



STREAMING THE FIRST CENTURY

SESSION 2: Parlez-vous français?

House Interview, 1979

Featuring: Bidu Sayão (role: Manon, 1939 season) and Terence McEwen (SF Opera general director, 1982-1988)

(transcript read time ~ 30 minutes; audio run time ~ 31 minutes)

[BEGIN AUDIO]

NARRATOR: Welcome to San Francisco Opera's Centennial Celebration.

TERENCE MCEWEN [TM]: This is a very special program for me because across the table from me is sitting a lady who is responsible for my being here. That is that Bidu Sayão is responsible for Terry McEwen having got interested in opera in the first place, which ultimately led to my arrival in San Francisco. (laughs) It's obviously terribly thrilling for me to introduce Bidu to our radio audience. When I was a young man, and Bidu was a young girl, I heard her sing a performance of *Manon* in Montreal, Canada, where I was brought up, in a French city whose standards when it came to French opera were pretty high. And when this charming and vivacious little lady got down on her knees beside the table in the second act to sing "Adieu, notre petite table," I burst into tears. As a 50-year-old opera lover, I'm not at all embarrassed to burst into tears nowadays, but as a teenager I was extremely embarrassed. I wanted to run down onstage and protect her. She was so precious and so fragile looking. I have since, however, learned that although the lady is still vivacious, gorgeous, and fragile looking, she doesn't need too much protecting. She's a pretty determined lady. (laughs) Bidu, welcome. It's lovely to see you.

BIDU SAYÃO [BS]: Thank you. Thank you very much, but I think you exaggerate very much.

TM: Oh, really?

BS: I don't agree what you said. (laughter)

TM: At any rate, enough of the effect of Bidu Sayão on my early operatic life. I'd like to talk about your early operatic life, Bidu. Did you study singing in Brazil before you went to Europe to make your debut?

BS: Yes, I started there without my great enthusiasm, because I didn't want to be a singer. I have no (laughter) any hope that I could sing later on. I was 13 years old and I would like to be an actress. My family was very much against. I lost my father. I was four years old. My mother was mother, father. Big brother 15 years older than me, lawyers, doctors. So show business was taboo in my house. And when I start those crazy ideas to acting and start to... Tragedy, tragedy. So I said, all right, I'm going to start singing, so perhaps I'm going to succeed and going to be an actress, and I went to step on the stage.

TM: Did you study acting first? You didn't study acting.

BS: Never. Never, never.

TM: Really?

BS: No, no.

TM: You're a natural actress.

BS: No, nobody believes that I could do anything. (laughter) Anything.

TM: You know, when I saw your costumes as Manon in the museum area of the opera house, which I encourage all our listeners to go and see -- there's a lovely exhibit of Madame Sayão's Manon costumes -- I remembered vividly every move you made onstage as Manon, not only in that first performance but in subsequent performances of that opera. You studied singing in Brazil with a rather famous singer, did you not?

BS: Yes, yes, she was very famous. My mother heard her in operas. She was dramatic soprano, really dramatic soprano. She was born in Bucharest, Romania, and her name was Madame Teodorini.

TM: Right, I am lucky to have managed to get a record of Madame Teodorini –

BS: Yes.

TM: -- and she was, indeed, a great singer.

BS: So I start, and I pray, I beg her to hear me, and she said, "How old are you?" I said, "I'm 13." She said, "Oh, my child, I don't want to lose my time with you. You come back when you'll be 15, but not now." I said, "Oh, Madame Teodorini, please, please. Oh, I can't live without singing. I must become a singer. I'd do anything you ask me. I devote my life to you." So she says, "Oh, so you have strong will." "Oh, yes, I have." "You have patience." "Oh, yes, lots of patience." "You are determined, you are ambitious?" I said, "I am all, everything you say I am." (laughter) And so she said –

TM: And so she took you on as a pupil.

BS: And so she said, "All right, let's try. Don't tell your mother, because I don't know if I'm going to take you as a pupil. I'm going to try one month, and if I find some little possibility so you ask your mother to pay the lessons." So I did. One month nobody knew that I was ah, ah, ah, ah. (laughter) And after that I told mama, and just my mother... You knew my mother.

TM: Yes, of course.

