# THE RECORD PRODUCER IN MALTESE MUSIC: A CRITICAL REFLECTION

**RENE' MAMO**

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of South Wales/ Prifysgol De Cymru for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

March 2017

## Abstract

The following thesis presents the author's reflective process on his role as a record producer in Maltese music. This work is the outcome of his twenty-two year career in sound engineering and record production, where he focuses on his self-produced albums and projects in the classical genre, in addition to his latest contribution to the music scene in Malta. Influenced by writers and producers such as Zak (2001), Gracyk (1996) and Howlett (2009), the study takes an auto-ethnographic approach through which, the author provides a portfolio of three albums, produced with different Maltese *bel canto* artists and classical musicians, and reflects on the experiences and challenges during the making of these records.

This research examines the cultural constraints and phenomena that are experienced during the making of classical music in Malta. It also explores how technology effects the Maltese musician's perception of a recording session. Finally, the study analyses whether the practices reported in the case studies conform to the author's characterization of the classical record producer as a Surrogate Orchestra Conductor. These evaluations, together with other empirical inquiries aim to present the reader with a unique investigation area in Maltese music from a production perspective.

## DEDICATION

**To my beloved parents Saviour and Connie.**

**Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors Professor Paul Carr and Dr Robert Smith for their professional advice, encouragement and support. My appreciation goes to Mr Lloyd George who was the first person to inspire me to follow this doctorate path in music production.

I would like to thank Dr Philip Ciantar, Ms Mary Ann Cauchi and Ms Moira Azzopardi Barbieri for their valued time in proofreading. Thanks also go to Ms Maria Gauci for her constant moral support during the writing of this thesis.

Special thanks also go to those who accepted to take part as interviewees in this research. I would also like to thank all Maltese musicians and artists who I have worked with throughout my music career who directly and indirectly contributed to this work.

Most importantly I would like to thank my parents for their endless support in my lifetime music journey.

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# INTRODUCTION

## 0.1 Aims and Objectives

> Is it just an accident of technology that for some centuries certain manually skilled specialists were needed to intervene, as it were, between music inventors and their audience?
>
> (Godlovitch, 1992)[1]

The aim of this critical commentary is to present and add to the body of knowledge in recording practice my work and experience as a record producer and engineer. This research study, through the presented portfolio, reflects critically on the role of the record producer in Maltese classical music. It investigates how Maltese classical music performers think, behave, and act during a music production and how all this coalesces with the producer and his role in the context of Malta.

These phenomena are analysed with particular focus on two fields of interest:

(a) the impact of the social and cultural context of Malta on the creative process of classically-trained musicians during an ongoing production;

(b) the technical practice employed by the author within the psycho-cultural constraints that such artists carry with them in the recording studio.

With these themes in mind the objectives of this critical commentary are:

- To explore the effect of the complex process of recording on the consciousness of musicians and performers in the context of a small island state such as that of Malta.
- To investigate the socio-cultural constraints brought by the classically trained Maltese artists and musicians to a recording project.

[1] Cited in Gracyk, T. (1997) 'Listening to Music: Performance and Recordings', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 55. No2, Perspectives on the Arts and Technology*, pp. 139 – 150. [Online]. Available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/431260 (Accessed: 10 May 2016).

- To analyze the impact of technology on classical musicians and artists in the recording context.
- To examine how classical artists and composers coming from a small island such as the Maltese environment view and respond to the record producers and, consequently, what kind of relationship they establish with them.
- To reflect whether decisions and actions, judgments and creative choices taken as an engineer and producer during the recordings, conform to a 'Surrogate Orchestra Conductor' as opposed to a 'Machine Operator.'
- To develop new and important knowledge to the public domain by contributing and stimulating the discussion on classical music production in Malta with emphasis on my personal perspective as the creator of this work.

### 0.2 Portfolio of Work

This critical commentary reviews the recording process of three albums I produced featuring various Maltese singers, musicians and composers. Each project was produced under different conditions and situations, with particular challenges and solutions and therefore, in turn, resonates in distinctive ways from each other. These distinctions are discussed in the case studies. The three selected albums were all produced between 2013 and 2015, and represent a sample of the recording activity in the Maltese classical music domain. Despite the limited opportunities compared with the UK and other larger European countries, Malta still boasts some fine classical artists and composers. With a different economy scale and a distinctive music industry than the UK, Maltese musicians, especially in the classical genre, strive to find ways to attract, maintain and increase their followers. Amongst other ways, artists promote themselves in concerts locally and abroad. Pianist Joanne Camilleri

argues that:

> Since Malta is a small island, the variety of audiences for the different concerts is limited, with a typical case scenario being that one finds the same people attending the different classical concerts. This is also why a concert programme is not repeated in different venues on the island, because the audience attracted to the programme is going to be the same every time. Having said this, musicians try to find different ways of increasing and widening their audiences, by trying to target as many tourists visiting the island as possible.[2]

These last few years marked an increase in the number of concerts held by solo and chamber groups in various venues around the island. Above all, very few Maltese professionals take the risk of hitting the local music market by recording an album. Financial constraints and poor sales are amongst the common concerns of the Maltese musician. The three albums, submitted as part of the portfolio are examples of those artists who strived and either took a personal risk or were supported by an established organization. These records are distinct from one another, each with its own story and resonance.

*Riflessi* (2015) is an album by the Maltese soprano Miriam Cauchi, who is one of Malta's leading singers, "possessing a beautiful, clear and very expressive voice which she uses expertly and to the best advantage" (Times of Malta, 2015). [3] The album is the first ever collection of Maltese art songs, which according to Cauchi "is all about Maltese identity". The record "certainly offer[s] something fresh and original to the local performing scene" (ibid.). All compositions are written and composed by Malta's finest composers and authors. The album was highly praised in a concert launch at the Manoel Theatre, Valletta in June 2015.[4]

*In Bach's Footsteps* (2013) is a solo piano recording by Joanne Camilleri.

[2] Information taken from the Interview Questionnaire with Dr Joanne Camilleri. See Appendix 1 for the full interview.
[3] Information taken from 'Reflections in Maltese Art Songs', *The Times of Malta,* June 2015. [Online] Available at: http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20150624/arts-entertainment/Reflections-in-Maltese-art-songs.573850
[4] The Manoel Theatre in Valletta, is one of the most prestigious places, which every Maltese classical musician aspires to perform in. Build by the Knights of St John in 1732 it is noted as "the oldest European theatre [which is] still functioning in its original [sic] " (Azzopardi, Bruni and Vella Bondin, 2007, cited in Buttigieg, 2015, p. 38).

According to Vella Gregory (2014), Camilleri is considered as "one of the leading pianists on the island" who performs both in Malta and around Europe. Despite Bach being a difficult composer to interpret, Camilleri managed to overcome this with great skill. The album is a "wholly Maltese product, but produced to the very highest international standards", said Vella Gregory (2014). *In Bach's Footsteps* also topped the local Maltese chart sales in February 2014 according to the Maltese newspaper *ItTorca* (2014) [see Plate 1].

The third album, *Aprile* (2016), is by the Maltese soprano Gillian Zammit, mezzo-soprano Clare Ghigo and harpist Britt Arend, three names that are leading figures in Maltese contemporary music. The project was commissioned by the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra board to promote top Maltese opera singers. The album was launched in a concert in Frankfurt in November 2015 and locally at the Manoel Theatre in February 2016. The works comprise a collection of Mediterranean music including compositions by Tosti, Granados and Debussy. The uniqueness of this ensemble is a fine example of how two distinct voices can blend with the delicate sound of the harp.

Other classical projects that I produced during these last few years, are cross-referenced and compared with these three albums to support my claims and arguments. These range from solo piano albums, chamber instrumental records to orchestral concert mixes by the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra.

l-aktar riċenti ħarġu ***'Iron Man: The Best of Black Sabbath'***, bħala sapport għall-kunċerti li kellhom 2012 Reunion Tour, marbuta mal-album b'mużika oriġinali, riċenti tagħhom, ***'13'***.

***'Iron Man: The Best of Black Sabbath'*** huwa l-istess lista tal-album ***'Greatest Hits'*** (2009) li jinkludi Osbourne u Ward, għajr għal waħda.

Mal-kumplament, jinkludi wkoll *"Evil Woman (Don't Play Your Game With Me)"*, l-ewwel diska li ħarġu Black Sabbath, ma' diski bħal *"The Wizard"*, *"Iron Man"*, *"Never Say Die"*, *"Sabbath Bloody Sabbath"* u oħrajn.

*(Tikketta: Universal)*

## D'Amato Top 15

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | In Bach's Footsteps | Joanne Camilleri |
| 2. | Loved Me Back to Life | Celine Dion |
| 3. | Amore | Joseph Calleja |
| 4. | Velvet | Nadine Axisa |
| 5. | Global Warning | Pitbull |
| 6. | Glory Road | David J. Sherry |
| 7. | Britney Jeans | Britney Spears |
| 8. | Midnight Memories | One Direction |
| 9. | Iron Man: The Best of... | Black Sabbath |
| 10. | Bangerz | Miley Cyrus |
| 11. | A Musical Affair | Il Divo |
| 12. | Feels Like Home | Sheryl Crow |
| 13. | The Last Ship | Sting |
| 14. | British Hit Parade | Art.Var. |
| 15. | Crossroads: Eric Clapton Guitar Festival | Art. Var. |

Kompetizzjoni

• **Min kien l-ewwel kantant tal-grupp Black Sabbath?**

Tweġiba: .....

Isem: ..... Telefon: .....

Indirizz: .....

.....

L-ewwel tweġiba tajba li tinfetaħ nhar l-Erbgħa tingħata voucher ta' €10 li jis-sarraf mingħand D'Amato Record Shop, Valletta.

Plate 1: Caption from the Maltese newspaper *It-Torca*, February 2014 illustrating a Top 15 record sales table including *In Bach's Footsteps* as best seller of the week.

### 0.3 Methodology

The critical commentary applies on a Reflective Practice Study approach from my perspective as a record producer and engineer. The study is based on the work I have done in my recording studio based in Malta.[5] In this sense, an auto-ethnographic approach has been adopted, through which processes, my recollections of "what I was thinking" and motivations are investigated and conclusions reached (Arnold, 2013, p. 16). Creswell (2009) contends that such analysis is an "interpretive inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation about what they see, hear and understand" (ibid., p. 17).

[5] This study marks my twentieth year as a record producer and engineer in Malta, four of which were spent in UK for study and music related work purposes [see Plate 4].

An influential auto-ethnographic study for this critical commentary was Mike Howlett's PhD thesis, "The Record Producer as Nexus: Creative Inspiration, Technology and the Recording Industry" (2009). Howlett presents a detailed report on the processes of five recordings from his perspective as producer. The study illustrated that the producer can be represented as a 'nexus' between the artist's creative inspirations, the technology of the recording studio and the commercial intentions of the record company.

Using Howlett's own definition, the auto-ethnography proposed here refers to an "autobiographical or narrative genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (2009, p. 4). It is an approach to research and writing that goes further than just telling stories and provides a study "that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience" (Ellis *et al*. 2011, p. 1). This critical commentary takes the form of a 'reflexive' ethnographic study as it "documents ways…[the] researcher changes as a result of doing fieldwork" (ibid., p. 5).

Duncan (2004, p. 3) states that the postmodern approach to auto-ethnographic 'art' is that of researching from the inside where the researcher is the insider. This philosophy is employed throughout this study considering my presence as a producer in (nearly) every stage of the three albums discussed in the case study chapters. Such an approach, together with a review of the available literature on music production to date, sheds light on how Maltese classical performers and musicians behave during a production and what that behavior says about the consciousness and cultural practice of classically-trained musicians in small island countries like Malta.

Everyone has their own stories and version of personal experiences. One has to be careful though when documenting and understanding what happened to

him/herself from such a personal viewpoint. Arnold (2013, p. 18) refers to Duncan, who notes that for an auto-ethnographic study to be legitimate it must deliver justifiable analyses based on multiple sources of evidence and must not consist solely of the researcher's opinions but also must be supported by other documents and facts that can support those opinions. Data collection and analysis are ethnographic methods that distinguish auto-ethnographic studies from other storytelling methodologies, such as autobiographical and narrative research (Duncan, 2004, p. 5). Multiple sources for this study are the original recordings, related literature, interviews with singers, composers and conductors and my own experience as producer and engineer. I also present computer screen images of multi-track sessions, photographs of on-site recording sessions, published articles, and personal communication related to the recordings.[6]

This research method revolves around classical music; a genre that forms part of what Bourdieu refers to the 'field of restricted production' (Johnson in Bourdieu, 1993, p. 7). This field – a theoretical notion derived by Bourdieu to describe how the social world is divided – concerns what is normally referred to as 'high' art, and not aimed for the large-scale market.[7] A degree of symbolic capital including prestige, consecration and artistic celebrity, drives the agents (artists) in this cultural space (ibid.). Johnson continues to explain that in a restricted production field:

> "economic profit is normally disavowed at least by the artists themselves), and the hierarchy of authority is based on different forms of symbolic profit, eg. a profit of disinterestedness, or the profit one has on seeing oneself (or being seen) as one who is not searching for profit" (ibid.).

The restricted production field, like in any other dynamic space, carries what the Bourdieusian framework refers to as a *habitus* – "a practical sense that inclines

[6] There are no recordings of the exact conversations during the tracking of these records. This research study was proposed and drafted after the recording of *Aprile* in March 2015.
[7] The restricted and large-scale fields structure the field of cultural production.

agents [musicians and myself as the producer] to act and react in specific situations in a manner that is not always calculated" (ibid., p. 5). The *habitus* in relation to the artists and producer's interactions with the field is analysed through the case studies in Chapters 3 to 5.

A simple short interview questionnaire was presented to the artists, musicians and composers who were involved in the three case studies.[8] This included general questions on the music market in Malta, their views on the technology in record making and my role in their album project.[9] Many of these responses have been directly quoted in this research to disclose the outlook of the participants and shed light on the link between this restricted production field and the contributors' *habitus*.

Important key issues in the quality of an auto-ethnographic study are the aspects of reliability and validity (Ellis *et.al*. 2011, p. 7). It is difficult to recall events in a way that represents exactly how they were lived and felt, and one often finds different interpretations of the same experiences (Tullis Owen *et al*. 2009, in Ellis *et.al.* 2011, p. 7). This fact was noticeable during the analyses of some participants' interview responses. Knowing that their responses were going to be documented, some of the given comments and views might have even been coloured and biased when compared to the researcher's perspective.

### 0.4 Maltese Culture and Society

Malta is a small Mediterranean island country with a population of around 400,000,[10] one of the most densely populated countries worldwide. It is an independent republic,

[8] See Appendix 1. The list also includes participants who are into the Maltese classical field.
[9] Despite the consent, enthusiasm and encouragement to do this research, two of the artists from the case study albums decided not to contribute in this interview questionnaire.
[10] Malta is a name given to an archipelago, Malta and Gozo together with a smaller island of Comino on which only one family is known to live. Both Malta and Gozo each have their own distinct social and cultural identity (Mamo, 2012, p. 3).

but is part of the Commonwealth of Nations, having been a British colony from 1800 to 1964 and a full member state in the European Union since 2004. The Maltese culture presents a gamut of assimilated traditions, beliefs and practices of different foreign societies and rulers who ruled the island in the past including the Phoenicians, Romans, Moors, Normans, Knights of St John, French and the British. Such cultural interactions and the island's geographical features that define Maltese society are pivotal to the Island's culture and identity. Its strong traditions, which might seem different to other Mediterranean countries, can also be seen as similar in many aspects.

Clark (2012, p. 93) argues that villages and towns in Malta are "face-to-face communities where persons know each other by name and also know many personal details about each other". He asserts that life in Maltese communities results in what he refers to as "multiplex relationships" which makes the aspect of one's honour a matter of utmost significance, a phenomenon likely to manifest itself and control social behavior in countries with multiplex relationships. Busatta (2006, p. 2) quotes Pitt-Rivers (1968, 1977) that "honour is the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of society". This social issue and others including family pressures, upbringing and education amongst others forge the cultural nature and consciousness of the Maltese and, by extension, that of the classical music culture in particular. By implication, the artist goes into the recording studio with his or her own cultural background. That background can effect the convoluted interaction with the producer, who is also shaped by his own cultural and social context. Anxiety, the way mistakes are tackled in the recording sessions and, as discussed in the case study chapters of this research, secrecy during the making of the records, can all be a consequence of this phenomenon.

### 0.5 Art Musical Culture in Malta

History shapes the musical culture of a country. One cannot detach from a country's culture, as culture is a result of the historical development of a nation. It is not the intention of this study to explore in detail Maltese tradition and history but it is helpful at this stage, to highlight what are the main factors that molded the Maltese art musical culture. Vella Bondin (1997, p. 1) argues that Maltese art music heritage was mostly based upon Italian models. Malta and Italy are neighboring countries with very strong historical relations. Italian opera was one of the most popular musical performances one could find in the two main theatres in Valletta, the Maltese capital city, up to the Second World War.[11]

A large number of sacred musical compositions also dominate the Maltese musical heritage. Malta was mostly a Roman Catholic country with local composers having appointments such as church musicians and concentrating on composing sacred music. This huge liturgical catalogue is found in Maltese churches and in other private collections around the island. Vella Bondin states that he would put the liturgical content as high as 75% of the Maltese 'art' music catalogue and, according to him, this percentage would have been higher if it had not been for the works of what he referred to as 'new era' contemporary composers whose works were 'theatre' oriented (ibid.). Vella Bondin also argues that Carmelo Pace (1906-1993),[12] Charles Camilleri (1931-2009)[13] and Joseph Vella (born 1931) are the three most frequently performed post-second world war composers. All three composers were and are still

[11] Apart from the Manoel Theatre in Valletta, Malta had a second venue for large performances, the Royal Opera House built by Edward Barry in 1866, unfortunately destroyed in 1942 during World War II.

[12] My latest to date classical production is *Piano Pastels* (2016), a solo piano collection by Carmelo Pace performed by Ramona Zammit Formosa. See Chapter 6, Section 6.2, for further discussion on this.

[13] Charles Camilleri was one of the tutors and my personal supervisor for my B.Ed (Hons) thesis *The Guitar, Its Mediterranean origins and its influence in Classical Music* (1994).

very influential through their teaching to many of the upcoming contemporary composers.[14] These composers are slowly but dynamically contributing to the body of contemporary Maltese music. Operas and symphonic concerts are still well attended by a middle-class and elite audience whereas traditional music festivals and concerts, which are very popular in Maltese villages, are related to the working class society.[15]

For the last decade, the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra has been instrumental in bringing classical music closer to the general public. Its busy season includes a series of concert events, which ranges from Baroque to contemporary twentieth century music, however, the orchestra also includes performances with light, crossover and even pop repertoire in order to attract a wider audience.

### 0.6 The Machine Operator …or not?

From a musician's perspective, a record producer may sometimes be seen as a "machine operator" whose job is to wire some microphones into a computer and press the record button. However, the record producer's role goes beyond this term and there are various definitions in today's music production literature to define such a role. Some of these are reviewed and discussed in Chapter 2.

According to Andrew Cornall the producer's role differs between different music genres (Burgess, 2002, p. 571). Cornall states that:

> The fundamental difference between classical and pop is that classical producers are primarily there to get someone else's musical interpretation down on tape and are not part of the creative team to the extent where they are responsible for the (orchestra's) sound.

[14] Camilleri and Vella are featured in the album *Riflessi*. See Chapter 3.
[15] In 2008, the Ex-Education and Cultural Minister Dolores Cristina stated that she was against making performances "exclusive to the more elite sectors of society". Information taken from: 'Classical Music at the Manoel – An Expensive Evening?', *The Malta Independent*, 9 June 2009 [Online]. Available at: http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2009-06-14/news/classical-music-at-the-manoel-an-expensive-evening-226327/ (Accessed: 14 October 2016).

