

ROMANTIC CLASSICS II

BERNICE SAMMUT ATTARD Piano
ANU TALI Conductor

Malta Philharmonic Orchestra

Saturday, 24 February 2024, 8pm
Mediterranean Conference Centre, Valletta



PROGRAMME

Heino Eller
Morgendämmerung (Dawn)

Sergei Rachmaninoff
Piano Concerto no. 2 in C minor, Op. 18

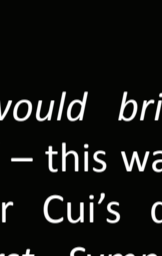
- I. Moderato
- II. Adagio Sostenuto – Più Animato – Tempo I
- III. Allegro scherzando

Intermission

Carlo Diacono
Intermezzo from opera "L'Alpino"

Johannes Brahms
Symphony no. 1 in C minor, Op. 68

- I. Un poco sostenuto – Allegro – Meno allegro
- II. Andante sostenuto
- III. Un poco allegretto e grazioso
- IV. Adagio – Più andante – Allegro non troppo, ma con brio – Più allegro



PROGRAMME NOTES

by Dr Joseph Camilleri

Heino Eller
(Estonia 1887 – Estonia 1970)

Morgendämmerung (Dawn)
(1915 – 1918, 1920)

Heino Eller was a composer and teacher who is considered a pioneer of contemporary Estonian music. He has an eclectic style in which the classical and romantic traditions of “art music” are combined with elements of folk music, as well as with more modernist tendencies. Among his colourful works are several tone poems, of which *Koit* (known also as *Morgendämmerung* or *Dawn*) is one of the most frequently performed. An early morning atmosphere is evoked through music of searing melancholy featuring soaring string melodies, lyrical woodwind solos and blazing brass outbursts.

Sergei Rachmaninoff
Piano Concerto no. 2 in C minor, Op. 18
(1900 - 1901)

- I. Moderato
- II. Adagio Sostenuto – Più Animato – Tempo I
- III. Allegro scherzando

A work which “would bring delight to the inhabitants of Hell” – this was one of the choice quotes from César Cui’s damning review of Rachmaninoff’s *First Symphony* following its premiere in 1897. Other critics were hardly less harsh, and the young, sensitive composer was soon in the throes of a nervous breakdown which kept him away from composing for close to three years.

As Rachmaninoff descended further into depression, his family attempted a desperate measure, sending him to consult experimental hypnotist Dr Nikolai Dahl, who had already treated one of Rachmaninoff’s aunts. Dahl, himself an amateur musician, set himself the task of convincing his patient to finally start work on a new piano concerto. Rachmaninoff would later recall, “I heard the same formula repeated daily while I lay half asleep. “You will begin to write your concerto...you will work with great ease... The concerto will be of excellent quality...” It was always the same, without interruption. Although it may sound incredible, the cure really helped me. New musical ideas began to stir within me – far more than I needed for my concerto”.

In truth, the cure was not as miraculous as Rachmaninoff made it sound. Nor did the composition of the concerto come particularly easily. In April 1900, Chaliapin took his friend with him to Yalta, where they visited Chekhov and then to Italy, where the bass made his La Scala debut in Boito’s *Mefistofele*. Inspired by the change of surroundings, Rachmaninoff started sketching his new concerto. Significantly, however, when it was first performed in December, the work only had two movements (which would become the second and third) and these did not consist of completely new material as they incorporated ideas from earlier compositions. Encouraged by the positive reception of this work-in-progress, Rachmaninoff completed the opening movement in the following months and the work as we know it was first performed (to great acclaim) in November 1901 with the composer as soloist. Fittingly, he dedicated the work to his therapist.

The concerto is based on the grand Romantic models set by Tchaikovsky and Liszt. It opens with bell-like chords on the piano which build up to a grand climax featuring the whole orchestra. A passage on the violas leads to a sumptuous piano solo – it is, surprisingly, one of the rare episodes in this movement where the piano has the stage to itself. The slow movement presents one of Rachmaninoff’s big tunes, drawn from a piano piece he had composed in 1890. The soloist moves in and out of the orchestral texture, by turns presenting the main melody and weaving delicate arpeggios around lyrical woodwind solos and string passages. True to tradition, the final movement is a virtuosic affair, although it also contains another of Rachmaninoff’s trademark melodies. Introduced as a humble second subject, Rachmaninoff cannily reiterates it in the finale, thundered out by the full orchestra, before a fast, rousing coda.

