

Thiago Soares

SOLOIST, THE ROYAL BALLET

interviewed by David Bain

Swedenborg Hall, London, 10 December 2003.

David Bain welcomed Thiago Soares and explained that Thiago was worried his English might not be good enough. Marianela Nuñez had agreed to come along to translate, if necessary.

Thiago was born in Brazil. He said it was a beautiful country with lots of sun and rain. There was not much tradition of ballet and there was a big problem of getting male dancers into the ballet world. He started by mistake. He went to a circus school as a child, where all the circus disciplines were taught – acrobatics, acting and clowning. The school had the advantage of offering free tuition and food! He started there when he was twelve.

Debora Basto saw him at the school and said he looked like a dancer. Boys were needed and why didn't he go to a ballet school? So he did. He studied ballet, jazz, singing and musicals. It was a varied curriculum for the stage and there were academic lessons as well. There was much praise for him after only one year – he was 16 years old.

He said that there is plenty of dancing in Brazil, but not much ballet – there is break dancing and, of course, the samba. There is a classical ballet company in Rio. It is 40 years old and has two official schools. The company has now been given official status. Most teachers are Russian or Cuban and are excellent. With extra coaching, he was soon entered for competitions. He won many gold medals in competitions in South America, although these competitions were not of a very high standard.

In his second year, his teachers wanted him to be seen in other countries. In 1998 he won the silver medal at the Paris Competition dancing solos from *Don Quixote*, *Swan Lake* and *Le Corsaire*. He was invited to join Le Jeune Balle de France but was advised to go home and finish school.

Thiago was asked if there was any family tradition in the arts. He replied, that his brother is a designer and his grandfather a musician, but his family didn't much like the idea of his making dancing his career. His father

had a certain amount of prejudice about male dancers and was worried about whether he could earn enough money dancing – 'So was I!'

He joined the National Company in Brazil at the age of 18, he is now 22, and danced both in the corps and as a soloist. In his second year, he danced most of the classical roles – Siegfried, Albrecht, Franz in *Coppélia*, Basilio, Prince in *Nutcracker*, Solor... There were about sixty dancers in the Company with two guest Principals.

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They didn't have many performances, but all still got salaries. Roberta Marquez is a Principal in the company. Thiago was there for four years.

In 2001, he entered the Moscow International Competition and won the gold medal – 'very good for my country.' This time it was a senior competition. His partner was Roberta and they danced the Black Swan pas de deux from *Swan Lake*, *Diana and Acteon* and Act 3 *La Bayadère*. Roberta got the silver medal. Thiago thought this was unfair – 'it all depends on the moment, what they are looking for in the competition.' A special mention was given to Roberta and Thiago as 'Best Duets.'

After the competition, Thiago went back to Brazil, although did some guesting in Japan. He was then invited to be apprentice with the Kirov for one year. He accepted but it was difficult to integrate. He only spoke Portuguese and was the only dancer from outside Russia. Whilst there he was coached for principal work.

A question was asked, if he had any problem with 'turn-out,' because of his late start in ballet. He replied that the circus prepared him well for any sort of dance.

He was asked if he was taught by Tatiana Lescova, but said not. He was taught by Makarova, Slawa Mukhamedhov and Desmond Kelly, who came to Brazil to teach Sir Peter Wright's *Giselle*.

He then went back to Brazil again. He danced Romeo in a production of *Romeo and Juliet*, by Vassiliev, which was great. 'The orchestra was in the centre of the stage and we danced around it.' Rostropovitch conducted. The production was performed here at the Barbican by the Latvian Ballet.

Asked whether his family watched him dance in Brazil, Thiago said 'Yes, my father realised it was the best thing for me and I had his respect.' His parents have not seen him dance in London.

Thiago was advised to try for the Royal Ballet where he would learn more about acting. He had already toured with the Moscow State Ballet, when only 20.

He contacted the Royal Ballet and auditioned for Monica Mason. They needed taller boys for the tall girls who are in the Company. He was offered a contract as First Artist from September 2002, but went back to Brazil first. He waited a long time to get on stage and his first role was carrying the coffin in *Mayerling*! He did not understand he had to be on stage in 15 minutes. He was told the Jonathan Cope was waiting for him. He had to be reminded by Monica that London time was not Brazilian time! He then had a standing part in *Nutcracker*, but covered a lot of roles. He danced in the waltz in *Swan Lake*.

Natalia Makarova then arrived to put on her new production of *Sleeping Beauty*. She knew Thiago from Brazil and cast him both as Carabosse and the Prince, and in the first cast he was a monster. Carabosse was very plastique and difficult. There had been many great Carabosses in the past, including Monica Mason, and nobody knew how he was going to do the role. It was pointed out to Thiago that it was unusual to have a dancer who took on character roles as well as the principal man. He felt his circus training helped in acting. He danced the Prince with Tamara Rojo first and with Marianela Nuñez in this season – 'It was great.'

Monica Mason decides on casting. Being seen in *Sleeping Beauty* was a great opportunity. He was cast this season as one of the step-sisters in *Cinderella*, following in the great tradition of Helpman and Ashton. 'Tim Matiakis and I are working well together. Christopher Carr teaches us the steps and as long as we keep to them

we can do whatever we like. It is hard to be like a girl, but as I am naturally clumsy, fooling about is not hard!' He dances the taller sister to Miyako Yoshida's *Cinderella* and is also cast as a Cavalier in Jamie Tapper's performances. 'It's good to learn everything.'

Natasha (Makarova) cast Thiago in *La Bayadère*. He had danced Solor in Brazil with Roberta Marquez. This season he was cast with Marianela Nuñez. They worked at it for a long time and were gratified to receive a good press. He also had good reviews for his High Brahmin. 'It is difficult just to stand there and be something.' Amongst other roles, Thiago has performed in *In the middle, somewhat elevated* and the Mandolin dance in *Romeo and Juliet*. He was also cast with Lauren Cuthbertson in David Bintley's *Les Saisons*. He was involved in the creation of the role. The music had been used for the ballet in Brazil, but a very different modern piece.

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Thiago was asked whether he found the idea of choreographing attractive. He said 'maybe in the future.' He feels that he is not dancing enough but acknowledges that it is difficult to give enough shows to those in the higher positions in the Company. 'Many talented people are waiting for their chance, you have to grab it when it comes.'

Asked about his interests outside ballet, Thiago cited playing the guitar, painting, listening to music and fighting with Marianela. But there isn't much time. Thiago is learning the role of Tybalt, which he will dance in Lauren Cuthbertson and Edward Watson's shows. He is going to dance Hilarion and is covering Romeo. He danced in *Gong*. He found it a different way to move to difficult music. He did not find it enjoyable. He also feels that Ashton is difficult – 'you have to count.'

Asked about his most embarrassing moment, Thiago talked of an occasion where he was supposed to be on stage, but was sleeping! Another example of Brazilian time!

Report by David Bain, corrected by Thiago Soares and David Bain ©The Ballet Association 2004.