



## O ESTADO DE S. PAULO

**Música Concertos:** by Joao Sampaio

May 2009

---

Could you comment a little bit about the repertoire you have chosen for your performances? How would you define these composers and works in the context of your career?

I made my debut in Baroque music ten years ago, first with Handel's *Ariodante* at the Dallas Opera with a modern orchestra, followed by Hasse's *Solimano* with René Jacobs and Concerto Köln at the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin. I am very happy that both of these operas and composers are represented in this program with Concerto Köln, as they both played pivotal parts in my career! I was requested to perform mostly Handel on this program, so I chose arias that I felt most represented Handel's florid, heroic style in "Dopo notte" and "Sta nell'ircana", as well as his more delicate side in Sesto's aria "Cara speme" from *Giulio Cesare*. As a huge fan of Hasse's music, I always try to incorporate one or more of his arias in my concerts. I would love to see Hasse restored to the public recognition and importance that he enjoyed during his lifetime, when he was acknowledged as being one of the three most important international composers, in the company of Handel and Haydn. The aria I have chosen for this program is from *Solimano*, as it seems particularly appropriate to celebrate ten years of collaboration with Concerto Köln!

How did you decide to pursue singing as a career? I read somewhere that you were touched by Tito Gobbi's biography, "My Life", a very interesting book. Could you talk a little bit about that? What made the book interesting?

When I began studying seriously for a career in opera, I read every biography/autobiography I could find of famous singers, as I had no idea what to expect from the career, the challenges and the lifestyle of a professional singer. I think I was most touched by Tito Gobbi's biography because of his sincerity, and because of the level of dedication and concentration he demonstrated for his art while remaining very much a human being rather than a "divo". I have always felt the need to stay true to myself as a person rather than building and supporting some sort of "diva" personality, and I really respect artists like Gobbi, Yo-Yo Ma, Itzhak Perlman and the countless others who seem to have found that balance between life as an artist and life as a private person. In his book, Gobbi also addresses the concept of faith, which has also been very important to me throughout my career.

You have a very close association with Baroque repertoire. Was that something you decided in the beginning of your career or did it just happen naturally? Do you think specialization is important for a singer? What are your plans for the future regarding repertoire?

My first three years as a professional were spent largely with Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, and *L'Italiana in Algeri*. After a while I began wondering what other repertoire I could explore, and was advised to look at the music of Hasse! I had no idea who Hasse was at that time, and coincidentally had an audition with René Jacobs for Hasse's *Solimano*. That audition with René was one of the two times in my life when I have been hired immediately, and that had an amazing impact

on my life and career. Prior to that experience with *Solimano* I had never heard a Baroque orchestra; the beautiful tonal colors along with the agility of the Baroque instruments completely enchanted me! From that point on I continued exploring Baroque music avidly.

I do believe that a certain level of specialization is important for a singer. We live in an age when many singers are expected to master almost four centuries of musical styles, in works which were most often composed for specific singers or voice-types. The concept that one voice can expect to encompass this entire gamut seems a bit incomprehensible to me. I am very happy in my niche of Rossini and Baroque, but do sing some roles outside of this *fach* once in a while to see how the voice is developing.

I have never had real goals in my career in terms of roles because there are so many composers and so many operas with which I am not familiar. I have been extremely lucky in that musicologists and conductors have always offered me a huge assortment of roles to sing, and I am happy to learn from them all. My main goal in my career is to sing as long as possible because it's something I truly enjoy doing.

**On a more personal level: do you still remember the sensations you felt the first time you set foot on a stage? In what ways is the sensation different now?**

Things have changed incredibly since I first began singing professionally! I used to be terribly nervous at rehearsals: I think I was most afraid that someone would see that I had absolutely no idea what I was doing and that I would be sent away. That was a good thing, however, because I work much harder when I am afraid! I am much more relaxed now, both in rehearsal and in performance. I used to be much more of a perfectionist in performance, while now my main focus is on finding something new in the musicality of my performance rather than on pure technical accuracy. I still work very hard on technique in rehearsal and with my voice teacher, Claudia Pinza, but when I am performing now I feel that technique is more the foundation on which I can build with emotion. I really enjoy that, and have much more fun now than I ever did before!

**How would you define yourself as an artist? How would you define the work of a singer?**

I suppose as an artist I'm somewhat serious; I try to be as disciplined as possible because at heart I'm a very lazy person! A singer either has to be very disciplined or have someone disciplined managing them, otherwise the days go by and no work gets done. I really believe that to be a singer one has to work every day, both singing and studying silently. It's a bit like someone training for a marathon, having to go to the gym every day; there are days you just don't want to exercise and you have to know your body well enough to understand whether you really need a break or if you just need a little kick-start! If you fall out of practice, the muscles atrophy and the voice just doesn't respond as it does when everything is in shape; if you work too hard the muscles get tired and you risk damage to the voice. A singer today has to be very multi-functional. One has to be computer-literate to respond to e-mail requests, good with languages both for singing and for life working in different countries, have a good temperament and understand when one can accommodate others and when one needs to stand up for one's own well-being and, above all, love music and the singer's lifestyle. Living on the road so much can be difficult, and if one isn't happy away from home, friends and family it can be extremely hard. The good thing is that there are many, many opportunities for singers today, whether as teachers, chorus singers, comprimario singers or soloists, so the trick is finding the place that's best suited to one's own particular voice and personality.