This statement is challenged in Chapters 3 to 5 by personal production experience. Modern classical record productions, like other music styles, are a 'representation' of the actual performance.[16] The classical producer achieves this representation by using recording techniques, which might be similar to practices used in pop and rock genres, in order to get a more focused sound result.[17] Zagorski-Thomas (2014, p. 157) beautifully refers to music production as "sonic cartoons". The author explains how this "artificial clarity" is a "distortion designed to influence our perception and interpretation". Similarly, a producer shapes sound, at times by exaggerating certain aspects of the mix, such as clarity and definition, so as to influence the listener's perception.

A record producer is an agent that makes decisions within a structured environment (McIntyre, 2007, p. 7). Zagorski-Thomas (2014, p. 613) claims that decision-making in the studio is a complex phenomenon and because the recording process involves a different workflow than rehearsal performances, there are decisions that are completely out of the hands of the artists. Contrary to Cornall's claim, classical productions can also include artistic decisions from the producer about the quality of the musical performance. These decisions are taken both during the recording and during the editing process. The producer, for instance, can facilitate directions in tempo and phrasing during a recording session. In the studio, the producer is responsible for creative decisions such as 'staging' and 'conceptual blending' of sounds amongst other artistic decisions taken during the editing sessions.

[16] Zagorski-Thomas (2014, p. 30) defines recorded music as a "representational form of art". This concept is further discussed in Section 6.1, Painting with Sound.
[17] Focused recording is a modern approach used in classical recordings. This is discussed in more detail in the Literature Review in Chapter 2.

Details of these applied techniques will be documented in more detail in the case studies. [18]

Even though, as is documented in Chapters 3 to 5, classical artists think of the producer as 'a machine operator', they still need the 'one' who brings all together and 'conducts' the whole production process till the very end, that is when the 'stop' button is pressed in the final mixing stage. This critical commentary, through a detailed analysis and self-reflection on the presented project albums, proposes the role of the classical record producer more as a Surrogate Orchestra Conductor than just an operator, where the producer is similar to a conductor who directs and unifies the project**.**

### 0.7 "Leave-it-to-the-engineer" Syndrome

It is not unusual in classical music to edit together parts of different takes. The various recorded parts of different sections are carefully selected and glued together to get an uninterrupted performance made up of 'snapshots of live performances' (Toynbee, quoted in Butler, 2014, p. 34). However, some production literature has reservations about how far one can go in editing classical music. Hein (2011), for instance, argues that this practice is viewed as "disreputable and even shameful".[19] Zak III (2001, p. 56) gives a well-detailed account from the early twentieth century phenomena of sound capture and manipulation with specific reference to classical music. While some saw the advantages of the technological 'fusion' in the music-making process, others looked at the method and process as "dishonest tricky, rendering the performance inauthentic or worse" (ibid.).

[18] 'Staging' is the term used for the treatment of sound to create "the impression of real and imaginary space through the production process". (Zagorski-Thomas, 2014, p. 129).
[19] Hein goes further by arguing that he has never heard any one admitting using note-by-note splicing or auto-tune (ibid.).

This thesis explores the editing procedure applied to the three albums in the portfolio. This qualitative examination process shows how, in many instances, the performers and singers relied on the technological side of the process during recording and also in the editing sessions. My role in many instances was of translating the performer's constraints, such as lack of recording experiences, preparation, and psycho-cultural issues into technicalities. Although anecdotal, I remember clearly an episode during a recording session of *Riflessi*, when one of the chamber musicians said to the others, '*do not worry, play as if you are in a rehearsal, Rene [myself] will fix all this.*' This attitude was also experienced in other classical projects and it illustrates the approach that some performers might take during a recording session. Zagorski-Thomas (2014, p. 581) states that:

> Performers often describe sessions in ways that are more reminiscent of rehearsals than performances, fragmented, repetitive and boring, rather than the comparatively short and intensive experience of the concert experience.

The Chapters 3 to 5 include analysis of different situations showing how in certain events, 'remedial' editing such as note-to-note correction had to be applied, resulting in a heavy amount of what Goodman (1968 cited in Zak III, 2001, p. 21) refers to as an 'autographic' process.[20] Katz (in Butler, 2014, p. 34) notes that such flawless recordings affect the expectations with which both audiences and artists approach concerts. The audiences are expecting more from the performer as many tend to evaluate his or her performance ability through the technological medium of a record.

[20] The term 'remedial' is used by Gardner (2016, p. 77) to define "invisible mending edits…[which] are meant to be seamless and inaudible, presenting the listener with the impression of a real-time event or musical performance".

### 0.8 Structure

The following critical commentary is presented in two parts. The first part, Chapter 1, commences with a concise narrative about the author's two decades experience behind the mixing desk as an engineer and producer in Malta. Chapter 2 focuses on the contextual evaluation of the producer in the classical music scenario. Various references from record producers and writers in the musicology of record production are analyzed. This chapter also presents the author's own analysis and hypothesis of the record producer as a Surrogate Orchestra Conductor.

The second part of this thesis focuses on the portfolio of productions. It includes accounts of three albums, previously introduced, with reference to other works, all produced in the span of four years. As an auto-ethnographic study, these chapters will document the making of these albums supported by sources of evidence to support the author's views. Each document includes the recording process, editing and mixing stages followed by a discussion and reflective analysis on whether the role of the producer in that project conforms to the author's concept of a surrogate orchestra conductor.

The various experiences presented in these three case studies lead to the concluding chapter which includes an analysis of the latest album to date, *Piano Pastels* (2016), which can be seen to represent an alternative way forward into Maltese classical music production. This section, together with a delineation of the common phenomena encountered in all presented album-projects, encompasses reflections on the role of the record producer in Malta.

# CHAPTER 1

## Thoughts on the Past

### 1.1 I want to be … a Sound Engineer!

> There is no passion to be found in playing small—in settling for a life that is less than you are capable of living.
>
> Nelson Mandela

This chapter defines the role of the classical record producer. It focuses on the autobiographical characteristic of this auto-ethnographic research study by selectively writing about my twenty years experience in music making. A concise autobiography was created after reflecting deeply on past professional life experiences and by consulting newspapers, journals, internet links and published recordings. This personal narrative includes a particular cultural identity, which illustrates aspects and characteristics of the Maltese music culture.

My passion for music making flourished at an age when Malta was heavily influenced (and still is) by music festivals especially the Eurovision Song Contest.[1] Since the early 60s song contests have promoted Maltese pop songs to a general audience. These events were inspired by the popular Italian San Remo festival, a song contest that used to be aired on Italian television RAI.[2] The use of the word 'festival' to describe these local music events is a direct influence from Italian media. My first festival experience dates back to 1996 as a classical guitar performer when I was asked to play live in the Malta Song for Europe festival.[3] I was immediately captivated by the atmosphere during production week: the top local artists under the same roof, the stage setup and, above all, the 'big sound' which was controlled by the

[1] Malta has been participating in the Eurovision Song Contest every year since 1991 after an absence of sixteen years. According to the well-known Maltese blogger Daphne Caruana Galizia (2016), up to this day, winning this contest is like reaching the 'Holy Grail'.

[2] Information taken from 'Song Contests in Malta.' Online: http://www.m3p.com.mt/wiki/Song_Contests_in_Malta (Accessed: 23 July 2016).

[3] Till 1997 all Maltese song contests were performed with a live orchestra.

'machine operator' who was in the middle of the hall.[4] Having asked around how one can participate and make music for this event, one of the festival composers suggested getting a home recording studio set up so as to build and record my own songs. I purchased an E70 Roland keyboard, an Atari 1040 computer loaded with Cubase software and a Fostex 4 track recorder. I still recall the moment when I switched on the computer for the very first time and said to myself *"I want to become…a sound engineer!"* In those days in Malta, to be a sound engineer meant that one had to have a recording studio (basically, all studios were home setups) and do all music related work including building up MIDI music arrangements, recording, mixing, mastering and, above all, composing your own songs.

My first song contest participation was in 1997 when I submitted an original song to one of the two main festivals in the Maltese language "Ghanja tal Poplu" – The People's Ode Song – which, surprisingly, won the event giving me an immediate positive reputation as a composer.[5] A typical festival song structure can be compared to the old 'Tin Pan Alley' form. According to Wall (2003, p. 28), Tin Pan Alley style, a name given to commercial song writing throughout the first half of the twentieth century, provided "a basic pattern for a song-based musical composition with 'catchy' repeated sections or choruses for the audiences to easily remember the song". The ballad form of writing was very popular with Maltese festival enthusiasts and composers.[6]

[4] Prior to this event, my musical exposure was limited only to classical tuition at the Johann Strauss School of Music Malta and solo performances, which I occasionally gave as a guitar performer.
[5] There were three main song contests in Malta in the late 90s: the Malta Song for Europe (Eurovision entry contest), the Ghanja tal-Poplu and The Festival of Maltese Song. The latter was abolished in 2003.
[6] 'Eternity' was a typical Malta Song for Europe Ballad that I composed in the year 2001. In all song contests the singers sang live with a backing track. The event was held at the Malta Conference Centre in Valletta. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-xPhJXoQPc (Accessed: 24 September 2016).

The accumulation of what Bourdieu (1993) refers to as cultural capital[7] and composing for local song contests contributed to the studio's popularity among Maltese composers and singers. For this reason, the recording facility had to be upgraded by investing in new equipment, installing new software to cater for the workload and also to compete with the other five or six studios that one could find around the country in the late 90s [see Plate 2]. The new recording setup provided the opportunity to deal with the majority of local Maltese artists at the time.[8] Throughout the years, works varied from festival songs, voice-overs, opening signature songs for various Maltese television programs, and musicals.[9] Many so called 'composers' used to come to the studio with a cassette tape containing an *a cappella* demo without any sense of rhythm or key. From this demo I was expected to create a track, which included the MIDI song arrangement, recording, mixing and mastering. This track was then submitted to the abovementioned song contests.[10] It used to be a personal challenge to create a completely new composition from just a hummed tune. If it were not for the voice recording sessions, these projects would have been my daily solitary studio routine. Composers and authors hardly ever interfered in my arrangements, or the recording and mixing. Conversely, according to Zak III (2001, p. 163), a record making practice should be "intrinsically a collaborative process involving the efforts of a 'composition team' whose members [in this case composers and singers] interact in various ways". Composers relied on my knowledge and experience in song arrangement. They were paying for a service and many preferred

[7] Cultural capital is the form of knowledge one acquires through being part of a particular social class, in this case, the Maltese music popular scene.
[8] Mark Tonna, Leontine, Nadine Axisa and Julie Zahra were among popular Maltese artists who have formed part of the music scene since the late 90s.
[9] A partial discography is listed in Appendix 3.
[10] 'Wahdek ma Tkun Qatt' – 'You Never Be Alone' was a track created from a single line melody without any form of harmony or tempo. The composer requested a full orchestral arrangement. The finished track was submitted to one of the main song contests Festival Indipendenza – Independence Festival in 2001 and won the event. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDfe7Nve4C8 (Accessed: 26 July 2016).

not to contribute to their own work. At times I was referred to other local song arrangements as an example to follow to build up their song.

My first Malta Song for Europe entry as a composer was in 1998 with the song 'Children of Mother Earth' sung by one of the established singers Leontine.[11] There was no particular sequence in the way that these original songs were created but main ideas or hooks were normally drafted on a guitar or on a MIDI keyboard. The singer was selected before structuring the main arrangement. In this way I could work using the right key if any additional live instruments were going to be included in the track. Separate authors penned the lyrics and were usually left free to decide on the subject.

For the next six years, I had regular entries in this festival and in the other two Maltese song contests, participating as a composer with songs interpreted by various

Plate 2: The control room setup used between 1998 till 2000.

[11] The Mediterranean feel was one of my characteristics in song writing. 'Children of Mother Earth' was a good example of this identity. Composed and arranged by myself in 1998, the song was performed live with a backing track at the Mediterranean Conference Centre in Valletta. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUVy2FHg4yg (Accessed: 26 July 2016).

local established Maltese singers.[12] The Malta Song for Europe contest was "the biggest annual music event and was eagerly awaited by practically everyone on the island" (Borg, 2001). Up to this day, this contest is more than a song festival, it is an annual event that keeps people talking throughout the year and is an important part of the Maltese culture.[13]

An incentive for the composers and artists was the release of a CD compilation, which included the 16 songs that made it to the final [see Plate 3]. The making of these albums was one reason to take part in this contest. Malta had a limited and restricted music market. These compilations were a means for the local composers to publish their works.[14]

There were two eliminatory stages before the final live festival event. A judging panel made up of Maltese and foreign 'experts' would then select the winning song during the contest. An audience tele-voting system was later introduced alongside the traditional judging system. One main concern with many participants, including myself, was that some Maltese judges knew some of the participants on a personal level. At the time, Borg (2001) questioned whether, "taking into consideration the fact that everybody knows everybody here, is it possible that the judgment of the Maltese judges is not coloured in any way?"

[12] 'Hdejk' – 'Near You' is believed to be the most popular song of all my personal compositions. Despite not winning the contest, it survived the test of time as one of the most popular songs as it is still heard regularly on local radios. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZj_W9Xoueo (Accessed: 26 July 2016).

[13] Information taken from 'The Eurovision in Malta'. Online: http://www.malta.com/en/coverage/2012/malta-and-the-eurovision (Accessed: 9 August 2016).

[14] I considered myself more as a songwriter than a composer. In Malta, anyone who could hum a tune was referred to as a composer. In my opinion, this title should be only attributed only to classical music composition.


Plate 3: Some front covers used for the Malta Song for Europe and the International Maltese Song CD compilations.

One had to experience these events to understand the significance of participating in such Maltese song contests, there being no available literature or articles related to the continuous political undercurrents attributed to these festivals. The recording studio was like a confessional booth where artists and composers expressed their concerns but were not strong enough to stand up and throw down the gauntlet outside the four walls. By 2004, I was seriously considering abandoning the Maltese music scene and pursuing my production studies abroad. Despite the ongoing studio projects, which were keeping the studio alive and financially viable, I was facing a lack of professional fulfillment, since certain ambitions could never come true. At the same time I was eager to learn more about making music. I had felt that I could go beyond the Maltese 'sound engineer' role and was capable of a more professional output. There were no music production classes or technology education

courses on the island – it was all learnt by trial and error. My last Song For Europe entry was in 2004 with a country rock track, 'One-way Love',[15] after which without any regrets but one of the hardest decisions, I left Malta to explore music production in the United Kingdom [see Plate 4].

Most of my past compositions and productions[16] are referenced in the Malta Music Memory Project (M3P).[17] This endeavour, launched in 2010, serves "to capture a living archive of past, present and future works of interest in connection to music and associated form of art in Malta" (Sant, 2011, p. 1). This is one of the very few sources available on Maltese popular music, which include my works from the late 90s and the early 2000s.

> The lack of a substantial body research on the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, coupled with an absence of long-term preservation strategies for Maltese Music and associated arts, makes it possible for cultural memory…to fade into anecdotal legend at best or become obscured, forgotten or even lost. (Sant, 2015, p. 115).

In 2008, I returned to Malta and went back behind the mixing desk the following year.[18] To my surprise a number of new recording studios had emerged during my absence from the island. Even more, musicians had started to produce their own music at home without the need of a professional producer or a sound engineer. Pras and Guastavino (2011) claim that such a phenomenon is associated with the modern technological advances in modern music recording and production. This offered a greater challenge to re-establish myself back on the local scene. It also

[15] Using multi-track recording I used to play all the live instruments except for the drums where I used MIDI mapping and sampling techniques. 'One-way Love', which reflected my interest in country rock music, included a pedal steel guitar sound, which was simulated using an ordinary glass test tube. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rpq58WdNDHE (Accessed: 26 July 2016).

[16] Reflecting on my past experience I now refer to these works – including the catalogue of works for other artists and composers – as 'productions'. My role during the process of making these songs was that of a producer and not of an arranger and engineer.

[17] See http://www.m3p.com.mt/wiki/René_Mamo (Accessed: 26 September 2016).

[18] I was awarded a Masters Degree in Music Engineering and Production at Glamorgan University in Wales, lectured for a year Music Technology modules at the same university and had some freelance productions including engineering work and sound design.

entailed exploring a new niche to be able to sustain my profession. The 'sound engineer' phenomenon was now phased out and every recording studio owner was now referred to as 'the producer'. Beinhorn (2015, p. 24) argues that the title 'producer' determines a "specific hierarchy and being the leader of a project can be very seductive for some people".

April 1, 2006

MUSIC

# Some production academy

Local songwriter **Renè Mamo**, now resident in Wales, has discovered a new pop world, as **Eric Montfort** found out lately

A COUPLE of years ago, Renè Mamo took a very important decision in relocating to Wales, and take up a music production course at Glamorgan University. This young songwriter, whose compositions had already made their mark in various song festivals, decided to broaden his understanding of popular music even though he knew that the scene in the UK is fiercely competitive when compared to our own highly competitive but relatively smug scene. Mr Mamo, who was already quite familiar with music education here, having taught the subject at our local secondary schools, went to Glamorgan University, took up a Masters in engineering and production and completely changed his attitude and perceptions.

"Through this intensive course, I realised that music production is as much important as the artiste himself," he added when I interviewed him lately. Back in 1984, top producer Mutt Lange told International Musician that it would be easier for a tea-boy with a good sense of the pop scene rather than a BSc graduate without any idea of pop music whatsoever. "It is basically a love and commitment for music that should fuel someone aspiring for this job." After all, the producer's world has changed so much over the years.

In the music industry, a music producer has many roles, among them controlling the recording sessions, coaching and guiding the performers, and supervising the recording, mixing and mastering processes. This has been a major function of producers since the inception of sound recording, but in the latter half of the 20th century producers also took on a wider entrepreneurial role. As such, his role is no longer just supervisory, but he must more than ever before participate actively in developing the songs and in a way, even integrate himself with the artiste's own qualities. What Phil Spector or Lieber, Sam Phillips and Stoller did more than four decades ago is now a golden chapter in pop history.



They dramatically changed the processes and economics of music recording and also ushered in new, sophisticated studios that were able to deliver crisp, fine recordings, thanks to top-quality equipment. A new generation of entrepreneurial producers – many of whom were former record company employees themselves – were able to create and occupy a new position in the industry, taking on a more direct and complex role in the musical process. These more independent, creative and hard-nosed producers typically did all the tasks involved, including selecting and arranging songs, overseeing sessions (and often engineering the recordings) and final runs. Some like Leiber and Stoller even took songwriting credits. Taking their cues from radio production organisations, independent music production companies rapidly gained a significant foothold in popular music and soon became the main intermediary between artiste and record label. They would sign new artistes to production contracts, produce the recordings and then licensing the finished product to record labels for pressing, promotion and sale.

The classic example of this transition is renowned British producer George Martin, who worked as a staff producer and A&R manager at EMI for many years, before branching out on his own and becoming a highly successful independent producer. Thereafter, the likes of Mickie Most, Don Kirshener, Tony Visconti, Chris Thomas, and in recent years Rick Rubin and Dr Dre brought in new artistic and organisational perceptions too.

"A producer can indeed, make or break you," added Mr Mamo when he referred to the producer's role. "At times a band may be overproduced in order to heighten their profile, and this usually hides the band's ability and potential. In marked contrast to a pop artiste, his role would be anything but glamorous."

At Glamorgan University, Mr Mamo studied subjects that featured these dynamics, as well as financial control, handling of production sessions, and new technical concepts. Renowned producers like Michael Howlett (Tears for Fears, OMD, A Flock of Seagulls) Tony Platt (AC/DC, Krokus), Mutt Lange, Hayden Bendall and Pascal de Loire all delivered very practical lectures which also addressed 5.1 mixing, a new technical concept that is gaining considerable ground.

"The holistic logic involved in 5.1 mixing is really intriguing. With good musical experience, a producer using this technique can literally overhaul a song. I experimented with an old Malta Song for Europe song I had composed for Fiona and even though the song was not yet finished, I could immediately notice a very big difference."

