.murashev.com/opera/Aida_libretto_English_Italian)

### 3.

One of the innumerable reasons that Mozart's effervescent "The Magic Flute" is so loved must be the opening sequence, which plunges you right into a crazy-fantastic wonderland of myth and fable that

does not let up for the duration of the tale. Talk about opera as sheer fun! Yes, there is a Masonic subtext, and implications of the Enlightenment, but don't let that spoil the goofball proceedings. If you are an opera novice, or have no particular interest in the genre, you should see "Flute" at least once in your life, such is its fancy and general joyfulness. Here is the opening sequence, in which Prince Tamino is on the run from a giant wurm (dragon), only to have his life saved by three goddesses. This is the aria, "Zu Hilfe! Zu Hilfe!" ("Help! Help!"), segued into the trio "Stirb, Ungeheuer, durch uns're Macht!" (Die, monster, by our might!). (Afterward, Tamino encounters Papageno, the bird-catcher, but that's another story. . .)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61eIRl8BQFY>

Translation:

(start at the top)

[https://www.murashev.com/opera/Die\\_Zauberfl%C3%B6te\\_libretto\\_German\\_English](https://www.murashev.com/opera/Die_Zauberfl%C3%B6te_libretto_German_English)

#### 4.

Yes, it's an obvious choice, but there is a reason for this: it's so winning! In today's Opera Openings Edition of SOL, we turn inevitably to Bizet's brimming-with-melodies masterpiece, "Carmen." (Which, of course, became a masterpiece after the poor man died at 36 in 1875.) Here are the opening moments, in which soldiers people-watch in the town square, and muse aloud. . . "On the square / everyone comes by / everyone comes and goes / funny sort of people these!" (Message to soldiers: they have only gotten funnier in the last 150 years.) With English subtitles. Note: this performance opens with a (needlessly) staged overture. Skip that and start at 5:35, which is the actual start of the opera.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ut6YzGn1vCQ>

Translation:

[https://www.murashev.com/opera/Carmen\\_libretto\\_French\\_English](https://www.murashev.com/opera/Carmen_libretto_French_English)

#### 5.



Puccini's "Turandot" is another opera that dramatically spells things out from the get-go, via startling music full of menace and exotica, and a town crier who ominously lays out the opera's gambit: Turandot, the "ice queen," will marry any man who can answer her three riddles. Those who fail will be executed. The opera is instantly involving, gripping.

Here are a few examples:

La Scala--- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B\\_hSo38B0PE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_hSo38B0PE)

The Coliseum(!)--- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p81kCWHE-QU>

Witchita Grand Opera(!)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHAzkgAlrtk>

### SOL EXTRA!



There should be an opera written about forgotten French soprano Nelly Martyl. What an astonishing person, and story. A busy star of the Paris Grand Opera from 1906 to 1909, she moved on to the Opera Comique, and also appeared throughout in Europe, including Covent Garden. Her stellar career was interrupted by World War 1. That is, she joined the war, as a nurse. Yes, this woman gave up her operatic career to devote herself to attending the maimed and dying in the horrific trenches of Verdun in 1916, and Aisne, the following year. Repeatedly gassed and wounded, this noble soul came to be known as "la fee de Verdun," or "the fairy of Verdun."

<https://cabinetcardgallery.com/2021/02/18/nelly-martyl-singer-nurse-war-hero-and-philanthropist/>  
AND. . .

There seems to be exactly one extant recording of this great human being, at least on Youtube, and here it is. From Gounod's "Mireille," Martyl and tenor Edmond Tirmont sing the bouyant love duet, "O Magali," with lyrics that would be the envy of any rapper or "hiphop artist." Example:

"O Magali, my beloved,  
Let us escape under the leaves,  
Deep inside the silent wood!  
Night spreads its veil over us  
And your lovely eyes  
Will make the stars dwindle  
High up in heaven!"

Oh, well, maybe not. The opera, based on one Frédéric Mistral's poem "Mirèio," concerns star-crossed lovers doomed by classism, ending tragically, poignantly. Just like life! But in this sequence, everything is coming up roses, as Mireille and Vincent sing of their mutual, wondrous, adoration.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jiYebbL8pjo>

Translation:

(Go to here and search for "Magali's")

<https://www.opera-arias.com/gounod/mireille/libretto/english/>

6.



