

FROM FOLK TO BALLET

FRANCESCO SULTANA Żummara / Żaqq / Flejguta

MICHAEL LAUS Conductor

Malta Philharmonic Orchestra

Friday, 05 January 2024, 8pm

Mediterranean Conference Centre, Valletta

PROGRAMME

Nicolò Isouard

Jeannot et Colin, Overture

Christopher Muscat

Mesogeios

Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky

The Nutcracker, Op. 71 – Selection

Overture

March

Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy

Trepak

Arab Dance – Coffee

Chinese Dance - Tea

Dance of the Reed Pipes

Waltz of the Flowers

Scene and Dance (Grossvater)

Scene: The Enchanted Palace

Clara and Prince Charming

Pas de deux: Intrada and Coda

Waltz Finale – Apotheosis

PROGRAMME NOTES

by Dr Joseph Camilleri

Nicolò Isouard

(Malta 1775 – France 1818)

***Jeannot et Colin, Overture* (1814)**

Isouard is justly considered one of the most important musical figures to come out of Malta. Born “Nicolas Isouard” in 1775 (or, possibly, 1773, as there is some uncertainty about his early years), Isouard soon showed an aptitude for music. He came from a wealthy family and could afford studies with leading musicians of the time – first Michelangelo Vella and Francesco Azopardi and, eventually, teachers in Palermo and Naples. In 1794 he was appointed Maestro di Cappella at St John’s Co-Cathedral by Grand Master Emanuel de Rohan and in the following four years wrote much sacred music as required by his post. During this period, he also composed several comic operas in the style of Cimarosa, successfully produced both in Malta and in Italy. On the arrival of the French in Malta, Isouard was appointed commissioner responsible for the theatre. He moved to Paris after the French capitulation, adopting the appellation Nicolò de Malte. Opera was confirmed as his métier – over the following two decades he composed around thirty further comic operas which were produced all over the continent in German, Russian, Spanish, Polish and English translations. At the height of his fame, however, Isouard was suddenly faced with tough competition from composer François-Adrien Boieldieu, who had returned to Paris in 1810 after spending several years in St Petersburg. Boieldieu was preferred to Isouard in two important appointments – professorship at the Paris Conservatoire and membership of the Académie Française. Isouard never recovered from this blow, took to drink and died a few years later. The overture being performed tonight is taken from *Jeannot et Colin*, an opera in three acts written to a libretto by Charles Guillaume Etienne.

Christopher Muscat

(Malta 1977)

***Mesogeios* (2018)**

Christopher Muscat’s *Mesogeios* (ancient Greek term for Mediterranean) blends the composer’s typical style of contrasting meditative and rhythmic moments with motifs and ideas from around the Mediterranean basin, mostly collected whilst attending a conference in Egypt back in 1996. Scored for string orchestra and a wide array of percussion and traditional instruments, this work is divided into five short, interconnected movements. The contemplative opening features the Żummara which leads into the contrasting, rhythmic second movement with its floridly ornamented melodies. The central third movement introduces the Żaqq set against complex clapped rhythms, a clear reference to African tribal clapping and Spanish flamenco palmas. The ensuing fourth movement features solo string instruments setting the mood with bird-like calls for a Flejguta solo whilst the fifth movement rounds up the work in an appropriately exuberant manner, making good use of north-African and Greek melodies.

Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky

(Russia 1840 – Russia 1893)

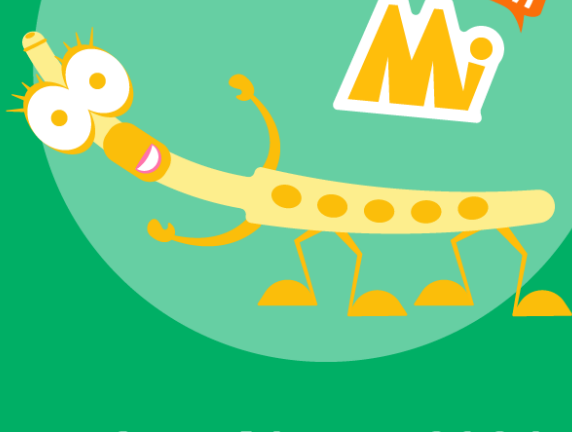
The Nutcracker, Op. 71 –

***Selection* (1891-1892)**

The *Nutcracker* was the last of Tchaikovsky’s three great ballets, the others being *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty*. It is based on a fairy tale by E.T.A. Hoffmann, later adapted by Alexandre Dumas père, in which a little girl (named Clara in the ballet) befriends a wooden nutcracker shaped like a little man. On Christmas Eve, the nutcracker comes to life and leads an army of gingerbread soldiers against the Mouse King and his subjects. The nutcracker is then transformed into a handsome prince who takes Clara on a journey to the magical Land of Sweets.