Besides the excellent settings of Glamorgan University, Mr Mamo was also exposed to a bubbly Welsh pop scene, which in recent years has flourished thanks to the likes of Stereophonics, The Manic Street Preachers, Catatonia, as well as emerging bands Brims and Moscow. Of course, one should not forget the likes of Tom Jones, Shirley Bassey and Dave Edmunds, all of whom are considered heroes among all and sundry in Welsh pop.

"The Vale of Glamorgan, with its valleys and factories, just a two-hour drive from London, has been a creative arts lab over the past 50 years. It has provided a great pop experience and most importantly, chart success, which is what matters most after all, notwithstanding all the technicalities involved nowadays."

Plate 4: Caption from the Maltese newspaper *The Sunday Times*, 1 April 2006, including an article by music columnist Eric Montfort.

I delved into different music making ventures such as rock and metal band production, sound design for film, children's music book CD recordings and working with new solo vocal artists. In each project, I tried to instil a new philosophy of production practice by amalgamating what I had learnt and experienced in the UK into a Maltese context. I avoided the previous 'one-man-does-it-all' working approach and adopted a collaborative studio setting methodology. Butler (2014, p. 37) notes

that the recording studio should be a creative place where producers, engineers and performers all contribute to the development of a work. As in every group creativity setting, their interaction is the "processual essence of collaborative emergence" (Sawyer, 2003, p. 163).

My interest in classical productions came in 2013 when soprano Miriam Cauchi approached me to 'produce' *Riflessi* (2015).[19] Since then, five other local artists have come forward asking for me to perform the same 'role' in their album projects. These recordings varied from voice, piano to chamber string setups with repertoire ranging from Baroque to Contemporary classical works.[20]


Plate 5: The six front cover classical albums self-produced between 2013 -2016.

[19] See Chapter 3.
[20] The six classical albums are: *In Bach's Footsteps* (2013) – Camilleri, *Riflessi* (2015) – Cauchi, *The Goldberg Variations* (2015) – Cincievski, *Aprile* (2016) – Malta Philharmonic Orchestra, *The Goldberg Variations* (2015)– Camilleri and *Piano Pastels* (2016) – Zammit Formosa. *Riflessi*, *In Bach's Footsteps* and *Aprile* are the three case studies in this critical commentary. See Plate 5.

As well as these six albums, I was approached to work on other similar-genre projects, ranging from chamber set-ups to the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra concert mixes. The classical music knowledge and understanding acquired during my childhood and teenage years helped me to adapt to these recordings without any difficulty. Score reading was an added skill to attract the attention of Maltese classical musicians.

Being part of the same Maltese music cultural field helped me not only to attract the artists' attention as a producer but also to communicate and connect easily with them during the making of their albums. I was able to work and successfully produce the projects by understanding the performers' exigencies in each step of the production process. Working in the classical environment means having to deal with highly trained musicians who sometimes have sceptical or distrustful attitudes towards recording technology in music making. Their performances are always driven by the adherence to a composer's score (Baugh cited in Davies, 1999, p. 198). Above all, classical projects are not usually recorded in the confined space of a studio but on location – a fundamental difference in art music production (Burgess, 2002, p. 323). The producer's role, which I developed over the years, had to be 'tweaked' for these 'new' circumstances. This adapted producer's function was also a consequence of how the Maltese artists viewed and responded to my position during the making of their records. The three classical albums studied in this critical commentary identify these characteristics, which I had to adopt as a record producer.[21]

[21] Experience has showed that in Malta it is not sustainable to limit and focus the production and engineering profession solely to classical music due to the country's limited market in this genre.

# CHAPTER TWO

## Literature Review

## 2.1 The Record Producer

> Without craftsmanship, inspiration is a mere reed shaken in the wind.
>
> Johannes Brahms

This chapter compares and contrasts my personal experiences with the available literature on the role of the record producer. There are several attempts by scholars and producers themselves to define their role in music production. In 2004, when I was a Masters student at Glamorgan University, it was frequently remarked that the producer is there to 'bring the best out of the artist'. This is a common denominator for every producer to keep in mind at every stage during the recording process. However, when analysing this role from a music genre perspective, one can note certain differences. Classical music as opposed to pop requires a different production approach.[1] Hepworth-Sawyer and Golding (2010, p. 14) support this claim by stating that "different musical genres require different treatment, and in most cases a different producer and production team". The role of the classical music producer is hereby examined and defined by relating to personal experiences and referring to citations from record producers, engineers and scholars.

In recent decades, there has been an increasing awareness in and acknowledgement of the role of the record producer by scholars and veteran producers. For example, Frith (2007, p. 1) argues that a number of 'key-figure' producers are currently evaluating "their 'life's work' and what it might mean". Many scholars, such as Zagorski-Thomas (2012) and Zak (2001) portray the producer as a highly respected figure in music making. Still, in general, they are cautious in their

[1] In this context 'pop' also includes rock and other similar music, which falls under the same umbrella.

arguments in substituting legendary producers such as "Phil Spector and George Martin for Beethoven and Mozart in narratives of innovation" (Frith and Zagorski-Thomas (2012, p. 38).

Beinhorn (2015, p. 13) contends that the producer's first commandment is "to help the artist excel". This is accomplished by guiding the artist to achieve the greatest performance potential during the recording session while "obtaining for him [or her] the ear of a public" (Hennion, 2006, p. 166). Every record producer has his own approach and methodology to reach this goal. He needs to be a little bit of everything: a psychologist, an engineer, a career advisor, a song co-writer, a best friend and an adversary (Farinella, 2010). In congruence with this thinking, Burgess (2002, p. 15) presents an interesting analogy when he compares the producer's versatility to a blank piece in Scrabble that can substitute for any letter. In general, the record producer is the 'studio-craftsman', as Kot (2006) refers to George Martin, "who could turn the Beatles most far-fetched ideas into sonic forget-me-nots that enhanced the song".[2]

Zagorski-Thomas (2014, pp. 508-509) defines various producers' roles according to their production approaches. He refers to three producer models: The Creative Hub as Trevor Horn, The Creative Enablers' as Walter Legge and The Creative Partners' as John Culshaw and Brian Eno. A different categorical definition is that of Burgess (2013, pp. 9-19) when he labels the producer's role into six typologies: The Artist, The Auteur, The Facilitative, The Collaborative, The Enablative and The Consultative. As is explored in the following case study chapters, these categories can overlap with each other.

[2] Information taken from 'What does a record Producer do?' Online: http://www.bbc.com/culture /story/20160310-what-does-a-record-producer-do (Accessed: 6 July 2016).

Some record producers give a different personal definition to their profession. Even though the passion for their work is the common denominating factor, each has their own distinctive personalities and opinions. Their contrasting definitions and approaches are subject to their different musical or engineering backgrounds (Massey, 2000, p. 10). Mike Howlett (2009, p. 10) states that the producer "is the ingredient in the process of recording a musical idea that interfaces all the factors necessary [good song, appropriate arrangement, expressive performance and technology] for the production of a satisfactory outcome". Frank Filipetti describes his production profession from his own perspective by contending that his "job is to bring the musical sensibility to [a song] that may put a new twist on it that the artist may not have thought of " (Massey, 2000, p. 16). Diversely, George Martin's personal view is that the producer "is responsible for the sound 'shape' of what comes out" (Burgess, 2002, p. 15).

The way a producer works reflects the environment in which the recording process has to take place. The producer is the one who creates the right studio atmosphere to achieve what many musicians and engineers refer to as 'Magic'– a phenomenon that can be rationally explained through recent literature. This special moment is achieved through a collaborative creative process between the artist/s, engineer and producer. Zak III (2001, p. 20) refers to this magic as 'transferal of aura', a concept derived from Walter Benjamin's notion of 'aura' as "the particular and unique moment of a performance" (Greig, 2009, p. 24). According to Zak, "while the process has its mundane, even tedious, aspects, at some point in the making of a successful record there is a magical transferal of aura from artists to artifact" (ibid.). It is the producer's duty to search and nurture the spirit that "enables that 'indefinite thing' and recognize when the transferal has occurred" (Zak III, 2001,

p. 174). The process requires "an array of decisions informed by artistic intuition as well as experienced technique" (Zak, 2007). Burgess (2013, p. 321) refers to intuition as instinct. This ability can be described as " a form of non-linear parallel processing of global multi-categorized information" (Bastick in McIntyre, 2012, p. 201). From this perspective, in many instances, the producer comes out with spontaneous ideas and decisions that are dependent on past knowledge and experience. This argument has some similarities with Bourdieu's theoretical concept of *habitus* discussed in Section 0.3 Methodology. Bastick contends that intuition, together with verification (the stage is where the producer seeks confirmation from people involved in the project), form the framework to creativity (McIntyre, 2007, p. 4).

### 2.2 The Classical Record Producer

In his paper 'Rock versus Classical Music' Steven Davies examines whether rock and classical music require different criteria for their appreciation and evaluation (1999).[3] The analysis is directed by considering arguments presented by Bruce Baugh (1993).[4] According to Davies, Baugh excessively degrades the creative contribution made by the performer of classical music and contends that rock music is more performance–based than classical music.[5] Davies (1999, p. 203) asserts that on a low-level aesthetic (genres, periods and style), both rock and classical are distinctive from each other, while at a high level ("narrational, representational and expressive properties"), the two styles share the same properties. He concludes that both genres can produce deep

[3] Davies uses the term 'Rock' as a broad classification of music styles including pop, alternative, blues, reggae and so on.
[4] Baugh, B. (1993) 'Prolegomena to Any Aesthetics of Rock Music', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 51, pp. 23-29.
[5] In his paper Davies asserts that in defining rock aesthetics, Baugh does not indicate any reference to recording. In fact, Baugh's 'rock as performance–based music' argument contrasts with Gracyk's view as, according to the latter, "when rock music is discussed, the relevant musical work is not simply the song being performed…recordings are the primary texts of this music" (Gracyk, 1996, p. 21). Zak also supports Gracyk's claims as he contends that recording is the 'sonic text' of rock and "what it [rock] sounds like, is precisely what it is " (Zak III, 2001, p. 41).

inward feeling response through musical elements such as a melodic and harmonic shape, lyrics and overall structure. Davies also contends that despite the difference in the 'sonic ideals' and techniques, the performer's virtuosity and musicianship in both styles should be a means to expressiveness.

From a recording practice perspective, the two genres are quite diverse. In many aspects, rock and pop recordings are constructs founded in the studio. Sound engineer Andrew Hallifax (2016) states that "the genre itself is an outcrop of technology".[6] On the other hand, personal experience has shown that classical music is less electronically mediated and according to Hallifax "there should be no reason for this genre to adopt popular music practices or become infused with its effects" (ibid.).

For many years the general practice approach in classical recording was to give the listener the effect of 'the best seat of the house' experience. Walter Legge, one of the main pillars in classical music production, states that "recordings of classical music should sound in the home as if they are being heard in the best seat in an acoustically perfect hall" (in Symes, 2004, p. 73). According to Ken Blair (2016), this practice was lost 50 years ago with developments of new recording techniques and approaches.[7] A case in point is the 'retexturing' production approach in the late 1950s by John Culshaw.[8] He was one of the first producers to demonstrate that recording can go beyond the idea of just reproduction of what a listener might hear in a concert hall (Feeney, 2016). [9] Martha de Francesco (2016) supports the same claim

[6] Guest speaker in *'The Aesthetics of Recording Classical Music'*, chaired by Blier-Carruthers, A. (2016) London College of Music, 2 February. [Online]. Available at: https://vimeo.com/153927392 (Accessed: 1 August 2016).
[7] Guest speaker in *'The Aesthetics of Recording Classical Music'*, chaired by Blier-Carruthers, A. (2016) London College of Music, 2 February. [Online]. Available at: https://vimeo.com/153927392 (Accessed: 1 August 2016).
[8] Culshaw refers to this retexturing production in recording as the "Theatre of the Mind" (in Symes, 2004, p. 83).
[9] One of Culshaw's famous productions is Wagner's Ring cycle for the use of 'special effects' (ibid.).

and states that even though the 'best seat' is part of what producers do, they also use techniques such as close recording to bring more character and definition to the sound.[10] Various classical producers support this new philosophy of a hybrid microphone recording technique.[11] For instance, producer and engineer David Bowles asserts that his recording technique is to use carefully placed microphones to get an "accurate audio image" of the musicians.[12] He emphasises that, "the process of recording is a creative one which allows [him] to expand [his] listening perspective beyond front row centre or the conductor's podium" (ibid.). Therefore this 'high quality' methodology matters more then ever in today's classical productions.[13]

The overall approach in classical recording is 'live performance practice'. Classical producers are not restricted to the studio but are normally out on location (Burgess, 2002, p. 583). Engineer David Lau (2013) states that in the majority of classical work, 70% is on location while the rest is in the studio (SMWTMS, 2013).[14] For small setup projects such as piano recordings, the producer might suggest tracking in the studio if there is enough space. Recording in a studio might be easier than on location as all equipment is normally set in an optimum environment (ibid.).[15]

As discussed in Section 0.6, on defining the role of the classical producer, Andrew Cornall states that his responsibility is to capture the sound of a performance (Burgess, 2002, p. 571). However, the duty goes far beyond this general statement.

[10] Guest speaker in *'The Aesthetics of Recording Classical Music'*, chaired by Blier-Carruthers, A. (2016) London College of Music, 2 February. [Online]. Available at: https://vimeo.com/153927392 (Accessed: 1 August 2016).
[11] Frith and Zagorski-Thomas (2012, p. 40) indicate that engineers in the 70s were already using close miking as well as the general front array setup to achieve clarity.
[12] Information taken from 'Magnatune.com'. Online: http://magnatune.com/artists/bowles (Accessed: 21 August 2016).
[13] Information taken from 'Andrew Keener'. Online: http://www.greenacre.info/Keener/page7.html (Accessed: 28 August 2016).
[14] Information taken from 'Fine Arts Recording and Editing for Classical Music'. Online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=94POc38gXxY (Accessed: 1 July 2016).
[15] In his seminar David Lau explains the advantages in recording in the studio such as floor noise reductions and other external noises which can be captured in an on location setup.

The classical producer works in a very limited and competitive market and so he needs to find that original repertoire to record or that distinguished interpretation.[16] Zager (2011, p. 164) contends that the classical producer is constantly searching for that something unique within a performance. Producer and engineer Theresa Leonard (2016) refers to this uniqueness as "the goose bumps factor…the magic".[17]

A classical producer should be a trained musician and show familiarity with traditional repertoire and scores (Zager, 2011, p. 163). Andrew Keener argues that with this repertoire knowledge the producer can gain the artist's trust.[18] Burgess (2002, p. 584) supports this argument by stating that a classical producer might find it difficult to work without music education as he is always working with highly trained instrumentalists, composers and *bel canto* singers. Interpreting music is subjective and one way to define the proper interpretation is to be very familiar with the period when the music was written in order to be able to discuss and share it with the performer (Zager, 2011, p. 164).

The classical producer should have the performers' trust to make the necessary judgments during the recording and editing stages. [19] According to Andrew Hallifax (2016) the classical producer can conceive a sound in his mind, which can be different from what he is presented with, and match it when he is making a recording. He claims that it is very difficult for a musician to have such listening skills or an objective role. Zagorski-Thomas (2014, p. 613) says that musicians "often judge a take by how it felt rather then how it sounded". As is will be discussed in the three

[16] Blair (2016) states that classical music sales make up only 3% of the market most of this percentage is made up of crossover, TV and movie related music.
[17] Guest speaker in *'The Aesthetics of Recording Classical Music'*, chaired by Blier-Carruthers, A. (2016) London College of Music, 2 February. [Online]. Available at: https://vimeo.com/153927392 (Accessed: 1 August 2016).
[18] Information taken from 'Andrew Keener'. Online: http://www.greenacre.info/Keener/page7.html (Accessed: 28 August 2016).
[19] In the following chapters, this claim is compared with the way the Maltese artists reacted and responded during the recording and editing process of their albums.

case studies of this thesis, musicians and *bel canto* singers tend to get confused on which sections to choose in the editing process, as they will remember the amount of retakes and problems they had in the same sections during the recording. The negativity towards the takes that troubled the artist during a recording session is reflected in the editing sessions. Martha de Francisco (2016) states that despite musicians feel the need to be involved and to decide on their performance, the producer should be the person they should trust to do such tasks. This argument is considered in more detail in the case study chapters.

### 2.3 The Surrogate Orchestra Conductor

> You are paying the wrong man…. he's the conductor and I'm not. I don't want this to be broadcast under my name if I'm not controlling the pianissimo, the mezzo forte, and the fortissimo.
>
> Stokowski [20]

The above quote refers to Leopold Stokowski who, in 1929, while conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra, mistakenly (or purposely) referred to the sound engineer as the conductor.[21] Zak III (2001, p. 8) adds that Stokowski finally accepted the "man sitting at a sort of keyboard with dials" as competent to record the session after he himself had worked with the recording team to find satisfactory microphone placement positions and balances (ibid.). Stokowski's incident is evidence for similarities and common ground between the role of a conductor and a record producer.

Together with this literature review and past personal production experience, which is partly dealt with in the case studies of this critical commentary, I propose the following definition: The classical record producer is a 'Surrogate Orchestra

[20] Cited in Zak III, A.J. (2001, p. 8) *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records.* University of California Press.
[21] Stokowski might have been sarcastic and knew exactly what he meant by such statement. He was aware that the 'engineer' was having control on the sound that was broadcasted.

Conductor' whereby as a conductor, he communicates with the audience and artists through his unique sound-shaping capacity. The term 'Surrogate' in this context is used in accordance with the Oxford English Dictionary's (2016) definition: a substitute, especially a person deputizing for another in a specific role or office.[22] In contrast to the conductor, the classical producer does not take the centre-stage or use the baton technique to conduct an orchestra during a recording session, hence a surrogate – a substitute analogy. Through his 'theatricality' on the podium, the conductor conveys his feelings and also acts as a visual focal point for the audience (Carnicer, Garrido and Raquena, 2015, p. 86). On the other hand, the classical producer expresses his mind vision through his communication skills and presence, and motivates and encourages the performers to perform at their very best in a recording session.

Just like an orchestral conductor, the classical record producer as a creative agent searches for quality, can create a positive harmonious ambiance, and has good leadership skills. He can "listen deeply and help reflect and amplify the energy of the performance" (Colletti, 2012). His role is to take artistic decisions during recording, editing and mixing stages including tempo phrasing, balance between instruments, judgments about the quality of the performance, wrong notes or incorrect inflections, style and intonation.[23] During the mixing sessions the producer wears the hat of the surrogate conductor as he reconstructs a musical piece using a combination of optimum takes and performances by "adjusting, where necessary the levels of

[22] Information taken from 'Surrogate'. Online: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english /surrogate (Accessed: 28 August 2016).

[23] The term 'mixing' in classical music, especially for small chamber ensembles, does not involve complicated effect chains as found in pop and rock mixes. A good sounding space and appropriate placement of microphones together with a decent signal path to the recording medium are needed for a high quality result. Compression is normally avoided as this might compromise the overall dynamics of the performances. Gentle EQ is at times applied to reduce any unwanted 'mud' from the signal and to add clarity and presence.

individual instruments, smoothing out idiosyncrasies in the timbre and depth of the overall sound".[24]

Both the classical producer and the conductor act as mediators. Carnicer, Garrido and Requena (2015, p. 86) state that the orchestra conductor is the 'mediator' between the audience, the score and the musicians. Similarly, Andrew Blake (2016, p. 195) argues that the classical producer is the mediator between the score, musicians and "the process and technologies of recording". Both roles are silent, do not make any physical sound in the performance, but are not transparent. Just as the use of colours, a pose or an object in a painting can all reflect the character of an artist, the skills and personality of both the conductor and the producer in their respective roles, will shape the musical outcome.