BS: She was a wonderful mother. And she says, "All right, dear, just to keep you quiet, I pay all the lessons you want, because I know that this is what you want, and let's go, let's see." And everybody laughed. My

girlfriends that I have in the school say, "Oh, Adelina Patti! We have Adelina Patti now in Brazil!" (laughter) And all those... More, you know, they laugh and they criticize me, more serious I become, and more determined I was to become... So this comes out just like with my strong will, I assure you, because I have a tiny, teeny, teeny voice, only was not disagreeable, you know? The quality was good.

TM: Right, it was a basically pretty sound.

BS: And they discovered that I was very musical. I was not a musician; I was musical. Means I catch everything easily, and I try in those horrible vocalises, Concone, Marchesi, but in those –

TM: Those horrible vocalises which are the basis of many great voices.

BS: But beautiful.

TM: Right.

BS: Yeah, but besides, the arpeggios and this... I have a technique for one ear. For that, I think my agility was good, because I vocalize all my life. But those beautiful exercises, those Marchesi, they are beautiful –

TM: Of course.

BS: -- with melody. And I remember I didn't sing those ah, ah, ah, just like stupid –

TM: Not just scales, right.

BS: No, I tried to put interpretation, feeling, piano, mezzo voce. And my teacher looked at that, says, "Look at her, look at..." And this was. And after the first year, she used to give recitals for all the pupils. She had 30. I was the only one in her studio that become somebody.

TM: Really?

BS: Yeah, only one. Anyway.

TM: Of those 30 pupils.

BS: And after one year she gave a recital, and I sang, (singing) "Vous dansez, marquise, d'un pied si léger." (laughter) That was my first song, and everybody was surprised. And afterwards, much easy. The second –

TM: It's interesting: the first language you sang in public was French.

BS: In French, French. Well, I was very familiar with French because you know my –

TM: I spoke French to your mother all the time in Europe. Yeah.

BS: Yeah, because my father's side, everybody was Portuguese -- Sayão is a Portuguese name -- and on my mother's side everybody was from Switzerland --

TM: I see, Switzerland.

BS: -- and French, so I learned French with my grandmama when I was a little girl.

TM: Right. That's a great advantage.

BS: I learned French and Portuguese at the same time.

TM: You didn't make your debut in Brazil, however, did you, Bidu?

BS: No, my operatic debut was in Rome, and that time we have a very celebrated theater, opera house, just like La Scala, and had competition with La Scala.

TM: Teatro Costanzi.

BS: Costanzi di Roma.

TM: Which later became the Opera, the Royal Opera in Rome, right.

BS: Yeah, and I met another great lady of the theater. Her name was Emma Carelli.

TM: Another great soprano.

BS: And this was after I started with Jean de Reszke, because I was supposed to be a recitalist.

TM: Oh, you worked with de Reszke before you went to Rome.

BS: Oh, yes, in Nice, in Nice. When I left Madame Teodorini, many tears in Bucharest, say goodbye, I went to Paris, and so I went to Vichy, because in that time my mother was very elegant. She wants to go to Vichy for the --

TM: To take the cure, right.

BS: -- water and everything. And Jean de Reszke was there, and I said, "Oh, I want to interview with him, because I want he can hear me. Perhaps he going to take me as his pupil." So I asked him. I said Maestro, "S'il vous plait..." I say it in French. (laughter) I said, "Please, can you make an interview with me, an audition? I would like to sing for you. In case you like me, you can take me with you and prepare me for recitals, chamber music, and especially all French repertoire."

TM: French songs, right.

BS: He says, "Oh, certainly. I'm going to hear you here, but I don't teach here. You must go to Nice." So I went to Nice with my mother, and I stayed there until he died. So –

TM: So in fact, although you were very young when you made your debut in Rome –

BS: Oh, I was –

TM: -- you had studied a lot.

BS: I was not -- yes -- 18. I was almost 18.

TM: Incredible. Absolutely incredible.

BS: Yeah, it might have been in March, and in May I was 18. And I studied with Jean de Reszke, and he gave me wonderful... He was not a vocal teacher at all, never, no.

TM: But he was a style teacher.

BS: He... Yeah, that feeling, the way you must sing French music, because it's so different than Italian style and everything.

TM: One of my greatest regrets is that I never heard him sing.

BS: Yeah, and so I learn with him all the composers for that. I was familiar with Debussy because I sang so much –

TM: Of course.

