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APS BANK EASTER CONCERT

Cliff Zammit Stevens
Tenor

Goldberg Ensemble
Choir

James Agius
Baritone

Michael Laus
Conductor

Noel Galea
Bass

**Malta Philharmonic
Orchestra**

Friday 14th April
St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta



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Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow



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PROGRAMMIE

Johann Sebastian Bach (arr. Michael Laus)

Toccatà and Fugue, BWV 565

Giacomo Puccini

Messa di Gloria

- I. Kyrie
- II. Gloria
- III. Credo
- IV. Sanctus - Benedictus
- V. Agnus Dei

PROGRAMME NOTES

Johann Sebastian Bach

(Eisenach, 1685 – Leipzig, 1750)

Tocatta and Fugue, BWV 565 (arr. Michael Laus)

Despite a period of relative obscurity in the decades following his death, J.S. Bach re-emerged as one of the pillars of Western music. His greatness can be seen in his mastery of various forms and particularly his ability to write fine music – whether sacred or secular – depending on what was requested of him by his patrons.

Organ music lies at the heart of Bach's oeuvre, as befits a composer who was also a brilliant organist. His pieces for the King of Instruments range from attractive miniatures to sacred chorale preludes to large scale contrapuntal masterpieces. The Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor BWV 565 was rediscovered during the years of the Bach revival in the early 19th Century. Felix Mendelssohn helped to have it republished in 1833 and included it in an acclaimed concert dedicated to Bach's music in 1840. In the 20th Century, thanks to its appropriation by pop culture (it was famously featured, for instance, in Disney's *Fantasia*) it became the best-known organ piece of the 18th Century and, possibly, of all time. It is ironic that little is known of the date and circumstances of its composition, and some scholars claim that it might not even have been written by Bach.

The work largely follows typical North German Baroque models, with an improvisatory toccata (which starts with the instantly recognizable flourish) followed by a more austere fugue, capped by a final triumphant coda. The transcription for string orchestra performed in tonight's concert is arranged by Michael Laus. of the galaxy.

Giacomo Puccini

(Italy 1858 – Belgium 1924)

Messa di Gloria (1880)

Puccini is, first and foremost, an opera composer and, apart from a considerable body of artsongs, wrote few works in other genres. So, when American priest Fr. Dante del Fiorentino came across the score of an early Mass setting by Puccini while researching for a biography of the composer in the early 1950s, he quickly arranged to have it published by Mills Music of New York, and a performance in Chicago followed in 1952. In actual fact, the Mass was no “lost work”. It had been Puccini’s graduation piece at the Istituto Musicale Pacini in Lucca, and had been first performed in a liturgical setting in July 1880 prior to his resuming his studies at the Milan Conservatory later that year. The autograph score was in the possession of the Puccini family, who passed it on to the publisher Ricordi. Scholars knew about it, but until then had shown little interest in what was deemed a piece of juvenilia.

Fr. Dante’s enthusiastic “discovery” led to a copyright dispute between Mills Music and Ricordi but, on a more positive note, it helped to popularise Puccini’s then little known early work. The Mass was published under the title “Messa di Gloria” and it is still known by that name, even though, technically a “Gloria Mass” is a setting of the Mass which only includes the Kyrie and the Gloria (omitting the Credo, Sanctus and Agnus Dei). Puccini’s is a full setting of the whole Mass which incorporates in it a reworking of a motet and a Credo which he had composed in 1878 for the feast of St Paulinus. It follows the models of “concert Masses” of the 19th Century, such as Verdi’s Requiem and Rossini Petite Messe Solennelle. It is written for tenor and baritone soloists, four-part choir and orchestra.

Puccini considered Verdi an important inspiration and this piece, written before Puccini had developed his mature operatic voice, still shows the strong influence of the older composer. The Kyrie with its emphasis on the choir and string accompaniment, has an archaic feel to it, looking back to the music of the Renaissance. The Gloria, which comprises around a half of the duration of the score, is the centrepiece of the setting, which might explain why the publishers went for the title Messa di Gloria. The opening “Gloria in Excelsis” passage is used as a refrain to bring cohesion to the movement, which is divided into several contrasting sections, including a dramatic tenor solo in “Gratias Agimus” and a concluding fugal passage. The next movement, the Credo is also divided into sections and makes use of the two soloists – the tenor, supported by unaccompanied chorus in the hushed “Et incarnatus est” and the bass in the “Crucifixus”.

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CLIFF ZAMMIT STEVENS

Tenor

Tenor Cliff Zammit Stevens is a graduate from the Royal College of Music and has been described as ‘a revelation’ (Daily Express), and as ‘showing exceptional promise’ (Opera Magazine).