### 2.4 Conclusion

Whilst there has been a considerable amount of research in classical music recording, there is currently a gap in the available literature regarding Maltese music from a production perspective within the context described in Section 0.1, Aims and Objectives of this critical commentary. No one has yet investigated the relationship between classical musicians and the recording process in Malta from a practitioner's perspective. The three case studies presented in the following chapters explore and propose answers while hoping to create a better understanding of the current musical identity of this island country.

[24] Information taken from 'Conducting'. Online: http://www.philharmonia.co.uk/explore/conducting (Accessed: 26 August 2016).

# CHAPTER 3

# RIFLESSI – MIRIAM CAUCHI

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on the process and making of the album *Riflessi* (2015), the first major classical work in my musical career as an engineer and producer. The following analysis is based on memory experience supported by multiple sources of evidence such as references to the original multi-track recordings, interviews with some of the composers from the same album, score references, photographs of the recording set-up, published newspaper articles and personal communications related to the production. The following accounts one can outline a profile of the role I had in the production process during various stages of its making. This writing does not intend to justify my actions and decisions at that time, nor to undermine nor criticize any musician and the artist involved in the project. Through a self-reflective analysis, I assess and evaluate whether there is a correlation between my responsibility as a record producer and the definition of a Surrogate Orchestra Conductor, as defined in Chapter 2.

Miriam Cauchi, the main artist on this album, is one of the leading *bel canto* singers in Malta. She is a highly respected soprano performer "having at her command a voice with a wide range…[She can]...control it most admirably combining technique and effect with deep musicality and very convincing interpretation of the lyrics".[1] As discussed in the introduction section, Cauchi is one of the very few classical artists in Malta who went so far as recording and releasing an album. Composer Philip Ciantar, who is included in this record with one of his works 'Fil-Bar tal-Kantuniera' (In the Corner's Bar), argues that the reason behind the

[1] Information taken from 'A great touch of nostalgia', *The Times of Malta,* 6 June 2009. [Online] Available at: http://www.miriamcauchi.com/reviews08.html (Accessed: 2 September 2016).

phenomenon in Malta comes down to financial constraints. Ciantar (2016) states that singers "might find very little financial support to do this [recording albums] and, consequently, they give up". [2] He adds that the problem might also be linked to the artist's "entrepreneurial inability to persuade people in business to invest in them" (ibid). Veronique Vella, another Maltese composer included in this album with her excerpt 'Cassa Quddiem Mera' (Stared in Front of a Mirror) also supports Ciantar's claims and adds further by contending that artists might ponder about the limited market in Malta.[3] Despite the various attempts to get private funding support and help from the Malta Arts Fund scheme, Cauchi had to be self-financed.

*Riflessi* is a collection of twenty Maltese compositions or, as Cauchi refers to them, 'Maltese Art Songs'. These works, written by seven Maltese composers and ten poets, are "unique, with styles varying from introspective and dark to the lighter and bubbly, passionate and bold".[4] The album was launched in June 2015 at the Manoel Theatre in Valletta.

### 3.2 The Recording

The first 'pre-production' meeting with the artist was in early summer 2013. During this session I was briefed about Cauchi's intended project and discussed the style and instrumentation of some of the compositions which were to be included. The original plan was to record around 15 pieces with scores ranging from voice and piano to string quintet setups. As discussed in the Part 1, Section 1.2.2, as in many classical music projects, and because of logistical issues, this album had to be recorded outside

[2] Information taken from the Interview Questionnaire with composer and senior lecturer at the University of Malta Dr Philip Ciantar. See Appendix 1.
[3] Information taken from the Interview Questionnaire with Composer Dr Veronique Vella. See Appendix 1.
[4] Information taken from Grima, G. (2015) 'Reflections on Maltese Art Song', The *Times of Malta*, June 2015 [Online]. Available at: http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20150607/arts-entertainment/Reflections-on-Maltese-art-song.571638 (Accessed: 3 June 2016).

the studio. The chosen location was 'The Grand Masters' Hall' at the Maltese President's Palace, the reasoning behind this choice was primarily that the artist aspired to record on the Steinway B grand piano, which was set in this hall. The first batch of recordings commenced in September and continued till November 2013, followed by a second set of sessions in March 2014.

As expected, being a prestigious and busy hall, with daily visitors visiting to the venue, the palace's manager requested that all equipment be dismantled after each recording. For this reason, measurements of microphone positions including height and distances were taken in order to keep the same setup for the next day. Fine artistic furniture surrounded the hall, including the abovementioned grand piano. Clear instructions were given by the administration that the piano was to remain in exactly the same place. This limitation left no other option than to use a close microphone recording technique to keep my options open.[5] The artist was placed in a half-open gobo setup, which was placed a few feet away from the piano [see Plate 6].[6] This arrangement helped to reduce any unwanted sound reflections from behind the singer while reducing the bleed of the piano to the vocal microphone. Despite the gobo setup, the artist and pianist could still communicate and hear to each other without difficulties. Since this was my first attempt at classical piano recording I opted to go for two microphone configurations, an XY and a spaced pair.[7]

The first recording session, which consisted of piano and voice compositions, anticipated the way recording sessions were going to proceed. The majority of the

[5] Close microphone technique is normally used in pop recordings. This practice was also used in the album *Aprile* (2016) discussed in Chapter 5.
[6] Gobo and other technical references are explained in Appendix 3, Glossary.
[7] After carefully listening to the first recording session on the studio's speaker monitors it was decided to only use the spaced pair configuration for the rest of the sessions. For this batch of sessions (September/November recordings) Rode NT3 microphones were used on the piano. These were updated to a matched pair AKG C414 for the March session recordings. The main voice was recorded using a valve Rode NTV passing through an Avalon 737.

judgements and decision-making throughout the recordings were joint decisions between the pianist, the artist's husband (who also played cello on some of the tracks), the composers (if they were present for the session) and the artist herself. The scenario was clear enough that my responsibility for the first session and the following recordings was going to be that of pressing the record button, following the score and jotting down my own notes for future reference. I believed that the best option at that moment was to present suggestions from my perspective in such a way as not to put extra undue pressure on the performer.

Plate 6: The recording set-up at the Malta President's Grand Masters' Hall. The Neumann U87 microphone on the bottom right shows the position where the cellist was placed.

One main concern during the recordings was that I was not informed about which pieces I was going to record on the day. It was also practically impossible for

me to attend rehearsals as many of them were done in the island of Gozo.[8] Both the main pianist and Cauchi are Gozitans and they decided to do all the preparation and practice alone on their native island.[9] Although there were rehearsals of the piano pieces, this was not the case for the works that included stringed instruments. It was clearly noticeable that apart from the cellist, all other members came to the recording venue unprepared. The approach to do an unrehearsed recording is common among many of the Maltese string players.[10] This notion also led to instances where, as discussed in the Introduction section, the musicians relied on the modular fashion of recording and the cut, copy and paste editing procedures available in post-production. After some time practising on the spot, the musicians, together with Cauchi, managed to perform great 'snapshots' of the score, resulting in tracks which, from a personal judgement, are the highlight of this album [see Plate 7].[11]

The spot microphone technique was applied for the chamber quintet and for the other pieces including strings.[12] For the quintet session an extra XY matched pair of microphones was set up 3 feet away from the centre as a safety net. The gobo structure for the voice was placed in front of the chamber for clear visibility and sound leakage balance. The Grand Masters Hall offered unique challenges during the recording: the background noises from the adjacent kitchen, the cry of the palace's peacock in one adjacent gardens were just a few of the obstacles to continuity.

[8] See Introduction Section, Footnote 8.
[9] 'Cassa Quddiem Mera' (and presumably all other compositions by Maltese living composers) was rehearsed in Malta. Information by Vella, V. (2016) Messenger Communication with Rene' Mamo, 8 September.
[10] This is further discussed in the self- reflection analysis in the next section of this chapter.
[11] Cauchi was very well prepared and comfortable to record these chamber pieces.
[12] Sound leakage from each instrument to the adjacent microphone was unavoidable. This effect helped to 'glue' the ensemble in the final mix.

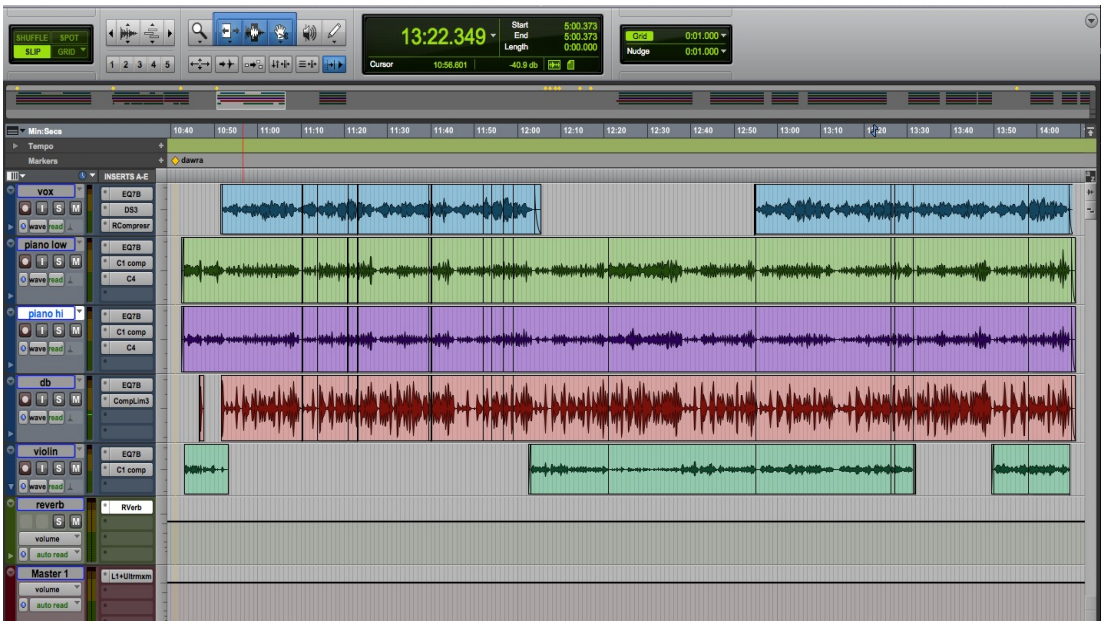


Plate 7a: Pro Tools Edit window for 'Il-Banda' by Composer Charles Camilleri. The fine vertical lines show the points where different (horizontal) takes were joined together.

Plate 7b: A moment during the recording session of 'Il-Banda'.
Note: Permission to reproduce this plate has been granted by Miriam Cauchi.

### 3.3 The Editing and Mixing Sessions

The artist and her husband assisted the editing sessions.[13] The approach was to evaluate all takes of a piece, select the best moments and put them together so as to get a smooth continuous performance.[14] From the very first editing session they requested to be involved and to decide which takes would be used for the final mix. Using the score they immersed themselves in listening in detail to their own performances. Although there were instances where I had quickly spotted good continuous possible phrases that could work together, decisions were taken after lots of discussions. It was a very time-consuming process as often the three of us could not agree on certain passages. There were moments were, Cauchi, with the score in her hand, was not convinced of her performance. Certain edit points included syllable-by-syllable splicing from different takes to get the best phrase interpretation and pitch [see Plate 8]. Editing and effects (such as tuning corrections) were attempted but the limitations of recording without separation meant that these did not work and the original takes had to be accepted as they were.

The mixing stage was done without any supervision from the artist. With fresh ears and with the score in hand I revised all the tracks making sure that everything was transparently edited. These mixing sessions allowed me to engrave my signature sound on each recorded piece. Fine volume automation was applied on the instruments and voice tracks to get better dynamic flow and unity. Separate EQ settings for each track together with a gentle touch of compression were applied without affecting the dynamics of the piece. A 'tweaked' Waves Renaissance reverb pre-set plugin enhanced the 'staging' by adding a warm spatial environment to the

[13] Originally the artist suggested inviting the Gozitan pianist to be present during the editing stage. According to her, it was beneficial to have another pair of ears, apart from us three. This issue is further discussed in Section 2.4, Reflections.
[14] The standard procedure used in joining two audio sections together is known as 'crossfade'.

whole album. The artist was very pleased with the result, although not all the recorded tracks were included in the final list.[15] The artist decided on the final tracking order and album title.

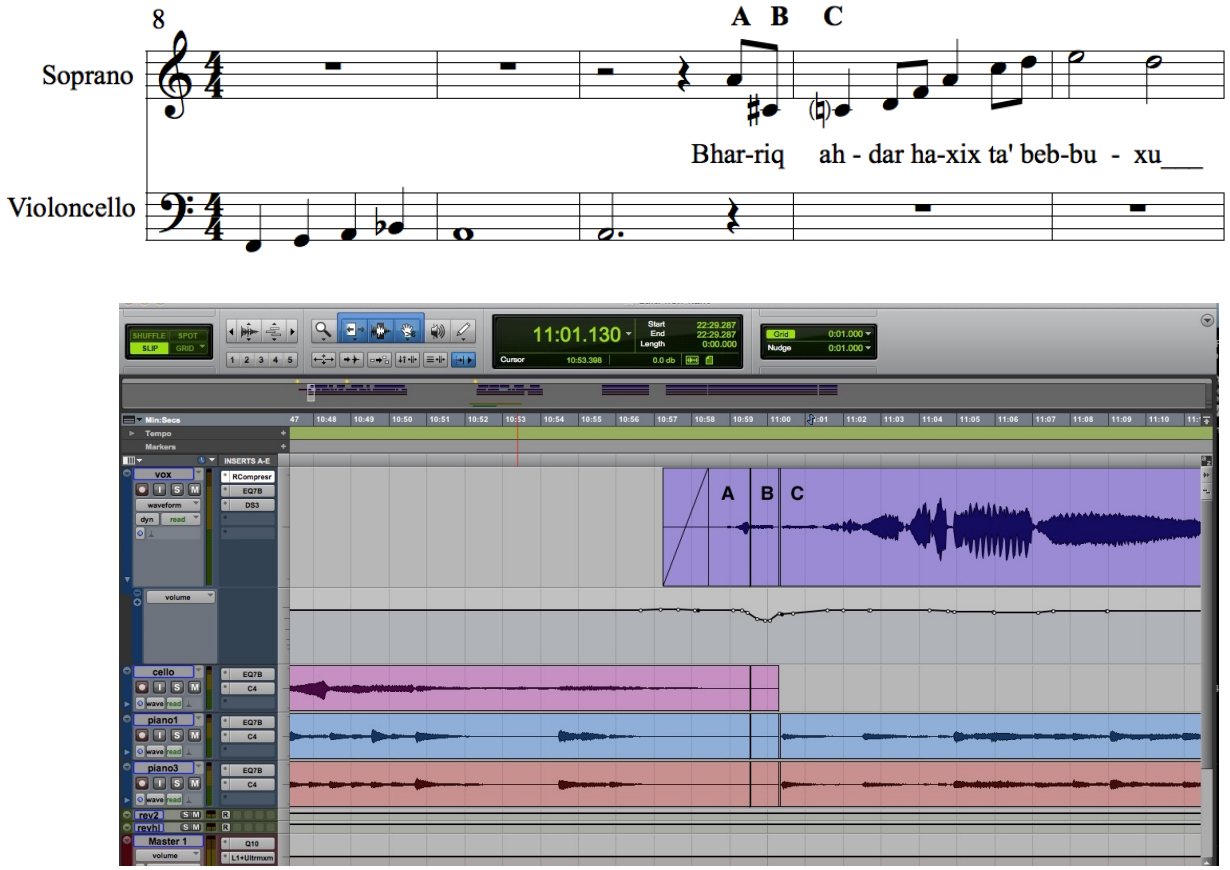


Plate 8: (Top) Bar 8 to 12 of 'Ghanja' by composer Joseph Vella. (Bottom) The same bars, digitally transcribed on Pro Tools. The Purple track is the voice, the pink is the cello and the others are the piano (not shown in the top score). The vertical lines of the first part of the voice show that the first three syllables (A, B and C) were taken from different takes.

The selected mixes were sent to a mastering engineer for Spectral Restoration processing to delete unwanted external noises and clicks and to attenuate excessive piano pedal noises.[16] The mastering stage also included a gentle overall dynamic

[15] A case in point, one particular track was sounding pedantic and with no *magic* when compared with the other tracks. Together with some technical and arrangement concerns, I was left with no choice but to try and persuade the artist that this piece had to remain off from the final list. It was not an easy task to convince the artist, as her desire was to include Maltese composers as much as possible in this collection.

[16] Some pianists were heavier on the sustain pedal than others.

process, levelling and ID tagging procedure. Finally the mastering engineer created a DDP file, which was directly sent to the CD replicator.

### 3.4 Reflections

Of all the classical projects I had produced to date, *Riflessi* was the most challenging and demanding. It took over a year and a half from the first recording session for the album to be released. It was a unique experience to transform one of the most prestigious Maltese halls into a recording venue.[17] The album is one of my current favourite classical projects.

Secrecy in the making of the record dominated the whole process till the last few weeks before the launching. This phenomenon of silence was also present in nearly all the other albums and classical projects, which I recorded during these last few years.[18] Mary Ann Cauchi (2016) contends that secrecy might be one way in which Malta's socio-geographic insularity manifests itself.[19] As was pointed out previously, rehearsals were carried out with the majority of the sessions taking place on the island of Gozo, making it impossible for me to attend.[20] Ciantar (2016) asserts that secrecy is a reflection of the lack of trust that Maltese have in one another.

> We [Maltese] learned not to trust the colonialist because it was mainly interested in protecting its own interests. We continued with that kind of attitude even among us till the present time. In my view, this lack of trust became symptomatic, ingrained in our consciousness as a nation. What happens in the recording studio is an extension of what happens in everyday life.
>
> Ciantar (2016)

Trust and judgment was a continuous issue throughout the project. It would have been more rational and efficient if I had been given trust in the decision-making

[17] I calculate that there were ten recording sessions.
[18] On only one occasion, during the making of the Bach's Goldberg Variations for String Trio (2015), the main artist Gjorgji Cincievski documented the recorded process on social media.
[19] Information taken from the Interview Questionnaire with Head of Johann Strauss Music School in Malta, Ms. Mary Ann Cauchi. See Appendix 1.
[20] Mamo, S. (2012, p. 3) states that that Gozitans have distinct culture and identity and they are more reserved than the Maltese.

from the very start and during the editing sessions. That the artist and her husband were present in every editing session resulted in a prolonged process. Blair (2016) states that the involvement of the musicians during editing is inefficient.[21] In many instances I spotted the right takes from the very start. As discussed in Chapter 1, Section 1.2.2, according to Hallifax (2016), musicians do not have the objective skill to choose which takes work best together.[22] They are too busy listening to their performance. Zagorski-Thomas (2014, p. 614) supports this claim and contends that the performer needs to have "faith in the producer's judgment if they are to allow themselves to be guided about which takes are the ones to use".

The lack of preparation from the musicians is also another factor common among classical artists. As explained in the citation by Zagorski-Thomas in the Introduction Section 0.7, performers might find recording 'boring and repetitive'. Many Maltese artists and composers use the same group of musicians to perform their music. In every session these musicians use the same methodology: sight read recording.[23]

This 'rehearsal approach' dominated the practice used throughout the recording sessions. The musicians and artist relied on the technology, as was used in the following editing sessions. They knew about the 'magical tools' available in the editing procedure. The 'leave-it-to-the-engineer' syndrome resulted in repeating the

[21] Guest speaker in *'The Aesthetics of Recording Classical Music'*, chaired by Blier-Carruthers, A. (2016) London College of Music, 2 February. [Online]. Available at: https://vimeo.com/153927392 (Accessed: 1 August 2016). An example of Blair's argument was noted in during the editing session of the track 'Hemel' where it took us hours to establish which three notes from different takes we should splice to create a smooth *perfect* introduction.

[22] Guest speaker in *'The Aesthetics of Recording Classical Music'*, chaired by Blier-Carruthers, A. (2016) London College of Music, 2 February. [Online]. Available at: https://vimeo.com/153927392 (Accessed: 1 August 2016).