BS: -- Debussy, Duparc, Chausson, Ravel, all those composers, and many other things, too. He teach me *Hamlet*, in case –

TM: The role of Ophelia, mm-hmm.

BS: Yeah, and he teach me a little bit of *Lakmé*, and I saw in that studio all the celebrities arrived there.

TM: Of course, the great –

BS: Oh, amazing. I saw Lina Cavalieri. I thought I was going to faint to see that beauty.

TM: The most beautiful woman in the world.

BS: And Muratore was with her –

TM: Really? Yeah.

BS: -- and many others. Ah, it was marvelous, marvelous experience I had.

TM: And then you went to Rome and made your debut, and from Rome –

BS: Yeah.

TM: -- you sang first in Italy and then in France, didn't you?

BS: Yeah.

TM: I mean, I'm talking about your operatic life before you came to America.

BS: Yes, oh, yes. I have ten years of experience before I came here.

TM: Mm-hmm. You sang at La Scala.

BS: Mm-hmm.

TM: At the Paris Opera.

BS: Yeah, yes.

TM: Who were some of the famous singers you sang with?

BS: In Paris, I sang... In opera and opéra comique.

TM: Both.

BS: Both. I sang opéra comique.

TM: Who were some of the famous singers you sang with in Italy and France, Bidu, in those days?

BS: In Italy, many, many. My debut was with Carlo Galeffi, you know, imagine.

TM: A-ha, the great Rigoletto.

BS: Nazzareno De Angelis.

TM: And he was Figaro, mm-hmm.

BS: No, Galeffi.

TM: Galeffi was Figaro, right.

BS: And Nazzareno De Angelis was a basso.

TM: Right, bass.

BS: Another basso comic Azzolini, terrific, and Tito Schipa, who was a tenor, and I don't know what is Berta, but anyway. And the conductor was Vitale, Maestro Vitale.

TM: That's a pretty great combination.

BS: And in that time when I make my debut, among all those celebrities, Madame Corelli said, "I have no money to give you any orchestra rehearsal."

TM: Really? You went on with no orchestra rehearsal?

BS: No, nothing. I never put my feet in that stage before the performance.

TM: Well, you see now that our listening audience can –

BS: They throw me there, that's it.

TM: Now our listening audience can understand why I said that later I discovered you weren't quite as fragile as I originally thought.

BS: Yeah, yeah.

TM: This is a lady who is not only Taurus but she's a very determined lady and already was –

BS: Determined, yeah.

TM: -- when she was 18.

BS: Yeah. And I was really lucky in my career. Lucky, lucky, lucky.

TM: You sang with great conductors and great other singers.

BS: Yeah, because look how today girls just like me, almost 18, arrive to a great manager and said, "I don't know any repertoire, I don't know any opera, I know only arias, and I want to sing." (laughs) This is a terrible thing.

TM: Well, if that girl happened to have a beautiful enough voice...

BS: But I find her, and she said, "Well, I want to hear those arias," and I sang the coloratura arias that I learned with Madame Teodorini and everything, and she gave me a coach. She says, "All right, I'm going to give you a chance. You're going to make your debut with Rosina, and with a cast that only celebrities." I says, "Oh my goodness, what I'm going to have..." She says, "No, I'm going to give you Maestro Richie. He's still alive at that time, my dear Maestro Richie.

TM: Yes, I know, great Maestro Richie.

BS: “He’s going to prepare you in *The Barber of Seville*, and Maestro Vitale going to supervise your lessons, and you’re going to make your debut.” And this happens.

TM: Fantastic. Bidu, f the roles that you sang in Europe before you came to America, what was your favorite? I know, for instance, that you sang at the great Bellini celebrations in Catania.

BS: Yeah.

TM: You sang both *Puritani* and *Sonnambula*, which are roles you never sang in America.

BS: Yeah. *Sonnambula* was one of my favorites. I asked so much Mr. Johnson -- that was my manager in the Metropolitan at that time, to sing Adina, because –

TM: Amina, you mean, yeah, right.

BS: -- Amina -- because I was fresh for this commemoration, and I studied very hard. I even went to Rosina Storchio in Milano for advice.

TM: Really?

BS: I was always –

TM: You also went to Tetrizzini, didn’t you, at one time?

BS: Yes. She gave me all her cadenzas for the *Barber of Seville*. No, she give me a book with all her cadenzas in different operas.

