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malta INDEPENDENT

*Maestro Damiano Binetti is no newcomer to Malta. In view of the forthcoming concert on 27 September at Hilton Malta he tells Marie Benoit that he believes in the cross fertilization in the arts and a little about his musical journey so far*

Maestro Damiano Binetti is not a new face in Malta. He has come here on other occasions; in 2011 to conduct Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* at the Manoel Theatre; the following year, also at the Manoel, *Il Traviatore* and earlier this year Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* and Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*.

But opera is not his only domain. In 2011 he conducted the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra at a Viennese Night at the Hilton and in 2012 a Viennese Opera Gala at the Mediterranean Conference Centre. And now, on 27 September he will be back at the Hilton.

He was born in Puglia and lived in Italy until he was 22-years-old and then

chose Prague to develop his musical knowledge. He explains: "After studying at the Conservatory of Bari, I applied to join the prestigious Academy of Music in Prague where I was chosen among many candidates and where I had the chance to study with talented conductors such as Vaclav Neumann, Frantisek Vajnar, Jiri Belohlavek."

Maestro Binetti obtained a Master's degree in conducting in 2000.

What does he consider to be the highlights of his eventful career? He comments: "These are tied in particular to my years as music director of the Prague Madrigalists, the Czech Philharmonic Chamber Group. I travelled the world with them and these happy occasions gave me a chance to conduct in the most prestigious concert halls in Europe such as the Gewandhaus Leipzig, the Théâtre de la Bastille in Paris, at the Piccolo in Milan, the baroque music festival of Wallonie in Belgium at the Tibor Varga Festival in Sion in Switzerland, as well as the Bavarian Philharmonic in Munich. There were others, too."

Parallel to his gaining knowledge of baroque music and early music in general Maestro Binetti began receiving invitations to conduct opera. "The one that most marked my life was the direction of Bellini's *Norma* at the National Theatre in Prague where in 2005 I won the Thalia prize, one of the most important awards in the Czech art scene," he recalls, not without a certain amount of pride. After all Prague is one of the centres of European music and there is quite a number of gifted local conductors there.

In the same years he held the position of artistic director of the National Theatre of Silesia in Opava, also directing the major works of the classical repertoire. It is through this that he visited Malta for the first time, having been invited with his team to perform at the Manoel.

How did he get involved in the world of music? "Like most of the musicians in the south of Italy, as a child of seven, I started practicing the clarinet and the saxophone and then later on the piano. Even now in my free time I play my alto sax," he told me.

What advice would he give to young people who want to conduct? "One of my teachers who unfortunately passed away last year, Frantisek Vajnar, has always told us that it is only at the age of 60 that you can become a 'permanent' conductor. Therefore, the advice I've always given to young people and colleagues is the following: to be cautious but above all humble because caution and humility in every profession help us to achieve their goals in a positive way. There is no room for upstarts in this business. You have to know what you are doing and do it well."

He stresses that at the beginning of one's career one must accept offers to conduct the classical repertoire: symphonic music and opera but without neglecting the 'old' music, the Renaissance, the Baroque, where the musician is formed and where "he develops the important bases of our profession, the concept of intonation and the music together. It is also important that one invests a lot of time in the understanding of the libretto and not just the music, because the music and the text are intertwined."

Maestro Binetti recommends to young conductors a long stay in a foreign country "where they can be in contact with others, more experienced than themselves and where they can discuss and assimilate everything that is difficult to find in their own country."

So what is in store for the music patron on 27 September at the Grand Master Suite, Hilton Malta? "This is going to be a concert to honour the 200th anniversary of the birth of Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Wagner. About 120 artists are taking part together with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra, the New Choral Singers and a number of singers such as the Russian baritone Andrij Shkuhran, winner of the Verdi Voices Competition in Busseto, Italy. In addition there will be the Italian tenor Giacomo Patti and the promising Maltese singers Albert Buttigieg, May Caruana, Claudia Tabona and Andriana Jordanova with whom I have already worked on an opera at the Manoel Theatre."

Maestro Binetti believes that music making offers the possibility of the exchange and cross fertilization of thoughts, ideas, different interpretive styles and so on. Hence these concerts combine the talents of artists from different country. "This 'mixture' adds colour and variety to a musical event. It is not only in music that we should avoid creating barriers but in art in general."

Where exactly does he live, I want to know. "In Italy I have my loved ones whom I visit about twice a year. I spend most of my life in Prague and currently also in Malta, where I so enjoy living," he explains.

How does this busy man spend his spare time? "I honestly don't have much time to spare but when it is available I like to swim, cook and be with the people I most care about."

For more information about this concert please visit [www.maltaartevents.com](http://www.maltaartevents.com) where you will find more information.

