

NAME: Der Standard
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AUTHOR: Ljubisa Tosic
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Tenor Johan Botha about Nelson Mandela and a benefit concert in his honour

On Thursday he is Parsifal at the Vienna State Opera. And apart from many other jobs around the world tenor Johan Botha can also be heard in the upcoming Easter Festival in Salzburg in Verdi's Otello. The South African-born singer is active and a class of its own, however he rarely gives concerts in Vienna.

However now there is a special opportunity at the Wiener Konzerthaus on 20 April: Together with the Vienna Chamber Orchestra (under the conductorship of Stefan Vladar) and the South African singer Pretty Yende Botha sings opera and operetta classics.

Arias by Verdi, Gaetano Donizetti, Vincenzo Bellini, Giacomo Puccini, Franz Lehár and Johann Strauss also serve a good cause here. This event celebrates twenty years of democracy in South Africa. Consequently, the concert is dedicated to the first democratically elected president, Nelson Mandela. And: The raised sum should benefit the construction of the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital in Johannesburg.

Naturally Johan Botha assists in supporting this cause: "It's sad, there are actually only four children's hospitals in the whole of Africa. We want to help with its construction, if the event is well received, the concert can be repeated annually. Then we can even get other singers from South Africa. By the way, the hospital is already under construction.

I had been Mandela's last wish and it was the wish of a person who Johan Botha admires. "You know, he was a man, who was released from prison, therefore, a man, who could have said: 'We will start a war now' Nelson Mandela, however, has done the opposite, he was for forgiveness, has appealed to form one nation together. That is why we appreciate and adore him – that is his legacy."

Chorister in Bayreuth

When Mandela was released from prison in 1990, Botha, who had already harboured his desire to become an opera singer at the age of five, was singing in Bayreuth. However in a choir. "Oh, well, there are many soloists in Bayreuth in the choir for me it was a springboard, and I luck in the beginning. They wanted to perform Richard Wagner's Lohengrin in South Africa and needed a large male choir. The choir in Pretoria consisted of only 40 people, but they needed 100. That is how the Choir Director Norbert Balatsch discovered me and brought me to Europe."

After Bayreuth we went to various auditions and engagements at the City Theatre Hagen, the Opernhaus Dortmund and at the Opera in Bonn. A tenoral international career followed - given Botha's clear and penetrating voice, his description of his voice transformation sounds amazing.

"In my youth I was a high soprano, after breaking voice actually a bass-baritone. It was only during my studies that I evolved into a tenor."

200 beds planned

Yes, Botha is living his dream. "I'm the happiest person when I can sing and be on stage." However, this also means virtually giving almost no interviews. And if he does speak, as at present, since it is the subject of his concern, he will not say a word about his colleagues. There are too many misunderstandings. In any case the hospital project is far more important, says Botha "It's is about the capacity of 200 beds," to promote this is important - and of course with the best vocal means.

April 20 Wiener Konzerthaus, Charity Concert Nelson Mandela Hosptial with the Vienna Chamber Orchestra, Johan Botha, Pretty Yende and Stefan Vladar, 20:00

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