

# Cura, José - Conductor

## Biography



World-famous for his intense and original interpretations of opera characters, as well as for his unconventional and innovative concert performances, tenor José Cura is a familiar name atop the marquees of the most prestigious theatres.

But Cura is much more than an operatic star: he is a trained composer and conductor, an opera director, a stage designer, a brilliant performer, and a natural showman determined to use the best music to engage, entertain, and educate.

After studying Composition and Orchestra Conducting in his home town, Rosario, Cura moved to Buenos Aires in 1984 to hone his skills. To gain insights into stage life in general and the art of singing in particular, he worked in one of the professional choirs at the Teatro Colón from 1984 to 1988, where his voice developed into the distinctive bold and bright tenor with tints of dark baritone that would eventually lead to international fame. In 1991 he moved to Europe to pursue the singing career that has since become legendary.

In 1999, José Cura resumed his **conducting** career, working with top orchestras like the London Philharmonia, the London Symphony, the Vienna Philharmonic, Sinfonia Varsovia, the Toscanini Orchestra, and the Hungarian Philharmonic, among others, in both operatic and symphonic works, thrilling audiences with his performance both in the pit and on the platform. Cura has also released several well-received recordings, including a powerful, intense Rachmaninov Symphony #2 that earned wide critical acclaim: *"I have heard several recordings of this work recently. Janssons with the St Petersburg sounds more natural but lacks the same rush as Cura. Sanderling and the Philharmonia are so much broader, but are nowhere near so excitingly presented. Svetlanov's battered and cut 1960s recording is perhaps the closest in urgency to Cura's. A performance you imagined, but never dreamed you would experience."* (Classical Music Editor)

2007 saw the world-premiere of La Commedia è finite - a creative re-imagining of Pagliacci coupled with dance and mime, designed and directed by José Cura - which marked the beginning of his career as a **stage director and designer**. In 2010 Cura set scenery, directed, and starred in Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* at the Badisches Staatstheater, crafting an innovative, modern take on the classic that left audience and critics raving: *"Cura has been following his calling as conductor even at the major houses on a number of occasions and has been thoroughly successful, but in Karlsruhe he was given the special honor of directing, designing and singing the lead role. The exceptional project lent wings to the ensemble and created an artistic result that would do credit to any international operatic stage."* (Opernglas). The production is available on DVD. The unanimous plaudits of the audience and critics for his *La Rondine* at the Opéra de Nancy and *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci* at the Opera Royal de Wallonie, both in 2012, sealed his stature as a director of distinction. More recently, his production of *Otello* at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires was selected as one of the most successful productions of 2013 by international voting.

For more information, please visit: <http://josecura.com/>

In cooperation with Cuibar Productions for Scandinavia and Baltic territories.

## Repertoire

### Conducting among others: Opera

<b>Bizet, G.</b>	Carmen
<b>Mascagni, P.</b>	Cavalleria rusticana
<b>Leoncavallo, R.</b>	I pagliacci
<b>Puccini, G.</b>	La fanciulla del West Madama Butterfly Manon Lescaut La rondine Il tabaro Le Villi
<b>Saint-Saens, C.</b>	Samson et Dalila
<b>Verdi, G</b>	Ballo in maschera Otello Stiffelio I vespri siciliani

### Symphonic/Oratorio

<b>Bach, J.S.</b>	Mass b-moll
<b>Beethoven, L.van</b>	5th and 9th Symphonies
<b>Borodin, A.</b>	Dances
<b>Brahms, J.</b>	4th Symphony
<b>Chopin, F.</b>	Piano Concertos
<b>Dvorak, A.</b>	9th Symphony
<b>Ginastera, A.</b>	Dances
<b>Grieg, E.</b>	Peer Gynt Piano Concerto
<b>Kodaly, Z.</b>	Dances Te Deum
<b>Piazzolla, A.</b>	Symphony Pieces
<b>Rachmaninov, S.</b>	2nd Piano concerto 2nd Symphony Variation's on Paganini
<b>Respighi, O.</b>	Pini di Roma Tramonto
<b>Rossini, G.</b>	Stabat Mater
<b>Tchaikovsky, P.</b>	Ouvertues 5th Symphony
<b>Verdi, G.</b>	Requiem

## Reviews

### José Cura reviews (Conducting)

- **Concert, Warsaw, 2001:** After the first collaborative performance of José Cura and Sinfonia Varsovia at the National Philharmonic, the sceptics must become silent. Cura proved to be a skilful conductor. This concert was the orchestra's first collaboration with José Cura, the worldrenowned tenor, who combines his singing career with conducting. The concert in the National Philharmonic was opened with Respighi's colourful symphonic fresco "The Pines of Rome."

