

PRESS RELEASE

Zarattini International promotes culture

Malta | January 21st, 2019

As part of its Corporate and Social Responsibility initiatives, Zarattini International proudly promoted a "Night at the Opera" with the Philharmonic of Nissena in Malta.

The event took place on January 20th, in collaboration with the Mediterranean Corporate Center and the European Foundation for Support of Culture. The initiative was well received by attracting a public of about 800 people.

Further details in the article:

MARIE BENOIT'S DIARY: OPERATIC BONANZA



Someone remarked: 'What is there to do in Malta except eat out?' Within a couple of days of hearing this a French couple on their way to a Baroque festival concert told me how they were able to enjoy so many more cultural outings in Malta than they do in Nancy as there is so much going on here, tickets are relatively cheap and getting to wherever, in spite of the traffic, still simple compared to other countries. I couldn't agree more. But of course all this is true if you have cultural interests; if you appreciate a good concert, a piano recital, a half-decent piece of theatre and so on. Well, if you don't then it's eating out all the way.

This time it was an Opera Evening, with the Philharmonic of Nissena, Italy conducted by Alexei Galea Cavallazzi. When are we going to see him conduct our own Philharmonic I wonder? Also on the programme were basso-buffo Salvatore Salvaggio and soprano Marvic Baldacchino. **Zarattini International** collaborated with the MCC and the European Foundation for Support of Culture, to bring us this concert.

The evening's programme was made up of works by Rossini, Bellini, Puccini, Mascagni, Mozart, Offenbach and Saint Saëns. What I did not know was that there were also two Neapolitan canzoni in store for we were not given a proper programme.

This was a well-conceived, popular selection which was not taxing on the audience. One could really sit back and relax. However I missed having a proper programme and therefore having no idea of who and what was going to be performed next.



Soprano Marvic Baldacchino who combines talent and beauty

The orchestra played the most famous intermezzo in classical music that of Pietro Mascagni's Cavalleria Rusticana, three minutes of pure bliss, emotion oozing from each note; the kind of music to listen to with your eyes closed and more often than not tears rolling down your cheeks. In private.

Pietro Mascagni was born in Livorno on 7th December 1863, in Piazza delle Erbe where - on the ground floor - his parents ran a bakery. The Maestro's views on food and beverages were handed down to posterity in a few lines in 1934: 'The first health rule does not refer to smoking, because from a very young age I have smoked a quantity of cigars each day that is larger than the number of my operas, Nerone included... the first health rule, the queen of health rules, the mother of all health rules is one. I eat slowly, adagio. The adagio is a symphonic tempo. But it is the only tempo of my eating art... I was born with a narrow oesophagus and, when the first mouthfuls went wrong, with my musical ear I immediately perceived the antiphon. If the oesophagus is narrow, mouthfuls must be small. In order for them to be small, one must chew and chew again'.

We heard no less than four of Rossini's compositions that evening. This is the composer who was dismissive of Wagner: 'One can't judge Wagner's opera Lohengrin after a first hearing, and I certainly don't intend hearing it a second time.'

It was a treat to listen to basso buffo or basso-baritono Salvatore Salvaggio, superb throughout the evening. He sang La Calunnia from Rossini's best known work, Il Barbiere di Siviglia and Miei rampolli Femminini from La Cenerentola. I would love to see Salvaggio playing Don Magnifico on stage. He is bound to be stupendous.

The basso-buffo gave us a last aria Piff, Paff, Pouf from Offenbach's La Grande-Duchesse de Gerolstein. It was a piece of fun but I have to say I had never heard of this particular Offenbach opera before. Jacques Offenbach I suppose was France's answer to Gilbert and Sullivan's English operettas and clearly a man with a sense of humour.

It was Offenbach who unleashed the can-can in his operatta Orpheus in the Underworld, on an unsuspecting French public in 1858.

More fun followed with, unexpectedly, but to the audience's delight, the basso-buffo singing Funiculì, Funiculà while urging the audience to join in. The audience clapped their way through it. This Italian song was written to commemorate the opening of the first funicular cable car on Mount Vesuvius and presented by the composers Turco and Denza at the Piedigrotta festival the same year. The sheet music was published by Ricordi and sold over a million copies within a year. There's success for you.

The orchestra gave us two other overtures from Rossini: one from La Gazza Ladra the other from his opera buffa L'Italiana in Algeri. Rossini had composed twenty-five operas by the time he was thirty-one. Some 6,000 mourners attended his funeral when he passed away in 1868. It is said that when the chorus sang the prayer from Moses in Egypt at the service, the crowd demanded an encore. Another overture was from Bellini's Norma. Casta diva, one of the arias sung by the protagonist in Norma, was one of Maria Callas' best-loved arias. She made it her own for several generations of opera lovers. Bellini rewrote it some 8 times we are told. Both the opera and the aria quickly became so popular that the names of Norma and Adalgisa won the people's hearts and a place in the birth registers in Emilia-Romagna.

And so to the soprano Marvic Baldacchino who was definitely in the front row when God was dishing out his gifts. Lovely voice. She has both talent and beauty.

Her first aria that evening was from Mozart's La Nozze di Figaro, Deh Vieni non tardar. A delicate, moving aria, sung delicately by Miss Baldacchino. She gave us the, to me at least, even more beautiful Quando m'en vo from the most sentimental of Puccini's operas La Bohème. Lush, tuneful and extraordinarily beautiful music, the young soprano certainly did justice to it. She also performed one of the most famous arias in the world O Mio Babbino caro from Puccini's Gianni Schicchi. It seems that the opera is rarely, if ever, performed but it has found a place in our hearts because of this aria. It was also used at the theme music in the film A Room with a View. Miss Baldacchino certainly did not disappoint. I am sure she will do very well for herself internationally.

The bass-buffo and the soprano gave us one duet: La ci darem la mano from Mozart's Don Giovanni. Here is a handsome philanderer who has managed to retain his popularity throughout the centuries, thanks to Mozart's tuneful music and a good story.



Conductor Alexei Galea Cavalazzi – going from strength to strength

Unexpectedly Miss Baldacchino sang a perennial favourite de Curtis's evergreen aria, No ti Scordar di me. I must say this is the first time I have heard a woman sing this moving song. It reminds me so much of my mother.

The concert ended with Saint-Saëns's sumptuous Danse Bacchanale from Samson et Dalila. Saint Saëns, another child prodigy who by the time he was ten had no problems at all in playing piano works by Mozart and Beethoven....apart from anything else.

Maurice Ravel however, was not complimentary about Saint Saëns's compositions. "I'm told that Saint Saëns has informed a delighted public that since war began he has composed music for the stage, melodies, an elegy and a piece for the trombone. If he'd been making shellcases instead it might have been all the better for music."

Who can possibly agree to that?

And so a most pleasant evening ended.