

Cura, José - Stage Director

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

Opera

- Puccini, G.** La commedia e finite - Rijeka, 2007
La rondine - Opera de Nancy, 2012
- Leoncavallo, R.** I pagliacci - Opera Royal de Wallonie, 2012
- Mascagni, P.** Cavalleria Rusticana - Grand Opera (Liege), 2012
- Saint-Saens, C.** Samson et Dalila - Badisches Staatstheater (Karlsruhe), 2010
- Verdi, G.** Otello - Teatro Colon (Buenos Aires), 2013

Reviews

La commedia è finita

(Rijeka, June 2007)

LA VOCE DEL POPOLO

A well articulated and intense show capable of drawing the audience in and making them think, so much so that at the end, the engagement drew long applause from the packed house. Cura's directing is all about enhancing, all about bringing out the feelings, the powerful and primitive passions, the dynamism and the theatrical vitality, and it is geared toward taking advantage of the total (theatre) space (the side boxes, the stalls). There is no doubt that it kept the audience spellbound. A richly stimulating theatrical event took place Wednesday evening at the TNC Ivan de Zajc. The spectacular is based on the music of Respighi/Rossini and Leoncavallo with the participation of the ballet, chorus and orchestra of the theater, of guest vocalists and with Cura himself in the triple role of director/set designer, singer and playwright. It evidently testifies to the many-sided, multi-talented personality of the artist whose generous, exuberant and imaginative nature is reflected here in that he has created and developed a show which is complex, replete with facets and has an intense and direct impact on the audience.

Samson et Dalila

(Karlsruhe, 2010)

RHEINPFALZ

José Cura, one of the world's leading tenors and a sensational multi-talent, the Argentine top singer, who is also active as conductor, designed the set for his acclaimed production of Saint-Saens' "Samson et Dalila", as well as directing it. That he would take on the role of Samson was all but obvious.

Cura knows his job, he masters the director's craft. The singer-director offered up a plausible version, which thankfully omitted superficial updating. There were scenes of violence, brutality and warlike barbarity, of seduction and hypocritical eroticism, in which lust for power, hunger for revenge and unbridled blind passion characterized the actions of the main players. The dynamism of Cura's production was captivating in many respects. For all its economy, the set design, a desert landscape with three stage-high watchtowers, "an abandoned oil camp" (Cura), also had an optical appeal of its own. The most hauntingly powerful moment staged was the excitingly intense and sensitively acted seduction and fake love scene, where Samson found himself continually entangled, caught in a white stage-high veil or net – code for Dalila's web of seduction.

Der Operfreund

"It has been one of the rare opera evenings that are etched on one's memory and you won't forget for your whole life. The first night of Saint-Saens' opera "Samson and Dalila" at the Badische Staatstheater ended with standing ovations and got to be a real triumph for all participants. It is no exaggeration to speak of a great moment of opera, one that will go down in the annals of the Karlsruher Staatsoper. [...]"

Merkur

José Cura, the "Gesamtkunstwerker" (i.e. an artist who creates and crafts an integrated, total work of art).

On to Karlsruhe. There, José Cura premiered as "Samson" yesterday, with José Cura in the title role but also as director, set and costume designer. The "Frankfurter Rundschau" (newspaper) attended a rehearsal: Tenors who direct are not quite the rarity one might assume them to be, and singers with conducting talent, too, can be found occasionally (Domingo, Schreier, Fischer-Diskau). Quite unique, however, is Cura's ambition to personally design set and costumes to boot. If it wasn't possible to compose the opera oneself; well, at least as performance it gets spun off of the fantasy and capability of one individual - a romantic notion of Wagnerian dimension; possibly even a

subject arising from the ostentatiously all-pervading power of the pop-culture entertainer. The Gesamtkunstwerker José Cura stands right about midway between these two phenomena. A romantic artist, in tune with the "Zeitgeist", the spirit of the times, with precision accuracy.

OperaPoint

It was José Cura's evening, outstanding in every respect: one doesn't necessarily have to shift this subject matter from the Old Testament into the present time (three shut-down derricks) - that one can nonetheless succeed in a very coherent manner with an interpretation that is inherently logical and absolutely sensitive, was clearly shown by this production.

Badisches Tagblatt

José Cura produces a modern version of Saint-Saëns' opera Samson et Dalila in Karlsruhe and shines in the title role.

The Badisches Staatstheater gave the singer the opportunity to develop Samson et Dalila based on his ideas: Cura created the stage design, the costumes, directed, and sang the role of Samson. He uses symbolic images to illustrate his concepts. Between the old oil derricks representing human greed he placed the choir and extras in a tableau with a dark orange backdrop that shows the misery of the oppressed. Children at play bring the scene to life, with the children of the victors playing with the children of the defeated until parents chase the others away.