It was a dark and stormy night. . .Verdi deeply admired Shakespeare. This, plus advancing age, made writing "Otello" protracted and problematic, with various drafts written between about 1881 and 1887, when the opera finally debuted to immense and due praise. If there is a more deliberately dramatic opening to an opera, it would be splitting hairs. The viewer is plunged into a terrific storm, with Otello's ship foundering offshore, and a choir of onlookers "calling the action."

The gist:

A tempest swirls. The people of Cyprus anxiously await the arrival of the new governor, Otello, from a naval battle with the Turks (Chorus, Montano, Cassio, Iago, Roderigo: Una vela! / "A sail!"). For a moment it seems as if Otello's ship will founder, to the delight of Otello's treacherous ensign, Iago, but Otello arrives safely and announces that the Turkish fleet has been destroyed, and the Cypriots cheer Otello, chorus: Esultate! L'orgoglio musulmano sepolto è in mar / "Rejoice! The Muslim's pride is buried in the sea." Here ya go. . .

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcuaN3jN29Q>

7.



**Sir John**

When Verdi wrote his final opera, "Falstaff," he was 80 years old. As seems the case with many an artist in advanced age, the art becomes more succinct, less decorous. It's as if there is a built-in mechanism triggered in old age that says, "just cut to the chase, Jack." And so he does with Fat Jack, AKA Sir John Falstaff, in an opera that is far more sung conversation than trademark Verdi melody and motif. Does



this make the opening more, or less compelling? The viewer is instantly immersed in the story, yes, but prosaically. You decide. *Mit der Englischen Subtitlen:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=We0heyFkqXU>

8.



Donizetti's 1832 two-act buffa, "The Elixir of Love" might not boast the most captivating opening moment in opera, but the chorus of townsfolk is hardly short of sumptuous, rollicking Italian lyricism, which alone makes it a favorite of SOL. But then it segues directly into the curvaceous legato of the tenor aria, "Quanto e bella," and, well, this is Donizetti firing on all eight. It is certainly one of the many reasons the opera remains in standard repertory today. The gist:

Nemorino, a poor peasant, is in love with Adina, a beautiful landowner, who torments him with her indifference. When Nemorino hears Adina reading to her workers the story of Tristan and Isolde, he is convinced that a magic potion will help him to gain Adina's love. The Marx Brothers show up and all hell breaks loose. (Just testing to see if you are reading.)

Here are a couple of examples of the sequence:

Vienna Opera:

(Start at 5:25)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K23CcJr2UdQ>

And here with Rolando Villazon:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14dAP2z79Go>

Translation:

<https://www.opera-arias.com/donizetti/l'elisir-d'amore/libretto/english/>

Translation, "Quanto e bella:"

[https://www.aria-database.com/translations/elisir02\\_quanto.t](https://www.aria-database.com/translations/elisir02_quanto.t)

9.

Certainly one of the top-ten most captivating openings of opera is found here. It is as ebullient and uplifting, invigorating and delightful, as the story is ultimately tragic. Quite the sly dramatic device, you say? Or is it ham-handed manipulation? Either way, it's wonderful. You know the scoop: Violetta Valery is celebrating her recovery from illness with a smashing wing-ding at her Paris salon. Gastone, a viscount, has brought a friend, Alfredo Germont, a young bourgeois from a provincial family who has

long adored Violetta from afar (as have many.) Baron Douphol, Violetta's current lover, waits to escort her---but when he is asked to give a toast, he churlishly refuses. The celebrants turn to Alfredo, who offers a *brindisi* – a drinking song. You know it, you love it, you can't live without it: "Libiamo ne' lieti calici" ("Let's drink from the joyful cups"). Here is L.A. Opera with Renee Fleming and Rolando Villazon, with Verdi's "La Traviata." This is Ms. Fleming's only topless appearance in opera. (Just testing to see if you are reading.) If you listen carefully, you can hear SOL applauding. With English subtitles.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZywmSJkKYE>

