



MALTA
PHILHARMONIC
ORCHESTRA

FOUNDATION DAY *Concert*

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FOUNDATION DAY *Concert*

Michael Laus
Conductor

Joseph Sammut
Guest Conductor

Malta Youth Orchestra

Malta Philharmonic Orchestra

Saturday 22nd April 2023
Mediterranean Conference Centre, Valletta

PROGRAMME

Joseph Sammut

Adagio No. 2, Op. 40

Johannes Brahms

Academic Festival Overture, Op. 80

Antonín Dvořák

Symphony No. 9, From the New World, Op. 88

- I. Adagio – Allegro molto
- II. Largo
- III. Molto vivce
- IV. Allegro con fuoco

PROGRAMME NOTES

Joseph Sammut (Malta, 1926)

Adagio No. 2, Op. 40

The musical career of veteran conductor and composer Joseph Sammut is inextricably linked to history of the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra. In 1944, when he was only eighteen, Sammut joined the Commander-in-Chief Orchestra, the precursor of the MPO, as its first bassoon player, becoming its conductor nine years later. He received a conducting scholarship, studying in London with Clarence Raybould and Malcolm Sargent who was then the conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra. On his return to Malta in 1954, Sammut resumed his duties with the Commander-in-Chief Orchestra. Further studies and musical ventures ensued, including the founding of Chorus Melitensis, which was for many years Malta's foremost classical choir. In 1968, the Commander-in-Chief Orchestra was disbanded, and Sammut was tasked by the newly independent Maltese Government to form the Manoel Theatre Orchestra, which assumed the role of national orchestra, and would eventually become the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra. He retained his position as chief conductor of the orchestra for twenty-five years, building an extensive repertoire of major compositions and new works by Maltese composers. This alongside other engagements in Malta and abroad, including a long and fruitful collaboration as conductor of the La Valette and Leone Bands.

In 1980, Sammut had written his first choral and orchestral concert piece, a Requiem, but his conducting obligations left little time for composing. His retirement from the Manoel Theatre Orchestra in 1993 ushered in a new phase in Sammut's career as it gave him the opportunity to concentrate almost exclusively on composition, building a prolific oeuvre of choral and orchestral works. This evening's concert sees Joseph Sammut's return as guest conductor of the orchestra of which he was the founder, in a performance of Adagio, a piece of sublime intensity scored for string orchestra and dedicated to all those who passed away during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

Johannes Brahms (Germany 1833 – Austria 1897)

Academic Festival Overture, Op. 80 (1880)

In 1879, the University of Breslau (now Wrocław) confirmed upon Brahms an honorary degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Brahms disliked public fanfare and, in a typically understated gesture, simply sent a note of acknowledgement and thanks. His friend Bernhard Scholz, the Director of Music at the University, however, insisted that Brahms should compose a new work for the occasion – perhaps even “a fine new symphony”! Brahms obliged with a “festive overture” (Festouvertüre) which he referred to as “Academic” (Akademische).

This title has an underlying self-irony to it. Brahms was, in fact, known – and often criticized – for having a too “formal” and “academic” approach to composition. In this light-hearted, celebratory piece, he hits back with a work which while as intricately designed as his larger-scale compositions, uses as its source material several student beer-hall tunes, which would have been immediately recognisable to a rowdy audience of new graduates. Brahms himself described the overture as “a very boisterous potpourri of student songs”.

The work is built of four continuous sections which, save for the opening C Minor segment, are all in bright major hues. The tunes used by Brahms are an adaptation of the Rakóczy March, the protest song *Wir hatten gebauet ein stattliches Haus*, a lyrical arrangement of *Der Landesvater*, a freshmans’ song known as “The Fox-Ride” and, finally, the medieval student song *Gaudeamus igitur*, resplendent in roaring brass and full orchestra.

The composer himself conducted the premiere of the overture on the 4th January, 1881. It has since remained one of his best-known and loved works.