#### **Gazeta Wyborcza 11 November 2001**

- **Concert, Warsaw, 2002:** In describing the concert with José Cura, one cannot ignore the whole non-musical layer the theater created around the music by the Argentinean. The artist, who looks like an American movie star, wearing a black, floating, long shirt, behaves himself modestly. On the one hand he draws attention to himself with his very presence and his every gesture. On the other hand, he cares for the orchestra all the time, showing with every motion that they are the most important element. José Cura's concert is no doubt going to go down in as one of the most important musical events in this region, in this season. **Wyborcza Gazeta, January 2002**

- **Verismo: The Verismo album** will give you a feel for what to expect of Cura's conducting, which is thoroughly engaging on its own terms. The Philharmonia plays beautifully for him, and one hears gradations of color, texture, and dynamics that one would be happy to have from any number of well-known but seemingly less attuned conductors on the international circuit.

#### **Andante, August 2002**

- **Concert, Lisbon, 2002:** The concert started with solemn tone, the first part filled with symphonies by Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov and arias from Puccini and Verdi operas, performed competently by the Sinfonia Varsovia and the Chorale Lisbon Cantat. A genius in communicating with the public, many time setting the mood, José Cura showed himself as a conductor, tenor, pianist, and guitarist as required by the moment. **Correio da Manhã**

- **Concert, Sweden, July 2002:** His work as a conductor was brilliant; he had the orchestra eating out of his hand. Rachmaninov's Second Symphony made up the second part of the concert.

It was a joy to see José Cura conducting this piece. **DD, Boel Ferm, July 2002**

- **Concert, Aalborg, November 2002:** José Cura is a multi-musical talent, something fully realized in the concert from the very first number. I have never heard Aalborg Symphony Orchestra play more beautiful. Here was precision, poetry and intense involvement. The whole concert was like this. **BT Online, November 2002**

- **Concert, Vienna, November 2002: A highly talented conductor who also sings opera for his own pleasure.** This evening at the Great Hall of the Vienna Konzerthaus showed Cura's Janus-faced talents. After the intermission, Cura proved his first class innate abilities with a breathtaking interpretation of Rachmaninov's vigorous II Symphony. The excellently disposed Sinfonia Varsovia set out to work for their Principal Guest Conductor with true enthusiasm. To summarise this enthusiastically received evening: a highly talented conductor who also sings opera for his own pleasure... **Die Press, 2 December 2002**

- **Concert, Vienna, November 2002:** Cura presented himself in his first profession as a conductor. With immense feel for drama and musical nuances he conducted a meticulous interpretation of Rachmaninov's Second Symphony. Without airs and graces, with sweeping gestures and precise entries he sketched an electrifying body of sound, in which each movement was followed by frantic applause. Cura thanked the audience with the Guillaume Tell overture. Brilliant!

#### **Kronen Zeitung, 1 December 2002**

- **Symphonic Concert, Sofia, September 2003:** José Cura prevailed in Sofia when he conducted the Bulgarian Philharmonia in his first performance in this Balkan country. Applause filled the sold-out auditorium in honor of the Latin American maestro as he directed the national orchestra. The program was comprised of works like *Pines of Rome*, by Ottorino Respighi, a perfect fit for his Latin temperament; the *5th Symphony* by Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky; and selected pieces

from **Prince Igor** by Alexander Borodin. The Bulgarian audience rose to their feet after the final note in an ovation that lasted several minutes. **Crónica Digital, October 2003**

- **Concert, Munich, 25 July 2003:** Cura conducted with inspiration, with vigour, with knifeedge rhythmic acuity and with a talent for showmanship. **Sueddeutsche Zeitung, July 26 2003**

- **Cavalleria Rusticana, Hamburg, 2003:** Cura inspired the orchestra to give a voluptuous, sensuous performance. At the same time, he accompanied his excellent colleagues sensitively.