TM: Really?

BS: Yeah.

TM: That’s marvelous.

BS: And she was extremely kind to me. I close my eyes, I can see her sitting at the piano, full of jewelry, full of –

TM: Covered with jewelry, uh-huh.

BS: Really full of jewelry, and (inaudible).

TM: And she was very little and very chubby, wasn’t she?

BS: Ah, just like a little cat. And she said, “Well, now, you’re going to...” She changed completely “Una Voce Poco Fa,” the cadenzas, she wants I sing, and the duet of *Figaro*, the first act. Everything should be the way she

sang. And she said, "I don't want you singing the original key," because all the sopranos when I arrive, the high F tremble and sing it badly all the aria waiting just for that note.

TM: Of course.

BS: You're going to do the way I used to do, and the audience never going to realize. You're going to sing the original key, and instead of the high F you're going to sing the flat E. Yeah? E-flat.

TM: Right, E-flat, yeah, mm-hmm.

BS: And you're going to feel so easy.

TM: Right. Of course, what Tetrazzini probably didn't know –

BS: I don't know.

TM: -- is that the role was written for a mezzo soprano originally anyway. (laughs)

BS: This is the speech she makes to me, and I hear wonderful... Only was a little bit too low for me in those passages. Anyway, I did.

TM: Yes, of course, especially at that age.

BS: She says, "I'm going to be in the box there, close to the stage. I'm going to watch you, if you don't forget one single variation that I gave to you, and then you study." It was terrible. (laughter)

TM: But Bidu, that brings up an interesting point, because in all your career, although you say that you had a squeaky voice, what I say you had was a beautiful, light lyric soprano, but you had a wonderful ability to darken the color and to sing very dramatic chest notes. I mean, in *Bohème* and in *Traviata*, for instance –

BS: I try.

TM: -- you used some very dramatic sounds. How did you learn to do that without hurting your voice? I mean, did you constantly practice?

BS: It was my husband. He changed me. I hate coloratura for that. (laughter) I didn't want to sing in the beginning, and after God gave me this tiny little voice, and I have the facility to go up, I become coloratura, but I hate coloratura because I think I was born an actress, and coloratura roles, they are only mad people, strange people, also brats. (laughter) You can't go out from those things. And this don't interest me at all.

TM: You didn't want to get stuck in that repertoire.

BS: You see, why I used to like very much *Mélisande*, because that beautiful drama, because at last –

TM: You could act.

BS: -- I could explode on the stage.

TM: But you could certainly act in *Manon*, and you could act in –

BS: Yes, for that, those operas, that I could act a little bit.

TM: In other words, those were your favorite operas: *Manon* –

BS: *Traviata* and –

TM: -- (inaudible) and *Bohème*.

BS: -- *Bohème*, yeah. But I would like to sing all Puccini. That was my dream, but I could.

TM: You sang Laretta in *Gianni Schicchi*, no?

BS: No, no.

TM: Not even that.

BS: I didn't like that so much. I would like to sing Tosca.

TM: You wanted to sing the big dramatically... Tosca, right. (laughter)

BS: Even –

TM: Nobody's happy. Birgit Nilsson wants to sing Gilda and you want to sing Tosca.

BS: Yeah, and Butterfly, because I think I could be a good Butterfly. I have the physique du rôle and everything.

TM: You made a beautiful record of the aria.

BS: But this was too heavy for me. And this is it: if you want to sing long and keep your voice in good shape, you never can force. This is what I tell all this new generation. Don't start with dramatic roles. Start very lyric and go up with age when you are in your full voice, in your forties, so you can go for dramatic roles. But don't start with dramatic roles because you spoil your voice, and this is what happens today.

TM: Bidu, I'm sure that many of our listeners don't know that you were married for many years to a very great singer, Giuseppe Danise.

BS: Yes.

TM: And I think Danise also advised you very much, and –

BS: Of course.

TM: -- helped you and worked with you a lot, didn't he?

BS: Oh, he –

TM: He was not only your husband; he was also your teacher for a while.

BS: He was my teacher. He made me cry every lesson, (laughter) so much that I had a relief the day I retired, because it was just like a punishment –

TM: Really?

BS: -- to study with him, because he never –

TM: He was a very difficult teacher, I remember.