[23] The Malta Philharmonic Orchestra is the hub where most of the Maltese composers search for musicians to play their music. Because of their busy season schedule, these players find little time to practice for other projects. A case in point, during the making of The Goldberg Variations album for string trio, it was clear that one of the artists was actually sight-reading and practicing the complex score during the recording sessions.

same phrases, similar to a rehearsal performance session. Despite all this, I only pressed the recording button when I felt that the musical phrases were getting in shape.[24]

There are two perspectives in delineating my role in this project. The feeling of a lack of trust in my judgment reflected how the artist and the rest of the musicians perceived the producer's job: that of a 'machine operator'. One can partly justify their view, as the artist was the person who had commissioned the work and understandably she felt that she should be involved and decide on the final result. After all it is her performance that is going out into the public domain. The attitude was that of employing the services of a person with the appropriate equipment to make their project.

On the other side, reflecting from my own personal perspective, I managed to make the artist's 'ideal performance', which could not be captured in one take, go on tape. The backbencher position held during the recording sessions, allowed Cauchi to record without further tension and pressure and to perform in her own comfortable way, surrounded by her husband and close-friend musicians. My sonic signature was engraved in the studio by enhancing the montage of best recording parts using the technology available at that time. Just as an orchestra conductor who interprets the Beethoven's 5th by bringing out the best playing from the musicians through his gestures and movement, I used the recording studio as the baton to conjure the most sophisticated sonic interpretation of the best moments of Miriam Cauchi's art songs.

[24] There were around 170 splices in the whole album: not a huge number when compared with the approximately 450 selected bits used for the Trio Goldberg Variations.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## IN BACH'S FOOTSTEPS – JOANNE CAMILLERI

### 4.1 Introduction

My interest in Baroque music repertoire goes back to the days when I was preparing myself for the Licentiate Diploma in Classical Guitar Performance. I recall one of my favorite pieces I had to learn, the Prelude, Fugue and Allegro (BWV 998) composed by Johann Sebastian Bach around 1735. It was originally written for a lute but various transcriptions are available for classical guitar including the version by virtuoso Andres Segovia. The fugue, in particular was very technically demanding but it exemplified beautifully Bach's ability in writing complex counterpoint music.

I was thrilled when, in summer 2013, professional pianist Joanne Camilleri contacted me to record and produce her first album, which included some Bach pieces. Her idea was to release a record that was not such a "mainstream project" in Malta.[1] *In Bach's Footsteps* (2013) includes four works chronologically tracked to represent the composer's musical development.[2] Vella Gregory (2014) states that Camilleri was courageous in releasing such work and notes that "Bach is [a] notoriously difficult composer to bring off satisfactorily…. [Camilleri] has more than risen to this Challenge." [3]

Camilleri is aware of the limited Maltese music market and her views are similar to those discussed in the introductory part of the previous chapter *Riflessi*:

[1] Information taken from the Interview Questioner with Dr Joanne Camilleri. See Appendix 1.
[2] Bach's music career as a performer and composer can be grouped in three phases, Wemar, Cothen and Leipzig (Wilson, 2011, p. 7).
[3] Vella Gregory, A. (2014) 'In Bach's Footsteps', *Times of Malta*, 12 January [Online] Available at : http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20140112/arts-entertainment/In-Bach-s-footsteps.502509 (Accessed: 10 September 2016).

> The culture of recording an album to be released in the international market is not very popular (since the nation's way of thinking is rather home-based), although in recent years the idea is taking hold and more natives are looking further afield.
>
> Camillleri (2016).

The artist is aware of the limited opportunities on the island to record an album. She even goes further by arguing that as a pianist it is also challenging to find the right recording venue. In fact the selected hall for this project was a privately owned huge garage space, which was transformed into a concert and multipurpose hall. It included two pianos, one of them the Boston piano that was used for this record. The recordings were scheduled for October 2013, the same month during which the tracking of the first sessions of *Riflessi* (2015) were taking place. Two recording sessions were planned for this project, as Camilleri was well-prepared and comfortable performing the selected repertoire. The album was released in December 2013 and officially launched during the Valletta International Baroque Festival at the Isouard Hall at the Manuel Theatre in Valletta in January 2014. As with *Riflessi*, Camilleri had to be self-financed, as the Malta Arts Fund did not support *In Bach's Footsteps*.

### 4.2 The Recording

A visit to the venue was organized a couple of weeks before the recording sessions in order to get an idea of the space and piano sound. The hall, a converted eight-car garage space could host small private concerts. With a huge mirror covering one wall and wooden parquet the venue sounded very reflective. The Boston piano was set in one corner adjacent to another covered piano. Compared with the Steinway B, which I was using for the *Riflessi* album, the Boston sounded rather metallic. My suggestion was to place absorptive gobo units in the middle of the hall and facing the piano to

reduce the reflections of the hall.[4]

The rigging was done a day before the first recording session. Since I was apprehensive about the sound quality of this piano I decided to use three different microphone configurations. A close position spaced pair and an XY setup were used facing the harp of the piano. Another XY configuration was rigged three feet away from the piano to catch some of the ambience [see Plate 9].[5] During the sound check it was obvious that the artificial lighting of the hall was producing an audible hum that was being captured by the ambience microphones. Half the hall lights had to be switched off to reduce this interference.

The recording sessions were relatively straight forward as Camilleri was very well prepared. From the beginning it was not my intention to correct and advise Camilleri technically on Baroque music, as she is renowned for her *bravura* in performing this genre. [6] Apart from engineering the sessions and following the score, I created a calming environment and did my best to encourage and motivate Camilleri to excel in her performance.[7] She was very relaxed during the sessions, even during technically demanding work such as the Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, BWV 903. In such instances I used to leave the record button on while I sat beside her acting as a page-turner while inspiring her to give her best. It was decided that before each take, just before she performed, the artist would say the bar number in order to facilitate the editing sessions when it came to locating the recorded phrases. The album was recorded in two half-day sessions.

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[4] The three self-handmade gobos, used also for *Riflessi*, consisted of a wooden frame stuffed with rockwool material and covered with a perforated sheet.

[5] Rode NT 3 microphones were used for the close set ups and Rode NT 55 for the ambience configuration.

[6] Camilleri holds a Doctorate in Music Performance which includes a thesis related to Baroque music: *Johann Sebastian Bach: Aria with 30 Variations - An Insight into its Style, Structure and Interpretation.*

[7] I used to take this motivation approach back in the days when pop Maltese singers used to perform my songs in the song contests.

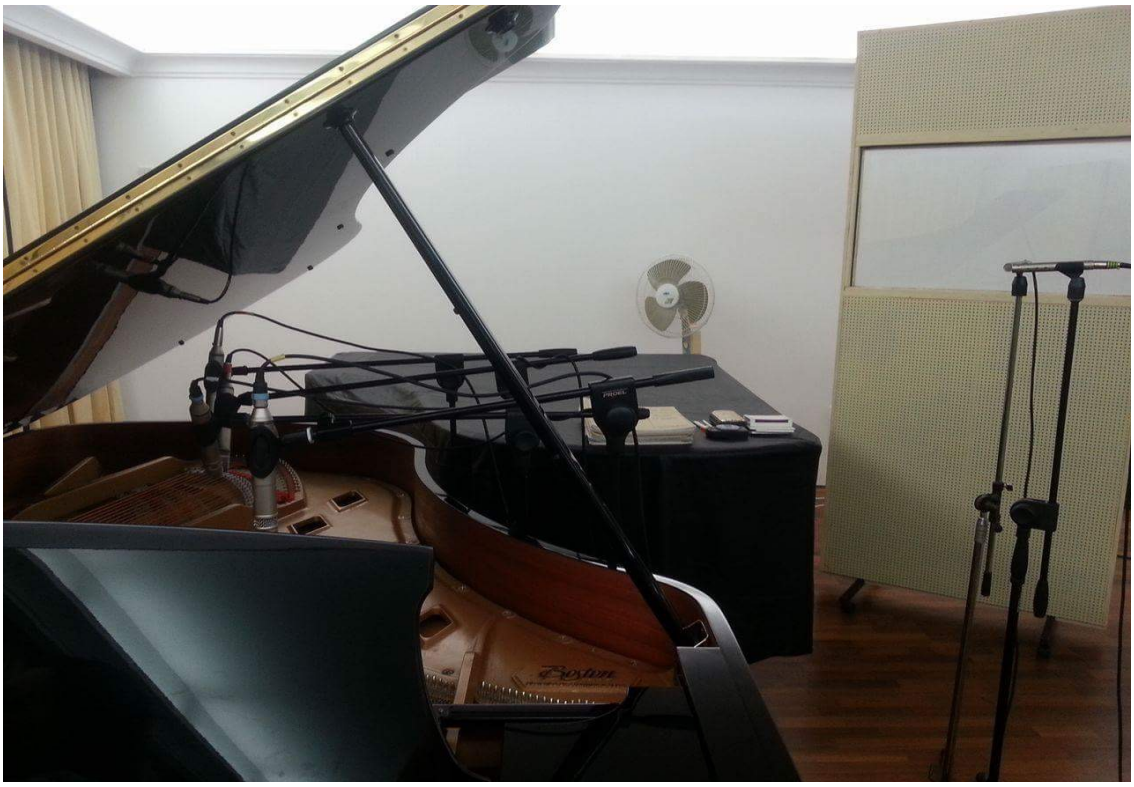

Plate 9: The microphone configuration used for In Bach's Footsteps: Close XY, Close spaced pair and XY three feet away from the piano.

### 4.3 Editing

We embarked on the editing process a few days after the recording in order to not to lose momentum. Six sessions were taken to evaluate, analyze, discuss and select the best moments of the recorded snapshots. While I was listening back to the takes and pointing out any abnormalities, which I could spot aurally, the artist immersed herself in the score analyzing every phrase and note. I recall that there were instances where editing involved replacing one note of the same pitch with another that was in a different part of the take. The only places we did not follow this procedure were in the Cadenzas found in the 'Chromatic Fantasy', Track 13 on the CD [see Plate 10]. These phrases allowed Camilleri to improvise a virtuoso passage to show personality and technical abilities. Once the editing was ready the artist took home a rough copy of

the whole project to make sure everything was in place before I proceeded to the 'staging' process.

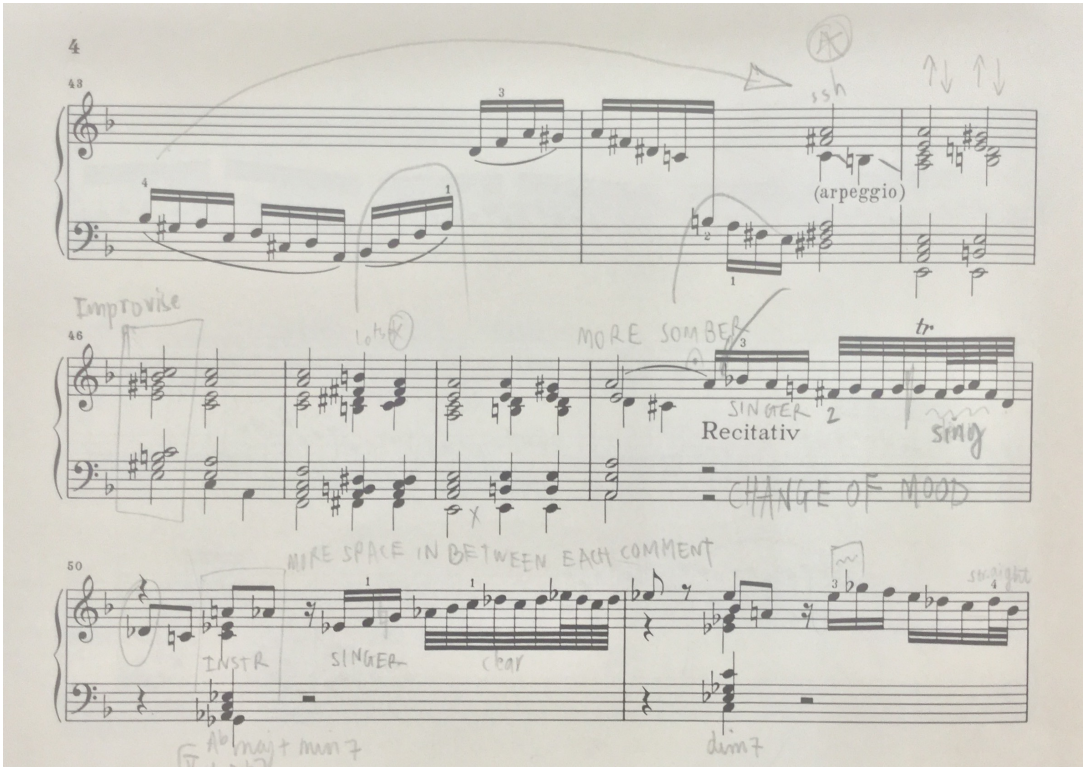


Plate 10: Section from the 'Chromatic Fantasy' score including Camilleri's markings. A Cadenza example is indicated by the term '*arpeggio*'.

The overall recording had some unwanted hiss especially noticeable in soft passages. To filter the signal, Waves Z noise plugin was applied while keeping an eye on the high frequency range.[8] An interesting characteristic noted in some recorded phrases was Camilleri's humming while playing the piano. I chose to keep this distinctive feature, as it is a form of identity and gave more life to the performance.[9] The piano's metallic timbre was addressed by balancing together the three-microphone setup signals and EQing separate channels accordingly [see Plate 11].[10] A gentle compression was applied at the final stage of the mixdown without affecting

[8] The Waves Z Noise was the only available noise reduction plugin available in my studio at that time.
[9] Humming is also noticed in the Goldberg Variations for Piano, which I produced for the same artist.
[10] The Rode NT microphone series did not help to address the heavy mid range sound of the piano.

the dynamic range of the pieces. The overall sound was bussed through a Waves Renaissance hall reverb set to create an artificial large space ambience. The mastering process was not applied on this project even though I suggested doing this procedure to eliminate unwanted background noises.[11]


Plate 11: The Pro Tools mixing window session of the whole album including the reverb and one of the EQ settings, indicating that, for the close XY settings, some air was added to the signal.

### 4.4 Reflections

Despite Camilleri being an in-demand performer, busy with ongoing recitals in Malta and in other countries, she decided to express herself on another level. Through the use of technology the artist shared her idealized vision of Bach's music and presented a "superior listening experience" to her audience (Gracyk, 1997, p. 5). Camilleri (2016) contends that technology can make the performer sound better than in live performances. Glenn Gould argues along the same lines as he states that recording "[enables] error-free, note-perfect performance far in excess of that which [is]

[11] The cover sleeve of *In Bach's Footsteps* mistakably shows that I mastered the album.

possible in a concert" (Symes, 2004, p. 56). Still, Camilleri is cautious as she admits that, "if [recording] is taken to the limit, one can actually produce an album which does not really reflect one's actual capabilities"(ibid.). Still, throughout the editing sessions Camilleri was submersed in the score following every detail of the notation, note values, dynamics and ornamentation. She searched for any slight blemishes in her performance in order to get as close to perfection as possible. Having good reading skills helped me to follow and understand the composer's music and the artist's interpretation. Blier-Carruthers (2016) questions whether such 'perfect' records might actually be capturing the score instead of the performance. She emphasizes that "no performance is actually the score because there is a person involved". Humanness includes human errors, which form part of the excitement in a performance (ibid.). Indirectly, the fact that some background noises (pedal noises, humming etc.) were left in the final version, gave the 'live' feel of an uninterrupted recital.

The phenomenon of secrecy during the making process was pretty much similar to *Riflessi*. No one knew about the album until it was released on the artist's website and in local music shops. There was no promotion or information on any internet site during the recording process of the album. Camilleri (2016) states that because of the limited opportunities in Malta, "one would not want to share his ideas for fear that the other person would take the idea and make it his own, and taking away the opportunity from the originator."

Blake's mediation role concept, which was defined in the concluding part of Chapter 2, was very evident during the making of this album. My position was similar to a coach providing confidence, initiative and enthusiasm to the artist to encourage her to give her utmost during the recording sessions. This multi-role position went

further as I was also a score reader, facilitator, listener and managing the technological aspect of the whole project. All these proficiencies link together 'the score, the artist and the recording technology. One can equate this role to an orchestra conductor's, as the latter requires similar social and emotional skills (excluding the technological competence) to be a good leader. Beinhorn (2015, p. 19) groups all these abilities when he compares the producer's role to a "clinical psychologist and catalyst". Throughout the record, Camilleri was comfortable and was aware that any concerns she had would be heard and addressed:

> I found great support and understanding from a musical point of view. The fact that he [the producer] could understand important musical issues was very comforting, particularly when we came to the editing part… His patience and strive [sic] for excellence were a very important part of my satisfaction while working on this project.[12]

[12] See the full Interview Questionnaire with Dr Joanne Camilleri in Appendix 1.

# CHAPTER 5

# APRILE – MALTA PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

## 5.1 Introduction

One of the most exciting roles I undertook during 2015 was that of a mixing engineer with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra. For a whole season, during 2015 – 2016, I was requested to edit and mix nearly all the live concerts of this orchestra. The challenge was that I had to work on someone else's recording. Microphone placements and setups were up to the person who, for a long number of years, had been assigned by the orchestra board to do the recordings. For this reason I used to attend the general rehearsals to take a note of the microphone placements. It was during one of these practice sessions, in February 2015, that I was approached by the orchestra CEO to discuss his idea of a harp and voices album, which was to be eventually entitled *Aprile*.

The performers for this record were the soprano Gillian Zammit, mezzo-soprano Clare Ghigo and the orchestra principal harpist Britt Arend. Both *bel canto* artists are renowned in the Maltese classical music scene. Zammit is "highly regarded as a recital singer with a varied repertoire of Lieder, Spanish, and French song, as well as being a respected exponent of Maltese Baroque music".[1] Ghigo, who "possesses a resonant and extremely flexible mezzo voice", and once a student of Zammit , is currently busy with concert and opera performances in various European

[1] Information taken from 'Gillian Zammit and Lucia Micallef in Shakespeare Commemoration on Tuesday 5 July', *Victoria International Arts Festival*, July 2016. [Online]. Available at: http://www.viaf.org.mt/gillian-zammit-and-lucia-micallef-in-a-shakespeare-commemoration-on-tuesday-5-july (Accessed: 20 October 2016).

countries.[2] This album was my second collaboration with Ghigo and the first experience with Zammit.

The album repertoire, drafted by Zammit, included songs by Debussy, Granados, Tosti, Saderno, and Vella Gregory, for which the pieces had been "carefully selected due to their strong imagery and their ability to enlighten the soul".[3] All music was originally scored for piano and voice. Ghigo argues that "some of the songs sound different with harp…[this instrument] creates a fantastic Mediterranean vibe".[4] The harpist performed using the original piano parts without any adaptation or re-arrangement for the harp. A pre-launch performance concert was held in Frankfurt in November 2015,[5] with the release of the album accompanied with a concert event at the Manoel Theatre in Valletta in February 2016.[6]

The recordings commenced during the last week of April 2015 and took four sessions to track all pieces. Recorded repertoire included eighteen solo and harp pieces and two duet compositions, with only fifteen songs making it to the final track list.[7]

[2] Information taken from 'Clare Ghigo', *BOV Joseph Calleja Foundation*, [Online]. Available at: http://www.bovjosephcallejafoundation.com/content/clare-ghigo-testimonials (Accessed: 20 October 2016).
[3] Information taken from 'Spring Awakening', *The Times of Malta*, 6 February 2016. [Online]. Available at: http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20160206/social/Spring-awakening.601418 (Accessed: 20 October 2016).
[4] Information taken from the Interview Questionnaire with Clare Ghigo (2016). See Appendix 1 for the full interview.
[5] Information taken from 'Vibrant Malta in Frankfurt', *The Times of Malta*, 13 December 2015. [Online]. Available at: http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20151213/arts-entertainment /Vibrant-Malta-in-Frankfurt.595619 (Accessed: 20 October 2016).
[6] Information taken from 'Marie Benoit's Diary: On Wings of Song', *The Malta Independent*, 22 February 2016. [Online]. Available at: http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2016-02-22/newspaper-lifestyleculture/Marie-s-Diary-On-wings-of-song-6736153725 (Accessed: 20 October 2016).
[7] The personal email correspondences show that Zammit organized a well-planned schedule plan depending on the difficulty of the pieces.