**Hamburger Abendblatt, February 2003**

- **Cavalleria Rusticana, Hamburg, 2003:** José Cura's musical direction was responsible for the success of the emotionally charged musical performance: the orchestra hadn't played with such precision and motivation in a long time. Cura's approach was very clear: with firm control he had the orchestra create intense, dramatically charged musical lines and was always attentive to the needs of the singers, showing his sure feel for the sound balance between orchestra pit and stage. The extraordinary attention the conductor paid to the choir also deserves special mention and praise, even more so as it reflected in the quality of the rhythmically tricky passages.

**Opernglas, April 2003**

- **Aurora and Rachmaninov's Symphony No. 2 in E minor (CDs):** One obviously need not worry about José Cura's "old-age pension": wherever his dramatic tenor's ambitions will lead him in the future, he has begun in time to build a second career as a conductor, and he doesn't confine himself to opera. Cura's two new releases with Sinfonia Varsovia reinforce the impression that singing is his job but conducting is his true passion. And the recordings leave no doubt that he knows what he is doing. The combination of Slavic melancholy and Latin American temperament is definitely fertile: although the musicians bathe in emotion in Rachmaninov's Second Symphony, the conductor always remains in control. **Fono Forum, June 2003**

- **CD: Rachmaninov's Symphony No. 2 in E minor:** This is a superb Rachmaninov Second Symphony, in fact, it's one of the better versions available. In no small measure, this must be due to the excellence of the Sinfonia Varsovia, and in particular to its first rate strings. Richly resonant yet always transparent, rhythmically spot on (listen to them attack the scherzo or the opening of the finale), they make a powerful impression from the very first note. The woodwind players also fare well, timpani and percussion don't miss a trick (terrific glockenspiel), and although horns and trumpets play with a bit more brightness and boldness than trombones and tuba, it would be foolhardy to insist that the climaxes lack fullness or power on this account. Roomy but finely balanced sonics also keep Rachmaninov's well-upholstered musical textures uncommonly clear and transparent. Now none of this would matter if Cura didn't know exactly what to do with the music, and he leads an expertly shaped, urgently vital performance, as true to the spirit of the music as to the letter of the score. Listen, for example, to the sure way in which he builds the introduction, and to the feeling of a true allegro with which he imbues the first movement (with exposition repeat). His decision to take the second subject in tempo and then relax and slow down only at the cadence theme proves far more emotionally clinching than many a more indulgent treatment (and it also makes the repeat sound inevitable rather than redundant). When the big climax arrives, with crashing cymbals and bass drum, he conveys the feeling of pent-up energy being unleashed without needing to make a massive ritard that checks the music's momentum. It would be a mistake, though, to claim that Cura's performance belongs entirely to the "classical" school of limited tempo variation. In the scherzo, for example, he maximizes the contrast between the quick principal theme and its lyrical episode, which here sounds truly luscious. The central fugato benefits from extraordinary clarity at a moderate basic speed, and its march episode has a wonderful, other-worldly feel thanks to sensitive quiet brass playing. A swift basic tempo for the famous adagio does the movement nothing but good. Note the well-judged ritard at the beginning that relaxes back into tempo primo for the ensuing clarinet solo --evidence that Cura knows what he's doing and how to get his musicians to do it. The finale whizzes by in a flurry of high spirits, again with minimal slowing down for the second subject. At the return of the motto theme at the very end, interpreters basically have two options: slam on the brakes (Svetlanov), or plow on ahead, as Cura does here. It's a decision entirely in keeping with his "excitement first" approach, one that never shortchanges the music's Romantic (even decadent) elements, but that also keeps the work moving forward and unfailingly

sustains the listener's interest. And that's no mean achievement. If you love this symphony, you will certainly have to hear this surprising performance from a very unexpected source. **ClassicsToday**