His operatic repertoire includes Otello Otello (Rossini), Don José La Tragédie de Carmen, Lensky Eugene Onegin, Don Ottavio Don Giovanni, Tamino Die Zauberflöte, Tebaldo I Capuleti e i Montecchi, Ismaele Nabucco, Nemorino L’Elisir d’Amore, Beppe Rita (Donizetti), Cassio Otello and Beppe Pagliacci. He took part in Britten’s War Requiem at RCM and Mozart’s Ascanio in Alba at King’s Place, and performed the tenor solos in Mozart’s Requiem at St Martin-in-the-Fields, Puccini’s Messa di Gloria and Rossini’s Stabat Mater at Harrogate Cathedral, Mro Joseph Vella’s Symphony No 3 ‘The Apocalypse Verses’ at St John’s Co-Cathedral, and in Mro Vella’s world premiere of The Hyland Mass.



JAMES AGIUS

Baritone

Born in Malta in 1981, James studied music theory with Carmel G. Borg and French Horn with Philip Psaila at the Johann Strauss School of Music in Malta. He furthered his music studies at the University of Malta where he graduated as Music Teacher in the year 2003. He is currently reading a diploma in classical singing at the Malta School of Music, under the mentorship of Dr Andriana Yordanova. He also participated in several masterclasses with renowned artists such as Baritone Wolfgang Holzmair, Soprano Miriam Gauci, Baritone Dr Carlos Conde, Soprano Miriam Cauchi, Mro Michael Laus and Soprano Dr Andriana Yordanova.

James has performed in various operas with the Teatru Manoel Chorus and Teatru Manoel Youth Opera, including Donizetti's *L'Elisir D'Amore*, Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, Gluck's *Orphée et Eurydice*, and Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*, where he landed the role of Apollo. James has also performed in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Tom Armitage's *Isperanza*, and Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.

As part of the Valletta-18, he was selected for the role of Rinaldo in the newly commissioned opera, *Corto Maltese* by Monique Crüs and later filled in as one of the main roles, *The Monk*.

In 2022, James performed the baritone solo (*Benedictus*) and duet (*Agnus Dei*) from Puccini's *Messa di Gloria* together with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Mro Michael Laus at St John's Co-Cathedral. He also performed in the MCMA Vocal Masterclasses Concert with the Uzbekistan National Orchestra, where he sang the duet "*La Ci Darem La Mano*" from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and the Aria of Zurga, "*L'Orage c'est Calme*" from Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers*.

Currently, James is an active member of the Opera Studio within the Malta school of Music where he performed in Mozart's *Così Fan Tutte*, Puccini's *Le Villi*, Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* and Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers*. He is also a member of the Goldberg Ensemble Choir and the Schola Cantorum Jubilate where he performs solo pieces.



NOEL GALEA

Bass

Bass Noel Galea studied vocal technique under Prof. Dobрева at Opera Studio and with Juliette Bisazza Zanni. He has admirably interpreted with foreign casts numerous roles in operatic productions in Malta and abroad, namely La Traviata, Macbeth, Fedora, La Bohème, Aida, Carmen, Tosca, Così Fan Tutte, La Cambiale di Matrimonio, Le Nozze di Figaro, Compostella, The Maltese Cross, Il Barbiere di Siviglia, Werther, Roméo et Juliette, Rigoletto, Die Zauberflöte, Aleko, La Clemenza di Tito and Il Trovatore. He has also performed in several concerts in England, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, Italy, Greece and France.

Galea has also sung Verdi's *Messa da Requiem*, Mozart's *Requiem Mass* and *Coronation Mass*, Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, Gounod's *Messe Solennelle*, John Galea's *Missa Ignes Charitatis*, and oratorios *Il-Qalb ta' Kristu* and *Laurentius*, Isouard's *Messa Leggera*, Colin Attard's oratorio *Gużeppi ta' Nazaret* and *Stabat Mater* by Carmelo Pace.

In April 2010 he performed in John Galea's *Missa In Fractione Panis*, in the Papal Mass by H.H. Benedict XVI in Malta.

Noel Galea has recorded several CDs with renowned foreign orchestras released under the label of EMI Milano Italy.

Noel Galea has also participated as soloist in the Chorus Urbanus 40th Anniversary CD "LUX", featuring sacred music by John Galea.



THE GOLDBERG ENSEMBLE

The Goldberg Ensemble, named after Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, the German harpsichordist who lent his name to Johann Sebastian Bach's Goldberg Variations, consists of a polyphonic chamber choir and a group of professional musicians from the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra, under the direction of Michael Laus, the Resident Conductor of the MPO. This collaboration of singers and instrumentalists in a single ensemble is the first of its kind in Malta. The ensemble performs primarily Baroque and Classical choral music in a historically-informed performance style.

