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MALTESE PIANO MUSIC

CAMILLERI • DIACONO
MALLIA PULVIRENTI • PACE

CHARLENE FARRUGIA

E. Dingle

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MALTESE PIANO MUSIC
CAMILLERI • DIACONO • MALLIA PULVIRENTI • PACE

CHARLENE FARRUGIA, *piano*

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Bösendorfer

CHARLES CAMILLERI (1931–2009)

AFRICAN DREAMS (1965)

21:36

- | | | |
|----------|---------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | I. Hymn to Morning | 03:15 |
| 2 | II. Rain Forest Fantasy | 03:37 |
| 3 | III. Experience of Conflict | 04:35 |
| 4 | IV. Festival Drumming | 02:37 |
| 5 | V. Children's Lagoon | 04:20 |
| 6 | VI. A Dance: Ritual Celebration | 03:10 |

CARMELO PACE (1906–1993)

PIANO SONATA NO. 2 (1973)*

17:33

- | | | |
|----------|---|-------|
| 7 | Andante – Allegro – | 06:52 |
| 8 | Lentamente – | 05:44 |
| 9 | Allegretto scherzoso – Largo – Allegretto | 04:57 |

CARLO DIACONO (1876–1942)

10 FANTASIE-IMPROMPTU (1928)*

06:02

*

WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDING

CARMELO PACE

FOUR BAGATELLES (1979)*

10:02

- | | | |
|-----------|-------------------------------|-------|
| 11 | No. 1. Andantino – | 01:50 |
| 12 | No. 2. Lento – | 03:10 |
| 13 | No. 3. Allegretto scherzoso – | 01:46 |
| 14 | No. 4. Vivo – Largo – Vivo | 03:16 |

JOSIE MALLIA PULVIRENTI (1896–1964)

15 IMPRESSIONE SINFONICA (version for piano) (1922)*

17:25

Con energia e maestoso – [Adagio] – Armonioso e con eleganza –
Con prima con maestà – Adagio – Tranquillamente sostenuto –
Allegro spigliato – Minaccioso – Largamente – Lento – Calmamente,
con imponenza – Ben ritmato e movendo un poco – Armonioso con
eleganza – Largamente – Moderato – Maestosamente largo –
[Coda:] Agitato – Con maestà

*

WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDING

TOTAL TIME: 73:04

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MALTESE PIANO MUSIC

'Off the south of Sicily three islands lie ... each of them possesses a city and harbours which can offer safety to ships which are in stress of weather. The first one is that called Melitē ...' (Diodorus, 1st century BCE). A member state of the European Union since 2004, modern Malta is principally about the Protestant British from 1800/14 to 1964/74, and before them the Catholic Knights Hospitaller from the early 16th century, a militarised feudal order driven out of Rhodes by the Ottomans before being abolished by Bonaparte in 1798. Long before that it was a Phoenician, Carthaginian and Roman trading port. Later, in consequence of the Arab-Byzantine Wars, it was ransacked and colonised by the Arabs (9th-11th century), whose Maghreb/Sicilian dialect and Muslim faith was to leave an enduring mark on the country's language and (for several centuries) religious practice. 'Welcome/hello' (*merħba*) is as familiar around the Maltese Islands as it is throughout the southern Mediterranean, phonically resonant from the Levant to the Pillars of Hercules. Place names like Mdina (Madīnah), Rabat and Żejtun share Arabic etymology. Following the Arabs there was Norman and Aragonese infiltration during the Middle Ages. Mirroring a location nearer North Africa than mainland Europe (latitudinally south of Algiers and Tunis), Malta, 'the place of honey', is small – London is five times bigger – but as a crucible where all compass points, all creative and expressive dimensions, any manner of cultures converge, conflict, coalesce and counterpoint, it's one of the Mediterranean's significant crossroads.

