

Mikiel Anton Vassalli College | Belt il Bniedem Artistic Platform

Proudly present

Gawhar Misjub

AN OPERATIC BANQUET



St. Agatha Auditorium, Rabat
Saturday 27th May at 8pm

An original concept by **Reuben Pace**,
where Professionals and Students work together for this artistic production.

The Programme

Ugo's Aria from the opera **Monna Bianca** (1936)
by **Giuseppe Camilleri**

Overture to the opera **Achille in Sciro** (1738)
by **Giuseppe Arena**

Se d'un Amor Tiranno from the opera **Artasersere** (1741)
by **Giuseppe Arena**

Tu Vuoi che lo Viva o Cara from the opera **Artasersere** (1741)
by **Giuseppe Arena**

She was Once So Demure from the opera **The Orphan of Geneve** (1850)
by **Francesco Shira**

Non è ver che sia Contento from the opera **Artasersere** (1746)
by **Girolomo Abos**

Piero's Aria from the opera **Monna Bianca** (1936)
by **Giuseppe Camilleri**

Overture to the opera **Cimarosa** (1808)
by **Nicolò Isouard**

Trio: from **Le Magicien sans Magie**
by **Nicolo Isouard. (1775-1818)**

Duet Regina ed Ugo from the opera **I Cavalieri di Malta** (1877)
by **Antonio Nani**

Oh What Joy to Hear from the opera **The Orphan of Geneve** (1850)
by **Francesco Shira**

Piero's Aria from the opera **Monna Bianca** (1936)
by **Giuseppe Camilleri**

Coro di Fanciulle from the opera **Angelica** (1973) by **Carmelo Pace**

Christmas Quartet from the opera **Monna Bianca** (1936)
by **Giuseppe Camilleri**

The Story

Roles:

Count: Ken Scicluna

Estranged Countess: Clare Ghigo

Daughters: Kim Zammit and Madeline Gruppetta

Duchess: Mariah Costa

Count's Brother: Michelangelo Muscat

Governess: Maria Grazia Grech

Butler: Martin Bezzina Wettinger

Head of Staff: Andrea Stegani

Chambermaids/ Guests: Thea de Gray, Jodie Grech, Francesca Gauci Grech, Amy Cassar.

Guest: Yosef Farrugia

Several children

Synopsis:

In the opulent ballroom of the Count's house, a brilliant but tormented man reflects on his life and the memories of his estranged wife. Surrounded by grandeur and nostalgia, he reminisces about happier times, yearning for the past when love and joy permeated his existence. As he prepares to host a lavish ball, he extends invitations to his closest friends and family, hoping to recapture a fleeting moment of happiness and perhaps mend the broken bonds that haunt him.

Amidst the opulent setting, the duchess, originally betrothed to the Count's brother, finds herself consumed by disappointment and sorrow as her once promising life becomes a mere shadow of what she had envisioned.

Meanwhile, the Count's daughters, caught amid a recent disagreement, attempt to provide solace and support to the despondent duchess. In their tender moments of interaction, they offer comfort and understanding, seeking to alleviate her pain and restore a sense of unity and harmony.

Simultaneously, the Count's brother, still haunted by the memory of his lost love, exudes a palpable undercurrent of anger. His relentless pursuit of his beloved manifests in his restless demeanour, hinting at the unresolved emotions and turmoil that lie beneath the surface.

In the vibrant atmosphere of the grand ball, the governess, though filled with a sense of melancholy, finds herself disheartened by her perceived lack of importance. She laments the diminished status she believes she holds, feeling as though she has been relegated to a lesser role. The absence of a prominent seat at the party serves as a painful reminder of her perceived insignificance.

Suddenly, an apprehension grips her as she catches sight of the count approaching. His sombre demeanour signals that something is amiss, prompting the governess to hastily depart, compelled by an urgency to address the impending arrival of the count.

Meanwhile, within the ballroom, the diligent chambermaids labour diligently to ensure the room is prepared to perfection. Later, the governess resurfaces, appearing resolute as she takes on the task of refreshing the count's daughters. She assumes the role of mentor and guide, imparting wisdom on proper etiquette and instructing the young girls on how to conduct themselves during the event. With a firm yet gentle demeanour, she shows them the values of grace, poise, and decorum, preparing them to navigate the social intricacies of the ball.

As the intertwining narratives of the governess, the count, and the preparations in the ballroom unfold, a web of anticipation and tension builds, hinting at the underlying complexities and secrets that will soon come to light within the Count's House.

As the tension mounts within the Count's House, a heated argument erupts between the Count and the Countess. The scene hints at the Count's suspicions of infidelity, fuelling his anger and mistrust. The countess, on the other hand, defends her innocence, but the rift between them becomes palpable, casting a shadow over their relationship.

In a contrasting turn of events, the Count's brother finds solace and happiness as he learns that his beloved has had a change of heart and accepted his marriage proposal. The news brings a renewed sense of hope and joy to his life, rekindling his optimism and anticipation for a shared future.

Meanwhile, the children of the house, yearning to be part of the festivities, venture around the mansion, eager to catch a glimpse of the arriving guests. Their innocent curiosity leads them to explore and spy, seeking a sense of inclusion in the much-anticipated event.

Finally, the long-awaited party commences, casting an enchanting atmosphere over the ballroom. Despite the earlier conflicts and uncertainties, the celebration unfolds harmoniously. The Count's

House becomes adorned with laughter, music, and dance, as guests revel in the joyous occasion. The storyline culminates in a resolution, as relationships are mended, misunderstandings are clarified, and harmony is restored within the household.

In the end, all conflicts find their resolution, and the characters find solace, happiness, and unity, leaving behind the shadows that had clouded their lives. The party becomes a symbol of rejuvenation and the start of a new chapter, ushering in a sense of fulfilment and contentment for the Count and his loved ones.

Mr. Victor Galea

Executive Producer,
Head of Mikiel Anton Vassalli College Network



Ġawhar Misjub : Discovered Gems

These are discovered gems indeed! It gives me great pleasure to be able to present yet another College production with the efforts and contributions from the specialised schools of the visual and performing arts (schools of Drama, Dance, Music and Art) through the artistic platform Belt il-Bniedem and this time with the collaboration of the Metropolitan Chapter of the Mdina Cathedral.

Following the production of the first Opera-Film in Maltese *BLAT – The Island Fortress*, premiered in June of 2022, we are now presenting the project *Ġawhar Misjub*, literally meaning *Discovered Gems*, which focuses on the operatic music of late Maltese composers. Today's concert is second part in this project since in December a concert with the singers and a piano was held at the National Libraries in which some of today's pieces were performed. The second part of the project you are witnessing today sees the pieces fully staged, thus bringing out the full artistic impact of these pieces.

Dr. Reuben Pace

Producing Artistic Director



Malta has a long history of composers of operatic music. Although most of these composers studied abroad and a significant number took up residence abroad (mainly due to the limited opportunities their homeland provided during their times), they still remained essentially Maltese in spirit. As this booklet details, each composer was very much in touch with the international arts scene which was contemporary to that period and also worked with the top musicians and institutions of their day. Today's concert is a celebration of these Maltese artists whose music has remained stagnant in several

archives for far too long.

