

Arts

Celebrating intercultural dialogue with classical music

Simon Mercieca

This year is dedicated to intercultural dialogue and the Euro-Med Anna Lindh Foundation has earmarked this Thursday as the day when activities are to take place all over Europe and the Mediterranean to celebrate what has been termed as the 'Dialogue night event'.

The University of Malta's Mediterranean Institute, with the support of the Anna Lindh Foundation, is organising three activities aimed at fostering mutual understanding. The foundation's network in Malta is headed by the institute.

On Wednesday, the University is hosting an afternoon seminar focussing on intercultural dialogue and migration while on Thursday two classical music concerts are being organised, an operatic concert at noon in the music room of St James Cavalier, Valletta, and the second at 7.30 p.m. at the Sacrestia Vaults at the Valletta Waterfront.

Entrance to both concerts is free of charge.

The first concert will feature arias sung by mezzo soprano Claire Massa, accompanied by Caroline Calleja at the piano. The concert will include operatic pieces from Purcell, Mozart, Rossini, Bizet, Beethoven, Gounod, and Menotti others.

The second concert will feature works for string ensemble by Telemann, Haydn, Beethoven, Dvorak and Schumann, as well as operatic arias by Claire Massa. Dr Hans Jürgen Nagel is the artistic

co-ordinator of this evening event.

There are many ways to celebrate intercultural dialogue and music is one way which helps to awaken the spirit and symbolises a medium of interaction between cultures. Music is a medium by which diverse cultures come together and communicate. These concerts are thus a perfect symbol of cultural consciousness. Classical music is today not only played by European countries, but in all music conservatories throughout the world. But perhaps few people nowadays realise that what is now considered to be popular music was originally considered contentious and divisive.

In a Europe divided by different religious creeds and political ideals, composers had to struggle until their music was universally appreciated throughout the continent. More often than not, the playing of music was not determined only by the value of the composition but more importantly, by the composer's creed or political ideas. If a composer was not of the same creed, his music risked not being played at all.

The same happened with a number of compositions written in the late 18th and early 19th centuries to commemorate military victories or to express subtle political outcries. Such innuendoes have nowadays been lost and this music is rightly being termed classical, implying a genre of music embodying universal values. In other words, it ceased to be the music of a restricted group and has become music for the masses.



Caroline Calleja



Claire Massa

The revival of the clavichord

Corinne Briffa

'Four clavichords in concert' was such a novel initiative in the series of concerts organised by St James Cavalier on Sunday mornings at St Catherine of Italy Church, Valletta. The concerts' aim is to make the audience more familiar with the history of the composers and their music. In this respect, the April 27 concert was even more appealing. The history of the development of the clavichord was demonstrated on four clavichord replicas from different musical periods, manufactured by Dr George Debono, while Ramona Zammit Formosa demonstrated their different tone qualities performing works of the 16th and 17th centuries.

The clavichord is a very fragile instrument and has a simple mechanism where a pressed key causes a metal tangent to hit the string. The earliest clavichord dates back to the 15th century and has been used throughout Western Europe during the Renaissance, and in Germany until the early 19th century.

The performer controls the dynamics through the varying force when depressing the keys. This changes the pitch and dynamics as soon as the key is struck, creating vibrato and portamento. However, if the key is struck too hard, the pitch will be distorted. The quiet tone of the instrument is a function of how the string is set in motion.

The sound produced by this instrument is very particular, soft yet exquisite and difficult to pro-

ject. Yet the tone quality of each of these four instruments was different and so the variety between the instruments was demonstrated clearly.

Dr Debono and Ms Zammit Formosa gave interesting accounts of the history of the instruments and the pieces being played on each of them. It was evident that much thought was given in choosing the pieces to be played. These were aimed to match the sound quality of the particular keyboard.

Ms Zammit Formosa first performed on a fretted Gemein clavichord of the type found circa 1610. J.S. Bach's *Prelude in C*, J. Dowland's *Lady Houndson's Puffe*, and Martin Peerson's *The Fall of the Leaf* and *The Primrose* were the works chosen for this instrument.

"It was striking to listen to such a soft and delicate sound"

It was striking to listen to such a soft and delicate sound. The venue provided the listener with an intimate setting to appreciate the sound of such a genre of instruments, which otherwise would be lost in a larger setting. Her touch on this instrument was very active and dynamical contrasts, although within the limitation of the instrument, were clearly projected.

The second replica was a 1784 clavichord built on the model by Gottlob Hubert, a clavichord manufacturer. It is a double-fretted clavichord on which variations

were performed, including Frescobaldi's *La Frescobalda* and John Bull's *St Thomas Wake*. However a particularly stunning performance was that of William Byrd's *The Bells*. An interesting C and D set the basis for the several rhythmic themes including skipping rhythms and scaly passages which faithfully interpreted an outbreak of the sound of bells.

The other clavichords were unfretted, one imitating a model dating back to the turn of the 19th century while the other to 1761, referring to the manufacturer Hass of Hamburg. The former clavichord has a beautiful middle section and allows considerable vibrato effect. These were the features the pianist kept in mind when choosing the following works, Pasquini's *Ganzone Francese*, Frescobaldi's *Gaillard in G minor* and Farnaby's *Spagnoletta* coupled with *The old spagnoletta*.

The works were a pleasant contrast between the Italian and English styles, all requiring dynamical colour which Ramona wonderfully portrayed. Yet, more compelling was the variety in the technical abilities of Farnaby's *Spagnoletta*. The 1761 Hass model was an exquisite instrument both with regards to its sound, guitar-like quality as well as its design. On this, Ramona performed the last two works, Samuel Scheidt's *The King of Denmark's Gaillard* and Alonso Mudarra's *Fantasia*.

This concert successfully linked the history of the development of the keyboard with the captivating musical genre of the Elizabethan style.

eden summer club

bowling
movies
fitness
games

Children aged 3-15 years are invited to join the fun at the eden summer club!

Tuesday and Thursday mornings, July to September, kids will have the opportunity to watch a great movie, enjoy Ten pin bowling plus fitness and fun classes. All this from €70 (Lm30.05).

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