Antonín Dvořák (Czechia 1841 – Czechia 1904)

Symphony No. 9, From the New World, Op. 88 (1893)

In 1891, Dvořák was approached by the American amateur musician, millionaire grocer and philanthropist Jeannette Thurber with an invitation to head the National Conservatory of Music in New York, which she had just founded. Dvořák accepted and, in September 1892, he moved with part of his family to America (four of his six children remained in Bohemia). New York would be his home for the next three years.

Dvořák believed that American musicians could develop a distinctive musical language based on traditional American music, much as European composers (Dvořák included) were starting to seek inspiration from folk songs and dances and from popular culture as expressed in national epics and legends. Dvořák's made no mystery of his admiration for "spirituals" and their professional arrangements called "plantation songs", to which he was introduced by one of his students, Harry Burleigh. In an interview given to the New York Herald in May 1893, he stated "I am now satisfied that the future music of this country must be founded upon what are called the Negro melodies. This must be the real foundation of any serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States. When I first came here last year I was impressed with this idea and it has developed into a settled conviction". He was also drawn to Native American culture and, despite the marked difference between African-American and American Indian traditions, he felt that there were common elements in their respective folk songs.

It is generally presumed that Dvořák's Ninth Symphony, written during the winter and spring of 1893 and premiered later that year, is directly inspired by his experience of the United States and the influence of America's traditional music and culture. Dvořák himself fuelled this idea by titling the symphony "From the New World" and explaining that it conveyed "impressions and greetings" from his adoptive country. He also stated that "the influence of America can be felt by anyone who has a nose". This notwithstanding, the musical language remains Dvořák's own and no actual folk songs are quoted. Indeed, some of the melodies and rhythms which we brand as "American" would not have sounded out of place in Bohemia.

The symphony follows a traditional four-movement form although Dvořák adopts a "cyclic" approach where some of the themes recur in more than one movement, giving tightness and coherence to the work's structure. The first movement opens with a brooding introduction, whose mood is broken by one of the symphony's recurring themes – a rousing horn call. Later, woodwinds introduce a playful melody which has been compared to *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*. The second movement – *Largo* – starts with a succession of solemn chords, followed by a lyrical theme which was later adapted (by another of Dvořák's students, William Arms Fisher) into the spiritual-like song "Goin' Home" (which is still often mistaken for an authentic traditional melody). The ensuing scherzo is inspired by Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*, an epic poem featuring a Native American setting and protagonists. One of the conditions which had been imposed Dvořák by Jeannette Thurber was that he should write "an American opera" based on this poem. The opera never materialised, but the Scherzo is a musical depiction of a feast and dance in one of the *Hiawatha* scenes. The finale introduces new themes alongside a restatement of the principal musical ideas from the preceding movements which are combined in the symphony's thrilling conclusion.

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JOSEPH SAMMUT

Guest Conductor

Joseph Sammut, born in Valletta in 1926, comes from a musical family. His grandfather was a double-bass player, and his father worked as a cellist with the Orchestra of the Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Navy (C-in-C), a professional classical orchestra of the British Mediterranean Fleet based in Malta. In 1944, at only eighteen, Joseph Sammut joined the Commander-in-Chief Orchestra, the precursor of the MPO, as its first bassoon player, becoming its conductor nine years later. He received conducting scholarships, studying in London with Clarence Raybould in 1952 and Malcolm Sargent in 1953, who was then the conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra. On his return to Malta in 1954, after finishing his studies at the Royal Guildhall School of Music, Sammut resumed his duties with the C-in-C Orchestra. Further studies and musical ventures ensued, including the founding of Chorus Melitensis, which was for many years Malta's foremost classical choir with notable performances including Verdi's *Requiem*, Dvorak's *Stabat Mater*, Faure's *Requiem* and a successful revival of Anton Nani's *Requiem*. In 1968, the Commander-in-Chief Orchestra was disbanded, and Sammut was tasked to form the Manoel Theatre Orchestra, which assumed the role of national orchestra, and would eventually become the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra. He retained his position as chief conductor of the orchestra for twenty-five years, building an extensive repertoire of major compositions and new works by Maltese composers. In 1970 he conducted the Kyoto Symphony Orchestra during the World Expo in Japan, and the London Symphony Orchestra for a recording of Malta Suite and Maltese Dances by Charles Camilleri. This alongside other engagements in Malta and abroad, including a long and fruitful collaboration as conductor of the La Valette and Leone Bands, he is also a prolific composer of a large number of orchestral and choral works, including symphonies, piano concerto, and oratorios, amongst others.

