



19TH MALTA SPRING FESTIVAL

ARADIANI FUTURE

MUSIC · DANCE · PERFORMANCES

22-26
APRIL
2025



A WORD FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

“It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light” - Aristotle. In the wake of a potential World War, I could not but be reminded of Vasily Vereshchagin The apotheosis of war from 1871 a work that generated considerable controversy when it started being exhibited. It was in fact many times

censored. The title for the 19th Malta Spring Festival reflects on the global feeling on Humanity’s destiny and the future for the up-and-coming generation. In this respect, one of the main aspects of the 19th Malta Spring Festival will be to establish the Malta Spring Festival Academy, providing masterclasses for national and international students by a line-up of world-class artists alongside the programme of events.

~ Karl Fiorini

OPENING CONCERT

Tuesday 22 April 2025, 8pm
St Paul’s Pro-Cathedral

QUÍRON QUARTET

Shostakovich | String Quartets #8 & #15

Edgar Gomes, *violin I*

Barbara Udovčić, *violin II*

José Azevedo, *viola*

Maria Nabeiro, *cello*



Quíron Quartet

Shostakovich I String Quartet #8

In the summer of 1960, Shostakovich travelled to Dresden to work on the score of a Soviet-East German film. Dresden, still bearing the scars of its destruction in 1945 by an Allied firebombing that claimed more lives than the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, became the setting where, in just three days, Shostakovich composed his String Quartet No. 8. Inscribed “In memory of victims of fascism and war,” the quartet’s dedication is clear, yet nearly everything else about its meaning and genesis has been the subject of considerable debate.

The Eighth Quartet is rife with musical quotations from Shostakovich’s own works, as well as his personal four-note motto, DSCH (D-E-flat-C-B in German notation). This suggests that the quartet is as much about Shostakovich himself as it is a memorial to war victims. According to Testimony—a controversial book published posthumously, based on the composer’s recollections as told to Russian journalist Solomon Volkov—Shostakovich supposedly dismissed the official dedication, claiming the quartet was a self-portrait. “You have to be blind and deaf,” the book quotes him as saying, to believe it is about fascism; rather, it reflected his personal struggle under Stalinist oppression, cleverly disguised to avoid retribution.

However, doubts surround this interpretation. If the disguise was truly that transparent, it would have failed to protect him from Soviet scrutiny. Furthermore, Testimony itself has been criticised for fabrications, with evidence suggesting it might reflect more of Volkov’s views than Shostakovich’s. Some sections of the quartet also seem unrelated to Shostakovich’s personal experiences—most notably, the use of a “Jewish” theme in the middle movement, which seems more connected to the Holocaust than his life. Moreover, Shostakovich’s political affiliations complicate matters: in 1960, he joined the Communist Party and became First Secretary of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic Composers Union. All this clouds any simple interpretation of the quartet’s significance.

Thus, while the Eighth Quartet is clearly laden with meaning, its precise message remains ambiguous. It could be a straightforward Soviet condemnation of fascism, a veiled protest against Soviet totalitarianism, or even a broader critique of totalitarian regimes in general. Various interpretations have been advanced, all with merit, and it seems we may never fully grasp Shostakovich’s true intentions. The quartet may not convey a single, clear message but rather a series of emotional responses to the suffering and turmoil of his time.

Structurally, the quartet unfolds in five movements played without interruption, built around the composer's DSCH motif. This four-note theme, previously used in Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony, emerges as the central thread running through the entire work. The first movement begins by introducing the DSCH motif in a fugue, followed by a reference to a theme from his First Symphony, the composition that brought him national fame. Another theme from his Fifth Symphony, which helped him regain favour after state censure in 1937, also makes an appearance. These musical references evoke key moments from Shostakovich's career, suggesting the quartet is as much a reflection on his personal life as it is a broader statement.

The introspective mood of the first movement is violently interrupted by the second movement, a ferocious Allegro molto, where the DSCH theme appears in various guises amid a musical blitzkrieg. At the movement's climax, a "Jewish" theme from his Second Piano Trio (written in 1944) erupts. In Testimony, Shostakovich commented on his fascination with Jewish folk music, noting how its capacity for conveying both joy and tragedy simultaneously resonated deeply with his own artistic philosophy. This duality—laughter through tears—mirrors the conflicting layers in his own music.

The third movement is a waltz-rondo, marked by a tonal ambiguity that is quintessentially Shostakovich. Here, the DSCH motif oscillates between G minor and G major, creating a feeling of uncertainty and tension. In the middle section, a theme from his First Cello Concerto (written just the year before) emerges. The movement ends with a dying away of its themes, as the cello concerto motif and a martial rhythm linger before dissolving into silence. The fourth movement opens with ominous banging, which has been interpreted as everything from gunfire to distant aircraft. Over this menacing backdrop, Shostakovich weaves together several poignant musical references: the Dies irae from the Catholic requiem mass, a Russian funeral anthem, and a revolutionary song. These are juxtaposed with a melody from his opera Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk, the work that triggered the first of many official condemnations of Shostakovich by the Soviet state. After one final, fateful repetition of the cello concerto theme, the movement segues into the final fugue. The fifth movement is an elegy built on the DSCH theme, which re-emerges from the ruins of the fourth movement. Here, the composer creates a heartbreaking fugal texture, intertwining the DSCH motif with a sense of inevitability and finality. The quartet ends as it began—with Shostakovich's signature and a profound sense of unresolved tension.

