



P r o f i l e o n ...

Prof. Joseph Vella

A Maltese composer and conductor. He studied with his father, was admitted a Fellow of the London College of Music in 1967, graduated in music from the University of Durham, UK, and continued his studies with Franco Donadoni in Composition and with Franco Ferrara in Conducting in Siena, Italy.

In 1958 he composed an orchestral suite *Three Mood Pieces op 4* (played at the Manoel Theatre, Valletta) which introduced him to the public as a composer. Together with Venera Maschat he set up the School of Music in Valletta during 1972. In 1994 he was appointed Associate Professor of Music at the University of Malta.

As a composer, Joseph Vella has touched on a considerable diversity of styles, all ingrained in a personal idiom stemming mainly from the 20th century neo classical movement. As a consequence, his music is never consciously *nationalistic*, although the Mediterranean influence does emerge in some of his works; for example, the song cycle *Seher op 39* for Soprano and orchestra (the first ever written using the Maltese language as a medium), or *Canti op 88* for clarinet, cello and piano.

Vella's language is basically atonal with a tendency to precipitate towards a fundamental note, if not towards a tonal centre. His diversity of style is amply evidenced by comparing the pungent asperity of his *String Quartet op 33* (written for and premiered by the Kronos String Quartet) with the lyricism of the *Canticle Cantata op 42* for soloists, mixed choir and orchestra; or the impulsive exuberance of the *Violin Concerto op 65* with the ascetic flavour of some of his a cappella works (*Sicut Cervus op 78*, *Sequenza a 2 op 85*). Very typical of Vella's inclination in the *Sinfonia (con voce femminile) op 48*, where abstract musical lines are woven together round a vague formal foundation through a dramatic exploration of orchestral sonorities.

The slow second movement of the *Sinfonia* introduces a vocal *cantaliene* for high soprano, another arresting example by Vella in which he explores the inherent musicality of the Maltese language. Up to the present time Vella's official catalogue of works reaches just under a 100 opus numbers. These includes 7 concertos (2 for piano, 2 for violincello, and 1 for violin, flute and bassoon),

2 symphonies, 3 oratorios, 7 song cycles for different combinations, 2 cantatas, and the ever popular *Mass in D op 20*, composed to be performed at **St. George's Basilica in Gozo** on the Saint's feast day. He has also written a large number of minor works (liturgical pieces, hymns, marches, music for wind band, etc), which are not listed in his official catalogue.

Vella's works have been widely performed (and critically acclaimed) in most European countries, the USA and Japan. In September 2001 he conducted the Prometheus Symphony Orchestra of New York in a programme of his works (Concerto for 2 Pianos Solo, the song cycle *Seher*, the overture *Jubilo*, the Mass for soloists, 4 part choir and orchestra, the choral motet *Domine Jesu Christe*, and the cantata for soloists choir and orchestra *Laudate Pueri Dominium*) at Lincoln Centre (Alice Trully Hall). A good number of his works are available on Compact Disc.

As a conductor, Vella has a wide repertoire and has received invitations to appear as a guest and to collaborate with many orchestras (Malta National Orchestra, Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra, Prometheus Symphony Orchestra of New York, Orquestra Nacional do Porto, *Goffredo Petrassi* di Roma, *Gli Armonici* Palermo, The Yamaha Goundation Symphony Orchestra etc).

During his long and fruitful association with the Malta Choral Society (1970-1982), he introduced to Malta some of the most outstanding choral works from the traditional and contemporary repertoire: Mozart's Requiem, Beethoven's *Choral Symphony*, Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Britten's *Ballad of Heros*, Bruckner's *Te Deum*. Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*.

Since 1970 Joseph Vella has been the musical director of the Astra Opera Theatre in Gozo. Over the past years he has conducted very successful

productions of Rigoletto, Lucia di Lamermoor, Aida, Nabucco, Macbeth, Turandot, Forza del Destino, Giacconda, Trovatore, Traviata etc, some of these with internationally acclaimed artists like Ghenia Dimitrova, Mark Rucker, Cecilia Gasdia, Nicola Rossi Lemeni, Aldo Protti, Rumen Doikov, Tiziana Fabbricini, Hao Jiang Tian and others.

Critics attribute to Vella's conducting a respect for the composer's perceived inclinations, manifesting an exceptional feeling for large/scale musical architecture, rhythmic dynamism, and a heightening of the musical line. His sensitivity and instinctive insights as a conductor have been acknowledged by various artists.

After a concert at the Manoel Theatre with world famous soprano Cecilia Gasdia she remarked that "Joseph Vella is one of the few conductors I know with whom I would be quite willing to sing a whole opera without even one rehearsal!"

Vella had the honour of being appointed the first resident conductor of the National Orchestra in Malta.

His pioneering work and continuing interest in early Maltese music has led to a renewed awareness of significant 17th and 18th centuries compositions, which he has edited, performed and promoted both locally and abroad (Germany, France, Sapin, Greece, Egypt). Vella has rightly been accredited as being the father of the Maltese revival movement.

Joseph Vella has contributed articles to several local and foreign publications, and he has participated and read papers at music conferences in Malta, Italy, France, England, Turkey and Greece.

He has also acted both as chairman and as a member on various music jury panels for international Music Competitions.

Joseph Vella is a Bandmaster of La Stella Band Club – Victoria (Gozo) and Count Roger of Rabat Malta.

*Il-President u l-Eżekuttiv
tas-Socjetà Muzikali La Stella Levantina
AD 1894 Banda Santa Marija
jawguraw il-festa t-tajba lil kulħadd*