Malta is a place of theatre and *festa*, street life and *palazzo* escape, gentrified society galleries and raw 'troubadour tavernas'. A rocky, largely treeless conurbation where Italian opera meets church and band club, jazz and 'Rat Pack' aficionados rub shoulders with rural *għana*, vibrant and piercing in its Semitic tongue and 'improvisatory-melismatic' *fioritura*. Operas and musicals, opera singers and vocal coaches flourish, aspiring 'Maltese tenors' rarely far away, local artisans in competitive demand. Compositionally,

today's generation is far seeking, as receptive to trends and techniques on both sides of the Atlantic as to indigenous heritage. Sound design and audio-visual installation is a focus amongst the young. The piano, however, has been less well served. Since the 19th century generally, the 1950s specifically, few works have captured a global public, scarcely any have grown out of the 'composer-pianist' tradition. Following up Charlene Farrugia's Grand Piano release of solo and chamber music by Karl Fiorini, *In the Midst of Things*, including the First of his completed Sonatas [GP880], together with her Naxos recording of Camilleri's *Mediterranean Concerto* with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra and Miran Vaupotić [8.573373], this album, featuring four première recordings, looks to redress the imbalance.

Charles Camilleri (1931–2009), *African Dreams* (1965). 'Music of the kind I believe in ... is the foreseeing of the cosmic embedded in the seemingly chaotic' (March 1987). Camilleri, born in Hamrun, journeyed from light entertainer to esoteric fantasist to faculty professor. Teenage accordionist to jobbing musician, arranger and composer in London's West End to studies with John Weinzweig in Toronto to directing the 1989 Mediterranean Music conference at the University of Malta. Folklorist (he called his Naxxar home Villa L'Għana, transcribed or paraphrased fragments of *għana* melody/style in his works, and collaborated with Ġużè Cassar Pullicino in a 1998 book on Maltese oral poetry and folk music) to *New Idea* symphonist. At his profoundest he was inspired by Teilhard de Chardin, Eastern mysticism, things cosmic. Megalithic Malta, Indian music, Middle/Near Eastern modes, African rhythms. References to Stravinsky, Bartók, Messiaen punctuated his speech. Generalisation, simplification, couching his thoughts in the broadest of brush strokes, using shock tactics to provoke, was his *modus operandi*. He left others to objectify the message. Camilleri was an irrepressible New Age Argonaut. Music for him was about affirmations, excitations and contradictions of silence and heartbeat, about mono-homo-polyphonic soundscapes circling distant points, free-wheeling through time. His imagination took him to 'worlds that never

were'.¹ Few 20th-century figures bridged so many styles and disciplines nor engaged/enraged/bemused such a wide breadth of society. Camilleri defined his work as being based on the four 'elements' engulfing, as he saw it, 'the whole world: the Orientally meditative, African ritualism, Jazz and European rationalism. [But] I do not directly copy [them]. Rather I take their aura, I make an abstract of such aura, and then I make an abstract out of the abstract'.² Reluctant to acknowledge his peers or predecessors, likewise, in later life, to be drawn on his students, the Afro-Arabic DNA of Malta (a divisive topic that still fazes many among the predominantly Catholic population of the Islands) piqued his curiosity. 'North African music' he was fond of claiming, 'has very complicated melodic lines and simple rhythms, while the music of Dark Africa has complex rhythms and usually simplistic melodies ... in the former the melodic aspect is based on small intervals, in the latter it's based on large ones.' With Xenakis and Scelsi, Camilleri, some argue, spearheaded the post-war 'Mediterranean School', at his most advanced contributing a lasting 'matrix' for the music of the region (Murray McLachlan).

A series of six thematically unrelated but rhythmically familial cameos, *African Dreams* was dedicated to the English ethnomusicologist Hugh Tracey (1903–1977) – for his 'lifelong devotion' to the music, mind and morals of Central and Southern Africa (he left over 35,000 field recordings). 'Hymn to Morning' is a self-renewing two-voice texture in 5/4 in which melodic lines of differing pentatonic cast, rooted in F, are punctuated, later accompanied, by 'drum' beats either regular or syncopated. 'Rain Forest Fantasy' (Central West Africa) is turbulent, striking in its opening recitative, cumulatively incessant chord repetitions, and final bass *tremolando*, *f–fffff*. The quiet third movement, *ghana* allusive, experiences the 'Conflict' (finally resolved) of tactile plains, the right hand pursuing a *legato* G flat black-note pentatonic melody in 13/8 against *staccato* white-note triads in the left wherein elements of major and minor progression combine with a two-bar rhythmic pattern to form an *ostinato* backcloth. 'Festival Drumming' – centred around

¹ Carl Sagan, *Cosmos*, New York 1980.

