

ClarínX

El gran diario argentino

A Cure for the Cold

*Born and raised in Alaska, Vivica Genaux,
noted opera singer, debuts in Argentina*

By Sandra de la Fuente, May 29, 2009
Translated into English by Sara Mejia Kriendler

Nothing could be farther from the cold Alaskan landscape, her homeland, than the warm voice of Baroque specialist coloratura mezzo-soprano Vivica Genaux. Neither the most difficult music of Handel nor a phone conversation with an inquisitive reporter could extinguish her expressive vivacity. For Genaux, music has been the most effective cure against cold and loneliness. “Alaska is not the God forsaken land that most people imagine. The arts in Alaska are highly developed because they are conducive to bringing people together and are a way to escape the lengthy winters. During my childhood and youth there, I was exposed to as many musical opportunities as were available: I studied violin for nine years and played in the orchestra, and sang in choirs and jazz bands.” This, she relates from Fairbanks, shortly before preparing to embark on a South American tour that will bring her to Buenos Aires to perform at the Teatro Coliseo, together with Concerto Köln from Germany, in the cycle of the Mozarteum on the 1st and 2nd of June.

Sandra de la Fuente (SF): But opera stages are rare in Alaska, are they not?

Vivica Genaux (VG): There are two enterprising opera companies. When I lived here there were none, but we had a great deal of musical theater. That is how I started, at age thirteen, to portray Eliza Doolittle in an extracurricular production of “My Fair Lady” at my school. Opera had begun to develop in the years when people came to Alaska to look for gold. These solitary adventurers needed fun, and created our first stages for song and dance. As the gold seekers came from Italy, good Italian opera could be heard in this most inhospitable landscape. But that tradition did not resume again until recently.

SF: It is easy to understand your passage from musical theater to *bel canto*, but harder to imagine how and when you came in contact with René Jacobs and the European Early Music movement.

VG: At the start of my career I was singing the Rossini ladies, and experts began to encourage a wider repertoire. Matthew Epstein suggested that I research the music of Johann Adolf Hasse.

SF: Do you know why he suggested Hasse?

VG: No! (Laughs) I have been thinking about it for years now and still have no idea why Mr. Epstein connected Hasse’s work with my voice. But the important point of the story is that a month after that talk I had an audition with René Jacobs, who was putting together a work by Hasse and I joined the cast. The experience of working with Jacobs and Concerto Köln - hearing a Baroque orchestra for the first time! - opened a huge window in my life and gave me a passion for this music, which I think will continue for a long time.