The first performance of the vocal group was Vivaldi's Gloria, RV589 in February 2012, in collaboration with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra. The group was invited to participate in the first edition of the Valletta International Baroque Festival 2013 in the oratory of St John's Co-Cathedral beneath Caravaggio's imposing Beheading of St John the Baptist, where the group performed works by Telemann, Fux and Vivaldi. This was followed by a Holy Week concert featuring works by Zelenka, Vivaldi and excerpts from Handel's Messiah. In June 2013 the Goldberg Ensemble performed, to great acclaim, Mozart's Regina Coeli, K127 and Schubert's Magnificat at St John's Co-Cathedral. Handel's Messiah followed as the opening concert of the Valletta International Baroque Festival 2014. In collaboration with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra and the Maltese Association of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, the group performed Zelenka's Miserere in C minor as well as Mozart's 'Laudate Dominum' from the Vesperae solennes de Confessore and Haydn's Te Deum in C major at St John's Co-Cathedral in July 2014. The choral group's participation in the concert organised by MASMOM has become an annual event. In January 2015, the Goldberg Ensemble organised and performed Handel's Messiah at the Anglican Pro-Cathedral, Valletta, as part of a multi-disciplinary project called Rejoice!. The Ensemble sang Messiah twice again at the Pro-Cathedral on Easter Sunday, 16th April 2017, and in January 2018, the latter together with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra. Other works performed were Pergolesi's Stabat Mater and Anton Nani's Responsori del Giovedì Santo, Carlo Diacono's oratorio San Paolo evangelizza i maltesi, and Puccini's Messa di Gloria. In March 2018, the ensemble performed a programme of Mozart's sacred music, together with soprano Miriam Gauci as soloist, at St Augustine Church, Valletta.

In 2019, the Goldberg Ensemble commissioned a composition from the Maltese composer Christopher Muscat. This composition, with the title of SensitIV, was performed at Palazzo de la Salle in June 2019. In November 2021, the ensemble performed selections from the comic operas of Gilbert and Sullivan, and in December of the same year they performed a concert of Christmas music from different countries at the Mdina Cathedral Museum.



MICHAEL LAUS

Composer

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MALTA PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

For half a century, the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra (MPO) has been Malta's foremost musical institution.

The orchestra was founded in April 1968, when musicians from the defunct "Commander-in-Chief" (C-in-C) orchestra of the Malta-based British Mediterranean Fleet regrouped as the Manoel Theatre Orchestra. It continued to serve as the theatre's resident orchestra until September 1997, when it became an independent orchestra, taking up the name National Orchestra of Malta. The orchestra became the MPO in 2008 when it expanded into a full-size symphony orchestra, bringing together musicians from Malta, Europe and beyond.

Joseph Sammut, the C-in-C's last conductor, was the orchestra's first conductor, remaining at the helm until 1992. Since then, the orchestra has also been under the direction of Joseph Vella, John Galea, Michael Laus, and Brian Schembri. In 2019, the MPO has appointed Sergey Smbatyan as Principal Conductor, joining Resident Conductor Michael Laus as part of the orchestra's Artistic Team. The MPO also works with local and international guest artists including Lawrence Renes, Diana Damrau, José Cura, Mikhail Pletnev, Gil Shaham, Joseph Calleja, Gautier Capuçon, Daniel Lozakovich and Enrico Dindo.

As Malta's leading musical ensemble, the MPO averages more than one performance a week including symphonic concerts, opera productions in Malta and Gozo, community outreach and educational initiatives, as well as various concerts of a lighter nature. During the past seasons, the MPO embarked on a Digital Transformation reaching over 32 million people worldwide through its Online Programme in 2021.

The orchestra has performed in leading venues across the globe, including in the United States, Russia, Dubai, Germany, Austria, China, Italy, and Belgium, and presently embarks on at least one international tour each concert season.

The MPO is a keen exponent of Maltese composers, regularly performing their works in Malta and overseas, as well as frequently premiering and commissioning new compositions.

Through the MPO Academy and the Malta Youth Orchestra, which regularly give concerts across Malta, the MPO is also responsible for the training and professional development of the next generation of Maltese musicians.

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Marcelline Agius**
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Fiona Giambra
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Mario Micallef
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Viola

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Ákos Kertészs*
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Lucie Kuchařová
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Rebecca Hall*

Oboe

Chiara Telleri*
Jennifer Melville

Clarinet

Daniele Galletto*

Bassoon

Giacomo Cella*

Horn

Etienne Cutajar*
Bernardette Vella

Trumpet

Kevin Abela*
Brendan Ball

Trombone

Roderick Bugeja*

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Jean Pierre Cassar^Δ

** Orchestra Leader

* Section Principal

^Δ Guest Section Principal



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