² Fiftieth birthday concert programme, London South Bank Centre, 30 September 1981.

tessitura, sonority, dynamic range, silence and modes of attack, coroneted in chains of falling Messiaenic chords – tempers the ferocity of ‘Rain Forest Fantasy’ within a rhythmic framework (in this instance chordally rather than melodically emphatic) suggestive of Camilleri’s self-identified ‘atomisation of the beat’ technique. A process where ‘the unit or beat is divided into small units of rational/irrational subdivisions, [resulting] in a feeling of improvisation [in the process achieving] a broad sense of medieval *tactus* in which metric structure can vary independently of the subsequently imposed bar lines of European Western music’.³ Like the first and third tableaux, ‘Children’s Lagoon’ (North Africa, coastal Tunisia), with its crystalline two-part writing, enters an evocative, pentatonic innocent, dreamingly still world. Closing the set, ‘A Dance: Ritual Celebration’ divides into two halves. *Vigoroso*, echoing ‘Festival Drumming’. *Allegro molto vivace*, exploding in a virtuosic amalgam of cross-rhythms, ‘white’ pentatonic octaves, ‘black/white’ boogie, and gasping semiquaver crushes chromatically hued.

Carmelo Pace (1906–1993), *Piano Sonata* (1973); *Four Bagatelles* (1979). Surviving the Axis bombing of Valletta during the Second World War, Pace was a composer and pedagogue of substance, ‘the most versatile and prolific native musical talent Malta has known’.⁴ No ‘ivory tower’ grandee, it’s been said, but a practical, practising musician ‘each of whose works, whether educational or virtuosic, theatrical or “absolute”, was utterly suited to its medium and precisely gauged to its purpose’ (Marcel De Gabriele). ‘He could be described as Malta’s first freelance composer, independent of Church and parochial band clubs, being neither a *maestro di cappella* nor *maestro di banda*’ (Farrugia/Fiorini, 2023). If Camilleri, briefly one of his students, was the Maltese Islands’ most cosmopolitan *musicus*, Pace was the opposite. A reticent recluse trained locally, speculatively autistic, taking correspondence courses in composition, devoting himself to teaching, and pursuing a relentless work ethic, he rarely left the place, living in Sliema. Pioneering folklorist and *ghana* proponent from at least the early 1930s – ‘the

³ Mariella Cassar, ‘Creative Responses to Maltese Culture and Identity’, PhD, University of Plymouth, 2014.

⁴ Joseph Vella Bondin, ‘Carmelo Pace: A life in music’, *Sunday Times* (Malta), 22 May 1994.

first composer to take an active interest in Maltese folk music' (Joseph Vella, 1994) – his output was copious. Over 500 scores, including operas, symphonies, concertos and ten numbered string quartets. Most remain obscure and unpublished, though his tone poem *Jubilamus*, commemorating the 400th anniversary of the founding of Valletta, was programmed at Expo 70 in Osaka Prefecture, along with Camilleri's *Maqam Concerto*. A casualty of 'Malta's lack of musical infrastructure [he] ended up working largely in isolation and in a critical vacuum'.⁵

The *Piano Sonata* (MS 2669, Cathedral Archives, Mdina) is listed as 'No 2' in De Gabriele/Caffari's 1987 catalogue, prepared with the composer's collaboration, probably because of an earlier example for accordion. 'Written in one movement without break [a familiar Pace procedure],' their entry reads, 'but contains many changes of tempo and mood corresponding to the three movements of the Classical sonata. The opening introduction is followed by an Allegro which leads ... to a slow section and a quick finale. It is a work of brilliancy and of enormous difficulty'.⁶ In her analysis of the work⁷ Lydia Buttigieg points to possibly Middle European/Russian models, Liszt onwards, subdividing the music into eight sections. (A) *Andante* [Introduction] – (B) *Allegro* – [Lento] (C) *Allegro come prima* – (D) *Lentamente* – (E) *Allegretto scherzoso* – (F) *Largo* – (G) *Allegretto* – (H) *Vivo*. (A–C) comprises a first movement, (D) the slow movement. Contrary, however, to her assumption that the finale begins with a slow introduction at (F), this recording proposes it starting with the quick Scarlatti-like 3/8 figurations at (E), the subsequent *Largo* functioning as a slow *interludium*, characterfully Romantic in precedent. The energised coda, transiently recalling the opening *Allegro* motif of the first movement, rounds off an intricate journey of keys, harmonies, aggregations and diversions, cadencing in E major. A driven organic testament: symphonic in its motivic and cyclic working-out,

⁵ Lydia Buttigieg, 'The Unheard Maestro', *Think*, 25 June 2014.

