

Operalaboratorio's concert of operatic arias

APART from featuring two operatic masterpieces, namely Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Don Giovanni* by Mozart, this year's Bank of Valletta Opera Festival also included a concert of operatic arias.

The concert was held on Tuesday at St Paul's Anglican Pro-Cathedral and featured *I Solisti di Opera-laboratorio* of the Teatro Massimo of Palermo, a group of young and talented musicians guided by Elizabeth Lombardini Smith.

While primarily focusing on excerpts from Rossini operas, the programme included arias from his near contemporary compatriots Donizetti and Bellini. An item by Bizet was also included in this programme of 19th century opera.

Although the repertoire presented was essentially in the same idiom, variety was ensured through the presentation of different voices and performers in various combinations, on occasion in collaboration with all male, all female or mixed choirs.

The concert began with *Vi ravviso, o luoghi ameni* from Bellini's *La Sonnambula*, an aria for bass sung by Maurizio Lo Piccolo. This at once established the standard of the performance and confirmed the sound technical preparation of the

Operalaboratorio soloists noted during last year's opera festival. Lo Piccolo's contribution was very well controlled, particularly in the shaping of phrases.

Respect for Bellini's beautiful melodic style was also noticeable in Vincenzo Taormina's rendition of *Ah, per sempre io ti perdei* from *I Puritani*. This was characterised by fine shading and expression, the presentation of a broad dynamic range and particularly appealing warmth of tone and roundness of sound.

The Bellini excerpts were separated by Lorena Scarlata's *Habañera* from Bizet's *Carmen*, that again revealed the solid technical preparation of the musicians. While it was a generally successful rendition, attention to mood and the approach to high notes could have been better.

Donizetti was represented by Ivana Speranza's *Quel guardo il cavaliere... So anch'io la virtù magica* from *Don Pasquale*. Here, contrasting moods were well handled by the soprano whose singing was expressive, lively, well shaped, particularly well controlled in the handling of intervals and quite impressive in the ornaments and colorature.

Similar features were noticeable in her handling of *Una voce poco fa*

from Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* that displayed the soprano's extensive range, power and clever exploitation of articulation to colour her interpretation.

Other passages from the same opera were ably performed by Ugo Guagliardo, Roberta Caly and the duet Nunzio Gallo and Giovanni Bellavia, who shaped their contributions well and paid attention to the spirit of the score.

The duet between Valentina Vitti and Domenico Bellantone was somewhat less successful. Bellantone's contribution to *Il duetto buffo di due gatti* was too tame in relation to Vitti's.

There was some fine chamber singing characterised by discipline, control and crisp articulation in the sextet *Scusate amico... Siete Voi!* from *La Cenicientola* performed by Vitti, Caly, Scarlata, Bellantone, Taormina and Lo Piccolo, the latter also producing a *Miei rampolli femminili* from the same opera that was replete with character.

The association of soloists and choir came with *Giusto ciel! in tal periglio* from Rossini's *L'Assedio di Corinto*.

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