In this production you shall be entertained to a wide variety of styles, idioms and musical epochs, starting from the Baroque till the Twentieth century. The range of subjects dealt with in the different arias covers a wide range of topics from ancient Kings and Emperors as in **Artasersere** by the librettist Metastasio to urban legends as in **Monna Biancha** by Giuseppe Camilleri whose libretto is essentially based on the myth of the white lady. Naturally love and all the complications brought about with it does not fail to feature as in Antonio Nani's **I Cavalieri di Malta** and Francesco Schira's **The Orphan of Geneve**.

Today's concert is the second part of the project 'Ġawhar Misjub' which is brought to you through the artistic platform 'Belt ilBniedem (City of Humanity) now fully endorsed by the Mikiel Anton Vassalli College. The main aims of this artistic platform is to serve as an artistic-educational environment where students of the visual and performing arts can take part in the actual productions alongside professionals in the sector.

Putting up a staged operatic performance such as today's is no mean feat as it involves several professionals besides the music performers. To mention but a few; one requires a stage director, a stage manager, a set designer, a costume designer, a lights designer – and the list goes on. Along with these professionals we have a substantial number of students who are part in the production by assisting and working alongside the professionals. The roles taken by students range from solo singers to backstage hands. By working and being mentored by professionals in different fields the students will master the leap from the classroom environment to the entertainment industry. The college has also gone further than this and has designed an accredited *Certificate in Practical MultiDisciplinary Studies in the Visual and Performing Arts* –, in which students can gain further knowledge and skills in their prospective career as artists, whether they intend to become full time artists or intend to take an artistic career on a parttime basis.

Clare Ghigo

Stage Director



The concept of presenting music from Maltese operas that have never been performed before or are rarely performed is a fascinating and important endeavour. It allows us to unearth hidden gems and share them with audiences, breathing new life into these forgotten compositions. As the director of this production, my primary goal is to honour the music and bring these

narratives to life through a captivating and cohesive production.

One of the main challenges I faced is the diverse range of narratives within the chosen musical selections. Each piece carries its own story, emotions and themes. Our task is to carefully navigate these narratives and create a seamless flow between them, ensuring that the audience can connect with the overarching themes of unrequited love, redemption, ingratitude, hurt, pain, joy, and pride.

To set the scene, a 1910-style ballroom was chosen as the thematic theatrical setting for the concert. The ballroom exudes an air of elegance, creates a mystic feel and grandeur, providing the perfect setting for this grand feast hosted by the Count, his estranged wife, two daughters and malicious brother. The set design should evoke the opulence and sophistication of the era, with attention to detail in recreating the ambiance of a bygone time.

One of the main challenges that this concert presented was the logistical nature of collaborating with a variety of schools within the Mikiel Anton Vassalli College: the Malta School of Music, School of Dance, School of Drama and School of Visual Art. Incorporating various disciplines at different levels is a key aspect of this and any opera production. We aim to create a multidimensional experience by integrating elements of dance, visual arts, and theatricality into the performance.

As the director, I worked closely with a set designer, the conductor, musicians, singers, and performers to achieve a cohesive interpretation of the music and create a theatrical flow EXPERIENCE. I also tried to help each of the students to create a narrative in a way that helps them find an authentic theatrical expression.

Ultimately, the main concept of this concert is a celebration of discovery, artistry, and the power of music to transcend time. Through meticulous attention to detail, thoughtful staging, and collaboration across disciplines, we, as a team can create a truly unforgettable experience that showcases the beauty and richness of Maltese operatic heritage. Let us embark on this journey with passion, curiosity, and a deep respect for the composers and their works.

The Composers

Giuseppe Arena (1707-1784)

Giuseppe Arena was born in Valletta in 1707. Around 1724 he began furthering his musical studies in Naples at the *Conservatorio dei Poveri di Gesu Cristo*. Arena's musical talent was immediately recognised and he was also Francesco Durante's assistant (a major Italian composer of the time). Although information regarding his life in Italy is quite unknown, we know that prominent singers such as soprano Francesca Cuzzoni and Castrato Anton Hubert, nicknamed Porporino, eagerly accepted to sing his music.

Around 1738, he premiered six of his operas. These include his first opera *Achille in Sciro* and a secular cantata named *Il Vello d'Oro*, both premiered in Rome. Other works included *Tigrane*, *Artaserse*, *La Clemenza di Tito*, *Alessandro in Persia*, and his groundbreaking comic opera *Il Vecchio Deluso*. Arena was always recognised as a Neapolitan composer and not as a Maltese one however in the late 19th century, the certificate of his birth stated that he was born in Malta.

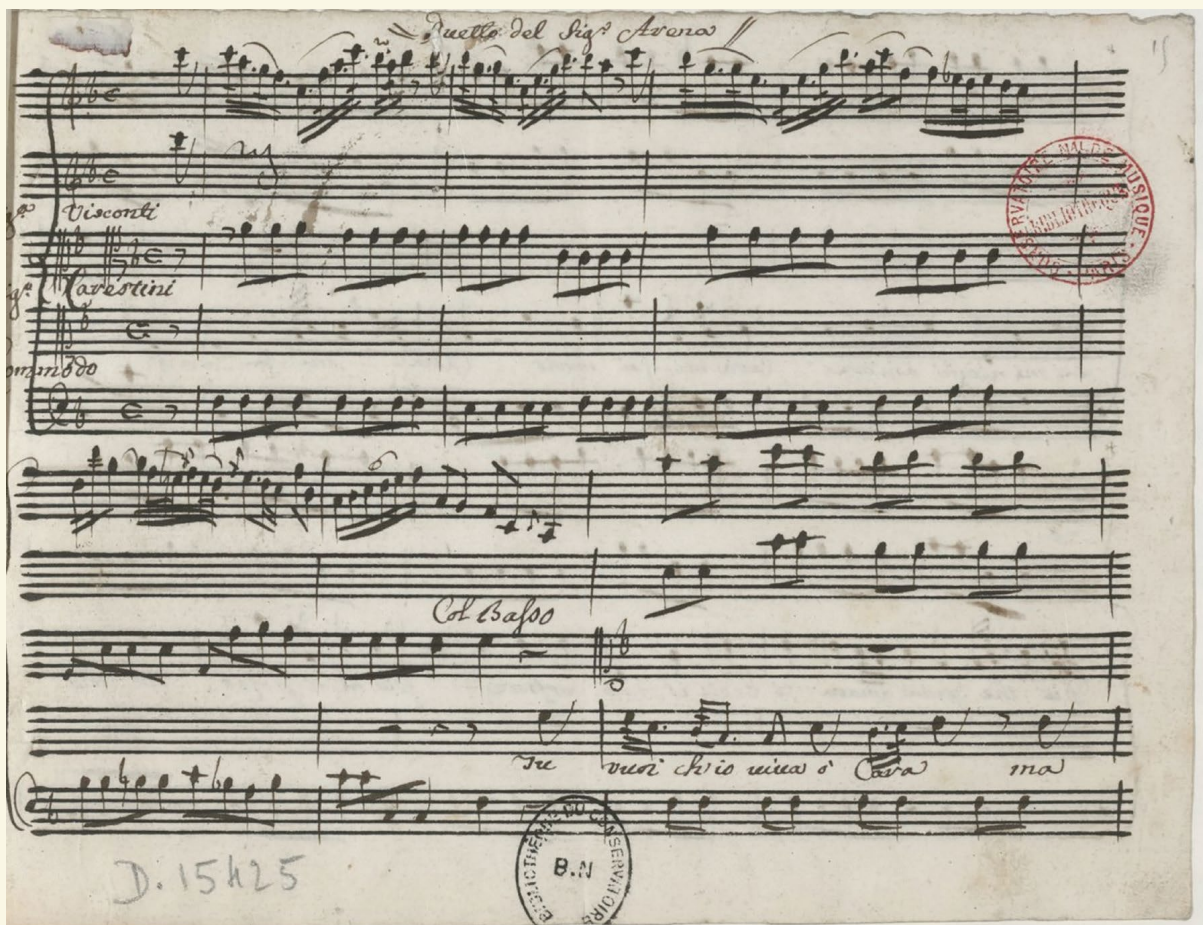


The façade of the Church of Santa Maria della Colonna, once the Conservatorio dei Poveri di Gesu Cristo (Naples)

