

BALANCING WORLDS

THE DUELING REALITIES OF RODRIGO SANTORO

Written by Paula Carvajal

Getting Rodrigo Santoro to sit for an interview is nearly impossible. This is not because the man is press shy or doesn't like to talk. He does. He is open, generous with stories and has that rare, uncanny ability of immediately making you feel like old friends just having a little catch-up.

Our "little catch-up" happened while Santoro was sitting, waiting for his flight at JFK. Just before New York, he was in Los Angeles. Now, he was headed to Miami. Then it's back to Los Angeles, then London, then Cannes and eventually home to Brazil. This whirlwind travel schedule packed into a few short weeks included press tours for *What to Expect When You're Expecting*, *Heleno*, *Hemingway* and *Gellhorn*, and preparation for the upcoming film *300: Battle of Artemisia*. No wonder it was tough getting him on the phone.

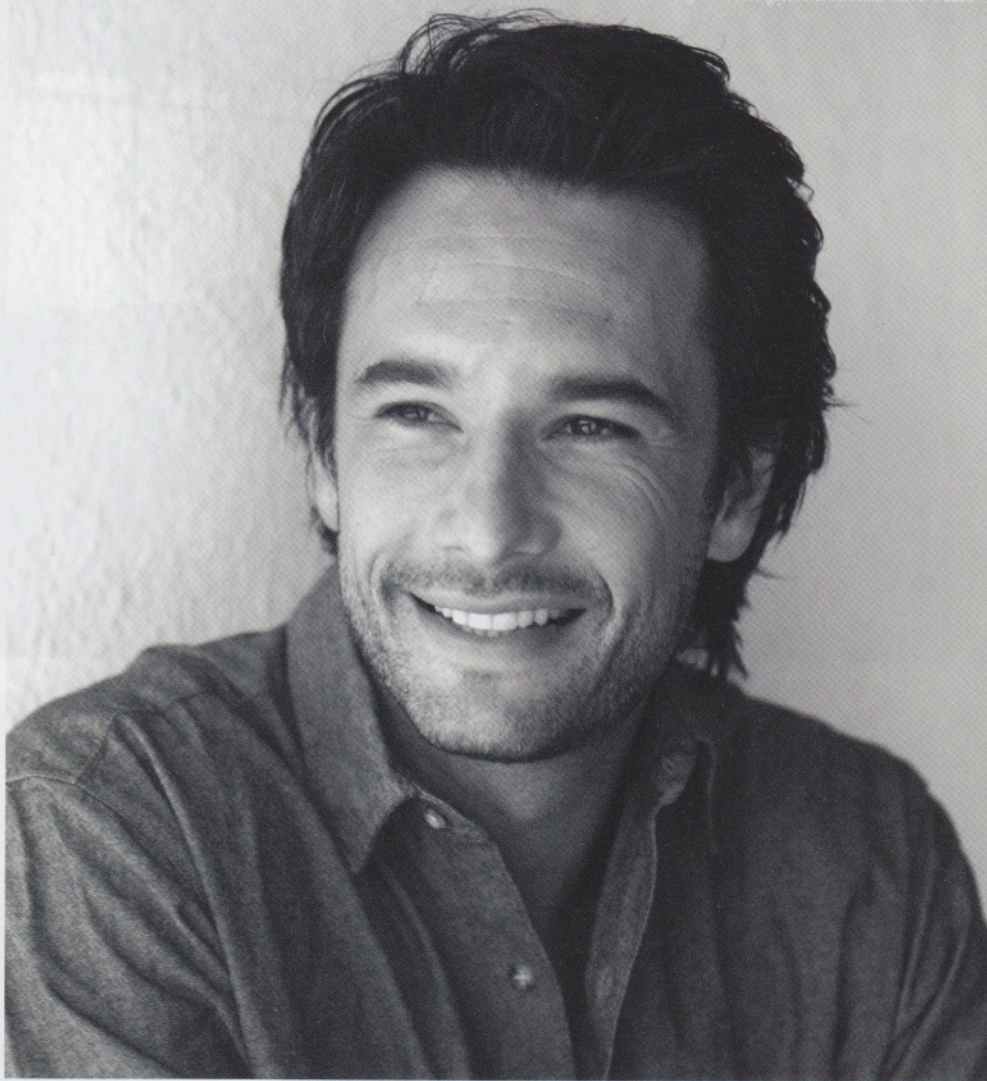
Not that this devilishly handsome man is bothered by such a schedule. "I relax between work," he says sounding very chilled out. "I always find a little bit of time. After Cannes, I will go back to Brazil and relax a little bit, surf. Everything is going to be beautiful."