The Christmas setting of the story and its fairytale subject have made of *The Nutcracker* a favourite festive work, but the circumstances in which it was written did not bode well for its success. For a start, Tchaikovsky loved Hoffmann’s story but was not keen on its balletic adaptation by choreographer Marius Petipa. Petipa included detailed instructions for the composition of each number, constraining Tchaikovsky to work within very strict parameters. Moreover, the composer’s sister died during the work’s composition and the completion of the ballet was further interrupted by Tchaikovsky’s other music commitments, including a performing tour in the United States. When the ballet saw the light of day critics were divided about the choreography but were generally positive about Tchaikovsky’s score which was described as “astonishingly rich in detailed inspiration” and “beautiful, melodious, original and characteristic”. Tchaikovsky himself seemed to think highly of it, since he arranged a suite of numbers from the ballet, which was premiered as a concert piece even before the performance of the full work.

The Nutcracker is notable not just for its lush melodies but also for its colourful orchestration which includes a host of “toy instruments” and a novel instrument at the time – the celesta – whose otherworldly silvery sound is used to great effect in the *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy*.



Sun, 14 Jan 2024

Robert Samut Hall, Floriana | 11:00am

For more information visit: maltaorchestra.com

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FRANCESCO SULTANA

Maltese Folk Instruments

Francesco Sultana is a Maltese musician and craftsman hailing from the village of Rabat, Malta. Born in 1991, Francesco's artistic journey began at a young age studying music and learning the Eb clarinet with the local village band club. After leaving the local village feast scene, he became captivated by various traditional percussions and woodwinds from around the globe. From world music, Francesco also moved to playing music in the alternative scene, recording works in various albums with local bands Plato's Dream Machine and Brodu while also participating as a session musician with other artists.

Apart from such projects, Francesco is also perhaps presently best known as one of the last-remaining exponents dedicated to preserving Malta's piping tradition and woodwind instrument making, such as the Maltese Żaqq, Żummara and Flejguta (bagpipes, reedpipes and flutes). He hopes to instigate another revival and building a repertoire of such instruments such as was done by other folk pioneers such as Ruben Żahra, Peter Paul Farrugia, Edmond Jackson and Ġużi Gatt. He has performed with his self-made folk instruments for Queen Elisabeth II during her state visit in CHOGM and as a soloist with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra on various occasion.



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 nevristenico*. 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 recently disbanded "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, who was the C-in-C's last conductor and the Manoel Theatre Orchestra's first, was succeeded by Joseph Vella, John Galea, Michael Laus, Brian Schembri and Sergey Smbatyan. The MPO's current resident conductor is Michael Laus. The orchestra also works with local artists including Joseph Calleja, Simon Schembri, Carmine Lauri and Miriam Gauci, as well as international guest artists including Ray Chen, Diana Damrau, José Cura, Mikhail Pletnev, Camille Thomas, Gautier Capuçon, Daniel Lozakovich and Enrico Dindo.

As Malta's leading musical institution, 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 audiences worldwide through its Online Programme.

The orchestra has performed in leading venues across the globe, including in the United States, Russia, Dubai, Germany, Austria, China, Italy, Spain and Belgium. 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. It is also responsible for the training and professional development of the next generation of Maltese musicians.

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Elena Imperato
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Fiona Giambra
Riccardo Rossano
Philip Orlov
Eduardo Garcia Salas
Ian Ellul

Violin 2

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Inmaculada Muñoz Salguero
Stefan Calleja
Francesca Moldovan
Valhvor Montfort
Rosanne Dimech
Mario Micallef
Stephen Debattista
Stephen Scerri
Stephen Zammit
Pierre Louis Attard
Kurt Falzon

Viola

Alexandre Razera *
Ester Garcia Salas
Mateusz Kuźma
Matthew Fenech
Marco Gallina
Savio Debono
Daniel Zammit

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Yaroslav Miklukho
Lucie Kuchařová
Frank Camilleri
Desirée Calleja
Giovanni Inglese

Double Bass

Michelle Agius *
Marco Agnetti
Abigail Grech
Stefano Giordano

Flute

Rebecca Hall *
Fiorella Camilleri
Clara Galea

Oboe

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Jenny Melville
Chiara Telleri

Clarinet

Giuseppe Recchia *
Daniele Galletto
Julian Azzopardi

Bassoon

Giacomo Cella *
Lampros-Ioannis Lapinas

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Manuele Catalano
Christos Maltezos

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