Shostakovich I String Quartet #15

Shostakovich's name is inextricably linked with his fraught relationship with Soviet officialdom, a struggle that shaped much of his career. This image, often simplified in early biographies, portrays the composer as a resilient figure—battered, yet defiant, producing work while constantly bracing for the next round of political criticism. His opponents in the cultural bureaucracy were just as persistent, but Shostakovich's survival and continued productivity suggest that he often emerged victorious, never fully exiled or stripped of his Communist Party membership.

Indeed, Shostakovich faced denunciation for refusing to conform to the Soviet expectation that art should be accessible and propagandistic. When criticised, he would temporarily lay low, perhaps composing a patriotic march or cantata to appease the authorities. But in private, he used his chamber music—works for more limited audiences—to express his darker, more introspective thoughts. Yet behind this uneasy relationship between the artist and the state, even after Stalin's death in 1953, was an exceedingly complex and conflicted individual. Shostakovich's life was marked by poor health from a young age, bouts of severe depression, a weak heart, and a host of neurological disorders, which were later compounded by compromised lungs from years of smoking.

This brings us to 1970, when Shostakovich was hospitalised for his recurring heart condition and a rare form of polio. It seemed unlikely that he would survive the year, let alone live another five years, during which he remained creatively active almost until the very end. In 1970, with his mortality weighing heavily on him, Shostakovich began composing his final three string quartets, each preoccupied with death. These quartets, often compared to Beethoven's late quartets for their emotional depth, began with Quartet No. 13, Op. 138, completed that fall. It was premiered to a small group of listeners by the Beethoven Quartet, his trusted interpreters, in Leningrad on December 13, 1970. His next quartet, No. 14 in F-sharp minor, Op. 142, followed in 1973. The final quartet, No. 15 in E-flat minor, was largely completed in the fall of 1974, less than a year before his death.

Shostakovich had intended for the Beethoven Quartet to premiere his final quartet, but the death of their cellist, Sergei Shirinsky, forced the performance to be entrusted to the Taneyev Quartet, who introduced it on November 17, 1974, in Leningrad. The Fifteenth Quartet, lasting about 35 minutes, unfolds in six movements, all marked adagio and played without pause, forming a continuous chain of laments. The only "contrasting" movement, the fifth, a Funeral March, is played even more



Quíron Quartet

slowly. The entire work remains rooted in E-flat minor, with few departures from this key. Despite its unrelenting slow tempo and minimal harmonic variety, the quartet is far from monotonous. Shostakovich achieves contrast and drama through dynamic shifts, with powerful crescendos and overwhelming climaxes. The piece is full of musical "events": Russian Orthodox chant motifs in the opening Elegy, fragmentary waltzes and a brief violin cadenza in the second movement, and a hauntingly lyrical passage for muted viola in the Nocturne. The Funeral March delivers thunderous, repeated chords that resemble gunshots, alternating with fierce, individual outbursts from each instrument. Unlike the two previous quartets, where the idea of ensemble playing was intentionally deconstructed, here the instruments engage in an angry dialogue. The final movement, Epilogue, recalls themes from earlier movements, including some of the livelier ones. After moments of buzzing trills, pizzicato, and a mournful cello line, the quartet ends not with resolution but simply stops.

The Artists

As well as its name, which comes from Greek mythology, more precisely from the figure of a centaur, representative of wisdom and art, the quartet seeks the deepest knowledge of string quartet formation and the art of its presentation to the public. Formed only in 2020, the Quíron Quartet already has performances in countries such as Portugal, France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland and Italy and at festivals such as Casa del Quartetto and Crans-Montana Classics, having worked on masterclasses with names like Eberhard Feltz, Mathieu Herzog, Clive Brown, William Coleman, Guy Danel, Joseph Kluson, Szymon Krzeszowiek, Van Kuijk Quartet, Jerusalem Quartet, Danel Quartet and Bennewitz Quartet. In 2023 the quartet has completed a Postgraduate degree in String Quartet at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels under the guidance of Eric Robberecht, is connected to the Chamber Music For Europe in Belgium, and it also integrates the Nederlandse Strijkkwartet Academie (NSKA) in The Netherlands, where they are regularly and intensively mentored by the Danel Quartet. Recently the quartet was awarded a special prize for the best interpretation of a contemporary piece, at the Karol Szymanowski International Music Competition in Katowice, Poland.

Thursday 24 April, 8pm
Teatru Manoel

MOVEMENT IN FLUX

Berio | Sequenza VIII for violin
Berio | Sequenza IXb for alto saxophone
Berio | Sequenza XIVb for double bass
Berio | Sequenza IV for piano
Boulez | 12 Notations

Kristina Besman, *violin*

Philip Attard, *alto saxophone*

Gjorgji Cincievski, *double bass*

Christine Zerafa, *piano*

Moveo Dance Company

Charlotte Carpentier, *dancer*

Cindelle Bouard, *dancer*

Irene Nocella, *dancer*

Natalia Filowait, *dancer*

Dorian Mallia, *choreographer*

Choreographer and dancer Dorian Mallia, will give new life to Luciano Berio's Sequenza IV for Piano and Pierre Boulez's Douze Notations through choreography, merging the intricate, avant-garde musical textures with dynamic movement. The performance will explore the relationship between sound and physicality, interpreting the complexity and intensity of each composition in a visually compelling way. "The intricate intensity of Boulez and Sequenza IV took me on an unexpected journey one not bound by their original intent but by the emotions they stirred within me. Their dissonances, and textures became a landscape for movement, leading me to deconstruct, reshape, and embody their essence in my own way. This choreography is a physical exploration of that journey, where sound transforms into motion, and structure dissolves into raw expression." - Dorian Mallia, choreographer.

The Artists

Philip Attard, *saxophone*

Maltese saxophone virtuoso Philip Attard has performed extensively as a soloist and chamber musician across Europe and the United States, with appearances at Wigmore Hall, Cadogan Hall, Southbank Centre, and the Royal Albert Hall. He has been featured at festivals such as the Malta Arts Festival, Three Palaces Festival, and the Embassy Series in Washington DC. Attard holds an MMus and an Artist Diploma from the Royal College of Music (RCM), where he studied with Kyle Horch and received several major awards, including the RCM Concerto Competition and the Royal Over-Seas League Wind and Percussion Prize. His engagements through the Tillett and Tunnell Trusts, and the Countess of Munster Recital Scheme, have led to widespread performances across the UK. Based in Malta, he performs regularly with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra and the Big Band Brothers. He holds an MEd from RCM and teaches saxophone and chamber music at the Malta School of Music. He has also delivered masterclasses at UK universities and the Malta Saxophone Festival.

Kristina Besman, *violin*

Born in Moscow in 1994, Kristina Besman studied at the Moscow Conservatory under Professors Victor Pikaisen and Eduard Grach, where she also completed her master's degree. She pursued further studies in Vienna with Professor Igor Petrushevski and, since 2024, has been studying in Spain under Zakhar Bron. She has participated in masterclasses

led by Boris Kuschnir, Pierre Amoyal, Rollo Kovac, Augustin Dumay, Ivry Gitlis, Wolfgang Redik, Ana Chumachenko, and Eduard Wulfson. A former participant in the Keshet Eilon master courses in Israel, Besman has performed widely across Russia and Europe to critical acclaim. She has appeared with the Moscow Philharmonic and the St. Petersburg House of Music, and her 2022 chamber recital in Vienna was broadcast on Austrian television. She is a laureate of numerous international competitions, including the Enescu, Lipizer, Khachaturian, and Vienna International competitions. She has performed at major festivals in Russia and Europe, including the Verbier Festival and December Evenings. Her concert engagements are managed in collaboration with Music Management IMK.

Gjorgji Cincievski, *double bass*

Born in Skopje, Macedonia, Gjorgji studied at the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM), where he graduated with distinction and later served as Junior Fellow in Double Bass. He has performed with orchestras such as the BBC Philharmonic, Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra, and Opera North, and has collaborated with conductors and soloists including Bernard Haitink, Valery Gergiev, Placido Domingo, and Anna Netrebko.

Festival appearances include the Salzburg Festival, Vienna Modern Festival, and the Valletta International Baroque Festival. Former principal double bassist of the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra, Cincievski is also active as a soloist and educator. He has given masterclasses and concerts across Europe, Asia, and the Americas. He serves as Artistic Director of the Malta International Double Bass Days and Chair of the Joseph Sammut Double Bass Competition. An endorsed artist with Pirastro strings, Cincievski is known for his technical precision and interpretative depth. His transcription of Bach's Goldberg Variations for string trio received the Best Transcription Award at the European Double Bass Biennale (2014). His published arrangements are available through Hofmeister Editions, Leipzig.

Christine Zerafa, *piano*

Pianist Christine Zerafa has been praised for her "sensual, silky tone and virtuoso command" (The Evening Standard, London) and described as "a musician with a warm and very communicative personality" (The Times of Malta). She has performed at prestigious venues like the Royal Festival Hall, Wigmore Hall, and Oxford Lieder Festival. Recently, she was honored as an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music for her





Moveo Dance Company

contributions to the music profession.

Christine has received numerous awards, including the Bice Mizzi National Competition, the Royal Northern College of Music Clifton Helliwell Prize, and the RAM Scott Huxley Prize. She was also a Park Lane Group Artist and a Tunnell Trust Artist Chamber Music Scheme award winner.

Christine holds a Master of Music in solo performance from the Royal Northern College of Music and a Master of Music in piano accompaniment from the Royal Academy of Music, where she also completed her PhD. Based in Malta, she enjoys a dynamic career as a concert pianist, researcher, and educator.

Dorian Mallia

Dorian Mallia is a choreographer, performer, and educator. He trained at the Johane Casabene Dance Conservatoire and the Central School of Ballet (London), and later earned a Master's degree in Performing Studies from the University of Malta. Mallia has performed with international companies including European Ballet (UK) and LaMov (Spain). As Artistic Director of Moveo Dance Company, he has led numerous international projects and received several national awards. He teaches at the University of Malta and MCAST, and his recent academic contribution includes a chapter in *Breaking the Silence: Homosexuality in Maltese History* (2024).

Moveo Dance Company

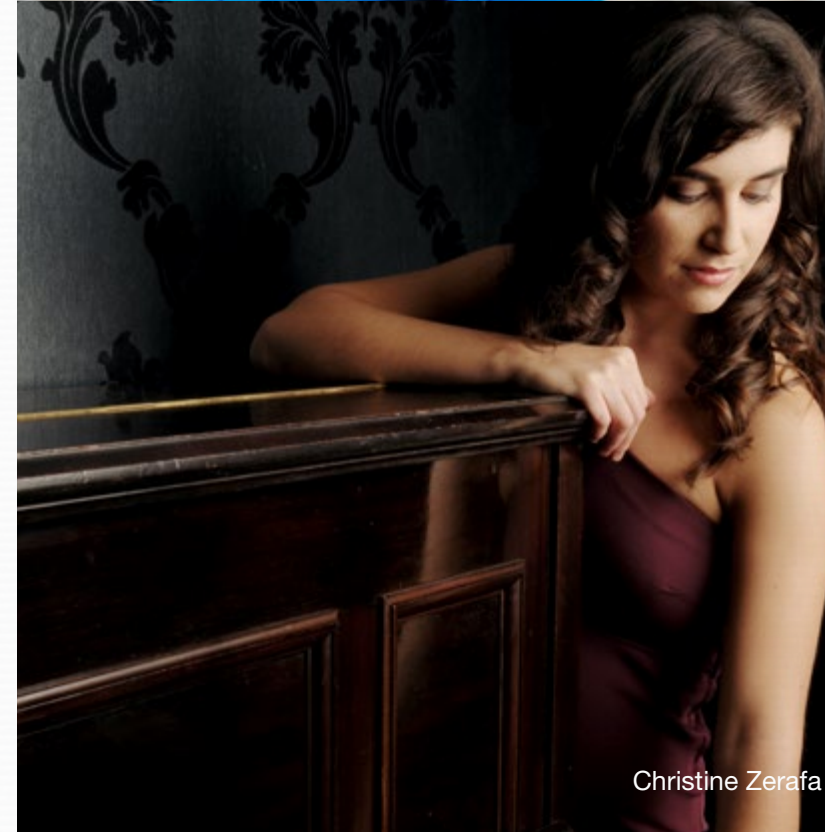
Founded in 2008 by Dorian Mallia, Moveo Dance Company has established a national and international profile for its contemporary productions. Notable works include *Frida*, *Carmen*, and *The Other Door – What's Wrong*, which have been staged across Europe, the United States, and the Middle East. In 2018, Moveo was commissioned to participate in *Black and White* at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Cultural Centre, Kuwait. The company has also appeared at major Maltese festivals including the Malta International Arts Festival and the Three Palaces Festival. Moveo Shine, the company's educational branch, focuses on performances and outreach for young audiences. Awards include the Premju Għall-Arti (Artists of the Year, 2018), Best Creative Enterprise (2020), and the STEM People's Choice Award (2021). *From Malta with Love* received a Special Mention Award from the Audience Jury at Teatro Nudo di Teresa Pomodoro (2023). Moveo is supported by the Arts Council Malta through the ICO fund.



Kristina Besman



Philip Attard



Christine Zerafa



Gjorgji Cincievski

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Friday 25 April, 8pm
Teatru Manoel

FRANCISCO ZERAFA

performs Beethoven, Fauré, Ravel and Scriabin

SANDRO ZERAFA QUARTET

Sandro Zerafa, *guitar*

Noé Huchard, *piano*

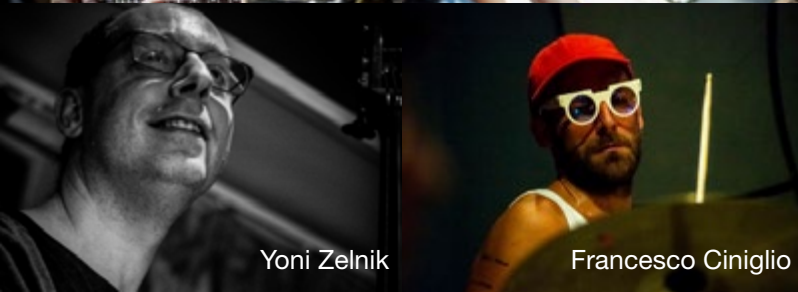
Yoni Zelkin, *bass*

Francesco Ciniglio, *drums*



Sandro Zerafa

Noé Huchard



Yoni Zelkin

Francesco Ciniglio

Beethoven | Sonata op.78 in F# major

Composed in 1809, Beethoven's Sonata in F-sharp Major, Op. 78 stands out for its elegance and originality despite its compact two-movement form. Dedicated to Thérèse von Brunsvik, one of Beethoven's students, the sonata became linked to the mystery of his "Immortal Beloved" letter, though this connection remains speculative. Structurally, the sonata reflects Beethoven's evolving style, marked by subtle harmonic clarity that foreshadows his later works. The brief Adagio cantabile introduction surprises with its completeness, leading seamlessly into an expressive Allegro ma non troppo. The fluid, improvisatory nature of the piece recalls the Fantasia, Op. 77, blending thematic contrasts and arabesque-like variations in a strikingly free-form manner.

Fauré | Barcarolle no. 3 op. 42 in Gb major

The Barcarolles originated as folk songs sung by Venetian gondoliers. According to Morrison, Fauré used the term more out of convenience than precision. He was not drawn to fanciful titles for his works and insisted that he would never have used generic labels like Barcarolle had publishers not pressured him. His son, Philippe, recalled that Fauré "would have much preferred to name his Nocturnes, Impromptus, and even his Barcarolles simply Piece for Piano No. X."

However, following the precedent set by Chopin and, more notably, Mendelssohn, Fauré made extensive use of the Barcarolle. His biographer, Jessica Duchon, describes it as "an evocation of the rocking rhythm and the rippling of water beneath lyrical melodies." Fauré's ambidexterity is reflected in the structure of many of his piano works, particularly in the Barcarolles, where the melodic line often lies in the middle register, framed by accompaniment in the upper and lower ranges. Duchon compares this effect to the reflection of light on water. The Third Barcarolle is dedicated to Henriette Roger-Jourdain, the wife of Fauré's friend, painter Roger Jourdain. It opens with a simple phrase that quickly develops into trills reminiscent of Chopin. As in the First Barcarolle, the central section maintains the melody in the middle register, with delicate arpeggios in both the bass and treble. Pianist Marguerite Long described these ornaments as "crowning the theme like sea foam on the waves."



Francisco Zerafa

Scriabin | Deux Poèmes op. 32

Scriabin's Deux poèmes, Op. 32 (1903) form a contrasting diptych: the first introspective and suffused with dreamlike intensity, the second extroverted and assertive, embodying the composer's growing preoccupation with self-affirmation. This philosophical concern finds explicit expression in the phrase Ya yesm' ('I am'), inscribed solemnly in a 1904–5 notebook and later symbolically manifested in the opening of Le divin poème. The works exemplify Scriabin's idiosyncratic approach to performance markings. In the first poème, the central section bears the invented directive inafferando, which scholar Valentina Rubtsova proposes derives from inafferrabile—suggesting an evanescent, barely perceptible touch, a quality for which Scriabin's own pianism was renowned. The second poème, marked Allegro, con eleganza, con fiducia, culminates in an injunction to play 'with faith'—an implicit credo of self-belief, reflecting the composer's increasingly Nietzschean artistic stance.

Ravel | Sonatine

Composed between 1903 and 1905, Ravel's Sonatine marks a turning point in his career, following his String Quartet and Shéhérazade. After several failed attempts at the Prix de Rome, he fully embraced his own artistic direction, and this work reflects his refined, concise style, distinct from the larger-scale Miroirs, which he composed around the same time. Though its title suggests a Classical influence, Ravel does not imitate the past; rather, he blends elegance with modern harmonic colors. The first movement follows a clear sonata form, opening with a lyrical theme in octaves over a shimmering accompaniment, followed by a more delicate second theme. The minuet is graceful and poised, while the animated finale is driven by rapid, flowing notes that propel the movement to a brilliant conclusion. Dedicated to his friends Ida and Cipa Godebski, the Sonatine premiered in Lyon on March 10, 1906, performed by Paule de Lestaing, and later in Paris by Gabriel Grovlez.

Sandro Zerafa Quartet

Sandro Zerafa has always been a musician difficult to categorise. His versatility and eclecticism have allowed him to work and record in various settings, ranging from Brazilian music and mainstream jazz to more modern styles. The music he offers as a composer reflects this diverse universe, as evidenced by his five critically acclaimed albums. Sandro now presents his brand-new quartet, with whom he has recorded his 6th album, released in 2024.

The Artists

Francisco Zerafa, *piano*

Francisco Zerafa was born in Gozo in 2008 but became Parisian by the third week of his existence. He started studying piano with his mother Angele Sultana. Following lessons with Selina Wakabayashi he was admitted to the Paris Regional Conservatory (Ida Rubinstein) in the class of Elena Rozanova. He also studies organ, piano accompaniment, harmony, chamber music and music theory. This is his first concert in Malta.

Sandro Zerafa, *guitar, band frontman*

Sandro Zerafa is undeniably Malta's most prominent jazz ambassador. Based in France since 1998 he has become an active member of the Parisian jazz community and has recorded over 20 albums as a sideman and 6 as a leader. Sandro is a musician of contrasts, unclassifiable and ambivalent. His deep love for jazz tradition never hindered his penchant for search and innovation. He cites Milton Nascimento, Hampton Hawes, Jim Hall, Shirley Horn, Thelonious Monk, Joao Bosco amongst his main influences. He is equally at home in mainstream settings as in more contemporary styles.

His latest opus - a double album, epitomizes this duality. A quartet album and a solo album. « Limestone » is a homage to that warm glow of limestone which permeates Sandro's homeland - eight original compositions imbued with some references to Brazil (« Edu », « Minas », « Jardim ») and also the inevitable nod to Monk (« The Rufus Thing »), all brought to life by the incandescent playing of his comrades - Noé Huchard, Yoni Zelnik and Francesco Ciniglio. Sandro will be presenting music from this album for the 19th edition of the Malta Spring Festival.



Sandro Zerafa



CAMILLERI PREZIOSI

A D V O C A T E S

Supporter of the 19th edition of The Malta Spring Festival

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CLOSING CONCERT

Saturday 26 April 2025, 8pm
Teatru Manoel

MALTA SPRING FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

Emanuel Salvador, *leader*

Charles Sewart, *sub-leader*

Maria Conrad, *violin II section leader*

Yana Kucherova, *viola section leader*

Adam Klocek, *cello section leader*

Gjorgji Cincievski, *double bass section leader*

Dmitry Sitkovetsky, *violin solo*

Brian Schembri, *conductor*

Violins

Adriana Bec
Amira Abouzahra
Amy Le-Mar
Anastasia Scripnic
Dominic Lucian Drutac
Ella Richardson
Eva Maria Dumitru
Goulwenna Vigneron
Jisun Min
Julia Tkaczow
Kurt Falzon
Małgorzata Grzanka
Mariam Abouzahra
Natalia Wojciechowska
Paulina Parol
Paula Guerra Collar
Tómas Vigur
Victoria León Alvarez

Violas

Constanza Ikei
Lucas Conrad
Mikaela Baluyot
Oliwia Stawicka
Teresa Ferreira
Unna Nousiainen

Cellos

Claudio Alvarez
Daniel Xuereb
Emily Henderson
Iván Carillo
Kamila Łuczka
Natalia Brzezicka

Double Basses

Emir Ünlüce
Sıla Arslan

Fiorini | Pentimenti

Fiorini's *Pentimenti* turns to painting for its catalyst – in this case *pentimento*, that technique – from van Eyck, Caravaggio and Zurbarán to Picasso - whereby a canvas is altered or over-painted, providing evidence of previous or other intentions or an artist's change of mind, perspective or direction: 'a reappearance in a painting of an original drawn or painted element which was eventually painted over by the artist' (Merriam-Webster). From the Italian, the word translates into 'repentance' – though 'remorse' and 'regret', a 'contrition' for past actions or sins, also permeate Fiorini's understanding. *Pentimenti*, scored for divisi strings and two percussionists, is an essay of complex texture and sculpting, largely cyclic in organisation (the third and fourth sections or 'movements' broadly metabolising the first two). If it has a programme, none is revealed. But, Schumann/Shostakovich-like, its melodic orbit is one of entwined ciphers and climactic cryptograms, of patterns and sighs developed out of expanding/contracting intervals, Mephistophelian tritones (two solo cellos at the start, vibraphone at the finish), glimpses of Gretchen's that once were, might still be (the first *arco forte* of the second section), never that far away. Underlying the whole is a grounded tonal trajectory, with E as the bedrock – its ever-searching Eb/D# companion initially high and lonely above the void, latterly consumed in a dying aftermath of major and minor thirds.

Shostakovich | Chamber Symphony for strings op. 110a

Rudolf Barshai's arrangement of Chamber Symphony for strings, Op. 110a is a transcription of Dmitri Shostakovich's String Quartet No. 8 in C minor, Op. 110 (1960) for chamber orchestra, created with the composer's approval. The quartet was composed in an intensely brief period of three days during the summer of 1960, following Shostakovich's visit to Dresden, Germany. Deeply affected by the devastation left by the Allied bombings of February 1945, which claimed approximately 140,000 lives, Shostakovich crafted a work of profound emotional weight. The quartet was officially dedicated "To the Memory of the Victims of Fascism and War," reinforcing its association with the destruction of Dresden. However, scholars have argued that the work is highly autobiographical, representing Shostakovich's own despair and sense of personal entrapment under the Soviet regime, even resembling a musical suicide note. Despite the depth of his anguish, Shostakovich lived another fifteen years, passing away in 1975. Structured in five continuous movements, the Chamber Symphony oscillates between moments of restrained sorrow and passages of violent intensity, including

sections evoking the bombings. The composition is notably self-referential, prominently featuring the DSCH motif (D–E-flat–C–B), a musical signature Shostakovich employed throughout his oeuvre. The work is further interwoven with quotations from his Symphonies Nos. 1, 5, 8, and 10, the Piano Trio No. 2, and the revolutionary Russian song Languishing in Prison. Particularly significant is his quotation of the phrase “Tortured by merciless enslavement” from his opera Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk, underscoring the broader theme of suffering, both personal and collective. The Chamber Symphony is often regarded as a condensed musical autobiography, encapsulating key elements from Shostakovich’s compositional legacy. Its first movement is solemn and introspective, dominated by the DSCH motif and a chromatic violin melody, disrupted by the frenetic, nightmarish energy of the second movement, where the DSCH theme is forcefully articulated by the high strings. The third movement unfolds as a skeletal danse macabre, incorporating a theme from the first Cello Concerto, which re-emerges in the fourth movement alongside a Jewish melody and the folk song Languishing in Prison, both potent symbols of oppression and resilience. The final movement mirrors the opening, gradually dissipating into silence, leaving a haunting impression of desolation and unresolved anguish.

Pärt | Fratres

Arvo Pärt’s *Fratres*, composed in 1977, was one of the first compositions to emerge following his period of “creative silence” in the mid-1970s. Premiered by the Estonian early music ensemble Hortus Musicus, the work exemplifies Pärt’s (b. 1935) signature tintinnabulation technique—a compositional style rooted in triadic harmony and inspired by his extensive study of Franco-Flemish Gothic and Renaissance polyphony. Originally written for string and wind quintet, *Fratres* has undergone numerous adaptations for different instrumental configurations, all retaining the same title. The first major reworking was a set of variations for violin and piano, commissioned by the Salzburg Festival in 1980 and premiered by Gidon and Elena Kremer. Subsequent arrangements have included versions for string ensemble and percussion, string quartet, wind octet with percussion, and eight cellos, among others. The composition is structured around a recurring six-bar theme, which is systematically transposed to different pitch levels—primarily by thirds—while its melodic contours are incrementally expanded. This process emphasises repetition and patterning, hallmarks of minimalist aesthetics. Despite its structural clarity and apparent simplicity, *Fratres* produces a deeply evocative effect. Pärt himself reflected on his compositional approach, stating: “I have discovered that it



Dmitry Sitkovetsky

Brian Schembri

is enough when a single note is beautifully played. This one note, or a moment of silence, comforts me. I work with very few elements—with one voice, with two voices. I build with the most primitive materials—with the triad, with one specific tonality. The three notes of a triad are like bells. And that is why I call it tintinnabulation.” This philosophy underpins *Fratres*, where the interaction between repetition, silence, and harmonic resonance creates a meditative, timeless quality that has made the work one of Pärt’s most enduring compositions.

Tchaikovsky | Serenade for strings op. 48 in C major

In autumn 1880, Tchaikovsky began sketching a multi-movement work, initially undecided between a string quartet and a symphony. Rapidly, it evolved into the *Serenade for Strings*, which he described to Nadezhda von Meck as being composed “from an innate impulse... not devoid of true worth.” Premiered privately that same year at the Moscow Conservatory as a surprise for the composer, it entered the repertoire swiftly, reaching New York by 1885. Tchaikovsky himself conducted it in Baltimore in 1891. The first movement, *Pezzo in forma di sonatina*, pays homage to Mozart — Tchaikovsky’s favourite composer— through its classical sonatina structure. A weighty *Andante* introduction, marked by dense string textures and double stops, yields to an *Allegro* in compound metre, featuring two contrasting themes presented without development. The movement closes with a brief return of the opening material, subtly darkened by chromatic inflections. A graceful waltz follows, demonstrating Tchaikovsky’s idiomatic command of the dance through elegant phrasing and rhythmic hesitations. The third movement, *Elégie*, is the most substantial, blending lush harmonies with tonal ambiguity. A serenade-like melody, accompanied by pizzicato triplets, unfolds through contrapuntal variations before culminating in an ethereal, high-register conclusion. The finale opens with a muted, introspective introduction based on Russian folk material, preceding a spirited *Allegro*. Two folk-inspired themes are developed with characteristic ingenuity, culminating in a recall of the first movement’s introduction before a vivacious coda brings the work to a close.

The Artists

Dmitry Sitkovetsky, *violin solo*

A renaissance man and a magnetic creative force, Dmitry Sitkovetsky is recognised throughout the world for the considerable impact he makes on every aspect of musical life. A prolific recording artist, with a career spanning more than four decades, he is celebrated globally as a violinist, conductor, creator, transcriber and facilitator – holding an undisputed and venerable position in musical society as a giant personality and educator. His celebrated career is documented in an extensive discography of more than 40 recordings, reflecting the impressive breadth of his repertoire. His recording collaborators to date include such orchestras as the London Symphony, Philharmonia, and Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, under the batons of such legendary maestros as Sir Colin Davis, Mariss Jansons, Sir Neville Marriner and Lord Yehudi Menuhin. As a soloist, Sitkovetsky has performed with the world's leading orchestras, including the Berlin Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, LA Philharmonic, Leipzig Gewandhaus, New York Philharmonic, NHK Symphony and Philadelphia Orchestra, among others. He is also in high demand as a jury member, having served at such competitions as Queen Elisabeth in Brussels, Tchaikovsky in Moscow, Montreal in Canada, Indianapolis in the United States, and the George Enescu in Bucharest, where Sitkovetsky returns as the President of the Jury for the fourth time in September 2024. Sitkovetsky's name has also become synonymous with the art of transcription. His iconic orchestral and string trio versions of J.S. Bach's Goldberg Variations have taken on a life of their own – enjoying regular performances and acclaimed recordings by many of today's leading performers

Brian Schembri, *conductor*

One of the most brilliant musicians to emerge from Malta, Brian Schembri started his music studies with his father Carmelo Schembri. He later graduated in piano and conducting at the Kiev and Moscow "Tchaikovsky" Conservatories studying with A. Snegiriov, S. Dorensky, R. Kofman and G. Rozhdestvensky. Actively performing as a concert pianist, he started working as assistant conductor with Michel Plasson and Emmanuel Krivine, closely collaborating with prestigious conductors Edoardo Muller, Serge Baudo, Yuri Temirkanov, Garcia Navarro, Armin Jordan. Eventually dedicating most of his time to conducting, he became Chief Conductor of the OPFOchestra and the Orquestra Metropolitana de Lisboa, Music Director at Malta National Theatre "Teatru Manoel" and Artistic Director and

Principal Conductor of the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra. Guest conductor engagements have included the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, l'Orquestra Ciutat Barcelona, l'Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, l'Orchestre Nationale de Radio France, the Lithuanian State Symphony, the Moscow Soloists, the Novosibirsk Philharmonic, London Mozart Players, l'Orchestre National de Lyon, London Philharmonic, Nordwestdeutsche Philharmonie, the Svetlanov State Symphony, opera productions at the Hong Kong, Lubeck, Nancy and Rennes opera theatres. Soloist have included Lucia Aliberti, Jacquelyn Wagner, Jose Cura, Joseph Calleja, Gianluca Terranova, Alexandre Da Costa, Carmine Lauri, Alexander Kniazev, Sergey Antonov, Ludmila Berlinskaia, Oleg Poliansky, Balazs Szokolay, Anne Queffelec, Emma Johnson, Sergei Nakariakov with performances at the "Festival Massenet", "Octobre en Normandie", "Les Rencontres Musicales d'Evian", "Festa da Musica", "Lisboa em Festa", "Festival Music Atlantico", "Fêtes de Genève", Henley Festival", "Kings Lynn Festival", "Colmar International Festival". He has also composed scores for theatre productions at the Manoel Theatre, Teatru Strada Stretta in Malta, the Comédie Française in Paris and the Malta Pavilion at the Biennale di Venezia 2022. Since 2009 Brian Schembri has been a strong supporter of the Malta Spring Festival. CD recordings include piano sonatas by Beethoven, Schubert and Rachmaninov, works by Charles Camilleri with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Bach concertos with the European Union Chamber Orchestra and Lucia Micallef and Tansman concertos with Diego Dini Ciacci and Fabrizio Meloni and the Malta Philharmonic. Receiving critical acclaim as an artist of high caliber for his strongly passionate and lyrical performances, he has forged a strong reputation for a moving profound musicality.

Malta Spring Festival Orchestra

The Malta Spring Festival Orchestra is an ensemble formed by outstanding string students from across the globe, brought together in Malta to participate in solo, chamber, and orchestral masterclasses. The orchestra is the result of a collaboration between young musicians and distinguished tutors, providing a platform for these students to refine their technical skills and musical understanding. The orchestra performs a varied repertoire, spanning both traditional and contemporary works. It serves as a space for students to engage with the practice of orchestral performance and to gain experience under the guidance of experienced musicians and pedagogues.



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