Opernglas

All-round star José Cura did himself triple credit in one swat and secured a publicity-hype rarely seen in this form for the ambitious Karlsruhe Opera House. In previous years already, one had been able to experience the outstanding tenor there in several key roles of his repertoire, most recently in his signature role of Otello. He has been following his calling as conductor even at the major houses on a number of occasions and has been thoroughly successful. In Karlsruhe José Cura was given the special honor of directing, set designing, and singing the lead role. The experiment was successful with only the smallest of missteps, bringing a much celebrated triumph to the theater and the singing-director.

The exceptional project lent wings to the ensemble and created an artistic result that would do credit to any international operatic stage.

Der Neue Merker

Breath-taking: "Samson and Delilah" in Karlsruhe

It is not exactly often that this work by French composer Camille Saint-Saens (1835 - 1921) can be found on the opera stages of German-speaking countries. Two years ago, the Argentine tenor José Cura staged the composer's opera "Samson and Dalila" for the Badische Staatstheater Karlsruhe. It is a production which received a great deal of attention from beyond the region and which Cuibar, his marketing company, is now presenting as a DVD by way of the Arthaus Music Label. Cura himself also takes the responsibility for the film. It is certainly out of the ordinary. The camera is always close to the action on stage. And it shows neither Jochem Hochstembach, the conductor, nor the orchestra -- not even the audience. And the applause was not recorded either. Instead, a music film was created -- no less breathtaking than the mis-en-scène itself.

Cura is also responsible for the costumes. He shifts the action to the here and now, and the High Priest even presents himself on stage in a tie. Cura intends to show that history repeats time and again. He succeeds brilliantly all the way to the downfall of the prison camp where a ray of hope remains: Samson sends the young people away. Two extremely worthwhile hours of viewing.

BNN

As If Made For Film

Cura's concept for the stage seems perfect for a conversion into film; the suggestive scenery makes a strong impression also on the TV screen. And the interminable cycle of the oppression of one people by another in the name of God, which in turn results in equally brutal methods of the freedom fighters, comes across as even more poignant due

to the detailed views and close-ups. Lucidly staged, the hope for a peaceful future, which the director sees in the attitudes and actions of the children, comes to light beautifully. That one of the visually most impressive productions of the Badische Staatstheater has been captured on DVD, is certainly to be welcomed; after all, it provides evidence beyond the House of its high level of performance.

La rondine

(Nancy, 2012)

Opera News

A new production conducted, designed and produced by tenor José Cura. This was a Youth Production sponsored by Nancy Opéra Passion, featuring a double cast of young singers. Cura is a well-known pedagogic figure here, where he has conducted master classes, and although it was an undoubted risk to allow him a free hand in all aspects of the production, the exercise produced a highly enjoyable performance of Puccini's underrated score. Cura was eager to reveal the seriousness of purpose behind Puccini's work, not as a Viennese-style operetta — as it was initially commissioned — but as a work dissecting the female psyche that could stand beside the works of Richard, rather than Johann, Strauss. This complex psychological tussle was directed with skill by Cura, who chose to set the action in designs and costumes of a post-World War II period. Puccini's much-revised ending was cleverly staged.

Resmusica

In charge of all aspects of the performance, José Cura was also in charge of the staging, the sets, and the costumes. His work was most respectable and even appealing, moving the action from the Second Empire to the Fifties and extending the metaphor of the bird cage, where the swallow (*la Rondine*) will return to self-imposed confinement. The direction of the actors led to a perfect naturalness; the costumes were elegant; and the sets, colorful and well lit, constantly appealed to the eye. But what was most seductive about this *Rondine* was the conducting of the very same 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 wronglyplaced emphasis. This was a veritable jewel of balance and subtlety.

ConcertCassic

The series of performances of *La Rondine* at the National Opera of Lorraine is the culmination of a project that started five years ago with master classes led by José Cura. From among those singers was then formed a troupe that would perform in Puccini operatic comedy, direct and conducted by the famous Argentine tenor. [...] The ending, with the heroine returning to her golden prison as the swallow returns to nest – remember the French translation of the title – reveals an effective intelligence in staging the scene, testifying to a skillful know-how in distilling dramatic tension.

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.

