

LA NACION

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Vivica Genaux, an icon of the Baroque repertoire: the mezzo will perform with Concerto Köln

Several features distinguish the charismatic North American mezzo-soprano: a clear voice with unique timbre, a flexible and broad extension, vocal beauty and agility, impeccable technique and a highly attractive stage personality. Of these qualities, the most outstanding is her capacity for spectacular coloratura. It is the art of virtuosity that Vivica Genaux - undisputed icon of Baroque repertoire - will demonstrate with arias by both Handel and Hasse in her debut in Argentina (tomorrow, at 20.30, at the Coliseum), accompanied by the prestigious German ensemble Concerto Köln, for the Mozarteum series. But another unique quality that distinguishes her from many of her musical counterparts is that throughout her career she has maintained her residence in Alaska. "I think I have a unique identity and that is something that pleases me immensely," answered Vivica, with that big smile that one can sense even over the phone.



Photo Credit: Harry Heleotis

Cecilia Scalisi (CS): How was studying music in Alaska, a place so distant, for an international career?

Vivica Genaux (VG): Usually, people do not think of Alaska in terms of an interesting cultural life. However, culture is key in a place where the winter is extremely cold and dark and lasts almost nine months. Musical activities provide opportunities for people to get together. When I was young, Russia was closed to air traffic and the artists who went on tour to Japan or Korea had to pass through Alaska to refuel their planes. They, therefore, would give concerts in the most populous cities before continuing eastward and thus, I had the opportunity to hear extraordinary artists, as if I had lived in New York, London or Berlin.

CS: How did you develop an international career from Alaska?

VG: I'm always traveling, so I never made my residence elsewhere. Alaska is wonderful. We are currently in the early spring, experiencing some glorious days. The sun stays in the sky until

after midnight and reappears at 4 a.m. It's my favorite season, because you experience a great sense of hope for good things.

CS: Her performance in Buenos Aires will feature two composers of the Baroque: Handel and Hasse. Despite both being very popular in the Eighteenth Century, Handel has regained his previous popularity while Hasse has continued to be more obscure. How do you explain this phenomenon?

VG: It's interesting that both composers were of German origin, studied in Italy, and became internationally renowned composers. Handel worked in London for a long time and much of the body of work is preserved there and, not coincidentally, London is the city that rediscovered Baroque music with the strongest commitment compared to other countries. For this reason, Handel's work has been more accessible.

CS: Although both were of German origin, but Italianized in their language, what unique vocal elements did each composer develop?

VG: Handel's music is much more complex, Hasse's however, is more Italianate, and has a simplicity in the sense of highlighting the voice and positioning the orchestra in a secondary role. In Handel, the German property of the complexity of the composition remained. Hasse, to his credit, had an incredible understanding of the human voice.

CS: You once said that at first you were not fond of Handel. What made you change your mind and what defines a score that is vocally pleasant?

VG: Initially, Handel did not touch my heart, as did Hasse and other Italian masters, who made me feel as if I were singing from my entire body and soul. With Handel instead I always had to take one step backwards and consider everything carefully. I felt I needed to understand his work better and so I set myself to the study. Now that I have interpreted so many of his roles I have gained a new sense of freedom with his music that has helped me to love his work. However, when it comes to his writing, Hasse is still much more comfortable and natural for my voice.

CS: Many consider Baroque to be a field for specialists. What qualities are necessary to become a Baroque singer?

VG: The Baroque repertoire is amongst the most challenging because it requires that you have a wide range of vocal abilities at your disposal. First, your voice is at the forefront of the music and must be incredibly versatile, agile, and nuanced to include it all. The training for Baroque is based on the *bel canto* and requires intense technical training. Second, addressing the roles of Baroque operas requires special dedication. In Baroque opera you're alone on stage singing very difficult arias for ten or twelve minutes. This makes it difficult to sustain your focus and maintain the audience's interest and attention. Thirdly, Baroque operas take a long time to produce because they require such thorough historical research. Nobody interprets a piece in the same way as anybody else. It is like having a custom piece designed specifically for your voice, like having a couture garment designed for you by Valentino.