Achille in Sciro and *Artasersere* are two operas written by the famous 18th century librettist Pietro Metastasio (1698-1782). Metastasio was one of the prominent opera seria librettists and composers such as Hasse, Vinci, Gluck, Handel and Mozart all made use of his literature. Most of the plot lines revolve around historic Kings, Emperors or heroes, such as the story of the Greek hero Achilles and the Persian King Artaxerxes.

Arena's first opera written in 1738 is an epitome of the Neapolitan Baroque style of writing. The plot line of *Achille in Sciro* is based on Achilles who dressed up as a girl to be able to enter the court of King Skyros and whilst being there he fell in love with one of the princesses. This part of Achilles's story seems to be omitted from Homer's Iliad but is later recorded by the Roman poet Statius.

In 1741 Arena wrote the three-act opera *Artaserse* on the famous libretto which deals with the Persian King and the son of Serse the first. This opera dwells on love, betrayal and antagonistic events. In the aria *Se un amor tiranno*, Mandane (one of the characters) cannot believe that her beloved turned out to be such a cruel man. Arena's appoggiaturas and trills seem to suggest the tormented lover and they almost mirror her sobs. In the duet *Tu vuoi ch'io vivo o cara* both characters are pleading, creating a melody as if by question and answer.



Part of the score of *Artasersere* (1741) by Giuseppe Arena
(Bibliothèque Nationale de France)

Girolamo Abos (1715-1760)

Girolamo Abos was born in Valletta in 1715 to French parents who set up permanent residence in Malta. Due to Malta's political connection with Italy, Girolamo went to Naples to further his studies. He went to The Conservatorio di Sant Onofrio and in 1742 he premiered his first opera *Le due Zingarelle*. Apart from numerous comic operas such as *La Moglie Gelosa*, *Il Geloso* and *La Serva Padrona*, Abos was also interested in opera seria.

Artaserse is Girolamo Abos's first opera seria and he used *Metastasio's* libretti for most of his opere serie. Abos became a popular composer; his most celebrated work was *Tito Manilo* which ran not only in Italy but even in other European Theatres. Apart from operas, Abos also wrote liturgical works, such as *Dixit Dominus*, *Magnificat* and *Stabat Matèr* and instrumental works.

In the opera *Artaserse* the aria *Non e Ver che sia contento*, the character Visconti realised that insulting his beloved has not made him feel better but even more tormented. This aria's musical mood suggests his realisation and his inner torment.

It is interesting to note that Maltese born composers such as Giuseppe Arena, Girolamo Abos and Niccolò Isouard all wrote works which made use of Metastasio's works. This signifies that the Malta born composers were in touch with current operatic traits and literature. However, one must not forget that although these three composers were born on the island, yet they all furthered their studies abroad.



The Conservatorio di San Onofrio a Porto Capuana (Naples)

N.º 1. buona *Artasersere*

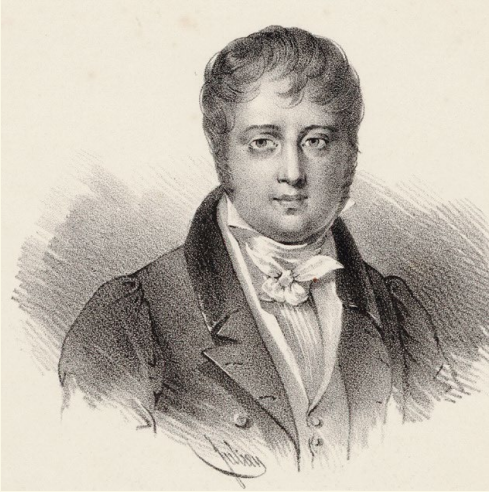
Aria
Del Sig. Abos.

Andante.

Mus. 1-F-28,1

Part of the score of the opera *Artasersere* (1746) by Girolomo Abos, Metropolitan Chapter, Mdina

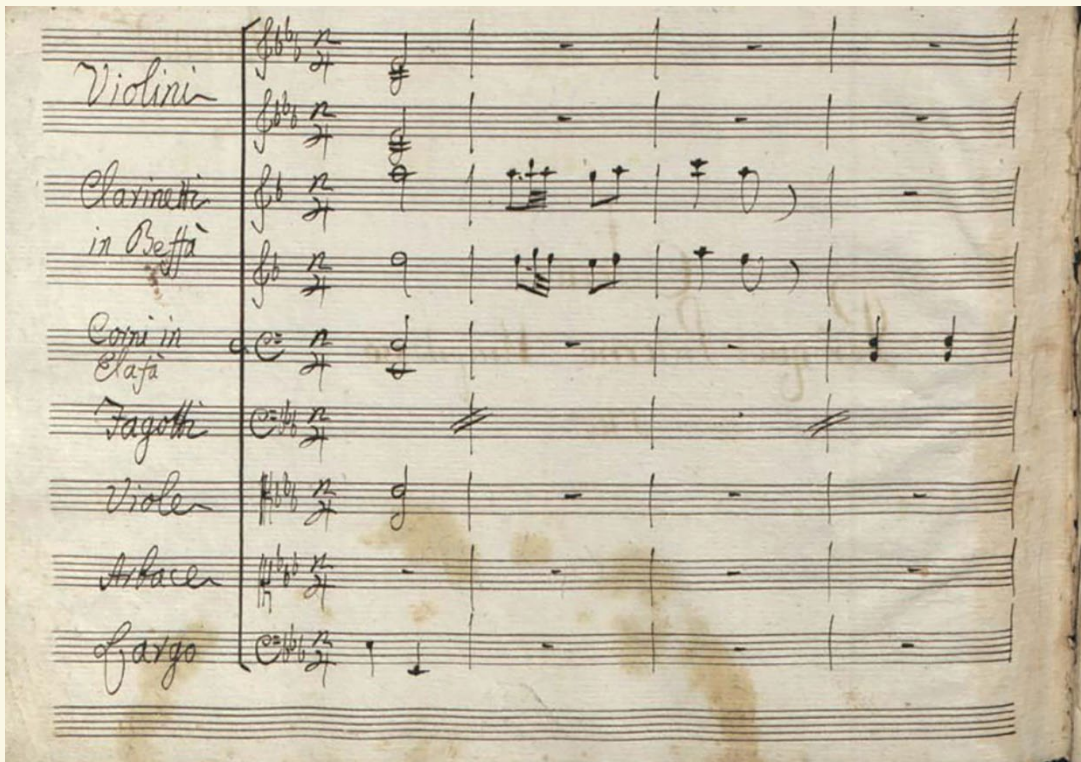
Nicolò Isouard (1773-1818)



Isouard who was nicknamed Nicolò de Malte was born in Rabat where he studied with Francesco Zerafa (another prominent Maltese composer of the time). Isouard then continued his studies in Palermo and later moved to Paris, where he became friends with notable composers such as Kreutzer. Isouard, having French descendants and being prominent in Malta during the French rule found an easy connection by moving to Paris.