Joseph Sammut has been awarded several national honours for his contribution in the promotion of classical music both in Malta and abroad. In 1972 he was made Knight of Grace of the Sovereign Order of St John of Jerusalem, and in 2002 was awarded the Medal for Distinguished Service rendered to the Republic of Malta, Midalja għall-Qadi tar-Repubblika. Earlier this year he was also awarded l-Il-Belt Valletta.



MICHAEL LAUS

Conductor

Michael Laus graduated in piano, harpsichord, composition, and conducting at the Conservatorio Giuseppe Verdi of Milan in 1982. He later participated in master classes in conducting given by George Manahan in the United States and Vladimir Delman in Bologna.

Principal Conductor of Malta's national orchestra for twenty-five years and now its Resident Conductor, he has conducted the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra in symphonic concerts both in Malta's main concert venues and on tour in Belgium and Italy. He has conducted several opera productions which include the Mozart/Da Ponte trilogy, *Die Zauberflöte*, *L'Elisir d'amore*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Rigoletto*, *La Traviata*, *Otello*, *Falstaff*, *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Gianni Schicchi*, *Roméo et Juliette*, *Werther*, *Pagliacci* and *L'amico Fritz*, as well as lesser-known titles such as Cimarosa's *Il matrimonio segreto* and Nino Rota's *La notte di un nevrastenico*. His performed repertoire includes the major symphonies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Handel's *Messiah*, the Mozart and Verdi *Requiems*, Jenkins' *Mass for Peace* and other works from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries with several first performances of works by contemporary composers. In July, 2016, he conducted the first European performance of Arvo Pärt's *Greater Antiphons*, in the composer's presence, and in November 2016 he conducted a highly acclaimed performance of Verdi's *Requiem*. He opened the first edition of the Valletta International Baroque Festival in 2013 with Vivaldi's *Quattro stagioni* together with Carmine Lauri, and the second edition with Handel's *Messiah*. Other soloists with whom he has collaborated include Katia Ricciarelli, Cecilia Gasdia, Joseph Calleja, Brigitte Engerer and Andrea Griminelli, while he also works regularly with his wife, the soprano Miriam Gauci.

Michael Laus has guest-conducted prestigious orchestras such as the Bournemouth Symphony, the Slovak Philharmonic, the New Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Belgrade Philharmonic, the Orquesta Sinfonica de Asturias, the Berne Symphony Orchestra, L'Orchestra Sinfonica di Pesaro, the Sibiu Philharmonic Orchestra, the Moldavian Symphony Orchestra and the Croatian Chamber Orchestra. He has appeared as music director in operatic productions at the Berne State Theatre and in Oviedo. He regularly appears in the double role of pianist/harpsichordist and conductor in a concerto repertoire ranging from baroque to twentieth-century works. In this double role, he has won international critical acclaim for his recording of Cyril Scott's *Harpsichord Concerto*. His restoration of the score of Ignaz Brüll's *Violin Concerto* and his subsequent recording of this work has also been received with acclaim.

Michael Laus has recorded works for the piano and orchestra as well as orchestral music on CD, which have been released on Discover International, Unicorn-Khanchana and Cameo Classics labels. These include a series of recording of works by British composers, and another series on Jewish composers. He has appeared on Rai 3, France 3 and Mezzo television channels. He is Associate Professor in Music Studies at the University of Malta. He was the founder and first music director of the Malta Youth Orchestra, and also the founder and director of the Goldberg Ensemble, a choral and instrumental group specializing in the performance of baroque music.



MALTA PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

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.



MALTA YOUTH ORCHESTRA

The Malta Youth Orchestra (MYO) aims to skill Malta's talented young orchestral musicians, while giving them opportunities to develop their ambition and aspirations. Operating in collaboration with the MPO Academy, the MYO nurtures a sense of professionalism in our young musicians, through regular rehearsals, workshops, masterclasses and performances with local and international music tutors.