Santoro's nearly two decades' worth of acting credits would give Bradley Cooper a run for his money (as would his good looks). He's played the love interest to Hollywood royalty including Nicole Kidman, Jennifer Lopez and Laura Linney. And he was Jim Carrey's first lover in *I Love You Phillip Morris*. Yes, you read that correctly — Jim Carrey.

Playing the love interest is not Santoro's priority, but neither is any specific character.

One of his more celebrated roles was in the Brazilian film *Carandiru*, based on the true story of one of Sao Paulo's most infamous prisons. Santoro played a transvestite named Lady Di. He described this work as "delicate" and "challenging" as he balanced the worlds between transvestite, man, woman and inmate. As Xerxes in *300*, a role he will reprise in 2013's *300: Battle of Artemisia*, he was both mentally and physically pushed. And Santoro's reaction to having to bulk up once again for the larger-than-life, elaborately adorned god-king of Persia? "Here we go again."

Extremes in weight gain and loss are a recurring theme in the roles Santoro has chosen. The opening image of Santoro's decrepit face in the Brazilian film *Heleno* (about Heleno de Freitas, an ether-addicted Brazilian soccer star who died at age 38) is shocking.



"All the roles have been challenging somehow at that time in my life," Santoro says. "It's hard to pick one, but I would say *Heleno* was the most challenging. It was a long shoot. Tense. The story is dark. It was really, really tragic. It was also the most complete because I was a producer as well. It was the first time I produced."

"I didn't plan to produce *Heleno*," Santoro continues. "It made sense though. I started to get very involved artistically with the director. We organically started working together and talking about the script. Then one day he came to me and said, 'Well, let's produce!' and I said, 'No, I really want to focus on my work as an actor.' He was like, 'No, no, no. You are already doing it. You're already involved. You give me notes on the script. Let's make it official.' That's how it happened."

Santoro lives between two worlds — one of unabashed fame and one of near anonymity. The funny part is that the anonymity is afforded to him in paparazzi-laden, celeb-crazed America. "I love it here when I'm here [in the U.S.] Usually, I can go to the super market and buy my vegetables. It's all good," says Santoro. "In Brazil, it's very different. It's a little tricky for me to do that there. I still do it; I don't limit myself. I live my life. I do whatever I feel like

doing, but I know I will have to interact with people and paparazzi. It's just part of the whole deal."

While most actors struggle with the loss of privacy, Santoro's sense of home overpowers the frustrations of celeb-dom. "I have what I call a 'base' in L.A. I have an apartment, but I call home Brazil," Santoro says. "That is where my dog is. My family is there. I can't just be apart for so long. It's hard for me to move. I have a beautiful little nephew who is growing up, and I want to be there. My parents, all my friends — it's very important for me to be connected to that."

It's obvious Santoro has a lot to miss when he is away from Brazil, but could there be anything he possibly misses when he is away from Los Angeles? "The weather," Santoro simply replies. Whoa. Rewind. The weather? Isn't Brazil a tropical paradise of eternal good weather? "You know, I love the weather in L.A. I do," he says. "Don't get me wrong, the weather in Rio is sunny with blue skies, but it's humid. The weather in L.A. is perfect. Chilly at night, and the day is good. I miss that when I leave."