⁶ Marcel De Gabriele & Georgette Caffari, *Carmelo Pace, A Maltese Composer, Thematic, Annotated and Illustrated Catalogue of Works*, Minnesota/Mdina 1991.

⁷ Lydia Buttigieg, 'Carmelo Pace (1906–1993): The career and creative achievement of a twentieth-century Maltese composer in social and cultural context', PhD, University of Durham, 2014.

texturally linear and stranded, at times almost an orchestral short-score. Physically pianistic and uncompromising: resisting easy exits, calling for a subtle range of attacks and articulations, fierceness and facility, to illumine its currents and shades of register, timbre and voicing. The first two *Bagatelles* (MS 2675), keyboard accessible and pleasingly crafted, are aphoristic and developmental by turn. The third is an effervescent 6/8 scherzo – *legato* and *staccato*, chattering slurs and dots, in playful opposition. Conceptually a latterday Mendelssohn *homage*. The fourth, cleanly structured, inexorably moving onwards, suggests a *moto perpetuo*.

Carlo Diacono (1876–1942), *Fantasie-Improptu* (published 1928). Prolific and refined, Diacono, from Żejtun, south east Malta, studied with Paolino Vassallo, a leading light in Paris during the late 1870s and 1880s. ‘Of the great Maltese composers up to his generation, [he was] the only one who did not study abroad’.⁸ Selected for highest office, he was appointed *maestro di cappella* at Mdina Cathedral and St John’s Co-Cathedral Valletta in 1923, succeeding Vassallo. Malta in the 1900s, the conductor Brian Schembri chronicles, was an environment musically regressed by Pope Pius X’s November 1903 Motu Proprio, implemented by Vassallo and designed ‘to stop the vulgar and profane aesthetic tastes and habits that had slowly infiltrated sacred music through the years ... In Malta this “cleansing” created a problem. Since [European-style] symphonic performance was all but non-existent, talented composers could only develop their art as church musicians within the restrictive [*depassé*] parameters of the Motu Proprio or in opera, [the staging of] which for a Maltese composer would have been an extremely rare opportunity. The seriousness of this drastic situation is best understood when one realises that the Motu Proprio was declared in that very epoch when European art and music in particular was literally exploding with the [radical] creativity of composers such as Debussy, Mahler, Schoenberg, Webern, Berg, Ravel, Satie, Sibelius, later Bartók, Stravinsky ...’ Not until his three-act melodrama *L’Alpino* – ‘probably the only opera written during World War I with the war itself as background to a passionate, tragic

⁸ Joseph Vella Bondin, *The Great Maltese Composers: Historical Context, Lives and Works*, Birkirkara 2016.

verismo love story', premiered at Valletta's Royal Opera House (Theatre Royal), in 1918, did Diacono finally achieve a work 'free of the yoke of the Motu Proprio, that is, with all his creative fantasy burning within him ...'.⁹ Published in Milan ten years later, dedicated to his slightly younger Parmense contemporary Ildebrando Pizzetti, the 3/4 *Fantasia-Improptu* is a Parisian-style paragon modelled on Chopin's disowned 2/2 effort. Both examples share a common ternary design and enharmonic tonic, but with Diacono opting for the dance-like outer sections to be in the major, *allegro assai vivace*, contrasting an emotionally darker central episode in chromaticised E major, *sostenuto con espressione*.