#### **FINAL BOW:**

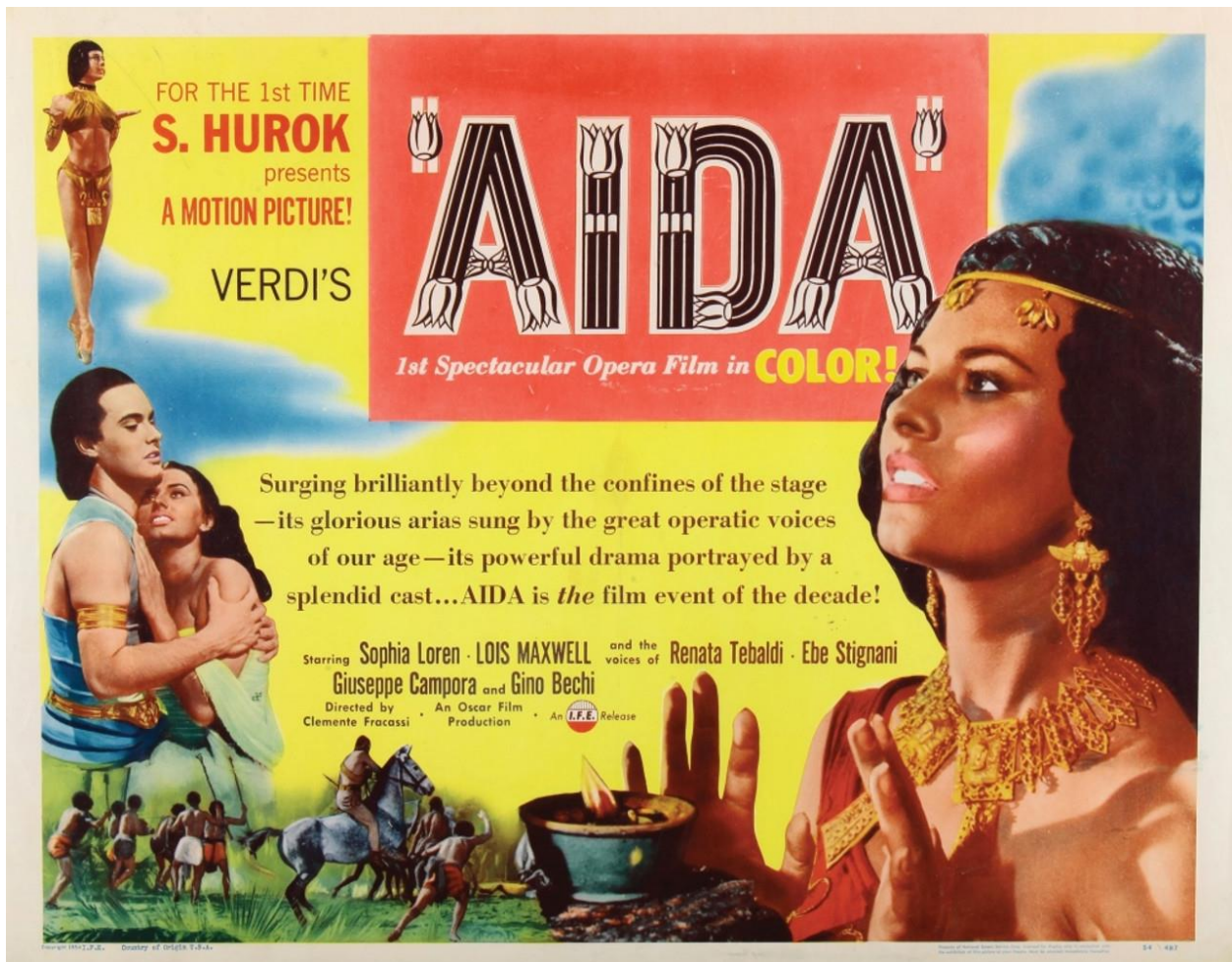
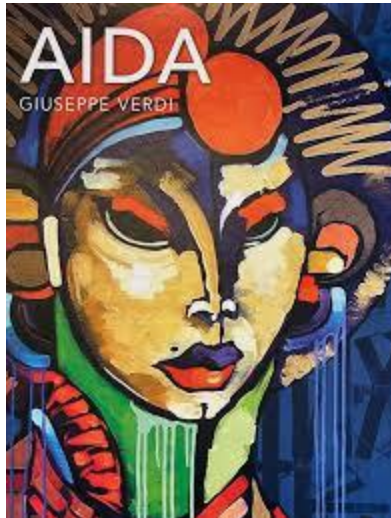


