

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Esteemed Puppeteer Basil Twist's Favorite Things

The visionary behind 'Symphonie Fantastique,' returning to the stage in April, reveals some of the tools of his trade



PHOTO: FRANÇOIS HALARD FOR WSJ. MAGAZINE

By Basil Twist

“I WAS TURNED ON TO Japanese silk 15 years ago. I use silk often in my work, like the red piece on the left. Japanese silk is like gold to me because it’s so difficult for me to get in New York.

“My now-broken Rollerblade—an Italian black leather boot with removable wheels—is below. I went everywhere in New York on those things. I could roll into a revolving door and come out the other side with the wheels off and walk into an elevator.

“In front of that is a fairy face I sculpted for the Lincoln Center Festival’s showing of *La Bella Dormente nel Bosco* (Sleeping Beauty in the Woods).

“The box to the right is a model of the set for my show *Symphonie Fantastique*. It was made for me, with such loving detail, by one of my puppeteers years ago when I was quite sick and in the hospital. *Symphonie Fantastique* will remount this spring at HERE Arts Center in New York.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/esteemed-puppeteer-basil-twists-favorite-things-1519671708>

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Basil Twist in his studio. PHOTO: FRANÇOIS HALARD FOR WSJ. MAGAZINE

“The ivory elephant miniature was my grandmother’s, whom I was very close to. The theater where *Symphonie Fantastique* first played in 1998 is named after her—Dorothy B. Williams. She cut the ribbon when the theater opened.

“The framed caricature in back, of my grandfather, Griff Williams, was done by Xavier Cugat; they were both big-band leaders.

“To the right is my Jackie Award for best new artist. Jackie 60 was a fabulous club in the Meatpacking District, a downtown phenomenon in the ’90s that became my initiation into a world of artists; it’s where I met friends I still have today.

“The festival bell lying in front is from my last trip to Kyoto, Japan, to attend the Gion Festival. There’s a sense of reverence and ceremony in Japanese culture that infuses every aspect of life.

“Hanging above is a puppet that I built 25 years ago when I was in puppetry school in France. A Brazilian master taught me how to carve it, and a Swedish master taught me how to string it. It’s one of my most-used puppets. I’ll bring it out in a small environment—at a dinner or a campfire—and people become absolutely rapt. I’m always amazed at how powerful puppetry is.”

—As told to Sara Morosi