Isouard composed frequently for the Théâtre de Opéra Comique and he wrote over thirty theatrical works, some of which are now lost. Some of his lost works include *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *I due Avari* and *Artaserse*.

Isouard's main operatic topics revolved around light-hearted stories and less historic libretti. The opera *Cimarosa* was written with the librettist Jean-Nicolas Bouilly (1763-1842). The overture is based on the French Galant operatic overture style and sets the uplifting mood for the opera¹¹



Part of the score of the Overture to *Cimarosa*, by Nicolò Isouard (1808), Biblioteca Palatina, Sezione musicale – Parma

Francesco Schira (1809-1883)



Another Maltese born composer that was a resident composer and vocalist in foreign theatres was Francesco Schira. Schira was born in Valletta in 1809 to a musical family and he was the youngest of four brothers. Schira was enrolled at the Milan Conservatory at the tender age of 9 years. He was a well-known teacher for voice performance at the Royal Academy of Music and a resident conductor of London's Drury Lane Theatre and Lisbon's National Theatre San Carlo.

Apart from being a prominent voice performance teacher, he was also known for his operatic works. His most famous to date are the *Ear-Ring*, *Lia* and *La Selvaggia*. One of his successful romantic operas is *Thérèse, the Orphan of Geneve*. The opera deals about Thérèse's unknown past and the jealousy of lovers. The character of Levine sings an aria taken from the same opera *She was Once so Demure* is written in a romantic style, and quite in an Italianate way. The quartet *Oh What A Joy To Hear* is sung by Thérèse, the Countess, the Count and Picard deals with the celebration of the engagement of Thérèse and Picard (these are all characters in the opera).

AH! WHAT JOY TO HEAR.

AIR AND QUARTETT.

Words by CHARLES JEFFERYS.

Music by F. SCHIRA.

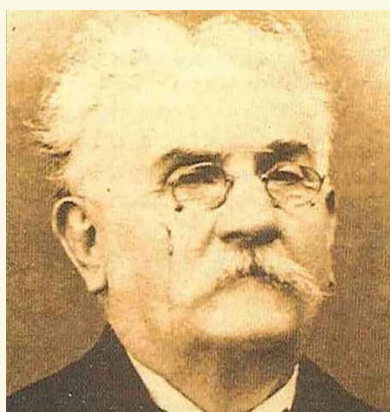
COUNT. *pp dolce.*
 LARGHETTO. Ah! what joy to hear
 From the lips I love, Words of wel...come
 sweet as thine; Words now doubly dear,
 Since to me they prove, All, all I hop'd for

Ah! what joy to hear.

Another Edition in C.

Part of the score of *The Orphan of Geneve* by Francesco Schira (1850), *The Public Library of the city of Boston, USA*

Antonio Nani (1842-1929)



Antonio Nani was born in Valletta in a prominent family of musicians. He studied in Malta under the tutelage of his father and furthered his studies shortly in Naples where he started composing his *Laudate Pueri*. Nani wrote a variety of sacred works, one of which describes the Shipwreck of St Paul (*Messa del Naufrago*).

He only wrote three operas, *Zorilla*, *I Cavalieri di Malta* and *Agnese Visconti*. Both the opera *I Cavalieri di Malta* and *Agnese Visconti* were performed at the then Royal Opera House, Valletta (Teatru Rjal) and

Nani's compositions were quite historical because it was the first time that Teatru Rjal produced a work by a Maltese composer.

Although Nani composed these operas during the British reign, the thematic notion of the Knights of Malta, suggested the island's devotion to the Catholic church as if to suggest the Italianate political stance. The premier of this work was a triumphant success due to the beautiful melodies and well executed plot. The duet written for the characters Ugo and Regina is a clear indication of Nani's Italian musical influence as it seems to remind the listener of the duet from Verdi's *La Traviata* and the *Rigoletto's* famous quartet.

A page of handwritten musical notation for a duet. The score is written on two systems of staves. The top system shows vocal lines for Regina and Ugo, with lyrics in Italian. The bottom system shows piano accompaniment for Regina and Ugo. The tempo is marked 'Moderato' and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics include: 're - a nunzia di mor - te ab - via su le nunzia di mor - te ab - via su le', 'Drego un'an l'olma smozzi - la', 'Chiedo in - viano al ciel a - li - ta un fan - ca - sma il suo fan - ca - sma sra - go o - gno il cie - lo e me'.

Part of the vocal score for *I Cavalieri di Malta*, (1877), by Antonio Nani, *Metropolitan Chapter Mdina*

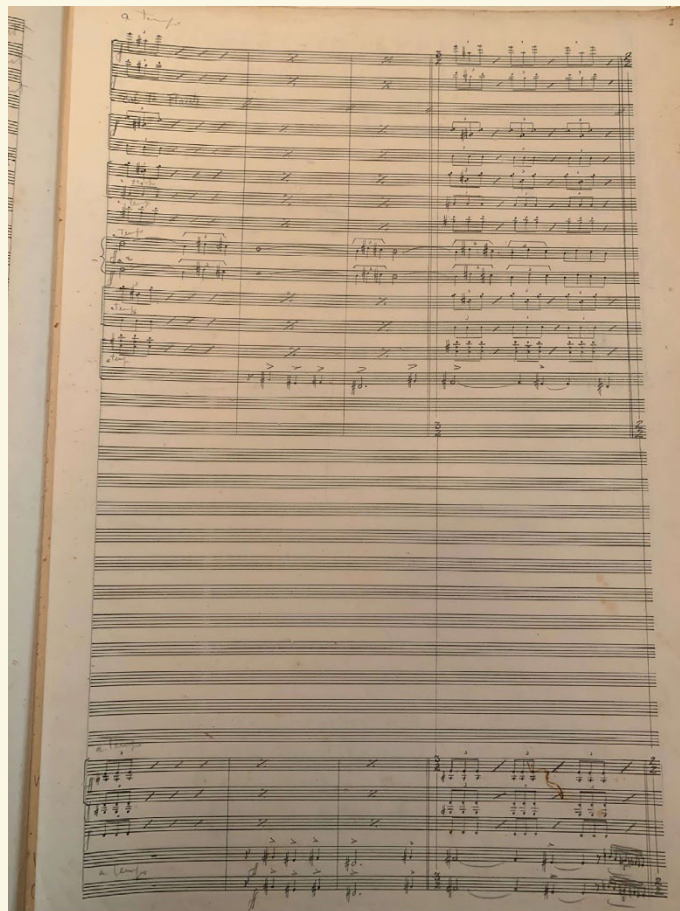
Giuseppe Camilleri (1903-1976)



Giuseppe Camilleri was born in a prominent musical family. He studied under his father's tutelage, Ferdinando Camilleri (1859-1942), who founded the *Cappella Camilleri*, which was mainly the musical provider of two of the Sliema Parishes (*Stella Maris* and *Sacro Cuor*). Giuseppe Camilleri was a gifted pianist and a prominent conductor, and he was the band master for the *La Vallette band*.