**Leoncavallo**

Many a more knowledgeable opera appreciator can cite many a more compelling operatic opening than SOL has done here today, but that's your tough luck. I'm a comparative opera rube, with a smattering of knowledge and only passing familiarity with repertory. But. . .it can safely be said that one of the most original and disarming beginnings in opera comes with Leoncavallo's classic, "Il Pagliacci." You know the story: a traveling troupe of actors. . .a love triangle. . .a jealous husband in clown make-up stabbing his wife and her lover on stage during a performance. . .the immortal aria, "Vesti la Giubba." But it all begins with a prologue---no, not an overture, but a sung introduction by one of the characters, Tonio, who explains that the tears you see on stage might be part of the story, but they stem from the genuine heartbreak in the actors' own lives. This is "Si Puo?" Or "Will you allow me?" Here is a splendid rendition (from a silly "Las Vegas" production) by baritone George Gagnidze. With English subtitles.

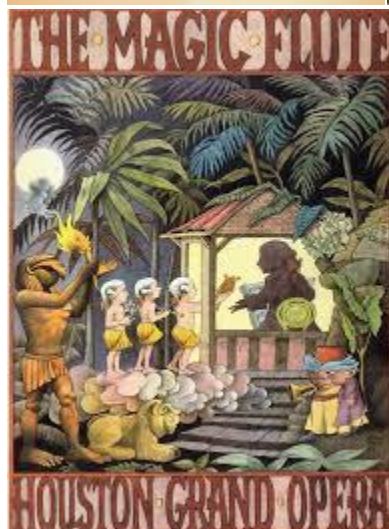
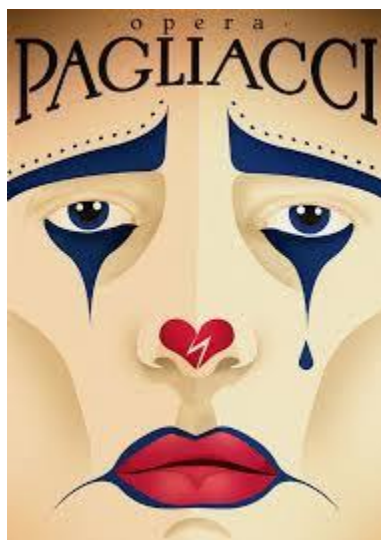
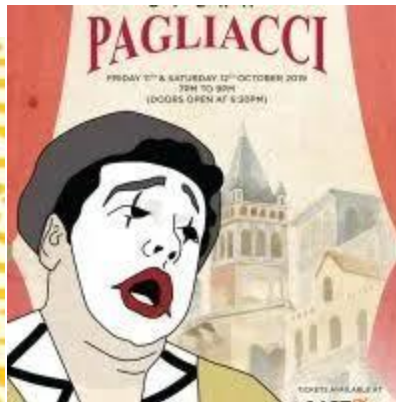
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*(Opera posters follow below)*



