

Appreciation: Maestro Professor Joseph Vella (1942-2018)

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Mro Vella (born 9th January 1942, died 25th February 2018) was a highly successful music composer and conductor. He became the first Maltese citizen to graduate Bachelor of Music, from the University of Durham, UK and continued his studies in London, Venice and Siena, particularly with Franco Donadoni in Composition and Franco Ferrara in Conducting. His first major composition presented to the public was an orchestral suite Three Mood Pieces op 4 at the Manoel Theatre, Valletta in 1958. Together with Verena Maschat, he set up the School of Music in Valletta in 1972. In 1994 he was appointed Associate Professor of Music at the University of Malta.

Diversity of Styles

Vella's style is contemporary, with influences from the neo-classical movement of the 20th Century, but his diversity of styles – including a Mediterranean



flavour - is very evident in other works. Vella's official catalogue of works amounted to 154 opus numbers of which ten concertos, five symphonies, five oratorios, eight song cycles for different combinations, two cantatas, and the ever popular Mass in D op 20, composed to be performed at St George's Basilica in Gozo (Malta) on the saint's feast day.

He has also written about 150 minor works (liturgical pieces, hymns, marches, music for wind band, etc.), which are not listed in his official catalogue. Vella's works have been performed in many European countries and elsewhere, including the USA and Japan.

His pioneering work and continuing interest in early Maltese music has led to a renewed awareness of significant 17th and 18th Century compositions, which he has edited, performed and promoted both locally and abroad. Vella has rightly been accredited as being the father of the Maltese revival movement and Malta's leading contemporary composer.

Public Spirit

Since 1970, until his passing, Joseph Vella acted as musical director of the Soċjeta` Filarmonika La Stella

Band and the Astra Opera Theatre in Gozo. In this latter capacity, he conducted many opera productions including Rigoletto, Lucia di Lamermoor, Aida, Nabucco, Macbeth, Turandot, Forza del Destino, Gioconda, Trovatore, Traviata, Un Ballo in Maschera. Maestro Vella was also the first resident conductor of the National Orchestra in Malta, and was also Musical Director of the Soċjeta` San Pawl Banda Konti Ruggieru of Rabat (Malta) for 40 years.

Maestro Joseph Vella was also the Artistic Director of the Victoria International Arts Festival, and the Artistic Director of "Mediterranea" — a festival focusing on Mediterranean culture, including archaeology, history, folk traditions and cuisine. The main event of this festival is the annual production of two performances of an opera.

A Humble Person

In spite of his very successful career and his international acclaim as a composer and conductor, Mro Vella remained a very humble person, always with a smile on his face. He is survived by his wife Nathalie, his elder son Alan and his wife Anna, his other son Nikki and his fiancée Michelle, and his grandchildren Cristina and Andrea.