

João Carlos Martins

Pianist João Carlos Martins, described by *Der Spiegel* as “the greatest pianist to come out of Latin America,” has enjoyed a remarkable success early in life, but throughout has been relentlessly sidelined by injuries that have altered the trajectory of his career. After debuts as the Casals Festival at 18 years of age, and at Carnegie Hall (with the National Symphony) when he was 21, he subsequently performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, Royal Philharmonic, and other major orchestras, all before turning 30. Then, while playing soccer in Central Park, he ruptured his ulnar nerve, and by 1970 had all but given up performing. But in 1978 he staged his first comeback, also at Carnegie Hall, and managed to complete and record the first half of Bach’s Complete Keyboard Works. In 1985 he suffered another setback, diagnosed with repetitive movement syndrome, but with treatment again performed and eventually completed the second half of the Bach series.

Mr. Martins could not have predicted a ghastly mugging on a trip to Bulgaria in 1995, which left him with severe skull and brain injuries – and the inability to use his right arm– followed by eight months of treatment at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami, Florida. In 1996 he again triumphed by performing at Carnegie Hall, while his right hand continued to atrophy. In 2000 an operation that went awry rendered his right hand virtually useless forever. A further blow came in 2002 when a tumor was discovered in his left hand.

Yet his unflagging and ferocious energy, documented in Irene Langemann’s award-winning film *Martins’ Passion* (2004), enabled him to begin a career as a conductor, and since 2004 he has led hundreds of concerts in Brazil and worldwide. Mr. Martins founded his own group of musicians, the Bachiana Chamber Orchestra, - now Philharmonic - and in the five years since their inception, they have performed extensively throughout Brazil and have had warmly received appearances at Carnegie Hall in 2007 and in May 2008 and at Lincoln Center’s Avery Fisher Hall in 2009, 2010 and 2011. While giving first-class performances, the Bachiana Chamber Orchestra has also given back to the community, initiating social programs that educate young people from the less-fortunate neighborhoods of the city of São Paulo. The orchestra has also helped form organizations like the Bachiana Youth Orchestra.

The chamber orchestra’s first rehearsals were in a hotel, and were followed by free concerts, major tours, and a series of recordings. Other conducting activities for Mr. Martins include recordings with the English Chamber Orchestra. Today, people from all over Brazil recognize the orchestra as one of the most important and determined ensembles in their country, a remarkable fact for a group of young musicians that has been born from pure dedication to music and charity.

(2012-2013)

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