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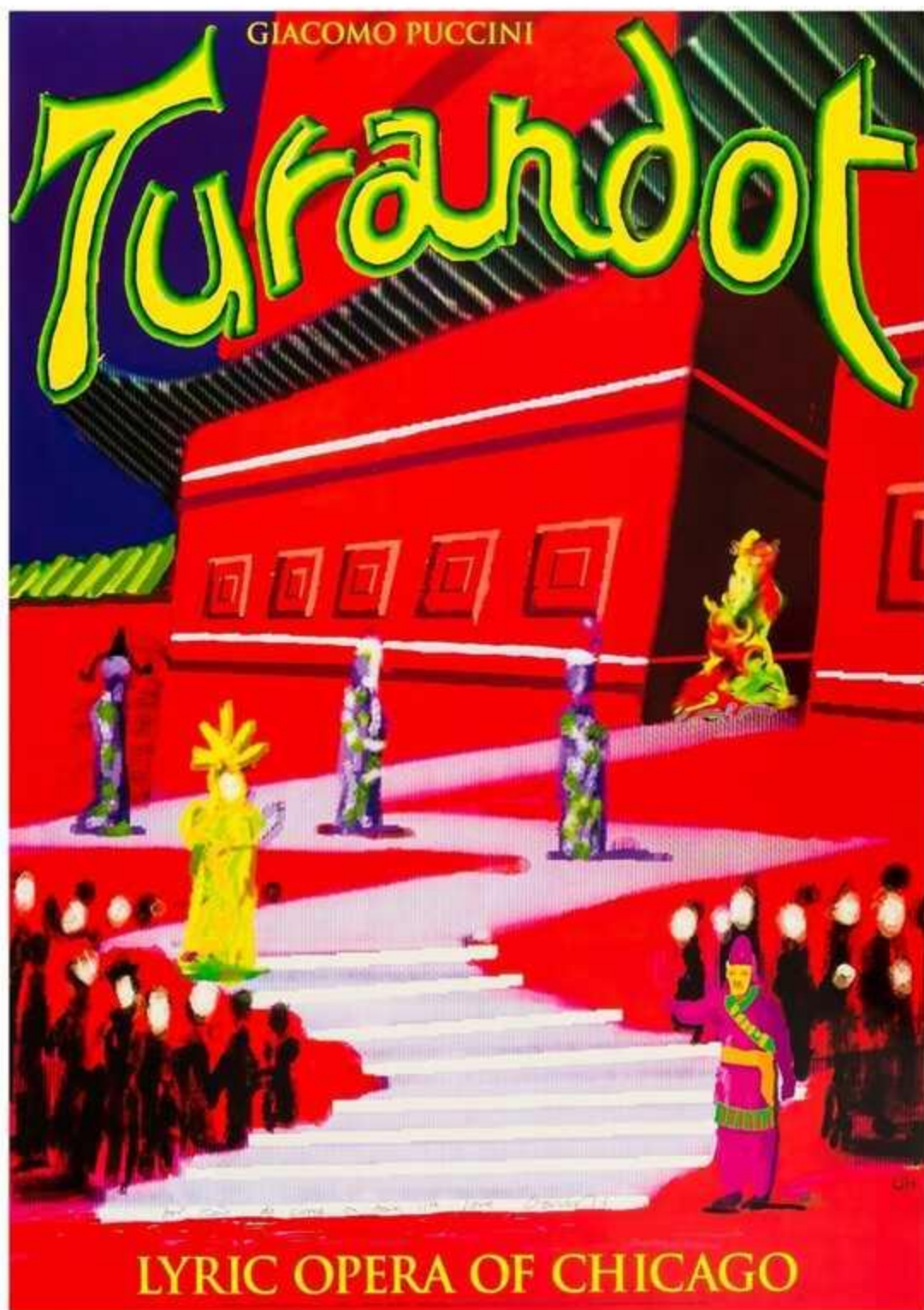


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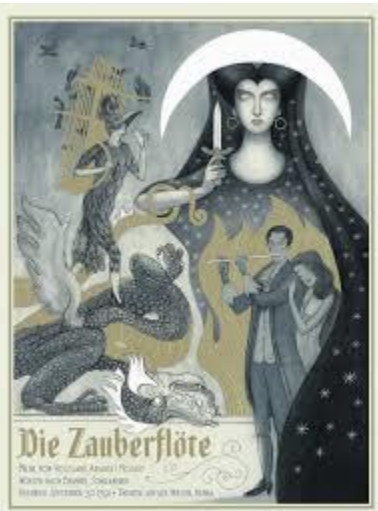