At the age of 22 he was appointed to be the *Maestro del Coro* at the Teatru Rjal, Valletta. There, he conducted operas and even met prominent composers such as Zandonai, Respighi and even celebrated singers such as Maria Caniglia. Giuseppe Camilleri's compositions were also praised by these same composers.

Camilleri's composition style is that of a modern Puccini. He wrote a variety of Sacred works, an operetta *Shalti Nar* and his only opera *Monna Bianca* which was never performed until today! The few selected numbers that will be part of this concert, have been chosen to celebrate Camilleri's beautiful melody line and his appreciation for the vocal melody.



Part of the score for *Monna Bianca*, by Giuseppe Camilleri (1936), Private Collection

Carmelo Pace (1906-1993)

Maestro Chev. Carmelo Pace (August 17, 1906 – May 20, 1993) was a Maltese composer, and a professor of music theory and harmony.



By the time he was 20, Pace had composed suites for piano, violin and violoncello, followed by numerous cantatas, orchestral and chamber music, sacred hymns, two ballets, band marches, concertos, and an oratorio. His 1931 composition, *Maltesina*, a musical fantasy based largely on traditional Maltese folk tunes and *għana*, was premiered by the Highland Fusiliers' Band in Palace Square. It remains a popular choice among marching bands during Malta's village festa season.

Among his most notable works are four operas, all of which are based on Maltese history, legend and folklore. *Caterina Desguanez* (1965), libretto by Ivo Muscat Azzopardi, tells the story of a Turkish slave who falls in love with his master's daughter. *I Martiri* (1967), libretto by Vincenzo Maria Pellegrini, features the uprising against the French occupiers in Napoleonic Malta. *Angelica* (1973), libretto also by Vincenzo Maria Pellegrini, is based on the Maltese legend of the Bride of Mosta. *Ipogea* (1976), libretto by Pellegrini, is about Neolithic Malta during the age of the mysterious temple builders.

In 1982 he composed the *Stabat Mater* for soprano, tenor, bass, mixed choir and orchestra. This was premiered by the St Monica Choir, under the direction of Sister Beniamina Portelli.

Pace achieved international recognition when his symphonic poem *Jubilamus* was played by the Kyoto Symphonic Orchestra during Expo '70 in Japan. His works have also been played in the United States, Russia, England, Wales, France, Italy, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Poland, Egypt, India and Argentina.

Carmelo Pace's music is often melodious, but at times quite characteristic of the early 20th century music tendencies. In his more lyrical moments, his music shows some references to verisim as well as Ravelian harmonies. Often of an intimate character, his more adventurous language is more abstract and atonal without necessarily being dodecaphonic.

The Performers

Conductor – Chris Muscat



Recipient of first prizes in the Joyce Dixey Competition (UK) in 2000, the Jaume Dotras Serrabella Polyphonic Composition Competition (Spain) in 2006 and the APS Bank Composition Competition (Malta) in 2012, Christopher Muscat has been described by the local press as "a young composer of outstanding talent" (The Sunday Times) and the "stark originality" (The Malta Independent) of his works has earned him an ever increasing reputation. His works have been performed

in many important music centres in Italy, England, Spain, Finland, Czech Republic, Croatia, Slovakia, Poland, Russia, Belgium, Germany, Tunisia, China and the United States of America in such prestigious venues as the Philharmonie in Berlin, the Great Hall of the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow and the Shanghai Oriental Arts Centre in China.

As conductor, his "clear conducting style" (It-Torċa), "high quality conducting" and "accomplished conducting technique" (The Sunday Times) have received constant public and critical praise. Since his professional conducting debut in 2000, Muscat has collaborated very closely with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra and the Malta Youth Orchestra and has also guest conducted other local and international orchestras and ensembles. Muscat is widely regarded as the leading authority on the great Maltese romantic composer Paolino Vassallo having been largely responsible for the composer's revival in 2006. Moreover he has premiered numerous works by contemporary composers and also recorded for television as well as for the international label GegaNEW.

Over the years Muscat has worked and collaborated closely with various internationally acclaimed artistes such as the Medici String Quartet, Quatuor CoryFeye, Leipzig Sinfonietta, Virtuosi di Praga, Matus Jakabcic (jazz guitar), David Campbell (clarinet), Giuseppe Nova (flute), Miriam Gauci (soprano), Gianluca Libertucci (organ), conductors Leos Svarovsky, Robert Sund and Ben Parry, composers Karl Jenkins, Marco Frisina and Vytautas Miskinis, the Choir of Clare College Cambridge, the National Youth Chamber Choir of Great Britain and the Coro Sinfonico di Milano Giuseppe Verdi.

Christopher Muscat is also very much active in the field of sacred music. Besides his role as Music Director of the Jubilate Deo Choir, Muscat has worked with various other choirs and has also conducted numerous special occasions at St John's Co-Cathedral and Mdina Metropolitan Cathedral

in Malta as well as Westminster Cathedral in London and St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. Through his pioneering work with the *Cappella Gregoriana Jubilate Deo* Muscat is at the forefront of a movement that aims to revive the art of plainchant singing in the Maltese islands.

As founding conductor of VOCALISE (a voluntary organisation aiming at providing training and opportunities for talented singers), Muscat has coached and conducted a number of productions, amongst these Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and Saint-Saëns' *Christmas Oratorio*, entirely made up of young Maltese singers. For many years he was also the chorus master for operas held at the Teatru Manoel (Malta's national theatre). In January 2017 he has been appointed Music Director of Fondazzjoni Paulus, a foundation whose main interest is the promotion of sacred music.

Christopher Muscat holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) degree in music studies from the University of Malta as well as a Master of Music degree (with distinction) from the University of Surrey where he studied with Sebastian Forbes (composition and choral conducting), Steve Goss (composition) and Nicholas Conran (orchestral conducting). For many years Muscat has taught music at the University of Malta and sacred music at the Archbishop's Seminary. Since 2011 he has occupied the posts of Artistic Director and Chairman of the Malta International Choir Festival, is a member of the World Choir Council and is regularly invited to judge international vocal, instrumental and composition competitions.

In December 2018 Muscat was appointed Director of Music of the Archdiocese of Malta and *Maestro di Cappella* of the Metropolitan Cathedral.

Soprano - Kimberley Grech



Kimberley Grech, 29, who is a doctor by profession specializing in Clinical Oncology, has always shown passion for music and art. At the early age of 12, Kimberley won a scholarship in Musical Theatre at the Margaret Howard Theatre College in the UK which then led to the discovery of her classical voice and her study of the Bel Canto technique.

By the age of 19, she obtained her ATCL Diploma in Singing with Distinction. Highlights of her career include singing roles of: Dorabella in *The Three Little Pigs*, Bubikopf in Ullman's *Der Kaiser Von Atlantis*, Mrs Jaffet in Britten's *Noah's Fludde* and Fiordiligi from excerpts of Mozart's *Cosi Fan Tutte*.