Carlo Diacono
(Malta 1876 – Malta 1942)

Intermezzo from opera "L'Alpino"
(1916-1918)

Carlo Diacono studied under Paolino Vassallo, who was also his mentor of sorts. In fact, Diacono worked closely with his teacher on the production of Vassallo’s opera *Frazir* (1904) and, on Vassallo’s demise, succeeded him as *maestro di cappella* at the Mdina Cathedral and St. John’s Co-Cathedral, Valletta. Diacono also served as *maestro di cappella* at a number of parishes including Senglea, Birgu and his hometown Zejtun, where he was appointed musical director of the Beland Band (founded by his father Orazio).

Alongside this busy performing career, Diacono maintained a steady flow of compositions, making him one of the most prolific Maltese composers ever. His works include forty-five Masses, twenty-two *Requiem* settings, three oratorios and an opera – *L'Alpino* – from which this *Intermezzo* is taken. This three-act opera to a libretto by Ramiro Barbaro was composed during the First World War and, interestingly, the events of the Great War serve as background to the plot. It was first performed in 1918 and described by the press at the time as “*un successo colossale*” (a colossal success). It was revived in 1946 (conducted by the composer’s son Franco Diacono), again to warm acclaim, with three performances during that season.

Johannes Brahms
(Germany 1833 – Austria 1897)

Symphony no. 1 in C minor, Op. 68
(1855 - 1876)

- I. Un poco sostenuto – Allegro – Meno allegro
- II. Andante sostenuto
- III. Un poco allegretto e grazioso
- IV. Adagio – Più andante – Allegro non troppo, ma con brio – Più allegro

The shadow of Beethoven hung heavily over Brahms. “I shall never write a symphony! You have no idea how the likes of us feel when we hear the tramp of a giant like him behind us,” he reputedly told conductor Hermann Levi. Brahms’s first symphony, clearly moulded on the master’s works, had a long gestation – Brahms spent about twenty years working on it prior to its first performance in 1876. Having overcome this hurdle, it seems Brahms quickly vanquished his “composer’s block” – his remaining three symphonies followed in a relatively short span of time: the Second in 1877, the Third in 1882 – 83, and the Fourth in 1884-85.

The first symphony was described by conductor Hans von Bülow as “*Beethoven’s Tenth*”, and in its four movements, Brahms certainly includes tributes to Beethoven, the most obvious one being a theme in the final movement closely modelled on the *Ode to Joy* from Beethoven’s *Ninth* (“*Choral*”) *Symphony*. Other, more veiled, references to the earlier master include the ominous atmosphere of the first movement, the use of short motifs to build larger structures, and the choice of C minor as the symphony’s home key (C minor is the key used by Beethoven in several of his major works, including his *Symphony No. 5* and *Piano Concerto No. 3*). But ultimately, Brahms remains his own man, particularly in the lighter inner movements. The second is divided into three lyrical sections, the third has a bucolic, dance-like feel to it.

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Sun, 10 March 2024

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BERNICE SAMMUT ATTARD

Piano

Ever since competing in the 2018 Eurovision Young Musicians Competition, Bernice Sammut Attard has gone from strength to strength, quickly emerging as one of Malta's top young talents.

Born in 2000, Bernice Sammut Attard is a Maltese pianist and violinist who is currently furthering her piano studies in Paris with Marian Rybicki at the Ecole Normale de Musique de Paris. Ruth Hahn is her violin teacher.

Bernice has been a prize winner in numerous competitions. Most notably, she was the winner of the Malta Eurovision Young Musicians 2018 competition.

Last October she graduated with a Master of Arts in Music degree from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. In July 2022 she graduated with a First Class Honours Bachelor of Music degree from the same institution. Throughout her studies she was a student of Petras Geniušas, Sinae Lee and Fali Pavri.

Throughout the past years, Bernice has performed in many countries including the UK, Poland, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Russia, Armenia, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland, Kazakhstan and the USA (Seattle). She performed at prestigious venues including the Royal Festival Hall, Bridgewater Hall and the Stoller Hall in the UK and at the Manoel Theatre, the Mediterranean Conference Centre, the Royal Opera House (Piazza Teatru Rjal) in Malta. Bernice has enjoyed playing piano concertos in Russia, Italy, Portugal and Malta with various orchestras including Kyiv Virtuosi Orchestra, Sicily Symphony Orchestra, Porto Conservatory Orchestra, North Caucasus Orchestra, Eurasian Symphony Orchestra, Ryazan Symphony Orchestra and the Astrakhan Symphony of the Astrakhan Opera and Ballet Theatre - collaborating with various conductors including Dmitry Yablonsky, Alexei Galea Cavallazzi, Mikhail Kirchoff, Sergey Oselkov and William Garfield Walker.