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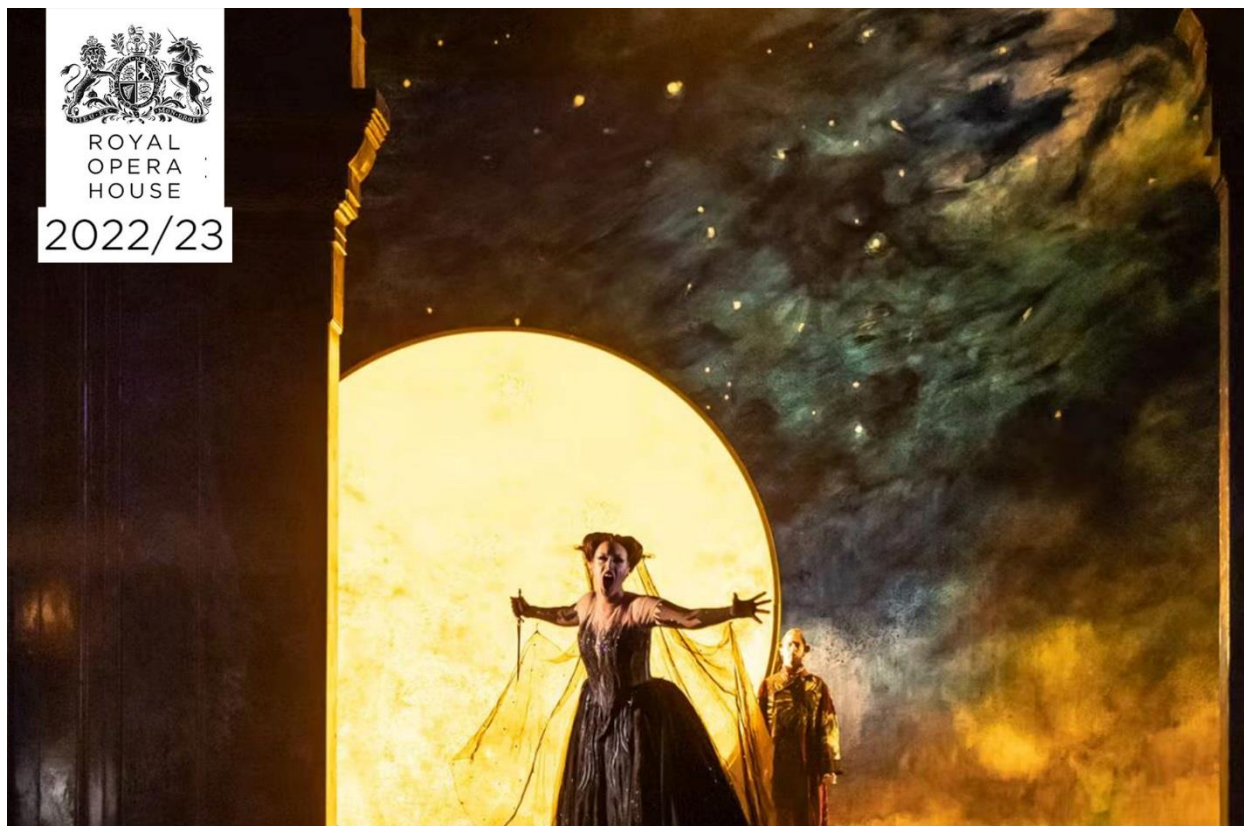
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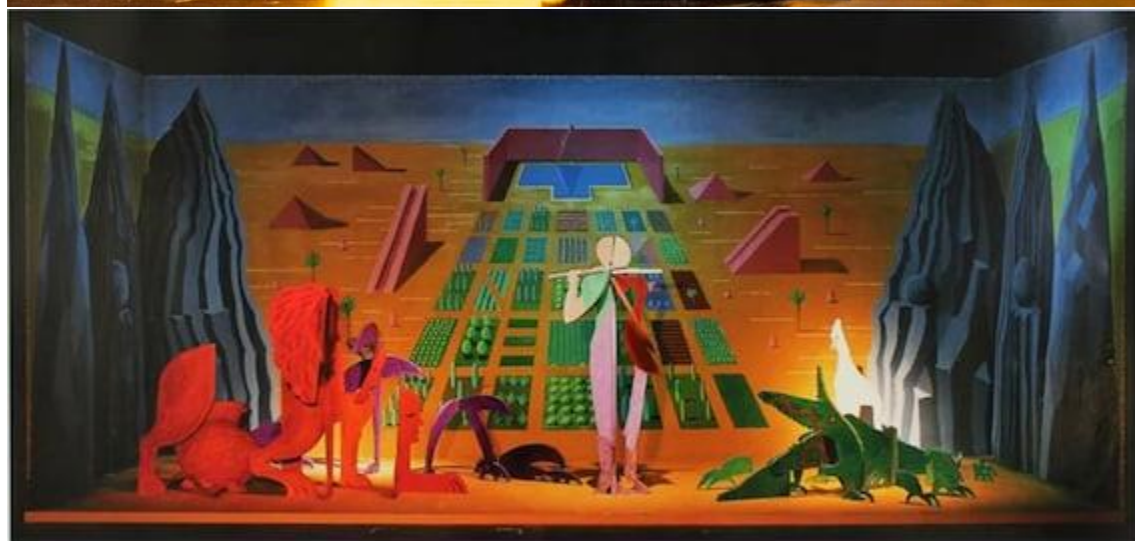


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2022/23



# THE MAGIC FLUTE



David Hockney

The Magic Flute

Salts Mill Saltaire Yorkshire