BS: -- he never was satisfied. He never told me after performance bravo, bravo, you know. But –

TM: Really? Yeah.

BS: -- he'd say, "Well" –

TM: He never gave you a compliment.

BS: -- "today you sang well. I'm very happy." Never. I asked him how I did. He says, "Mm." He said in Italian, "Non c'è male." How you translate this?

TM: Not too bad, not too bad. (laughs)

BS: "Non c'è male," not too bad.

TM: My dear.

BS: That was a big compliment.

TM: Bidu, how did you make your debut in San Francisco? It was in 1939, wasn't it?

BS: Yeah, yeah. Well, they print in the newspaper -- I laugh yesterday when I read this -- that they knew I was in the jungle of Brazil, (laughter) and our dear, dear, dear friend, Maestro Merola, was very close friends with my husband. They were from Naples, both of them. And I was in big tour, because I touring Brazil -- that's terrific big country (laughs) -- twice, from the Amazon, because now they have only that but this gorgeous opera house there, beautiful.

TM: Yes, I've heard about it, yeah.

BS: And so I'd like to go there, and I was in Pará, Belém, the state, and from Pará, in Belém at that time, they have no airlines. So I said, "I want to go. I want to sing. That theater is beautiful."

TM: The determined lady again.

BS: So they said, "Well, the only way you must go is take a boat, and navigate eight days in the Amazon River with bogs and 110 temperature."

TM: Good heavens.

BS: And I did. I did.

TM: You did, in order to sing in that opera house.

BS: I wanted... I was there when a telegram came, and was Maestro Merola, and said to Danise, "Listen, I'm here in a terrible situation." Was during the war, 1939.

TM: Yes.

BS: He said, "I engage Mafalda Favero." I adore Mafalda Favero –

TM: Yes, I do, too.

BS: -- one of my favorite singers.

TM: Lovely artist, yeah.

BS: Yeah. And he said, "I engaged Mafalda Favero to open my season with *Manon*, and the Italian government didn't allow her to have the passport," or something happened to her –

TM: To come to America, yes.

BS: -- "and she can't come. I am in distress because I want a real good *Manon*," and he knew my debut two years before in the Metropolitan. I make my debut as *Manon*, and so he knew my *Manon*. So he said, "You must convince Bidu to take a plane and come here and sing for me." I was very eager to come to San Francisco –

TM: Of course.

BS: -- after my debut in New York, but I never thought that it's going to be so early. And they said, "Well, you must cancel lots of concerts here. You want to do that?" Certainly I want to do that, what a question. (laughter) Left the jungle and get to San Francisco, and we flew, and I arrive here just for the general rehearsal.

TM: Just for the sort of the night before the premiere.

BS: Yeah, the night before, in the piano (inaudible), just like that.

TM: Right.

BS: (inaudible) after with all the ensemble, and was Tito Schipa...? I don't know who was the rest. I don't remember the cast.

TM: I know you did sing it with Schipa here, but I'm not sure if it was in '39.

BS: I don't think so in '39. Anyway, but I remember it was a good performance. And now –

TM: And obviously then San Francisco –

BS: -- I saw in the lobby (inaudible).

TM: Really?

BS: Oh, I was so thrilled to see. (laughter) Oh, dear me.

TM: Well, then that was 1939, and obviously San Francisco took you to its heart, because the following year, 1940, you came back and sang Susanna and Mimì and Manon again.

BS: Yes.

TM: But I remember you telling me –

BS: What?

TM: -- Madame Sayão, because it absolutely kills me when you say that, that you didn't really like Susanna.

BS: No.

TM: (laughs) Why?

BS: Yeah. It's ungrateful role. She works so hard, and she -- the most –

TM: But she makes everything happen. She's responsible for everything.

BS: Well, right, but she's a kind of recitatives and duets and quartets. She's just like a little butterfly, goes all around, and nobody pay attention to her, (laughter) and when everybody started no critics -- the critics –

TM: My dear, if I remember correctly, when Bidu Sayão sang Susanna everybody paid attention. When you did that famous revival at the Metropolitan with Pinza and Rethberg, and who conducted? Bruno Walter conducted.

BS: No, with Panizza.

TM: Panizza first.

BS: After Bruno Walter.

TM: Then Bruno Walter.