Cavalleria rusticana / Pagliacci

(Liege, 2012)

Cavalleria/Pagliacci: intelligent and creative

José Cura: traditional, but creative and without stereotyping in his mise-en-scène

José Cura has staged *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci* at the Opéra Royal de Wallonie, and as a distinguished singer of verismo tenor arias, has also taken on the two tenor leads himself. Within the framework of this production's handsomely illustrated scene (he also designed the stage set), he has carried out a number of ideas that are really original. First of all, Cura locates the two stories in the same place, on Caminito in Buenos Aires. The time of the action is the beginning of the 20th century, a decade of quite heavy Italian

immigration to Argentina. Thus, the production already has an appropriate logical superstructure.

These days, it is no longer quite so easy to achieve the same effect as fifty or even a hundred years ago with these perhaps most typical examples among the Verismo operas that have survived in the repertoire. But José Cura has definitely done it with his adaptation. It is not only the logical, convincing staging concept of interlocking the two operas plus naturally also the nice décor and costumes (Ferdinand Ruiz signed for the pleasing, vividly expressive costumes) that contribute, but also the perfect (hands-on stage) craftsmanship. From the seemingly casual movement of the choruses to the detailed directing of individuals and the many staging ideas, the craftsmanship, too, impresses as being inspired and sensitive. Cura proves that with clarity, inspiration and delight in detail it is definitely still possible to stage a work in a traditional manner and be of interest to the audience.

The raw meat of passion

José Cura, who is evolving from "just" a star tenor into a "stage-all-rounder", is making his third guest appearance just now at the Opéra Royal de Wallonie. This time, he sings, acts, directs and does the stage design for Cav and Pag' the veritable twins of Italian operatic verismo: Pietro Mascagni's "Cavalleria rusticana" and Ruggero Leoncavallo's "Pagliacci". Everything is direct, unmitigated expression. The wild, the excessive, the being-in-turmoil remains Cura's constant companion, even in restraint; thus a scathing glance, a tender gesture, an abrupt turning away suffices for the almost 50-year-old to conjure up with small gestures the great drama about love, jealousy, infidelity and murder.

LESOIR: Editorial Opinion

José Cura has managed to merge the evening's two works successfully in beautiful temporal and spatial continuity. The set is a replica of the scenic Caminito alleyway in the heart of the Italian Quarter of la Boca in Buenos Aires. And all the characters in the course of the two operas live there. The realism is immediate, powerful and poignant, tastily colorful but without an excess of local color. Each character emerges from the crowd there in the Quarter or turns up uninvited like the comedians of Canio's troupe. And it works from start to finish, with a bandoneon player taking care to ensure nostalgic continuity by playing during the intermission whereas the two composers monitor what's going on onstage, Mascagni incognito and Leoncavallo by appropriating the famous recitative of the prolog to "Pagliacci".

Jealousy in Argentina

José Cura enchants the audience with a production that leaves nothing to be desired. The enthusiasm about Cura's singing and his production got the audience to their feet. It is not unusual to have a connection between the two operas that only with the passage of years grew together to a sort of diptych. In particular Cura does not only set the two parts at the same stage setting and, consequently, the company of actors plays at the same square, but also integrates most of the protagonist in both parts. Nedda's lover Silvio works as a waiter in Mama Lucia's taverna and he's like a second son to her so that at the end Mama Lucia did not only lose her real son Turiddu but has also mourns the death of Silvio. For that very reason Cura puts the last words of Canio "La commedia è finita" in her mouth. Also Alfio and Lola appear as picture roles in the second part of the evening and show the audience the pitiable fate of Lola after Turiddu's death.

With a view to the stage design Cura was inspired by his Argentinean homeland and he relocates the story in Caminito, a pedestrian zone in La Boca district in Buenos Aires. The colorful street, that is also named Italian district, catches an atmosphere with his popularity that, on the one hand, relocates the event of both operas to this days and, on the other, leaves the operas to their originality and they breathe a breath of tradition.

Grand opera in Liege: Cavalleria Rusticana and Pagliacci

The two one act operas are often shown on one evening. In the production in Liege tenor and director José Cura even combines them to a thematic unit. And it was successful.

José Cura is in Liege for the verismo double performance. Cura is responsible for direction and stage design and he sings both title roles. He settles the story in consistent stage design for both one act operas. Namely at the Italian quarter of his homeland Buenos Aires in the 1920s when his own ancestors arrived there. One by one he had the streets of the quarter recreated and this image, by no means kitschy, is of appearing beauty. And this was the aim of Cura.

And so he tells the story in a realistic way, there's no need of philosophical superstructure to maintain tension. At the suggestion of José Cura there's also a Bandoneon, the Argentinean national instrument, included in the musical event during the famous Intermezzo of Cavalleria and as a transition between the two operas. And, as already said, the story continues despite the break. Small example: Santuzza, who's at the beginning of her pregnancy in Cavalleria, is six month later at Pagliacci, heavily pregnant.