She has also performed as a soloist in concerts held at the President's Palace, the Office of the Prime Minister, MUZA, in various Notte Bianca editions, The Hybrid Festival, Spazju Kreattiv and as part of the Strada Stretta Concept amongst others.

She has also performed solo works of Nicolò Isouard accompanied by the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra, under the direction of Mro. Brian Schembri. In 2019, Kimberley together with well-known Czech Baritone Filip Bandžak featured in the 7th edition of 'Classics under the Stars' at the Girgenti Palace yet again accompanied by the MPO under the baton of Mro. Charles Olivieri Munroe.

Early on in 2020, Kimberley sung the solo soprano section of one of Prof. Oliver Friggeri's well known Cantata *Hodon Fjuri Lil San Publiju* composed and directed by Mro. Ray Sciberras. In 2021, accompanied by Ensemble Télémaque under the direction of Mro. Raoul Lay, Kimberley sang the role of the oppressed Bubikopf from *Der Kaiser Von Atlantis* which was the closing opera for the International Spring Opera Festival under the direction of Karl Fiorini.

Internationally, Kimberley participated in recitals held in Scotland, Italy and Bethlehem, Israel. She has also attended masterclasses lead by: Mariella Devia, Prof. Laura Sarti, Prof. Patricia Macmahon and Dr. Matteo dalle Fratte.

She owes her musical knowledge and technique to vocal coaches including; Ms. Arleen J Barlow and Dr. Andriana Yordanova. Currently, she is under the artistic guidance of Madame Juliette Bisazza and working on extending her operatic repertoire to suit her Lirico-Spinto soprano voice.

Soprano – Maria Grazia Grech



Maria Grazia has had a passion for music since a very young age. Her love story with singing started after participating in a production of 'Carmina Burana' in 2012 and she has never looked back since.

Currently she forms part of the Mikiel Anton Vassalli Malta School of Music, Teatru Manoel Youth Opera, as well as KorMalta. Roles interpreted in opera scenes include Violetta ('La Traviata'), Leila ('Les Pêcheurs des Perles'), Prilepa and Liza ('Pikovaya Dama'), Barbarina ('Nozze di Figaro'), Erste Dame ('Die Zauberflöte') and Mère Marie de l'Incarnation ('Dialogues des Carmelites'). Appearances include the Valletta International Arts Festival under the baton of Mrs. Michael Laus, Teatru Manoel Opera Gala, ensemble member of Maltese film-opera 'Blat' and chorus of 'Tosca' under the direction of Jose Cura, multiple concerts with choirs including Kor Mirabitur, Cappella Caeciliana and Cappella Diacono.

She has also performed as a soloist in several concerts and recitals including multiple lunchtime concerts at the Mdina Cathedral Museum and with the Barocco Foundation. She has also participated in masterclasses including with Miriam Gauci, Jennifer Larmore, Andriana Yordanova, Luis Aguilar and Nicola Said.

Maria Grazia was the recipient of the Trinity College Exhibition Award in 2018 for obtaining one of the highest Distinction marks in the European region in a singing exam. She is currently reading for a Licentiate with the Trinity College of Music (LTCL) in singing.

Soprano – Madeleine Grupetta



Madeleine Grupetta is a Maltese soprano who has made her debut on the Manoel Theatre stage as Lauretta and Lo-dive Jenny during the Celebration of Opera Gala 2022.

She has stage experience in operatic choruses such as Manon, Così Fan Tutte, Norma and contemporary choruses such as Aħna Refuġjati and Phantom of the Opera.

She forms part of KorMalta, Malta's national choir and has recently started to participate in competitions, such as the Organ and Voice International Competition in 2020, obtaining a third-place ranking. She has also been broadcast on radio and television in commercial roles and supporting roles with companies like Roaring voices. She

is currently reading for an M.A. in Creativity and Innovation at the University of Malta and has recently actively participated in masterclasses with Barbara Frittoli, Jennifer Larmore and Luis Agular.

Mariah Costa – Soprano



Mariah Costa is an eighteen year old soprano. She started singing at an early age with the Mirabitur Youth Choir under the direction of Ms. Simone Attard. She began her vocal training at the age of nine years old with Mezzo Soprano Karmena Radovska and continued her vocal studies with Mezzo Soprano Graziella Debattista. Mariah holds a Grade 8 certificate in Music Theory and Classical Voice. She is furthering her studies at Diploma level under the tutelage of Soprano Miriam Cauchi at the MAVC Malta School of Music. She receives operatic training and direction at same school, where she has interpreted various roles

including Contessa d'Almaviva (Mozart's 'Le Nozze di Figaro'), Anna (Puccini's Le Villi) and Mimi (Puccini's La Boheme) amongst other roles.

She has attended workshops and masterclasses led by diverse pedagogues and singers, which include Soprano Barbara Frittoli, Soprano Miriam Gauci, Soprano Tatiana Lisnic, Soprano

Juliette Bisazza Zanni, Tenor Jose Cura, Mezzo-Soprano Jennifer Larmore, Int. Baritone Professor Carlos Conde Gonzalez, Opera Director Vivienne Hewitt, Soprano Nicola Said and more.

In 2018, she made her debut at the Teatru Manoel, in the opera 'Corto Maltese' composed and conducted by Maestra Monique Krus where she interpreted the role of Cranio. She has been part of the chorus in the operatic productions of Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and Puccini's *Tosca* at the Teatru Manoel. Mariah was part of the adult choir in the opera film: *Blat: City of Humanity*.

Mariah is a member of KorMalta, Malta's national choir, under the direction of Maestro Riccardo Bianchi both as a chorister as well as a soloist. In addition, she forms part of 'The Monteverdi Project in Malta', under the direction of Maestro Marco Mencoboni and Soprano Gillian Zammit where she performs both solo and choral works. Mariah has also represented Malta in Latvia at the *Talsumūzikas*.

Mezzosoprano - Clare Ghigo

Photo credits Ken Scicluna



Clare Ghigo is a theatrically and musically versatile mezzo soprano. Her operatic roles include Cherubino in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, Annio in Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito*, Madrigale in Puccini's *Manon*, Hänsel in Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, the Third Lady in Mozart's *Zauberflöte*, the old Gypsy Woman in Rachmaninov's *Aleko*, Speranza and Proserpina in Monteverdi's *I'Orfeo*, Carmen in Bizet's *Carmen*, Angelina in Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, Maria in Piazzolla's *Maria de Buenos Aires*, and Rosina in Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. Clare also performed contemporary works such as works by Schoenberg, Morten

Feldman, Luciano Berio, Reuben Pace, Karl Fiorini, Euchar Gravina, and Veronique Vella. In the 2021 Malta International Spring Orchestra Festival, Clare directed the semi-staged opera and performed the role of the Trommler in Ullmann's *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*.

This coming April Clare will perform the role of Zerlina in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* with the Camera Bardi in Syros, Greece and will understudy the role of Mercedes in Bizet's *Carmen* at the Longborough Festival.

Apart from operas Clare performed a number of recitals internationally in cities such as San Francisco (United States), London, Cardiff, Edinburgh (United Kingdom), Paris, Dijon (France) Karlsruhe, Berlin,

Frankfurt (Germany), Pesaro, Lanciano (Italy), Yerevan (Armenia), Bethlehem (Israel), and La Mancha (Spain), and Luxembourg.