## 5.2 The Recording

The chosen venue for this recording was the Robert Sammut Hall in Floriana, an Anglican Church currently used as a rehearsal space for the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra. *The Goldberg Variations* for String Trio (2015) and *Piano Pastels* (2016) albums were also recorded in this hall. I attended a couple of rehearsals in the same venue with Zammit and harpist Arend to familiarize myself with the repertoire and artists. Ghigo, who at the time of the recording resided in Cardiff, came to Malta for a few days to track her songs, although she was only able to practice her pieces alongside the harpist during the same week of production.

The recordings were all scheduled in the afternoon, as there were orchestra auditions in the same hall in the mornings, resulting in all equipment having to be dismantled after each session and assembled again the following day. For this reason, tape markings, pictures and measurements of the microphone stands were taken on the first day to keep the same position and setup for the following recording sessions. This harp and voice project, including duet tracks, involved some challenging technicalities. The recording setup had to be different from the piano and voice assembly used in *Riflessi* (2015). The three main concerns were the soft sound projection of the harp, the way the ambience of the hall reacted on loud voice passages and the difference between the voices of Zammit and Ghigo. From the first rehearsal with Zammit and the previous collaboration project with Ghigo, I noted that the former sounded softer when compared with the latter's strong projecting voice.

This was not the first time I had worked in this hall and from past experience I was concerned about the quality of its natural ambience.[8] For this reason, the main recording technique applied for this project was spot miking. My idea was to capture

[8] All members of the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra are known to complain about the sound quality of this hall. From personal experience, this venue can give excellent results for small string chamber setups.

the harp using a pair of AKG 414s in XY stereo configuration to get a wider image of the accompaniment. I had to keep in mind that any leaked sound coming from the singer should be kept to a minimum and if captured, would feel as if it was coming from the centre of this microphone array. To reduce this unwanted effect, transparent shields were placed between the voices and harp, keeping enough space and distance for the performers to hear each other comfortably [see Plate 12]. An extra spot microphone was placed on the harp angled towards the sound box to help definition in the mixing stage.

Plate 12: The XY Microphone setup for the harp using a matched pair of AKG 414s. An extra spot microphone was placed on one side directed towards the sounding box.

It was impressive how Zammit, unlike other *bel canto* singers I have worked with, recorded her pieces with hardly any vocal warm up exercises and was very relaxed and confident with the repertoire. The early moments of the first recording session indicated that Zammit was not going to have any problems and that her pieces were going to be smoothly tracked. In the event, her preparation was reflected in the

few retakes and corrections needed, apart from the repeated takes for security purposes.[9]

Ghigo's pieces took longer to go 'on tape' [see Plate 13]. One reason for this might have been the lack of practice with harpist Arend, with the result that some pieces had to be sectioned and tracked in phrases to get the right feel and pitch. At times Zammit guided Ghigo in her interpretation. My interventions to express my views were very minimal as Zammit, with her scores in her hand, was taking note of Ghigo's performances. Actually, my role during the tracking sessions of this album was similar to that of *Riflessi*: operating the recording equipment and marking takes on the given scores. Nearly all judgments and decisions were a mix between the harpist and the two singers with instances when my suggestions were ignored or unnoticed. A case in point was an incident during the recording of Saderno's song 'Amuri Amuri'. In one of Ghigo's takes, it was noted that in certain instances she was hitting the high notes by approaching them from below, resulting in a slightly off-tune phrasing. My suggestion was that we should keep these takes, as the interpretations were a good example of what we were aiming at. Being a Sicilian song, written by Saderno, the marginally off-tune 'cry' performance was typical of the Mediterranean style of singing. Unfortunately my comments were not noticed and Ghigo continued to repeat the same phrases till both Zammit and Ghigo herself were pleased with the interpretation. However, later during the same session, we had a visit from conductor Brian Schembri who assisted for the rest of the recording session.[10] As expected, Ghigo asked Schembri's opinion about the Saderno piece. His views were similar to

[9] My normal recording practice was to have at least two takes of the same section.
[10] Brian Schembri is the current principal conductor of the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra. He is well respected by the classical Maltese artist circle.

my previous suggestions, which resulted in Ghigo repeating the same track to get the proposed Mediterranean 'cry'.[11]

The repertoire included two duets both recorded in one session. For these recordings the setup was slightly changed by adding another microphone for the second voice. The three performers faced each other in the form of a triangle to get a balanced picture at the mixing stage. All transparent shields had to be eliminated as Ghigo was having difficulties hearing Zammit's voice who was just a few feet away from her [see Plate 14].

Plate 13: Mezzo-soprano Clare Ghigo during one of her performance recordings of *Aprile* in Robert Sammut Hall. Notwithstanding the distance from the harpist, in certain loud passages, her voice was heavily leaked into the harp's microphones.
Note: Permission to reproduce this plate has been granted by Clare Ghigo.

The performances of the harpist Arend were brilliantly executed. For accuracy reasons the harpist requested to record multiple takes of some of the introduction sections. In general, there were very few retakes to fix the accompaniment except for

[11] Despite all the efforts and takes, 'Amuri Amuri' by Saderno was not chosen for the final track list.

the pedal noises, which the harp was producing to shift from certain to notes to others. These awkward movements could not be avoided. These unwanted squeaks were attenuated during the editing sessions using Spectral Restoration techniques.

Plate 14: The duets' first attempt setup, which included a transparent separator between the vocal microphones (far left and far right of the photo). This partition had to be eliminated since Ghigo was finding difficulties in hearing Zammit.

One downside of the Robert Sammut Hall was external noises. The venue was in one of the main roads of Floriana, which happened to be the main route for all Malta transport buses to the main terminus. There were many instances where we had to stop and wait for a complete silence to proceed with the recordings. Unfortunately some of the unwanted background noise was captured during some good takes. Spectral restoration was again applied on these artefacts during the editing sessions.

### 5.3 Editing and Mixing Sessions

Zammit requested to attend the editing sessions where together we selected the best snapshots of the performances by analyzing the interpretations of both artists (including herself) and that of the harpist. It was a rather straightforward procedure when compared with other self-produced album projects, as the recording sessions were not heavily loaded with retakes [see Plate 15].

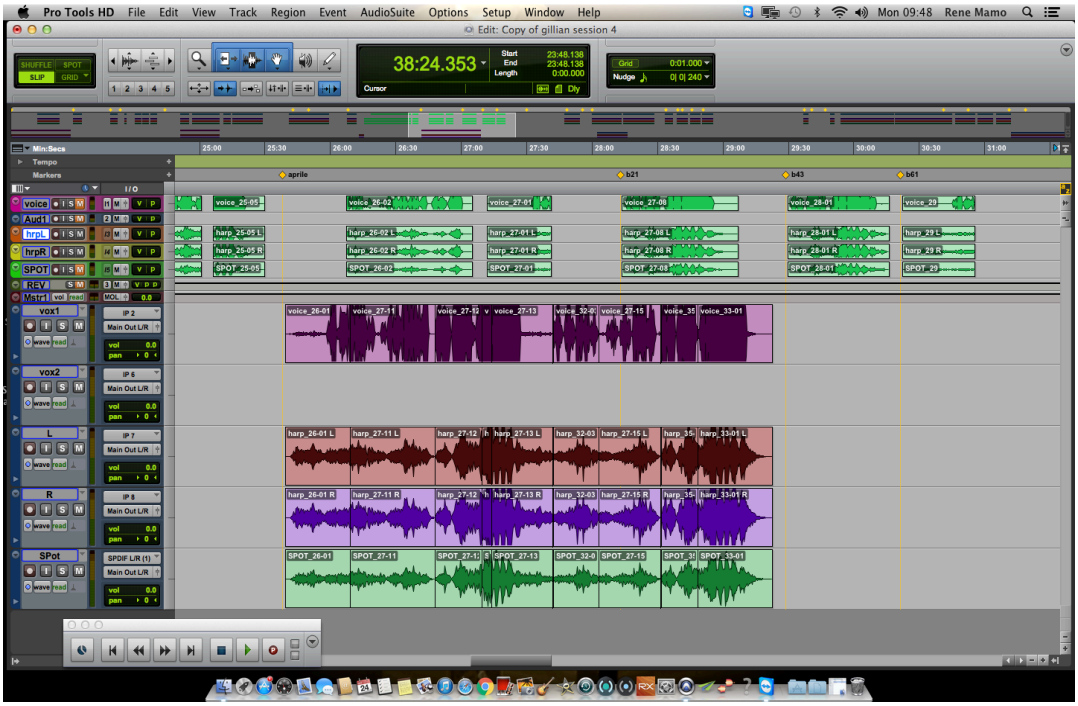


Plate 15: The Pro Tools Edit window showing the original takes (top rows in green) and final edited track 'Aprile' (bottom in multiple colours).

The major concern noted during these sessions was the different staging sounds between the two singers and the harp's front position in the 'soundbox'.[12] Ghigo was sounding as if she was on a larger stage than Zammit, due to the fact that the former voice leaked more into the harp microphones than the latter. The only way forward to minimize this unwanted effect was to mask this difference using artificial

[12] Moore (2016, p. 30) defines 'soundbox' as a virtual special enclosure model for mapping sound sources.

reverberation.[13]

It was also noted that some of Ghigo's piano arrangements were scored in a low register resulting in a soft, 'bassy' sounding harp. This problem was slightly attenuated by using some gentle EQ and volume automation on both the voice and accompaniment without affecting the dynamics and perspective of the track.

A meeting in the studio was held at the end of the editing and mixing sessions with the artistic director, Zammit and myself during which we discussed which songs could go on the final track list.[14] At first, only fourteen songs where selected, with both duets being left out, as Zammit was not pleased with the singers' interpretation.[15] After some perseverance from my end, it was finally agreed to include at least 'Allons Voir', a duet structured in the form of question and answer with some few harmonic phrases (Track 15 on CD). My main argument was that the album needed at least one duet to consolidate all the tracks. I also suggested using *Aprile* as a title track as it was one of the best-recorded tracks, beautifully executed by Zammit and also because the album was scheduled to be launched in Malta in April.

The final fifteen mixes were sent to a mastering engineer for an overall gentle dynamic procedure, levelling and ID tag process. The mastering studio also provided the final DDP file, which was sent directly the CD duplicator.

### 5.4 Reflections

This project resonates differently from the previous two case study albums when considering artist/producer relationships and collaboration. Whereas in *In Bach's Footsteps* and *Riflessi* my role was partly psychological by providing confidence and

[13] Despite, as suggested by the master engineer, there is an additional reverberation, the different stage effect is still audible in the finished product. Listen to tracks number 2 and 3 from *Aprile* CD. My personal opinion is that a bigger hall reverb effect could have addressed this issue.
[14] Unfortunately the artistic director was not present during the recording sessions.
[15] Some of the tracks did not have the 'magic' factor. See Chapter 2, Section 2.1, The Record Producer.

enthusiasm to the artist, it was not the same scenario in *Aprile*. There was a lack of interpersonal communication from the *bel canto* singers, which was felt throughout the whole project. This barrier was directly reflected in the way they viewed and responded to my actions. The artists characterized my role as the 'machine operator', which might be the reason behind the lack of trust the artists had in my judgments. The fact that Ghigo took the advice of conductor Schembri despite my similar suggestions indicates that my contribution for this work, from the perspective of these artists, was just technical. For the mezzo-soprano, my role in this project was that of:

> [a] sound and recording engineer, which involved, not only setting up the ideal recording devices and setup for the type of music, but also making sure what one is playing/ singing is being captured on the recording.[16]

There were many instances during the recording sessions where both singers could not decide on certain takes. My suggestions were at times completely unnoticed, with their reaction being to simply re record the same phrases with the hope of performing them better. This uncertainty supports Zagorski-Thomas's (2014) argument discussed in Section 2.2, The Classical Producer, that the pressure of repeating a phrase that they are unsure of would make them feel negative towards that particular section. These episodes also demonstrated Hallifax's (2016) claims that it is very difficult for a musician to combine performer's and critical listener's roles.[17] Alternatively, the fact that they asked for more retakes showed that the artists relied on the recording technology of postproduction editing. Even the harpist counted on the editing procedures and opted for the modular fashion of recording by tracking parts of her solo sections separately.

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[16] Information taken from the Interview Questionnaire with Clare Ghigo. See Appendix 1 for the full interview.

[17] Guest speaker in *'The Aesthetics of Recording Classical Music'*, chaired by Blier-Carruthers, A. (2016) London College of Music, 2 February. [Online]. Available at: https://vimeo.com/153927392 (Accessed: 1 August 2016).

The phenomenon of secrecy was again present during the making of this record. It was only in the last couple of weeks before the launch that the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra circulated a social media advert about the release of this album. Neither artist ever referred to this project publicly during its making. According to Ghigo (2016), "living on such a small island, where everyone knows each other… one seems to always want to know what others are doing [sic]".

The lack of the producer's coaching as opposed to the two other case studies blurs the mediator's role presented by Blake (2016) in Section 2.3, The Surrogate Orchestra Conductor. Although I managed to present a picture of the 'ideal performance' of these artists by selecting and enhancing the best moments of their performances, the 'machine operator' response was remarkably strong in all stages of this production. All this, together with the artists' outlook and lack of decision-making, do not conform to the 'surrogacy' concept presented in the Literature Review in Section 2.3 of this thesis.

# CHAPTER SIX

# CONCLUSION

## 6.1 Painting with Sound

The techniques implemented in the three case study albums involved well-thought-out actions that contributed to the final recorded versions, representing a reflection of the sound pictures envisioned in the mind of the producer. Every activity throughout the production processes, from the early stages of microphone placement to the final mixing session, was intentional. Nothing was accidental. George Martin described this practice as 'painting with sound' as these albums involved shaping and crafting best-recorded snapshots together with creating the right effects.[1] One can argue that these case study records are 'representations' of performances that never actually existed (Graupera, 2010, p. 7). Each album does not transmit a specified live session but it represents a fictitious perfect performance. The actual recording sessions included stops and repeated takes of the same phrases which were later processed and enhanced in the editing stages to arrive at the final version of what the listeners actually hear on their speakers. Time and space were transcended in these records (ibid.).

As discussed in Chapters 3 to 5, these albums involved a significant amount of technical processing. Whilst a traditional, less electronically mediated classical recording practice was applied in the album *In Bach's Footsteps* (2013), a more contemporary pop music recording approach was implemented in *Riflessi* (2015) and

[1] Information taken from "Soundbreaking: Stories from the Cutting Edge of Recorded Music" 8-Part PBS documentary', in "*Weekly Wilson – Blog of Author Connie C.Wilson"*, March 2016. [Online] Available at: http://weeklywilson.com/2016/03/18/soundbreaking-sxsw-painting-music-8-part-pbs-documentary-special/

*Aprile* (2016) with the use of solely close microphone configurations. As a result, mixing sessions had to be implemented, which included balancing of the vocal recorded tracks with the accompaniment, together with ambient effects and EQs. This whole process of sound manipulation, together with the splicing editing processes, contributed to the *uniqueness* of these records. Indeed, the use of studio technologies and the fact that artists can never replicate exactly their original recording performances results in a distinctive sonic image that can never be reproduced.

Nelson Goodman's idea on art authenticity supports the claim that the presented three case study records presented can be referred to as 'autographic' works, as there is no possibility of producing an exact replica of the same albums and because they "carry with them the physical traces of their making" (Zak III, 2001, p. 21).[2] The process of sound manipulation, i.e. my autographic imprint, is actually happening in what Zak refers to as the 'track' layer: the third compositional stage of a recording (ibid., p. 24). He contends that the track is the recording itself and it represents the finished musical work. The other two layers, the song and musical arrangement, are experienced through the sound of the track. This is the stage where my role as a record producer and engineer took place. As in all classical recordings, both the song and arrangement layers were completed before the commencement of the track.[3]

The recorded pieces can be reproduced by 'allographic' methods in a live performance. In fact the songs included in these records are the 'allographic' part of

[2] Zak refers to Gracyk's study on rock aesthetics where he denotes Nelson Goodman's forms of categorizing media. Goodman claims that a work of art is autographic if the distinction between the original and its forgery is significant. He argues that an original painting is an example of an autographic art, as even the most exact duplication of it can never be counted as genuine since it does not have the actual touch of the artist. On the contrary, music scores (not recorded music) are allographic arts as all copies are genuine instances of the work.

[3] Zak argues that these three layers can operate simultaneously and interactively. This is normally seen in pop and rock music productions where one can find overlapping of layers during the making of the projects.

the same albums as they can be notated, performed and recognized as the works themselves (Graupera, 2010, p. 8). For instance, during the *Riflessi* CD concert launch one could identify the songs that were on the same album as the artist and accompanying performers used scores (the allographic means) to perform the music.

The participants' interview responses about technology in classical music (see Appendix 1) revealed the lack of knowledge and understanding in the autographic process involved in a recording. All artists, musicians and composers know that there is this 'magic wand', which can reshape their performance and compositions. Maybe conductor Schembri's outlook sums up all viewpoints when he states that for him (and them) it is irrelevant how one uses technology to arrive to the final result.[4] It is immaterial what kind of magical potions and incantations are used, as long as the magic makes them sound better, if not perfect. The case studies revealed how the artists and musicians relied on technology especially during the recording stages. For instance in Chapter 3, Footnote 21, it was documented that the string chamber section came to the recording venue unprepared and their pieces where tracked in phrases.

This was also noted in other projects when the musicians, who happened to be members of the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra, practiced on the spot and considered the recording as a rehearsal session. The tight orchestra performance schedule was reflected in every production experience with these performers. A similar experience was reported by Von Rosenvinge (2006) when he documented the recording process of three works by composer Kenneth Fuchs with the London Symphony Orchestra back in 2006. He states that it was a usual procedure for the orchestra to record without any rehearsal as "they are legendary for their unsurpassed ability to read at sight the most complicated musical passages, not only without fault but with

[4] Information taken from the Interview Questionnaire with Brian Schembri. See Appendix 1 for the full interview.

extraordinary artistry." Not only the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra musicians relied on their sight-reading ability but also, as in pop and rock recording projects, on the technological tools employed by the engineer, such as the cut, copy and paste editing facilities, which were offered by the non-linear recording practice. They knew that their performance could be fixed at a later stage and so relied on the "creative cheating".[5]

Artists included in the case study albums and other records and who had rehearsed well before the recordings also counted on the technology that was going to be implemented after the tracking sessions. One example took place during the recording of *Piano Pastels* (2016). Towards the end of a long tiring session on this album, pianist Ramona Zammit Formosa ended up repeating the same phrases over and over again without giving any verbal indications from which bars she was playing. She was playing the same bars as if she knew that in some way editing would smoothen up and solve the jigsaw puzzle performance.

### 6.2 Piano Pastels

Launched in November 2016, *Piano Pastels* was my most recent classical album production to date. It included original piano works by the late Maltese composer Carmelo Pace. Pianist Ramona Zammit Formosa argues that the reason behind this record was to show her admiration of this composer and believed that his work should be performed more on the island and on an international platform. Recorded in one-day session at Robert Sammut Hall, the same recording venue of *Aprile*, *Piano Pastels* reflects my experience and maturity acquired as an engineer and producer.

Technically it is a one of my finest records from the piano collection works.

[5] Glenn Gould cited in Symes (2004, p. 70).