Josie Mallia Pulvirenti (1896–1964), *Impressione Sinfonica* (published 1922). Despite orchestral concerts being unestablished in pre-war Maltese cultural life there were exceptions. Beginning in 1936 Paul Nani was 'responsible for the articulate introduction [and broadcasting] ... of musical concerts as an art form totally separate from operatic theatre' (Vella Bondin), inaugurating an orchestral series in 1939 sponsored by the British Institute. In December 1933 Respighi conducted his *Pines of Rome*. Before that, 5 April 1924, Mallia Pulvirenti's symphonic poem *Impressionismo* was premiered at a Theatre Royal matinée – heralded as an 'added attraction ... for all local music lovers [its author having won] a Musical Competition held under the auspices of the Impresa [of the theatre] highly commended by the Examining Committee'.¹⁰ Valletta-born, Mallia Pulvirenti studied locally with Vassallo and with the composer-organist Giulio Bas in Milan, graduating from the Conservatorio in 1936. Involved in the family business, his catalogue was modest but accomplished. In the *Impressione Sinfonica* inscribed to Vassallo – a young man's urgency, scored ambitiously for triple woodwind, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, tam-tam, triangle), two harps and strings – Boito, Respighi's Triton/Trevi fountains, Franco/Italian impressionism, rhetorical gesture and lyric sentiment, massiveness and delicacy, allusions to Beethoven and Wagner, *Appassionata* to *Tristan*, blend and blur. Relying on

⁹ Brian Schembri, Beland Music Society Žejtun December 2018; *Opera Today*, 27 April 2019, adapted.

¹⁰ *Daily Malta Chronicle*, 4 April 1924.

shared rhythmic figures, repetition, key transpositions, and ornamental/textural/dynamic variation more than motivic development, its demarcated, adjectivally verbalised structure is complex and diffused, though, schematically, an elaborated sonata aesthetic might be discerned. Double Exposition: A B C (x [transition]); A B D E (y). Development I: (A) E (z). Interlude: F. Development II: E (y), D. Reprise: C (x) E (z) E (y). Coda: (D) Cadential fanfares [E major, *ffff*]. Whether entirely from Mallia Pulvirenti's hand (the first edition's claim) or that of an anonymous collaborator, the transcription recorded here (uncut) is a concert masterpiece of virtuosic majesty and keyboard knowledge, steeped in the piano's Golden Age from Liszt to Stradal, Busoni and Agosti.

Ateş Orga

CHARLENE FARRUGIA

Maltese pianist Charlene Farrugia studied with Dolores Amodio and Diana Ketler at the Royal Academy of Music in London. She was subsequently mentored by Boris Petrushansky for several years. Farrugia gained her doctorate in performance under Kenneth Hamilton with a thesis on piano repertory for the left hand. In 2018 she received Malta's International Achievement Award, and in 2020 she was made an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music in recognition of her contribution to the music profession. An ambassador of EMMA for Peace (Euro Mediterranean Music Academy), under the auspices of UNESCO, she is currently associate professor of piano at the Academy of Music of the Juraj Dobrila University in Pula, Croatia. With a wide repertory ranging from Baroque to contemporary works, she made her concerto debut with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra playing Mendelssohn's *Piano Concerto No. 1* at the age of 13 – the orchestra's youngest ever soloist. She has since toured widely, with engagements taking her throughout Europe to North America and the Far East, appearing in venues such as the Teatru Manoel in Valletta, Théâtre Princesse Grace in Monaco, Château Sainte-Anne in Brussels, Smetana Hall in Prague and Shanghai Oriental Art Center. Among her recordings are Camilleri's *Piano Concerto No. 1* (Naxos 8.573373), Karl Fiorini's *In the Midst of Things* (Grand Piano GP880), and a Khachaturian anthology including his *Children's Albums* and *Recitatives and Fugues* (Grand Piano GP834).

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CHARLENE FARRUGIA
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CHARLES CAMILLERI



CARLO DIACONO





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Positioned between Southern Europe and North Africa, Malta has long been an artistic crucible that forms one of the Mediterranean's most significant cultural crossroads. With its intense pianistic colours, Charles Camilleri's *African Dreams* explores that continent's native rhythms and melodic lines, while Carmelo Pace and Carlo Diacono look towards the worlds of Liszt and Chopin. Josie Mallia Pulvirenti's rarely heard *Impressione Sinfonica* is a concert masterpiece of virtuosic majesty, steeped in the piano's Golden Age. Award-winning Maltese pianist, Charlene Farrugia, has done extensive research into the life and work of composers from her homeland.



CHARLENE
FARRUGIA

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