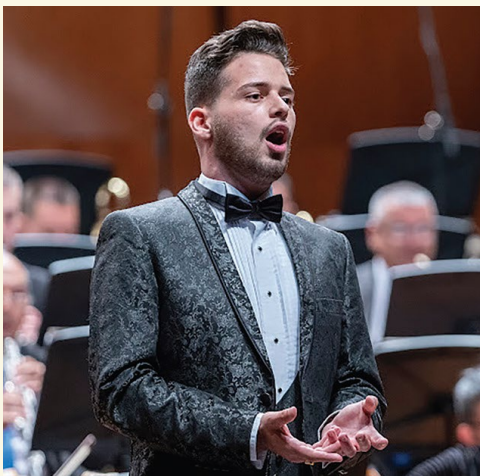
Clare's recent performances also include video productions such as an adaptation of Beethoven's *Fidelio*/ Leonora with The Strada Stretta Concept, *Trouser Girl* -a superhero film with the Teatru Manoel Toi Toi project for Ziguzajg, chorus in Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges* with Virtual Opera. Together with the Gozitan visual artist Joseph Calleja, she created the Stabat Metric project funded by the Malta Arts Council.

Clare participated in various operatic competitions, she won the Malta International Singing Competition, was a semifinalist of the Alfredo Kraus Vocal Competition, a finalist in the Hans Gabor Belvedere competition, and a semifinalist in the London Handel Competition 2016.

Clare performed for acclaimed singers such as Joseph Calleja, Bryn Terfel, Anna Tomova Sintova, Nelly Miriciu, Monserrat Caballé, Daniela Dessi, Richard Bonyngé, Luciana Serra, Jennifer Larmore , Anna Bonitatibus and worked with various ensembles, such as the Jeune Orchestre Atlantique, Guildhall Consort, Karlsruhe duo, Rossini Ensemble, the Ensemble Télémaque, La Mancha Philharmonic, Re: Orchestra, and the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra.

Clare forms part of the English National Opera chorus, is an ENOA (Aix en Provence) and a Solti Accademia Del Bel Canto scholar.

Tenor - Angelo Muscat



Born in Malta in 2000, Angelo began singing at an early age with the Chorus Urbanus in Gozo under the direction of Dr. John Galea. He later proceeded with his opera and classical studies under the guidance of Juliette Bisazza Zanni and subsequently Dr. Andriana Yordanova at the Mikiel Anton Vassalli College – Malta School of Music. Angelo made his debut performance back in 2012, performing as a soloist with Chorus Urbanus accompanied by the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra in a Christmas concert held in Qala, Gozo and in St. Julian's, Malta. Each year, tenor Angelo Muscat engages himself in a series of concerts where he invites international and local artists to

collaborate with him.

Angelo has been engaged in a number of musicals held at The Don Bosco Oratory Theatre in Victoria Gozo. These include the roles of Sasha and the Russian Tenor in *Fiddler on the Roof* in 2017, the role

of Young Ebenezer in *Scrooge the Musical* in 2018, and the role of Cardinal Frustenberg in a musical on Pope Wojtyla's life in 2019. An aspiring tenor, Muscat has also been invited to perform the role of Parpignol in the opera *La Bohème* by Puccini, at the Aurora Theatre in Gozo in 2019. September 2021 has seen Angelo performing as Marco in the first ever Opera-Film in Maltese produced by Mikiel Anton Vassalli College 'BLAT – the Island Fortress'. In December of the same year, Angelo was invited to sing in the oratorio *Guzeppi ta' Nazaret* in collaboration with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra, and in the annual MPO Christmas Concert held at the Metropolitan Cathedral of Mdina.

Muscat has participated in various international concerts beyond our shores, including the UK, Italy, Austria and Bulgaria. In 2020 Muscat was chosen among ten singers from all over the world to work and study with renowned singers such as Krum Galabov and Daniela Diakova in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Shortly after, he was invited to sing at a recital at the Boris Christoff House Museum. In September 2021, Muscat was invited to perform in a concert with the Kaliningrad Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Mro. Arkady Feldman at the Music Hall Jumeirah Zabeel Saray in Dubai.

Recently, Angelo has been receiving notable international success. In October 2021, he was the winner of the *Audience Award* in the Royal Sound Music Competition, winning also first place. In that same month, Angelo went on to win the *Star Award* for the *Best Vocal Performance of Russian Music* and an overall second place in the *Classical Singing Category* in the *Eighth International Performing Arts Competition - Stars of Albion*. In September 2022, he has won 3rd place in the Medici International Music Competition in London, UK.

Ken Scicluna - Baritone



Ken Scicluna has been active in the visual and performing arts scene from an early age, presenting Opera and Film Music radio programmes, as an actor in theatrical and TV productions and later in singing roles and also scripting, producing and directing three short films.

Ken was the first ever Maltese singer to have studied at the Rimsky-Korsakov State Conservatory in St. Petersburg, Russia, accepted in the class of legendary Kirov/Maarinsky tenor, Yuri Marusin. He also attended masterclasses by Cheryl Studer, Sergei Leiferkus, Fabio Mastrangelo and Jennifer Larmore amongst others and worked with Helmut Rilling in Germany.

Apart for countless recitals Ken sang several central roles in Opera and Oratorio alongside singers such as Dessi, Armigliato, Maisuradze, Martinucci, Marton, Guelfi, De Grandis, Gauci, Gallo, Ferrer, Alonso Padin and Interisano and stage directors such as Gandini, Stinchelli, Cheristich, Teperberg, Matheson, Moxham, Castiglione, Schembri Bonaci and Van Eyck these including *Rigoletto*, *La Traviata*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Otello*, *Don Carlo*, *Don Giovanni*, Salieri's *Prima la Musica poi le Parole*, *Nozze di Figaro*, *Carmen*, *Così fan Tutte*, *Elijah*, Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*, Menottis' *Ahmal and the Night Visitors*, *Aida*, *Manon Lescaut* and *Turandot* in theatres in Russia, Italy, France, Germany, Israel, Spain and Malta.

In 2008 Ken premièred Mussorgsky's song-cycle *Bes Solntsa* (Sunless) in Malta, in 2010 organised the Camerata Summer Academy for Chamber Music at Manoel Theatre whilst the following year launched a series of lunchtime recitals at St. Paul's Anglican Pro-Cathedral, Valletta. Amongst highlights of 2016 and in 2017 he has appeared in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in Israel making his debut as the Conte in Mozart's *Nozze di Figaro* and Guglielmo in *Così Fan Tutte*, performed in a series of recitals and awarded the Special Jury Prize in the second edition of an International Voice Competition in Jerusalem, was invited to the Opera Sostenibile Festival in Madrid, whilst in Malta he appeared as Zuniga in Strada Stretta Concept adaptation of Bizet's *Carmen*, and performed a solo recital in the International Spring Festival.

In late 2017 he made his debut as the Colonel in Gilbert and Sullivan's Opera *Patience* with Teatru Manoel Youth Opera and further on performed in Puccini's *Turandot* in Strada Stretta Concept's unique adaptation, Mendelssohn's *Elias* in Germany apart from a concert entitled Opera's Villians with Malta Youth Opera. Early in 2018 he appeared in a concert dedicated to the the Bernstein Centenary with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Wayne Marshall. Later on that year, a highlight for the V18 festivities, included the opening of the music season at Malta's National Theatre as Hugo Pratt's famed character Corto Maltese in the World Premier of the Opera *Una Ballata del Mare Salato* by Dutch composer Monique Krus written exclusively for his voice, another TMYO initiative.