The Yamaha C7 Piano was placed in the middle of the hall together with an array of three different microphone configurations: a close pair, an MS setup four feet away and an XY placed around eight feet from the piano [see Plate 16]. The MS recording gave the best representation between the piano sound and ambience of the hall. As these works had never been published, Zammit Formosa read and performed directly from the original hand written scores. In fact there where instances were in both the recording and editing sessions we had to decipher certain roughly scripted notated passages. The only major technical concern during the editing process was an unwanted 7KHz frequency tone, which was resonating from the piano harp during certain passages. This issue was addressed by using the Spectral Restoration process.

Plate 16: Recording moment during *Piano Pastels* showing the six simultaneous microphones input signals being fed in Pro Tools which included a close matched pair, MS configuration and an XY setup 5/6 feet away from the piano. Pianist Ramona Zammit Formosa is seen behind the monitor screens during the recording.
Note: Permission to reproduce this plate has been granted by Ramona Zammit Formosa.

Zammit Formosa attended all editing sessions but left all judgments and decisions to my discretion. In fact the producer's role in this album was very particular when compared with the majority of the other produced projects as she accepted my input as a creative collaborator and not just a machine operator. Zammit Formosa (2016) states that my presence and attitude "made it easier for me to perform, concentrate and enjoy the recording. He was like my mentor and maestro". The making of this record was a fine example of trust. The mediator's role between the music score, Zammit Formosa as the artist and the technology was clearly perceptible in every stage of the production process. As a producer I searched for quality and was given the chance to guide the artist to reflect and strengthen her performance during the recording session. Acting as a surrogate orchestra conductor, through encouragement and motivation, my role assisted Zammit Formosa to perform her finest interpretations during the recordings while using technological tools as the baton to conjure the musical outcome.

### 6.3 Cultural Constraints

In the Introduction Chapter, Section 0.2, it was argued that financial constraints and poor sales are among the concerns of the Maltese musician when deciding to make a record. The Malta Arts Fund, a funding mechanism of the Malta Council for Culture, did not fund either *Riflessi* or *In Bach's Footsteps*. Both Miriam Cauchi and Joanne Camilleri self-financed the respective projects, including all recording and production expenses, additional musicians' fees included in the album (in the case of *Riflessi*) and launching event expenditures.

Apart from the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra musicians, nearly all Maltese musical artists, including those mentioned in the case studies, are full-time music

teachers. It is difficult to earn a living as a classical virtuoso performer in Malta. The 'professional' classical Maltese musicians can be counted on one hand. Some reside in other countries such as France and UK. One reason for these artists leaving the country might be because "the Maltese concert landscape is not really part of the international networks" (Schembri 2016).[6]

Maltese music also suffers from poor sales, which is noticeable in all genres. In recent years, this phenomenon has been a topic of concern amongst local artists who wish to promote their work and virtuosity though records. Malta is relatively small and therefore the limited sales will hardly cover the expenses for the making of the record. There is also the attitude of "that which is local…[is] often regarded as being inferior" (Mayo and Borg, 2015, p. 122). Giving preference to all that is foreign is one of the legacies of colonialism in Malta (ibid.). It is not the purpose of this thesis to engage in this particular debate but despite there being a noticeable interest in local productions in these last few years, one can still note precedence among listeners, consumers and radio DJs toward Italian, American and British charts over Maltese music. Bugeja (2013) asserts that this inferiority, derived from "our oppressors [who] knew we were the helpless sons and daughters of a tiny Mediterranean island", became ingrained in our psyche.

Secrecy can be regarded as a common denominator in nearly all-classical albums I produced to date. The three case studies revealed how the artists kept *what* was being recorded secret from their contemporaries throughout the making of the project. As discussed in Chapter 1, Malta is a small country where everybody, especially in the same industry or scene, knows everybody else. Sultana (2013, p. 136) refers to the Maltese proverb 'the air has eyes and the walls have ears' as

[6] Information taken from the Interview Questionnaire with Brian Schembri. See Appendix 1 for the full interview.

nothing on the island country is ever truly private and that things will ultimately get known. According to the interview questionnaires and personal correspondences, the artists' main concern was that someone else would use their ideas before they had released their project. A case in point was noted during the making of *Piano Pastels*. Zammit Formosa insisted on keeping everything inconspicuous till the week of the launching event. She claims "the few times I shared my future plans/projects these were taken, and performed before my performance".[7]

Secrecy was also perceived around *how* albums were made. The recording and editing processes are not something musicians are inclined to discuss. Indeed there are artists "who wish to maintain deception, the illusion that they have played flawlessly all in one take" (Fishko, 2002). The endless repetitions of the same phrases and mistakes are expected to remain concealed between the walls of the recording hall. Artists might be in denial, as they do not admit to themselves how much editing is done (ibid.). This attitude was reflected in the publicity articles published in local newspapers on the case study albums where there was no reference to the record producer who had produced the record. Likewise, the absence of this same record producer from all the different album launch events (except for *Piano Pastels*) might also be an indication of the desire not to expose the truth that there was someone else behind the perfectly performed work. It could be *shameful* for the artist to reveal the technological mediation involved to his/her audience.

> Artists who opt not to share their experiences of the recording process might do that on the premise that whatever they say might challenge or putting at risk their professional reputation and, therefore, the current gain from their artistic activity [sic] (Ciantar, 2016).[8]

[7] Information taken from the Interview Questionnaire with Ramona Zammit Formosa. See Appendix 1 for the full interview.
[8] Information taken from the Interview Questionnaire with Dr Philip Ciantar. See Appendix 1 for the full interview.

All these psycho and socio-cultural phenomena are constraints, which the Maltese artists and musicians brought with them into the recording environment. As the producer of these albums, I had to adapt and act according to these circumstances. Certain cultural characteristics are imprinted in our Mediterranean identity, making it a tough journey for change.

### 6.4 The Baton or the Razor?

The case study chapters reveal that the general perception of Maltese classical artists and musicians of the record producer's role is that of a 'machine operator'. Despite the performers on these albums referring to the position as 'producer', the way they behaved and responded was as if all they actually required was a sound engineer to take over the technical side of the recording. Their outlook can be literally compared to the terms 'director of recording' or 'recorder' – terms used for a record producer in the early days (Burgess, 2013, p. 15).

As discussed in Section 0.3, the genre in itself involves a degree of symbolic capital, which is a critical factor in the way processes of power relationships operate in the recording environment (McIntyre, 2008, p. 6). This form of capital – prestige, celebrity and consecration – was strongly felt among the *bel canto* artists of *Riflessi* and *Aprile* albums. Marshall argues that celebrity "acts as 'a way of providing distinctions and definitions of success' for those working in the studio and this 'celebrity status confers on the person a certain discursive power'" (ibid.).

As a decision-making agent my role as a producer was overshadowed through the strong symbolic capital of artists, especially during the recording process. As shown in the three case studies I had to intrinsically adapt to the circumstances during the recording sessions by working in the shadows and acting, wherever

possible, as a facilitator in creating the right atmosphere for the artists and musicians to perform at their best. The following editing sessions involved levels of decision-making, such as technical processing, that were often completely out of the hands of the artists. All the artists (apart from Ghigo in *Aprile*) assisted this process. Even though this is not the norm in editing sessions, each phrase selection was discussed with the respective artist with reference to the music scores and flow of the performances. As the producer I had to find ways to convince the artists which phrases they should go for. The three case studies, together with all other classical projects I produced to date, show that musicians tend to want perfection and are always immersed in their own detail without being able to listen subjectively and critically. It required the producer's patience to persuade the artists, which phrases actually worked together.

The mixing stages were the moments where as a decision-making agent I crafted and polished the final tracks without the artists' presence. Through the use of studio technology I could enhance the dynamics, refine the performance timbre and changed the listener's perception of the hall size through artificial reverberation.

Just like an orchestral conductor, in my role as a record producer I had clear goals for each project. The method of achieving them was not necessarily dictated to the artists although I brought them to my side in nearly every stage of the production process. The conductor analogy is also reflected when as a producer I acted as a coach by providing the artists encouragement during the recording process even if in certain cases (as in *Aprile*) my suggestions were unnoticed. Coaching was also carried out in the editing sessions where I guided the artists to reflect objectively on the recorded performance. My responsibilities in the projects went far beyond what they perceived as their 'machine operator'. As a surrogate orchestra conductor of the presented

projects I had a vision where I pictured the end result in my mind and translated it onto the recording.

### 6.5 Final Thoughts

This critical commentary presents the analysis and reflections of the processes involved in the making of three classical albums produced over a period of four years.[9] These projects represent the accumulation of experience and a lifetime's dedication to music. As the first-ever Maltese study in music production, this thesis explores different personal experiences as a record producer in this island country. The case studies reveal good and bad aspects of practice including different ways of collaboration, standing much of the time in the shadows and doing the invisible work behind the scenes. The final project to date, *Piano Pastels*, seems to answer lots of the questions and to justify the instincts that I had developed through the previous albums. It presents a practice where the artist was prepared to trust my experience as a producer and engage me in every part of the process – from the early rehearsal practise sessions to the launch event of the album. For Zammit Formosa (2016) I was "her right and left hand" throughout the whole project.[10] What I have learnt from this PhD critical reflection is that this collaborative process based on trust is an essential new way forward in Maltese classical music recording and production. Maybe Zammit Formosa was more dependent on me as collaborator than the others. What is apparent is that she needed someone, in this case a record producer, with the sensitivity to understand her musical needs to achieve her personal idea and ideal performance.

[9] See Plate 5.
[10] Zammit Formosa (2016) [Imperial Ballroom, Sliema. 24 November].

In an environment where everybody knows each other, only a few will manage to be active in the sphere of arts. As Sultana (2013, p. 137) argues, the maxim 'it's who you know, not what you know' is particularly relevant to the Maltese context. Networks such as family groups and political parties are the norm to succeed. Sultana claims that "this is not necessarily corruption and favouritism – though of course it can be, and often is" (ibid., p. 137). Few of the fine Maltese artists and musicians are opting to pursue their career and studies abroad. There are the rare cases of success such as Joseph Calleja, the Maltese tenor who is currently one of the most sought-after tenors in the international market. The majority of other hard working artists and performers who reside in Malta are, as conductor Schembri argues, "are fishing in very limited shallow waters".[11]

As discussed in Section 0.4, Maltese Culture and Society, pressure to protect one's honour and reputation is a typical phenomenon in small tight-knit communities. This might be a plausible reason why all the Maltese classical artists who I have worked with in these last few years kept the making of their albums and projects away from the public eye until the release. Furthermore, many of these musicians showed a sense of unwillingness to cogitate and self-critique. With this attitude artists are holding themselves back not only in terms of their own development as musicians but also on what they can achieve in and with the recordings. Being self-critical, more self-reflective and open to collaborate and trust whomever the artists take on board as their record producer are good practice recommendations to get the best outcomes out of Maltese art music.

[11] Information taken from the Interview Questionnaire with Brian Schembri. See Appendix 1 for the full interview.

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## Appendix 1

## Interviews

### Dr Joanne Camilleri – Pianist: Interviewed on 20 July 2016

*Why do very few Maltese classical artists and musicians go the extra mile and release an album?*

In my opinion, in order to release an album, one must make sure that the level of professionalism is high and up to international standards. The Maltese population is small and relatively a very small percentage of artists are at a high professional level, where they can believe that their recording will compete well in the international recording industry (although anybody can really record an album!)

Another factor is that in Malta, the culture of recording an album to be released in the international market is not very popular (since the nation's way of thinking is rather home-based), although in recent years the idea is taking hold and more natives are looking further afield.

The level of opportunity to record on the island is rather limited. It is very challenging to find the right recording venue (and instrument, in the case of pianists) and particularly to find a recording engineer/producer whom the musician believes is truly professionally skilled to produce a high-quality album. From my experience, the fact that my recording engineer/producer was himself a classical musician, who could also read and understand music, apart from being a skilled producer, was a pleasure and made the experience easier to deal with.

*What are your views on technology in classical music recordings?*

While working on my albums, it was delightful to learn about the different techniques available to the producer. It is amazing how much technology can help in

making the performer sound even better than one is in live performance, and if this is taken to the limit, one can actually produce an album which does not really reflect one's actual capabilities (through much editing in cut/paste of bars of music, tuning, tempo..) – which, in my opinion, is very sad. However, from the positive aspect, technology can also enhance the quality of the product produced by a high quality musician, making the album a great experience to listen to, and a good substitute for a live concert (with the technological enhancements of producing the actual reverb of the concert hall on recording).

*Despite the limited opportunities, Malta still boasts some fine classical artists and composers. Still, Maltese musicians, especially in the classical genre, strive to find ways to attract, maintain and increase their followers. Do you agree with this statement and why?*

Yes I agree. Since Malta is a small island, the variety of audiences for the different concerts is limited, with a typical case scenario being that one finds the same people attending the different classical concerts. This is also why a concert programme is not repeated in different venues on the island, because the audience attracted to the programme is going to be the same every time. Having said this, musicians try to find different ways of increasing and widening their audiences, by trying to target as many tourists visiting the island as possible.

*One common phenomenon noticed in Maltese classical music production is secrecy during the recording stage. Why do you think local artists opt not to share the recording experience during its making?*

I think this is because the opportunities on the island are so limited that one would not want to share his ideas for fear that the other person would take the idea and make it his own, and taking away the opportunity from the originator.

*What is/are the reasons you decided to do the record?*

When I came to record my first album, I had reached a certain level of achievement and recognition, with several noted performances to my name and also with a prestigious academic qualification (Doctorate in Music Performance), which only a handful of other Maltese had. I felt I wanted to take my personal achievements a little further by recording an album, whose theme actually tied in with my doctoral research. I wanted to produce something that was not such a mainstream project on the Maltese islands.

*Define my role in your album.*

I felt that my recording engineer / producer was a very important part of the whole project, particularly since I found great support and understanding from a musical point of view. The fact that he could understand important musical issues was very comforting, particularly when we came to the editing part. Seeing somebody confidently setting up the recording studio, somebody who took extreme care in the setting up of microphones and soundboards, gave me confidence from the start that the album was going to be of a refined quality. His patience and strive for excellence were a very important part of my satisfaction while working on this project.

**Mary Ann Cauchi – Head of Johann Strauss Music School, Malta:**

**Interviewed on 18 July 2016**

*Why very few Maltese classical artists and musicians go the extra mile and release an album?*

Releasing an album is permanent and several professional Maltese artists and musicians actually go much more than an extra mile to mark their permanency.

*What are your views on technology in classical music recordings?*

As a performer, I always sought authenticity in all aspects including instruments, scores, technique, and interpretation. Thus, I very gladly appreciate to listen to and perform authentic recordings – holding as much as possible onto the original with all mortal perfections and imperfections.

*Despite the limited opportunities, Malta still boasts some fine classical artists and composers. Still, Maltese musicians, especially in the classical genre, strive to find ways to attract, maintain and increase their followers. Do you agree with this statement and why?*

I agree with the above as a statement in general however this phenomena is not only applicable to classical music and neither only applicable to Malta but on a European scale if not also internationally. I believe that our go-go-go society does not permit to attract, maintain and increase followers consistently……it's rather unpredictable.

*One common phenomenon noticed in Maltese classical music production is secrecy during the recording stage. Why do you think local artists opt not to share the recording experience during its making?*

Secrecy does not necessary pronounce a negative vibe. Malta's socio-geographic insularity portrays in various ways and means…and this is only one of them.

**Dr Philip Ciantar – Senior Lecturer at The University of Malta /Composer:**

**Interviewed on 20 July 2016**

*Why do very few Maltese classical artists and musicians go the extra mile and release an album?*

In my opinion, it's all about financial constraints. They might find very little financial support to do this and, consequently, they give up. This may also be linked to their entrepreneurial inability to persuade people in business to invest in them. Others might think that online facilitates (like YouTube and Facebook) are enough to help them market themselves locally. Their perspective is mainly local with minimal or no interest to reach international markets.

*What are your views on technology in classical music recordings?*

In my view, technology in classical music recordings is the key to international fame. Moreover, making recordings of your own music is a means of preservation. Unfortunately, in Malta we have several examples of brilliant performers whose music and performances were never recorded professionally. The result of that being either no recordings at all of these artists or recordings which are amateurishly produced.

*Despite the limited opportunities, Malta still boasts some fine classical artists and composers. Still, Maltese musicians, especially in the classical genre, strive to find ways to attract, maintain and increase their followers. Do you agree with this statement and why?*

I definitely agree. Some local artists and composers still think that they can make it all on their own. So, they hold back or even refuse from investing in the right supporting professional people (managers, promoters etc.) who can really lead them professionally to market themselves effectively. I think that it all stems from the way some Maltese artists still think about investing in such set-ups which they might consider as waste of money. There are huge benefits and strong turnouts from having the right supporting team of people which local artists and composers are not yet aware of and/or reluctant to explore. Local artists and composers should become more aware of such supporting structures if they really want to become international. Training in cultural and arts management is the key to a change in mentality.

*One common phenomenon noticed in Maltese classical music production is secrecy during the recording stage. Why do you think local artists opt not to share the recording experience during its making?*

It's all coming from a lack of trust that people in Malta have in one another. We learned not to trust the colonialist because it was mainly interested in protecting its own interests. We continued with that kind of attitude even among us till the present time. In my view, this lack of trust became symptomatic, ingrained in our consciousness as a nation. What happens in the recording studio is an extension of what happens in everyday life. So, the attitude that you describe in your question should be seen in this perspective. Malta is a small insular island in which people are

continuously struggling to protect their own space (being geographical, cultural, social, financial etc.) and interests. Too much openness is sometimes seen here as a threat to one's status quo and, therefore, should be avoided or be dealt with extreme discreteness. Artists who opt not to share their experiences of the recording process might do that on the premise that whatever they say might challenge or putting at risk their professional reputation and, therefore, the current gain from their artistic activity.

**Mro. Brian Schembri – Principal Conductor and Artistic Director at the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra: Interviewed on 19 July 2016**

*Why do very few Maltese classical artists and musicians go the extra mile and release an album?*

Honestly, very few are of essential artistic interest to make such an investment worth the while. Of course this may be a subjective opinion and definitely should make us think of why would anybody need to do a recording?

Apart from these fundamental general issues, I would think that in Malta, financial considerations, logistic issues (venues, instruments etc), lack of experienced and qualified artistic producers, make it difficult for anybody to go that exra mile. The Maltese concert landscape is not really part of the international networks, therefore there may be a lack of scope for a locally based artist to issue a classical cd. They may not really need a recorded production for local promotion purposes, due to the diminutive size of our local classical music scene.

*What are your views on technology in classical music recordings?*

Once the decision to record has been taken, the whole concept of the performance changes, for better or for worse. It is a risk the artist needs to take.

A recording should be loyal to the work and give an honest portrait of the performer. How to achieve that technologically is irrelevant to me.

Personally, I think that a recording is in fact done by the record producer and his sound engineer/s and editors. Of course my input as artist, performer and "judge" is indispensable to make the recording "mine", but ultimately it is the persons in the recording booth that are really experiencing the performance as a recording-taking-form, most probably in an empty studio. It is these persons who can and should channel the performance towards the recording it may become. Therefore, the choice of production team is of primary importance.

*Despite the limited opportunities, Malta still boasts some fine classical artists and composers. Still, Maltese musicians, especially in the classical genre, strive to find ways to attract, maintain and increase their followers. Do you agree with this statement and why?*

As I said, however busy it might seem, the local Maltese music landscape is not really part of mainstream international networks. Therefore artists active locally are fishing in very limited shallow waters.

The size of a culturally conscious public, avid for the regular intake of classical music is quite limited, even if proportionally to the population, it may even be in line with international statistics. Present day artistic or pseudo artistic trends and official policies built for and by these trends are not the best guarantees that this classical music public will develop. Even if it somehow does quantitavely, I am not

sure that present day ideologies will permit the masses to develop the emotional and intellectual thirst for the search of the spiritual and the divine in art.

**Dr Veronique Vella – Composer: Interviewed on 29 July 2016**

*Why do very few Maltese classical artists and musicians go the extra mile and release an album?*

Perhaps due to lack of funding opportunities for this particular genre. Also they might think there isn't a big enough market for it, particularly locally.

