

João Carlos Martins – The Biography

João Carlos Martins' individualistic interpretations of Bach have polarized audiences between ecstatic admirers and rabid adversaries, but his stunning technical prowess and the intense emotional involvement he brings to all his performances have been acknowledged throughout his life. Harold Schoenberg, Pulitzer prize-winning music critic of the New York Times said, "His technique sends fireworks in all directions... he does everything with extraordinary élan." The Boston Globe characterized him as "The most exciting player of Bach on the modern piano to emerge since Glenn Gould," and National Public Radio described Martins' Bach "as is in the same tradition of, say, Furtwängler's Beethoven or Bernstein's Brahms. The pianist has placed such a vivid stamp on the material that it is no longer the composer's alone... It's literally breathtaking." His collection of the complete keyboard works of Bach, a 20 CD edition released on the Concord Concerto label and the most extensive of its kind ever recorded by a single pianist, resulted in spectacular reviews throughout the world including feature articles and cover stories in some of the most prestigious music magazines.

Born in 1940 in Sao Paulo, João Carlos Martins began piano at the age of eight, studying with Russian-trained Josef Kliass. His formidable talents were recognized early on by the renowned pianist Cortot who said of the young Martins: "With this kind of tone, with the ability of his fingers, he could become very important for the history of piano playing." Martins attracted worldwide attention at the age of 20 when he gave a performance of the 48 Preludes and Fugues of the Well Tempered Clavier his 1961 U.S. debut concert in Washington, D.C. The reviewers were ecstatic. His name quickly spread throughout the concert world-no surprise to concert-goers in Brazil, who already knew him as a child prodigy. Three years later he made his New York debut, followed by engagements with all major orchestras in the United States and recitals throughout the world, including sold-out performances at Carnegie Hall and Avery Fisher Hall. Recordings of Book I & II for the Connoisseur Society label followed soon thereafter and in 1968 RCA released Ginaster's piano concerto with Martins and the Boston Symphony under Erich Leinsdorf, a widely acclaimed first recording of this work appearing for weeks on Billboard's best seller list.

Afflicted by injuries and setbacks throughout his mercurial career, João Carlos Martins has shown a remarkable degree of perseverance and determination. After undergoing numerous treatments, including a new version of biofeedback therapy on his right arm, he played a triumphant comeback concert in Carnegie Hall in 1996, appearing as soloist with the American Symphony Orchestra, performing Ravel and Ginastera. A book about his life and career entitled "Conversations with Martins" by noted author and pianist David Dubal ("Conversations with Horowitz") has just been published and new recordings are currently being prepared with works by Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven.