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In Response to Timothée Chalamet: Is it curtains for ballet and opera?

by Gianna Cassino | WEEKLY COLUMNIST | SHE/HER/HERS | gic23015@uconn.edu



Dune actor Timothée Chalamet has spent the past few weeks under fire for “taking shots” (his words) at the ballet and opera industries in an interview with *Variety*. Long story short: Chalamet stated that he wouldn’t work in an industry that “needs to be kept alive”, and artists of all disciplines instantly pushed back. His statement has led to widespread online discourse on the cultural relevance and worth of these industries. Although he definitely could have been kinder, Chalamet isn’t completely incorrect. Two of the world’s oldest live art forms are criminally underappreciated by younger generations. I am of the firm belief that opera and ballet are not only alive and well, but worthwhile pastimes for those of all ages. An awful PR move for Chalamet turned out incredibly beneficial for marketing teams of the indus-

tries he’s attempted to tear down. Chalamet’s statement has brought the opera and ballet communities together at the forefront of the online pop culture sphere in unprecedented ways. Theaters throughout the world have seized their added spotlight as an opportunity to show off their incredible stars and design teams on social media, tagging Chalamet or mentioning him in shady captions. Some, like the Seattle Opera, have even begun offering discounted tickets using Timothée’s name as a coupon code. Ironically, Chalamet belittling these industries for being underappreciated by younger generations has brought them further into the minds of those that ignored them. Younger audiences respond incredibly well to snarky, personality-based marketing (the official Wendy’s twitter account speaks volumes). United against a common enemy, opera and ballet companies have a unique opportunity to rebrand their marketing voice as something relatable, modern and witty — all things they’re perceived as lacking. The potential to engage with new audience segments is a groundbreaking step towards shattering myths and misconceptions. Speaking of the ability to rebrand as an industry, this discourse sits upon the ever-present question of why young people aren’t inclined to consume ballet or opera. Two detrimental assumptions are killing interest: perceived dullness and inacces-

sibility. Some operas and ballets are indeed slow-paced and centuries old. However, both art forms have evolved significantly with the times and feature distinct genres. There are absurdist, dream-like ballets and operas that feel like edge-of-your-seat reality TV broken up by song. Centuries-old classics in the public domain mean anything is fair game, from modern pop-culture references to improvised jokes. Directors want their shows to be fun to perform and watch — they’re eager to breathe new life into old works. Of course, I can’t guarantee that you’ll fall in love with every ballet on the planet. It simply might not be your thing, like how table tennis isn’t mine. However, generalizing an entire form of media before engaging with it yourself could stop you from discovering a genuine interest. Furthermore, to say that these art forms are inaccessible would be blatantly incorrect. The mass impression of utter boredom attended solely by old-timey elites in suits and evening gowns is far from reality. Younger generations have a place in both performing and engaging with opera and ballet. Theaters across the country have begun offering discount codes in the wake of the Timothée scandal, and the New York City Ballet offers \$30 rush tickets for those between the ages of 13 and 30. Theaters want young people in the audience. There’s no pressure to dress a certain way or come from a certain status or to have extensive back-

ground knowledge on the history of the show you’re attending. Art is useless if it isn’t open to be viewed by all. Even if you can’t make it to New York, never fear! The University of Connecticut’s music program is staging an opera this weekend right on campus. Featuring a talented cast of majority UConn undergraduate students, it’s the perfect convenient and affordable introduction to opera. Further information can be found on the UConn music department’s website and Instagram. Shameless plug aside; everyone should attend an opera and ballet at least once in their lifetimes. In a world prioritizing short-form digital content, witnessing longer live performances is a refreshing way to reset the mind and temporarily escape from the outside world. It sounds cheesy, but chances are you’ll see the world a little bit differently after every live performance you engage with.