BS: That was a dream. But this role is (inaudible). She struggle all three acts. It's a long three acts, and in the end when everybody is tired, or must go because otherwise I lose my train or my bus and everything, (laughter) here I come and I sing the end.

TM: At the end of the opera.

BS: That's one of the beautiful arias –

TM: Yeah, moments.

BS: -- in the opera, and no critics, because they –

TM: They left by then. (laughs)

BS: -- aren't there. The next day, I read in the paper, Susanna... They mention the Countess, with those gorgeous arias, Figaro, and said, "Oh, Susanna was very pert."

TM: Pert, right. (laughs)

BS: Pert. What mean pert? Pert means what?

TM: Pert.

BS: Cute.

TM: Pert, cute, yes, lively, vivacious, everything you are.

BS: Yeah, but they don't know how many miles I walked on that stage during four acts, really. (laughs)

TM: Of course.

BS: I prefer Zerlina thousand times to Susanna.

TM: Really?

BS: Yeah, [inaudible].

TM: Because why, it's a more peppery character?

BS: No, a smaller role, not so much responsibility, but two beautiful arias, and if you are graceful and you have the style of the music, you can make success. I made success with Zerlina.

TM: You sang Zerlina with Bruno Walter also, didn't you?

BS: Yes, yes.

TM: Right. (laughs) And you kill me, Bidu, because some of –

BS: Why?

TM: -- because some of the favorite things that I heard you do I now know were roles you didn't like. Adina also, for instance, in *L'elisir d'amore*.

BS: I hate Adina.

TM: (laughs) The greatest Adina anybody's ever heard, and she hated it.

BS: Well –

TM: At least we never knew that, Bidu, when we were sitting in the audience.

BS: The things that I hate is the ones I studied the more, because I didn't do this with love.

TM: I see. In other words, you really had to work to get into them.

BS: I did this because I was [inaudible] to do, so I studied very much, very careful, at least to sing in a good style and please a little bit the audience, because everybody goes for Nemorino in that opera, (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) –

TM: Right. Of course, yes, Nemorino has the big aria.

BS: -- and after that terrific aria comes her with that beautiful little aria, that is really beautiful –

TM: Lovely, but –

BS: -- but if you don't do in a style and approach as much you can to the music of Nemorino, you are a comprimario. You become a comprimario in that role. You must create the role, in one word.

TM: Well, that's an interesting point, Bidu.

BS: You must create.

TM: Now, how did you...? Did you have a system for preparing a role? I mean, did you always do the same thing when you prepared a certain role? How did you go about it?

BS: I have only coach when I was ready myself. I take –

TM: A-ha. First you studied it by yourself.

BS: Oh, yes. I never played piano, because I was anti-musical (laughter) when I was a little girl, but I learned –

TM: Or maybe you just had a bad piano teacher, like I did.

BS: -- solfeggio. Yeah, my mother gave them. Was a disaster. So I said to her, before I start to study music -- I mean singing -- I said, "I want to study solfeggio and theory. I want to learn. I want to read my notes."

TM: Right, be able to read music, of course.

BS: My mother was so proud about this and says yes. So I could read, and with one finger on the piano I learn all my roles by myself, and after I call the coach and we go. But I take the score with me, and I start to read all that score, just like you read a book, everybody, from the chorus into my part, everything. And I –

TM: Well now, for instance, many of your roles you sang with great conductors, like Toscanini, Marinuzzi –

BS: Yes.

TM: -- Panizza –

BS: Yeah.

TM: -- Bruno Walter.

BS: Yeah.

TM: Did you work at the piano with them a great deal also?

BS: Of course. Of course. Oh, each one was hours with us –

TM: Really?

BS: -- individual.

TM: Individually.

BS: That is the process.

TM: That's wonderful.

BS: So you know all -- when I need to have more breath, when I am in little difficulty in one phrase, that is it. That is... Papi was a great conductor. I adore Maestro Papi.

TM: Gennaro Papi, mm-hmm.

BS: He sits me with hours and says, "Don't do this, don't do that. Here I wait for you. There... That, I can wait for you." You know what I mean?

TM: Yes.

BS: It's a collaboration. We must have –

TM: So that you felt absolutely secure when you were onstage.

BS: Well, we don't need... When we used to go there, we just looked to him, of course, and Bruno Walter has this. When we sing well, he threw little kisses from the podium to us. (laughter) Just pay all the study every day with that gesture, you know. I remember when Madame Rethberg and after Eleanor Steber sang that opera, and they sound so beautiful, he... (makes kissing sound)

TM: Throw a kiss from the podium. He threw a kiss.