At the age of 16, she was the first Maltese to attend the UK's prestigious music school Chetham's School of Music, where she studied piano and violin as a joint principal study. Bernice commenced her studies at an early age in Malta, studying piano with Karen Briscoe and violin with Marcelline Agius.



ANU TALI Conductor

Described by the Herald Tribune as “charismatic, brilliant, energetic”, Anu Tali is one of the most captivating and versatile conductors on the international scene today, an artist whose pursuit of fresh and ingenious artistic creativity is acclaimed worldwide by critics and public alike.

Highlights of the 2023/24 season include appearances with Orchestre National de Metz, Würth Philharmonic at Enescu Festival, Rheinische Philharmonie Koblenz, Südwestdeutsche Philharmonie Konstanz, Orchestre Symphonique de Mulhouse, Sinfonietta Cracovia, Junge Deutsche Philharmonie, Malmö Academy of Music, Dubai InClassica International Music Festival, Athelas Sinfonietta Copenhagen, Musikkollegium Winterthur, Essener Philharmoniker, Odense Symphony and concerts with her Nordic Symphony Orchestra in Tallinn.

Former Music Director of the Sarasota Orchestra in Florida, Anu Tali appears with orchestras worldwide including the New Japan and Tokyo Philharmonic orchestras, Orchestre National de France, Houston Symphony Orchestra, Mozarteumorchester Salzburg, Orquesta Sinfónica de RTVE and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra. In Germany she has worked with the Deutsches Symphonieorchester Berlin, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Konzerthausorchester Berlin, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen and Ensemble Modern.

In opera, Tali has had major success with the production of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* at Staatsoper Unter den Linden, with *Carmen* at Magdeburg State Opera and was invited to conduct the Freiburger Barockorchester in a production of Gluck’s *Telemaco* at the Schwetzingen Festival and Theater Basel. Another notable highlight includes acclaimed semi-staged performances of Goebbels’ *Songs of Wars I Have Seen* with ensembles including the London Sinfonietta at New York’s Lincoln Center, London’s Southbank Centre and in Saint Paul/Minnesota, Seattle and Barcelona. In 2021, she made history as the first woman to conduct an opera at the Teatro de la Maestranza in Seville, in the Calixto Bieito production of *Carmen*.

Together with her twin sister Kadri, Anu Tali founded the Nordic Symphony Orchestra in 1997, with the aim of utilising music as a tool to develop cultural contacts between Estonia and Finland, and to unite musicians from around the world. Today the Nordic Symphony Orchestra brings together musicians from the world’s leading orchestras, with members from fifteen countries. In autumn 2007 the orchestra undertook its first European tour to Berlin and Munich.

Her debut recording, *Swan Flight*, (Finlandia/Warner Classics) earned Tali the 2003 ECHO Klassik ‘Young Artist of the Year’ Award. Other recordings include *Action Passion Illusion* for Warner Classics, featuring works by Rachmaninov, Sibelius and Erkki-Sven Tüür. And her album of Tüür’s *Strata and Noësis*, released on ECM, was also met with significant critical acclaim.

Anu Tali has been the subject of numerous documentaries by international broadcasters such as ARTE, NHK Japan, YLE Finland and Deutsche Welle. She began her musical career as a pianist, graduating from the Tallinn Conservatory before training as conductor at the Estonian Academy of Music with Kuno Areng, Toomas Kapten and Roman Matsow. From 1998 to 2000 she studied at the St Petersburg State Conservatory with Ilya Musin and later with Leonid Kortchmar and Jorma Panula.



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.

MPO MUSICIANS

Violin 1

Marcelline Agius **
Agnieszka Kuźma
Vincenzo Picone
Elena Imparato
Klara Nazaj
Philip Orlov
Roberta Attard
Fiona Giambra
Riccardo Rossano
Emilia Wiśniewska
Pierre Louis Attard
Giulia Tavano

Violin 2

Matteo Colombo *
Inmaculada Muñoz Salgüero
Stefan Calleja
Valhvor Montfort
Rosanne Dimech
Francesca Moldovan
Stephen Debattista
Mario Micallef
Ian Ellul
Marco Gallina

Viola

Alexandre Razera *
Mateusz Kuźma
Savio Debono
Matthew Fenech
Mikaela Baluyot
Orietta Zammit Beaumer
Joseph Mallia
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Ákos Kertész *
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