- **Rachmaninov's Symphony No. 2 in E minor (CD):** Cura, temporarily abandoning the stage, directs the Warsaw orchestra in a fast and powerful performance. His grasp and focus is impressive, the more so in a work that has its longueurs. If you are averse to Previn's classic version on EMI with its smeared and haloed romantic aura then this is for you. This performance is full of vivacious temperament and fairly flies along. Cura makes many telling points along the way and the fact that his foot is down on the gas pedal matters not a bit. I have heard several recordings of this work recently. Janssons with the St Petersburg sounds more natural but lacks the same rush as Cura. Kurt Sanderling and the Philharmonia are so much broader, but are nowhere near so excitingly presented. Svetlanov's battered and cut 1960s recording is perhaps the closest in urgency to Cura's. I really enjoyed this version. It is closest to the full-blooded Russian approach. You may well find yourself wanting more Rachmaninov from Cura, who certainly rediscovers the furies in Rachmaninov's music. Great Rachmaninov playing in a furious and tender version of the Second Symphony. A performance you imagined but never dreamed you would experience. **Classical Music Editor, February 2003**

- **Rachmaninov's Symphony No. 2 in E minor:** The first movement exposition bowls along compellingly enough to merit its full repeat here; the scherzo is as bright and articulate as the finale; and the now-clichéd love-song contours of the slow movement retain a certain freshness. **BBC Music Magazine**

- **Rachmaninov's Symphony No. 2 in E minor: A performance you imagined but never dreamed you would experience...** fast and powerful... impressive... vivacious. Great Rachmaninov playing. **Classical Music Web**

- **Rachmaninov's Symphony No. 2 in E minor:** A fresh and virile Rachmaninov reading from José Cura, who has definite ideas about how the music should go. Fresh and genuine. **Gramophone**

- **Rachmaninov's Symphony No. 2 in E minor:** The production convinces with its passionate, highly emotional expression, its romantic exuberance, its diffuse, elevated idiom, and its directness in the communication of feelings. In the conductor one senses the "breath" of a singer in long musical phrases: ample and rich in sound, like a pleasant ecstasy. **Salzburger Nachrichten, 22 March 2003**

- **Concert, Prague October 2003:** Cura knows how to imbue an emotional openness to which these orchestra musicians are not accustomed, but with which they can play nevertheless. This tenderness then runs through the concert hall like a shiver and its fervour sounds like an everyday conversation. "You play like angels," said Cura in praise of the Prague Chamber Philharmonic. The whole was played at the limit of tempo and feeling, on a wave of emotional effusiveness, against which we are fortunately helpless. **Lidové noviny, 25 October 2003**

- **Concert, Prague October 2003:** In his second performance in Prague, Cura once more performed not only as an outstanding soloist, but also as an ever more frequent conductor. In front of an orchestra, in this case the Prague Chamber Philharmonic, as ever immaculately, Cura radiates an irresistible charisma, which served only to highlight his precise and clear hand movements, accompanied by an eloquent expression. **Deníky Bohemia, 25 October 2003**

- **Concert, Geneva, December 2004:** Purists can purse their lips and bite their tongues; José Cura has pulled off what few of his colleagues can pride themselves in achieving: that is to win the entire audience, no matter what the age, over to his cause. Pleasant talk, charming attitudes, the poses of a 'great prince' —all that is brought into play, but without a complex over getting crowds to love, to adore him. And it's a deal. Good heavens, there he is: such an attractive and engaging appearance; a musical talent of this magnitude, this broad a scope; and above all, such a need to break down barriers. That kind of thing bears fruit which concert organizers are only too happy to gather. What better way to refute the progressive disinterest in the classics? The halls are overflowing. With a gentleness that is more coaxing than disruptively overwhelming, Cura knows how to lead, to guide the musicians with the baton. His very physical version of Dvorak's *Symphony from the New World* leaves no room for dillydallying. The ensemble is brought into shape with a solid hand; the brio passages are sustained with strength and power. It



was a shower of music from which the listeners left entirely reinvigorated, and capsized. **Tribune de Genève, 21 December 2004**