BS: When we sang the little duet, letter duet, that is such a jewel, and he threw a kiss. (laughter) It's wonderful, oh, my.

TM: Those are incredible experiences.

BS: God bless him, because he was marvelous.

TM: Bidu, in San Francisco, in your last season here, you sang a role which must have given you a lot of satisfaction –

BS: Yes.

TM: -- because it's a very dramatic role.

BS: Which one?

TM: And I remember when I saw in *Opera News* that you were going to sing in San Francisco –

BS: You [can't believe?].

TM: -- Margherita in *Mefistofele*, I thought to myself, that is really something for Sayão.

BS: This Maestro Merola did for me, because I ask him.

TM: Really? (laughs)

BS: You know, I would like to do –

TM: Your partner was Ferruccio Tagliavini, wasn't he?

BS: Mm-hmm. And –

TM: And, of course, that made a lyric couple, so it was good.

BS: For that, for that, and –

TM: If you had had a dramatic tenor, you might have had a problem.

BS: I try... It was only here I sang. Was the end of my career.

TM: Right.

BS: So my husband didn't want.

TM: He didn't want you to sing it.

BS: So he didn't, no. I said, "I could have voice enough for that." I didn't like Margherita, the *Faust*. I sang in Europe, in my... I don't like it. I don't know why. I like little bit the second act, which I don't like –

TM: Well, she's not vivacious enough for you, Bidu. (laughs)

BS: No, she was not dramatic as the other one. And so my dream, at least, because I could sing what I want, at least that. And I said, "If I ruin my voice, what matter? I am the end."

TM: At the end of your career anyway. (laughs)

BS: Let me have this. I just (inaudible). So I asked Maestro Merola. He didn't want me at the beginning. He didn't believe I could do it. And I said, "Maestro, I assure you that I will be true." And so he gave me this opportunity, and I am dying to see this tape. I never could have the tape.

TM: No, I've never heard a tape of it, either. I don't know if there is one. But you enjoyed singing the part.

BS: I did, very much.

TM: Right. And I have heard that the audience enjoyed you very much in it, too.

BS: Yeah. (laughs)

TM: Bidu, we've talked about your past, and we are thrilled at your presence. How about your future?

BS: Well, I never think about the future. (laughs) I live day by day, and I'm very fortunate, that I lost my family, as you know, but I have so many good friends. You are one.

TM: Thank you, Bidu.

BS: I treasure your friendship, because it's really sincere friendship.

TM: But I know that many people have asked you why you don't teach singing. Don't you think, Bidu, there is a way that you can pass on some of this wonderful knowledge?

BS: I want now. Before, I didn't want at all. I was so full of music, and all my life I studied until the day I retired, and I start so young, and I have 30 years of career for a soprano. It's enough. So I thought that it didn't interest me, but now in those last years I said why. I should transmit, at least, I think, what I know to this new generation. But how can I find a girl just like I was, full of patience, full of determination –

TM: Determination.

BS: -- or ambition, that takes this so serious, and don't want in two or three months the miracle happens –

TM: Right. Doesn't want to be a star overnight, yeah.

BS: -- to study. If I find anybody with this qualities, I am ready to devote myself to them. Because we need –

TM: But do you mean in the sense of masterclasses rather than teaching singing?

BS: Yeah. No, teaching voice, I don't think so I am able to do it.

TM: You want to talk about style and –

BS: Yes. I don't know if here in San Francisco I could do that. I would like very much.

TM: I think we better look into it, Bidu.

BS: Very much. I would like very much to prepare a singer for one or two roles, special French repertoire.

TM: That's a wonderful idea, Bidu, and let's hope that San Francisco has Bidu Sayão masterclasses very soon.

BS: Thank you. And I –

TM: Thank you, my dear, for coming today.

BS: And I wish you, Terry, the best, the best that can happen for your new role in this country, in the Opera San Francisco going to be one of the best in the world, under your –

TM: Thank you very much. It already is, and I just want to keep up the standard, Bidu.

BS: Well, you're going to make even better.

TM: Thank you.

BS: Bye-bye.

TM: Bye-bye.

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[END AUDIO]