The MYO made its first public appearance in December 2004 during a concert held at the President's Palace in Valletta under the direction of Michael Laus. Between 2011 and 2014 the MYO rehearsed regularly under the direction of conductor Joseph Vella, and has since then been working with a number of prominent local and international conductors, including Peter Stark, Robert Hodge, Philip Walsh, Anthony Gabriele, Virginia Martínez, Kelly Kuo, Michalis Economou, Sergey Smbatyan, Pablo González and Darrell Ang.

In 2019, José García Gutiérrez was appointed as the Artistic and Music director of the Malta Youth Orchestra.

Despite being essentially a student orchestra, the MYO tackles core classical repertoire spanning several centuries and genres. The MYO has been busily engaged since its conception in various concerts including participation during *Notte Bianca*, Christmas concerts, bespoke performances for the Žigužajg International Arts Festival for Children and Young People and the highly successful MPO-MYO Side-by-Side Concerts.

MYO musicians often perform alongside musicians of the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra, fulfilling one of the MYO's purpose of being an aspirational milestone for Malta's young musicians, helping to nurture them into becoming the future musicians of the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra and ultimately the catalysts for our country's cultural development.

MPO & MYO MUSICIANS

Violin 1

Marcelline Agius**, *Kurt Falzon*
Agnieszka Kuźma, *Stephen Scerri*
Klara Nazaj, *Bernard Curmi*
Emilia Wiśniewska, *Nicholas Conrad*
Roberta Attard, *Ella Richardson*
Elena Imperato, *Eliza Melillo*
Riccardo Rossano, *Jacob Abela*
Vincenzo Picone, *Veronica Bartolo*
Kamie Troisi, James Caruana Turner

Violin 2

Matteo Colombo*, *Luke Paul Attard*
Inmaculada Muñoz Salgüero, *Xiang Gui*
Stefan Calleja, *Isaac Camilleri*
Stephen Debattista, *Teona Debono*
Valhmor Montfort, *Nicole Gixti*
Mario Micallef, *Sara Cachia*
Rosanne Dimech, *Isabella Mercieca*
Francesca Moldovan, *Gabriel Farrugia*
Amrita Azar

Viola

Alexandre Razera*, *Lucas García Conrad*
Ester Garcia Salas, *Mikaela Baluyot*
Mateusz Kuźma, *Matthew Fenech*
Marco Gallina, *Savio Debono*
Joseph Mallia, *Daniel Zammit*

Cello

Ákos Kertészs*, *Daniel Xuereb*
Yaroslav Miklukho, *Sophia Farrugia*
Lucie Kuchařová, *Christopher Mercieca*
Frank Camilleri, *Maya Ungaro*
Desirée Calleja, *Ryan Paul Camilleri*

Double Bass

Gjorgji Cincievski*, *Abigail Grech*
Michelle Agius, *Gian Carlo Santos*
Dion Xuereb, *Aleksandre Zgorzak*
Marco Agnetti

Flute

Rebecca Hall*, *Nicole Spiteri*
Elisa Borg, Anouschka Vella
Juliette Zammit

Oboe

Chiara Telleri*, *Ismail Mourtuda*
Jennifer Melville, *Maxilmilian Schembri*

Clarinet

Giuseppe Recchia*, *Julian Azzopardi*
Eliza Brincat Kent

Bassoon

Giacomo Cella*
Lampros-Ioannis Lapinas
Maria Spiteri Zahra

Horn

Etienne Cutajar*, *Isaac Cassar*
Manuele Catalano, *Ian Massa*
Marco Cola, *Miriana Collins*
Bernardette Vella

Trumpet

Kevin Abela*, *Philip Zammit*
Brendan Ball, *Elena Gatt*
Matthias Agius, Cher Attard

Trombone

Roderick Bugeja*,
Emanuel Giordimaina
Dennis Camilleri, *Francesco Tanti*
Jesmond Azzopardi, *Jhair Alexis*

Tuba

Christopher Spiteri*

Timpani

Jean Pierre Cassar^Δ

Percussion

Raffaella Baldacchino
Alan Grech
Katrina Fenech
Aiden Bondin

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MPO Musician, MYO Musician

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