- **Concert, Berne, December 2004:** José Cura, a conductor and also an internationally renowned tenor, has introduced himself in Berne within the framework of the Post-Finance Christmas tour and has taken the sold-out Casino hall by storm, conducting Dvorak's 9th Symphony *From the New World*. Remarkable was the way in which this artist, clearly a person of comprehensive musicality, both elicited and extracted colours, contrasts and expressivity from the work. Make no mistake; this popular symphony has been played in this very hall with much less vitality, inspiration and verve. His remarkable ability surely found its finest expression in the Largo: here he proved subtlety, sensitivity and the capability to also shine an insightful light into the mysteries of the abyss, into the enigmas far below the surface of this score which has not lost any of its power and effectiveness. Is it no wonder that the ovations took on stormy dimensions also after the second part. **Berner Zeitung December 2004**

- **Concert, Piacenza, December 2005:** L'orchestra della Fondazione Arturo Toscanini was conducted by Cura with such enjoyable extroversion that he earned ovations from the Piacenza audience. Thanks to José Cura, the audience was able to experience sparkling conducting and the stage presence of a real "personality." In Piacenza he received yet another confirmation of his talent on the podium. **Libertà, 15 December 2005**

- **I Vespri siciliani, Mantova, 2005:** José Cura, this time in the role of conductor, commanded the orchestra with confidence, demonstrating his understanding of the elegance of the score. He didn't give in to the temptation to exaggerate, even during those moments of extreme "popular" flavor. Tempi were appropriate and the piani of the orchestra substantially well calibrated. His gestures proved very effective. The excellent orchestra and choir of Toscanini Foundation responded well and the relationship between the pit and the stage turned out well balanced. **OperaClick, December 2005**

- **Butterfly, Vienna, May 2006:** The conductor offered up a first-rate reading of the composition and proved that the expression of sensitive, tender emotions does not need either sentimentality or sugary sweetness. The members of the Vienna Philharmonic orchestra were totally committed, accepted him without reservation and followed him willingly. Cura drew clear distinctions in the orchestral rendition, in that strong dramatic outbursts were followed by the most delicate and soft lyricism in the blink of an eye. To the singers he was an optimal guide and accompanist. After his singing career, the doors of a conducting career are going to be wide open for him; that much was proven. *Martin Robert Botz, Der Neue Merkur, May 2006*

- **Concert, Verdi Requiem, Hungary, February 08:** The cracking noise of chairs, mindshaking sneezes during the intervals between the movements, tiny snorts, fidgeting, suppressed coughs were always part of every, however remarkable, production. Even if it was a masterpiece of the music literature by interpretation of any big name musician, I have not had the luck to attend a concert without these annoying distractions. Surprisingly, on this occasion, there aren't any noises whatsoever. The good old Music Hall is packed to full capacity - Even a whisper does not break the silence between the movements. Heavy, almost palpable the silence in the auditorium, before the sounds of the dark, pulsating, powerful, and passionate music chills us to the bone, and José Cura puts us completely under his spell. **Népszava Online, 12 Feb 08**

- **La Rondine, Bologna, February 09:** Continuing on to the orchestra conductor there it was the surprising presence of José Cura who, as a conductor, has a great future in front of him. To begin with, the care with which he wraps, protects the soloists is the reason for the sustained singing. He was attentive to the rich colors that Puccini spread freely throughout this bird that are many times underestimated. Bravo Maestro Cura! **La Recensione, April 2009**

- **La Rondine, Nancy, May 2012:** What was most seductive about this *Rondine* was the conducting of José Cura. He lovingly supported his singers by making sure never to drown them out. He supported them without ever lacking refinement, without a single uncalled-for affectation, without a single wrongly-placed emphasis. This was a veritable jewel of balance and subtlety, the Nancy Symphonic and Opera Orchestra visibly under his spell and rich in finesse, with the Chorus of the Opera National de Lorraine perfectly in tune. **Resmusica, 5 November**

## 2012

- **La Rondine, Nancy, May 2012:** In caring for the vocal platform, José Cura's conducting breathed with the confidence that seemed connected to the musician of the Orchestre Symphonique de Nancy and confirmed the relevance of the project that he carried, bringing credit to the institution in Lorraine. **Concertclassic**

- **La Rondine, Nancy, May 2012:** José Cura infuses the magnificent score with great emotion while bringing order in the confrontation of the various aesthetics. The tremendous ovation he received during curtain call was undoubtedly for this talent. **ConcertoNet, May 2012.**