The opera *Swar* was the first collaboration with Maltese composer Dr. Reuben Pace where he featured as the revolutionary Monk in the Opera Trilogy *City of Humanity* also written for him by the composer. As part of Strada Stretta Concept programme for V18 he also sang in two concerts one with Spanish Tenor Moises Molin and Mexican Soprano Dolores Granados in a programme of Spanish Operatic Arias and Songs and later with Russian Soprano Maria Chulkova singing film music songs in Songs from the Silver Screen and stepped in last minute as the Page in Menotti's *Ahmal and the Night Visitors* at Manoel Theatre. Later that year he played the romantic figure of Andrea in the centenary of Carlo Diacono's masterpiece in verismo style echoing the works of Mascagni and Puccini, his only Opera *L'Alpino*, in concert version with Brian Schembri as conductor and pianist. Recent appearances have been in *Aida* in Santiago de Compostela, Spain late last year and early this year in a concert dedicated to Verdi in Trieste, Italy.

Ken made significant debuts in 2020/21 including Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly* in Northern Spain, Rocco in Beethoven's only Opera *Fidelio* and as the Kaiser in *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* by Victor Ullmann which was the closing opera for International Spring Orchestra Festival .

He has recently taken the role of the traditional Monk in the first Maltese Opera-Film *BLAT: the Island Fortress* in Reuben Pace's *City of Humanity II*, where he was also Production Designer and overall consultant.

He premiered one of the title characters in Sullivan's *Cox and Box* at Palazzo Parisio, production of Teatru Salesjan. Scicluna has travelled extensively around the globe and is fluent in six languages.

Choreographers :

Elise Ellul



Elise is a freelance contemporary dance artist based in Malta, holding a Bachelors in Dance Studies (Hons) and a Masters in Teaching and Learning in Media Literacy Education. She has attended various workshops with foreign and local teachers, choreographers and dance performers, and continues to train regularly in contemporary and ballet. She teaches the co-curricular dance subject at G.F.Abelo Junior College and founded the youth group Żfin Kullegġ in 2018. She also leads contemporary open classes teaching release technique and flying low technique, ballet open classes, and conducts creative workshops through dance theatre, imagery, and contact work. She co-founded Żugraga Dance Organisation in 2016 and tikkArti Dance Collective in 2018. Elise has performed in many professional works with RedTape Dance Company, DÙ Theatre, Contact Dance Company, Moveo Dance Company, ZfinMalta Dance Ensemble, Diciembre Dance Group, Zugraga Dance Organisation, and tikkArti Dance Collective in Malta, Berlin, Athens, London, Leeds, Ramallah, Jerusalem, Vienna and Swansea.

Yosef Farrugia



Yosef is a Maltese freelance dancer, choreographer, and co-founder of tikkArti Dance Collective. He trained at the Leicester College of Performing Arts in the UK and furthered his education by obtaining his Bachelor's degree in Dance Studies (Hons.) in 2013. During his studies, he attended many different workshops and was thought and trained by well-known dancers and teachers in the mainstream industry. He has led many different workshops and dance classes in ballet, contemporary, modern, commercial dance and Keep Fit sessions throughout the years. From a very young age, he has collaborated, directed and choreographed various dance productions in which he has also performed, both locally and overseas. He has collaborated with Naupaca Dance Factory, Alison White Dance Studio, L.C.P.A., YADA Dance Company, MavinKhooDance, Redtape Dance Company, Zugraga Dance Organization, Du Theater and D.O.P.E. Dance Company. He was the second runner-up on the local television program, *L-Isfida* 3. He appeared on stage as a backup dancer with local singers in several music and other local festivals. His latest work was during the Ziguzajg Seasonal Festival 2022 with the production 'Hall of Frames'.

The Crew

Stage direction – Clare Ghigo

Assistant stage directors – Amy Cachia Musu, Veronika Milev, Almikaya Aquilina, Faye Galea

Set Design – Romoulo Moretti

Set Building – Claudio Apap

Assistant set builders – Martina Gauchi Grech, Ezra Baldacchino, Uliana Ushenina, Noele Formosa Cumbo, Mia Jones, Jan Cuschieri Valentine, Amelie Calleja, Michela Bianco

Light Design – Domic Grech

Costume Design and Manufacture – Sarah Grech

Assistant wardrobe mistresses Amelie Calleja, Daniela Camilleri

Stage Management – Marco Mallia

Assistant stage manager – Martina Formosa

Audio Engineer – Alec Massa

Drama Coach – Simone Ellul

Choir master – Geoffrey Thomas

Production Manager – Nicole Sciberras

Hair and Make-up – Jackie Grima

The Orchestra

FLUTE / PICCOLO - Natascha Chircop

OBOE / ENGLISH HORN 1 - Demetria Bugeja, Maximilian Schembri

CLARINET / BASS CLARINET - Josefa Muscat, Marta Spiteri, Samuel Darmanin, Noel Beck

TRUMPET - Alex Bezzina

FRENCH HORN - Aaron Borg

TROMBONE - Jonathan Abela

EUPHONIUM - Savio Galea

PERCUSSION - Joseph Bibi Camilleri (Snr)

VIOLINS - 1st Augusto Quintano (Leader), Eric Bugeja, Christabelle Scerri, Bernard Curmi

VIOLINS - 2nds Sonia Mallia, Luke Paul Attard

VIOLAS - Daniel Zammit, Joseph Mallia

CELLOS - Gilmour Peplow, Kevin Psaila

DOUBLE BASS - Abigail Grech

KEYBOARD – Geoffrey Thomas

Acknowledgments

Mikiel Anton Vassalli College (MAVC) would like to thank the **Metropolitan Chapter Mdina**, particularly Mr. Mario Gauci for the excellent collaboration for this project.

MAVC would like to thank the **Arts Council Malta** for making the funding of this project possible and officials at the **Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation** for supporting the College in such artistic productions.

Last but not least MAVC would like to thank the Administrators and Teaching Staff of its four schools (Art, Drama, Dance and Music) for the dedication to promote visual and performing arts education.

Behind the scenes Photo-Diary

Performance Teams



Chamber Music practices



Choral Rehearsals



Orchestral rehearsals



Dance & Choreography Practices

Design Teams



Designing and Building of the set



Hair Styling



Costume Design



Light design



Make-up

Direction teams



Certificate in Practical Multi-disciplinary Studies in the Performing and Visual Arts

Mikiel Anton Vassalli is currently offering a course in the multidisciplinary arts. This 2 year course goes in depth on opera, musicals, ballet, drama and films. The course consists of 6 modules :

1. Concepts of Music, Dance, Drama and Visual Arts
2. The Synergies of Multi-Disciplinary Productions
3. Direction and Production Teams
4. Intra and Interpersonal Skills
5. History of Multi-Disciplinary Productions
6. Placement in a commercial multi-disciplinary production

Applications for the course are currently open. Follow this link

<https://mavc.gov.mt/programme/apply>