*What are your views on technology in classical music recordings?*

It is important to work with professionals who have experience recording music in that particular style. Technology is there to enhance the natural acoustics of the instument(s) in the chosen venue for recording. If recording takes place in a studio, the end result would be that of a high-quality 'live' recording where single takes are always more desirable than a heavily edited tracks.

*Despite the limited opportunities, Malta still boasts some fine classical artists and composers. Still, Maltese musicians, especially in the classical genre, strive to find ways to attract, maintain and increase their followers. Do you agree with this statement and why?*

There are several Maltese musicians and composers who have left their mark. I do believe that despite its small size, concert halls locally still manage to attract large audiences especially if well-known classical pieces feature in the programme. Audience numbers are much smaller when contemporary or lesser known works are played, but this is the case with many other countries too, including UK. What often

happens is that a new or less popular piece is sandwiched between 2 famous works to attract numbers.

I think the fundamental problem is awareness and education from an early age. In recent years in Malta, as in many other countries, there have been some admirable efforts to increase children's appreciation of classical music, such as Teatru Manoel's 'Toi Toi' education programme. However, in schools, if Music lessons feature at all, this is still viewed as having secondary importance possibly due to the lack of 'job' opportunities a music career may offer on a small island.

*The one common phenomenon noticed in Maltese classical music production is secrecy during the recording stage. Why do you think local artists opt not to share the recording experience during its making?*

I am not sure how to answer this, but it might be because they would rather share the complete finished product rather than snippets of the work in progress.

*Define my role in your album/project.*

As composer and pianist I have had the pleasure of working with Rene Mamo on several occasions. The most recent projects were 2 of my new compositions, one for soprano and piano (Miriam Cauchi's CD), the other for string quartet and digitally manipulated samples (music for dance by Malta's national dance company ZfinMalta, featured in the 2016 edition of the Malta International Arts Festival). Rene's role was that of recording artist/sound engineer/producer. During the recording process he was very helpful, direct, patient and never obtrusive. His knowledge of classical music and other genres is apparent. He shows great passion for his work and was timely in his delivery of the work.

**Alex Vella Gregory – Composer: Interviewed on 24 July 2016**

*Why do very few Maltese classical artists and musicians go the extra mile and release an album?*

I believe there are several challenges to be faced:

- the lack of distributors willing to promote Maltese artists
- the lack of state of the art recording facilities and / or qualified sound engineers
- the challenges posed by media sharing online
- the time limitations: most Maltese musicians are part-time…those who are full time have to devote most of their time to teaching and performing, making recordings unviable or too time consuming to fit in.

*What are your views on technology in classical music recordings?*

As with any other technology, it is the way in which it is utilised that determines its effect as being positive or negative. Better recording equipment can result in a clearer sound, and a more balanced recording. However I question the use of over intrusive editing (including pitch correction, ambience manipulation, etc.) which can result in cold unemotional studio recordings.

I believe that it is fundamentally about redefining the role of the sound engineer not simply as being a technician or craftsman, but also an artist who has to shape the sound with the technology available to him/her.

*Despite the limited opportunities, Malta still boasts some fine classical artists and composers. Still, Maltese musicians, especially in the classical genre, strive to find ways to attract, maintain and increase their followers. Do you agree with this statement and why?*

This could be a whole dissertation in itself…:) I will again outline a few main points.

- Competition from other forms of art and entertainment. The development of a virtual platform means that people no longer have to attend concerts or listen to the radio to listen to music…but can search for whatever they like whenever they like.
- the lack of proper management structures and proper distribution channels
- the lack of arts education
- the gap between artists and their audiences, often leading to unattractive programming
- the inability of most artists to engage with the community

*One common phenomenon noticed in Maltese classical music production is secrecy during the recording stage. Why do you think local artists opt not to share the recording experience during its making?*

It all boils down to a small competitive market. Unlike the pop industry, where the recording process is often used as a marketing tool in itself…many still think that talking about doing it will somehow effect the end product. I think it is the by product of a closed mentality…I can find no logical reason for it!

**Clare Ghigo – Mezzo Soprano: Interviewed on 13 September 2016**

*Why do very few Maltese classical artists and musicians go the extra mile and release an album?*

Firstly only few Maltese artists manage to be full time musicians, the others do music on the side as a hobby. Therefore an 'amateur ' singer may not have the need or the sufficient funds to invest in a cd recording, let alone release an album.

*What are your views on technology in classical music recordings?*

I think that most classical musicians, are not so informed on the matter. However I must say that high quality recordings a great asset for young artists who want to get themselves noticed. Therefore the artist should know and learn how recordings work.

*One common phenomenon noticed in Maltese classical music production is secrecy during the recording stage. Why do you think local artists opt not to share the recording experience during its making?*

Living on such a small island, where everyone knows each other, creates unnecessary anxiety to keep secrets. One seems to always want to know what others are doing, and on the island there is a great amount of talent and not a lot of work.

*What is/are the reasons you decided to do the record?*

I think some songs sound different with harp and there isn't much harp and voice recordings out there. Also the harp creates a fantastic Mediterranean vibe.

*Define my role in your album Aprile.*

Sound and recording engineer, which involved, not only setting up the ideal recording devices and setup for the type of music, but also making sure what one is playing/ singing is being captured on the recording.

**Ramona Zammit Formosa – Pianist: Interviewed on 16 September 2016**

*Why do very few Maltese classical artists and musicians go the extra mile and release an album?*

Today, musicians have the luxury of hearing most works on YouTube, on the other hand I think it's a lack of financial funds/sponsorships.

*What are your views on technology in classical music recordings?*

Though I am not a technological person, I appreciate the high level of technological possibilities/remedies.

*Despite the limited opportunities, Malta still boasts some fine classical artists and composers. Still, Maltese musicians, especially in the classical genre, strive to find ways to attract, maintain and increase their followers. Do you agree with this statement and why?*

Yes certainly. Pop /popular musicians and singers take most of the opportunities and work of trained musicians especially in cultural spots /work etc. Therefore classical musicians study and strive to try to make a way.

*One common phenomenon noticed in Maltese classical music production is secrecy during the recording stage. Why do you think local artists opt not to share the recording experience during its making?*

On a personal note, the few times I shared my future plans/projects these were taken, and performed before my performance.

*What is/are the reasons you decided to do the record?*

As a performer, I enjoy sharing music. This recent recording is of a composer whom I deeply admire and who I believe deserves to be performed more locally and internationally.

*Define my role in your album.*

Rene Mamo was very helpful throughout this recording. His calm, attentive, precise attitude made it easier for me to perform, concentrate and enjoy the recording. He was like my mentor and maestro.

## Appendix 2

## GLOSSARY

**Auto-Tune** – Software for tuning a performance automatically.

**Compression** – A reduction or gain dynamic process using a signal processor, which acts as an automatic volume control.

**Cubase** – Software music sequencer by Steinberg.

**Decca Tree** – A popular microphone setting for orchestral situations originated in the early 1950s by Decca engineers that uses three omnidirectional microphones. The arrangement consists of a basic tree in the shape of T with one microphone placed in front to provide the front/centre sound while the other two capture the left and right stereo field.

**EQ** – Abbreviation for 'Equalisation': a process used to alter and control the relative amplitude of frequencies.

**Floor Noise** – Low frequency rumble from external sources.

**Gobo -** A movable partition used to prevent the sound of an instrument from reaching another instrument's microphone.

**Half-Open Gobo** – A gobo with glass window at the upper part.

**Mics** – Short term for microphones.

**MIDI** – Abbreviation for 'Musical Instrument Digital Interface': a digital language that allows synthesizers and computers to communicate and control each other.

**MS Microphone Configuration** – Short for Mid-Side technique that uses two coincident-pair microphones. One of the mics (Mid) is faced forward towards the sound source. The other mic (side) is set to a figure of 8 polar pattern and placed at an angle of 90 degrees to the other mic as to capture the ambience. A sum-and difference- matrix is used to obtain a stereo image.

**Spaced Microphone Configuration** – A microphone technique, which uses two mics of the same type and manufacturer, placed few feet apart in order to create a stereo image.

**Spectral Restoration –** At times referred to as 'spectral repair': a software tool for attenuating unwanted sounds from a recording such as squeaks and outside noises.

**Spot miking** – Placing the microphones few feet away from the sound source.

**Splices** – Term derived from 'splice', which was used in the reel-to-reel recording days to define a tape joint.

**Waves Renaissance Reverb** – A reverb plug-in by Waves.

**Waves Z noise** – Noise reduction audio processor by Waves.

**XY Microphone Configuration** – A coincident-pair microphone technique used to obtain a coherent stereo image. The microphones are placed with the their grills as close together as possible and facing at 90 to 135 degrees to each other.

## APPENDIX 3

## Partial Discography of Rene' Mamo

**Works Between 1998 -1999**

| Artist | Track/Album/Project | Role[1] |
|---|---|---|
| Charlie Mamo Caligari | Lil-Ommi - CD album | PR |
| Claudio Tonna | Missier Int u Jien | SW/PR |
| Mark Tonna | Ahjar | SW/PR |
| Mark Tonna | Allergija ghal-Bnedmin | SW/PR |
| Mark Tonna | L-akbar Imhabba - Musical | ME |
| Debbie Scerri | Kollox Jinbidel maz-Zmien | SW/PR |
| Lara Azzopardi | Too Much for Words | PR |
| Lara Azzopardi | Dreams | PR |
| Lara Azzopardi | Avventura | PR |
| Lara Azzopardi | Crush | PR |
| Helen Micallef | Bhal Kull Omm | PR |
| Lawrence Grey | Xi Hadd | SW/PR |
| Mark Tonna & Leontine | Ma Nifhimx | SW/PR |
| Joe Demicoli | Alaxanxe - CD album | PR |
| Joe Demicoli | Il-Maltin | PR |
| Rita Pace | F'Bahar Wiehed TV Opening Signature Tune | PR |
| Rita Pace | Hagar Qim | PR |
| Rita Pace | Xemx | PR |

[1] Legend: PR – Producer, SW – Songwriter, ME – Mix Engineer, EN – Engineer, SD – Sound Designer,

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Leontine | Pupa tal-Loghob | SW/PR |
| Leontine | Il-Karba tal-Mument | SW/PR |
| Leontine | Children of Mother Earth | SW/PR |
| Leontine | Southern Dream | SW/PR |
| Rene Mamo | Cama Cama Opening Signature Tune | SW/PR |
| Enzo Gusmann | Hallini Nohlom | SW/PR |

**Works between 2000 -2004**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Ludwig Galea | Forever Love | PR |
| Nadine Axisa | Ocean Winds | SW/PR |
| Fiona Cauchi | One-way Love | SW/PR |
| Fiona Cauchi | All I Need | SW/PR |
| Nadine Axisa | Love Unconditional | SW/PR |
| Karen Polidano | L-Imghoddi mill-Gdid | SW/PR |
| Karen Polidano | Put Your Faith in Me | SW/PR |
| Karen Polidano | Dreams | PR |
| Karen Polidano | Three Days | PR |
| Karen Polidano | Nothing I Can Do | SW/PR |
| Leontine | Fjamma Bla Tmiem | SW/PR |
| Leontine | Nistennik | SW/PR |
| Leontine | Il-Bidu u t-Tmiem | SW/PR |
| Leontine | By Your Side | SW/PR |
| Leontine | Heaven | SW/PR |
| Leontine | Ghalik Biss | SW/PR |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Mark Tonna | Nixtieq Naf | SW/PR |
| Mark Tonna | Taparsi | SW/PR |
| Mark Tonna | Il-Bikja tal-Lejl | SW/PR |
| Mark Tonna | Farag ta Xejn | SW/PR |
| Mark Tonna | L-Imhabba Ghalik | PR |
| Mark Tonna | Thallihomx | PR |
| Mark Tonna | Land I Call Home | PR |
| Mark Tonna | Wahdek Ma Tkun Qatt | PR |
| Mark Tonna | Kantali Habib | PR |
| Mark Tonna | X'Hin Tkun Hawn | PR |
| Nadine Axisa | Jekk Ghada ma Jisbahx | SW/PR |
| Marthese Tanti | Meta Jidwi l-Lejl | SW/PR |
| Marthese Tanti | Worlds Apart | PR |
| Marthese Tanti | Light the Fires | SW/PR |
| Marthese Tanti | Helsien | SW/PR |
| Rita Pace | Your Fool | PR |
| Rita Pace | Int u Jien | PR |
| Rita Pace | Hallini Hdejk | PR |
| Rita Pace | Hares Madwarek | PR |
| Rita Pace | Walking Storm | PR |
| Rita Pace | Moments of Love | PR |
| Rita Pace | Iggamjajt | PR |
| Rita Pace | Ghalik Biss | PR |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Rita Pace | Dream Me | PR |
| Rita Pace | Love is All We Need | PR |
| Rita Pace | Come Back Home | PR |
| Rita Pace | No More Lies | PR |
| Rita Pace | Come Into My Life | PR |
| Rita Pace | Touch the Wind | PR |
| Rita Pace | Why Do We? | PR |
| Rita Pace | Oasi fid-Desert | PR |
| Rita Pace | Irrid Inhobbok | PR |
| Rita Pace | Thallinix | PR |
| Ludwig Galea | Qalb Makusa | PR |
| Julie Zahra | Inhobbok | SW/PR |
| Julie Zahra | Kwiekeb | SW/PR |
| Julie Zahra | Il-Bank fit-Triq tal-Wied | SW/PR |
| Julie Zahra & Ludwig Galea | Let Them Know | SW/PR |
| Julie Zahra & Ludwig Galea | Adagio | SW/PR |
| Julie Zahra | Jum Wara Jum | SW/PR |
| Julie Zahra | Eternity | SW/PR |
| Julie Zahra | Hdejk | SW/PR |
| Miriam Christine Borg | Fid-Dell ta Haddiehor | SW/PR |
| Mark Doneo | F' Hajtek Dahhal Daqsxejn Muzika | SW/PR |
| Hermann Bonaci | Dizzjunarju | SW/PR |
| Hermann Bonaci | Warrbuli | SW/PR |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Renato | Kumbinazzjoni | SW/PR |
| Jeffrey Scicluna | X'Jahti | PR |
| Walter Micallef | Canfira | PR |
| Walter Micallef | Nofs in-Nhar | PR |
| Walter Micallef | M'Jien Xejn | PR |
| Walter Micallef | Il-Fjamma | PR |
| Walter Micallef | Siehbi fil-Cupboard tal-Kcina | PR |
| Debbie Scerri | L' Angli ta l'Art | SW/PR |
| Debbie Scerri | F'Omm il-Vjolin | PR |
| Gillian Attard | I'm in Heaven | SW/PR |
| Amanda | Djamanti | SW/PR |
| Ira Losco | Fejn Stahbejtli | PR |
| Mark Spiteri Lucas | Dal-Gens | PR |
| Marbek Spiteri | Il-Ballu Tac-Cinju | SW/PR |
| Godwin Lucas | Triq ghal-Gejjien | SW/PR |
| Godwin Lucas | Fejn Hu l-Fjur | SW/PR |
| Olivia Lewis | Kapitlu Gdid | SW/PR |
| Donna Marie Ellul | Zerniq | SW/PR |
| Glen Vella | Colourblind | PR |
| Glen Vella | Kelma Wahda Biss | SW/PR |
| Glen Vella & Eleonor Cassar | It-Tfal tal-Lum | PR |
| Mark Spiteri Lucas | Tektik | PR |
| Mark Spiteri Lucas | Qamar Biss | PR |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Ivan Spiteri Lucas | Ghanja lil Krista | PR |
| Mark Spiteri Lucas | Min gol-Garaxx | PR |
| Mark Spiteri Lucas | Rulett | PR |
| Mark Spiteri Lucas | Hitan | PR |
| Mark Spiteri Lucas | A World of Love | PR |
| Mark Spiteri Lucas | Min Jaf | PR |
| Chan Vella | Messagg ta Kuragg | PR |
| Bernice | When Dancing Dayes are Over | PR |
| Bernice | Secret Garden | PR |
| Rene' Mamo | Canteen TV Opening Signature Tune | SW/PR |
| Rene' Mamo | Teenage TV Opening Signature Tune | SW/PR |
| Rene' Mamo | Il-Princep Zring TV Opening Signature Tune | SW/PR |
| Rene' Mamo | Snips TV Opening Signature Tune | SW/PR |
| Rene' Mamo | Tghid Giet Hekk TV Opening Signature Tune | SW/PR |
| Rene' Mamo | Spettur Tur TV Opening Signature Tune | SW/PR |
| Neville Refalo | Ghanja ta' Mhabba | PR |
| Thea Saliba | Ballerina Dancer | PR |
| Dianne Camilleri | Overdose | PR |
| Katherine Vigar | Tisfrattawhomx | PR |
| Tiziana | Hekk Kif Dhalt f'Hajti | PR |

**Works between 2005 - 2007**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Fiona Cauchi | All I Need (Club Mix) | SW/PR |
| Fiona Cauchi | Sun and Rain | SW/PR |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Fiona Cauchi | Secret Love | SW/PR |
| KEF | New and Digital Media | ME |
| Zorano | Wild about Music | EN |
| ITV (Wales) | First Kiss (Its My Shout Short Film) | SD |

**Works Between 2010 - 2012**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Aldo Busuttil | December Concert 2011 | ME |
| Aldo Busuttil | December Concert 2012 | ME |
| Maddee Loveday | Get it on the Dance Floor | ME |
| Klinsmann Colerio | Keep Going On | PR |
| ELF Japan | Lets Take a Walk - CD album | ME |
| Malta Education Department | Music Primary Book 1 - CD album | ME |
| Ivision | Imhabba Fuq l' Gholja - Film | SD |
| Maras Kiss | Sweet Insanity | PR |
| Billy Lee | Rise | PR |
| Billy Lee | Story on My Mind | PR |
| Danica Muscat | Hidden in the Stars | PR |
| Danica Muscat | 1565 | PR |

**Works Between 2013 - 2016**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Aldo Busuttil | December Concert 2013 | ME |
| Smart City | Independence Concert 2014 | ME |
| Reuben Pace | Original Works CD (unpublished) | RE |
| Rosetta Debattista | MiniGig | ME |
| Gabriela N | Walk in Style | PR |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Decline the Fall | Fall of Eden | PR |
| Decline the Fall | Made Masquerade | PR |
| Decline the Fall | Mortal Men | PR |
| Decline the Fall | You Make My Demons Go | PR |
| Decline the Fall | Carnival world | PR |
| Georgian Sinfonietta | Virtuosi for Mama Concert 2015 | ME |
| MPO[2] | Malta Suite | ME |
| Jeffrey Scicluna | Darbtejn Insiru Tfal | PR |
| Robert Galea | I Sing | PR |
| Claire Ghigo | Promotion X4 Arias | PR |
| Cappella Sanctae Catharinae | Memento Mori Concert | PR |
| MPO | May 2015 Concert | ME |
| MPO | April 2015 Concert | ME |
| MPO | Youth Opera Concert May 2015 | ME |
| MPO | October 2015 Concert | ME |
| MPO | January 2016 Concert | ME |
| MPO | February 2015 Concert | ME |
| MPO | March 2015 Concert | ME |
| MPO | Maltese National Anthem | ME |
| MPO | Arts Festival Concert 2015 | ME |
| Gjorgji Cinvcieski | Goldberg Variations for String Trio - CD album | PR |
| Joanne Camilleri | In Bach's Footsteps - CD album | PR |

[2] Malta Philharmonic Orchestra

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Joanne Camilleri | Goldberg Variations for Piano - CD album | PR |
| Miriam Cauchi | Riflessi - CD album | PR |
| MPO | Aprile - CD album | PR |
| Jess Rymer | Eve - Organic Choir | ME |
| Veronique Vella | 50,000 - MPO String Quartet | PR |
| Ramona Zammit Formosa | Piano Pastels - CD album | PR |
| Graziella Debattista Briffa | Promotional Project X3 Arias | PR |