

European Union Baroque Orchestra: Simply superb

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There is only one way of describing the European Union Baroque Orchestra (Eubo), which performed in Malta on Tuesday and Wednesday last week: simply superb.

Someone who isn't accustomed to Baroque music might think it might sound too technical and sophisticated, and probably not relevant to society today.

But as Eubo musical director Lars Ulrik Mortensen said during a press conference held prior to the Eubo concerts at Auberge de Castille in Valletta, the idea for which the orchestra was established was never to create a museum.

Music has a function beyond time and place, he said, adding that a number of venues in Malta, and particularly in Valletta, provide the most fitting of settings.

Having attended the well patronised second Eubo concert at the Auberge de Castille's Ambassador's Hall on Wednesday, I couldn't agree more with the maestro's comments.

The audience was clearly highly appreciative of the orchestra's precision, professionalism and enthusiasm, which were

evident in every piece played.

Luckily, for those who appreciate this type of music, this will probably not be the first and last appearance of Eubo in Malta.

The Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism, the Environment and Culture Mario de Marco actually hinted at the possibility of a Baroque festival being held in Malta, saying people are hungry for such an event.

What is particularly fascinating about the orchestra is the fact that it is formed anew every year. It provides specialist Baroque orchestral training to new graduates from all over Europe.

Every year, for the past 25 years, the orchestra has invited 100 talented Baroque musicians from across Europe, to audition.

The 25 successful candidates, typically from 12 or more countries, with an average age of 25 years, spend six months together, training, touring and performing throughout Europe and further afield, under the direction of the world's leading Baroque specialists.

The orchestra was originally conceived as a one-year project to celebrate the European Music Year in 1985, which marked the 300th anniversary since famous composers

Handel, Scarlatti and Bach were born.

Such was the success of the original project that the orchestra's work has been continued permanently. Eubo is an official training programme of the European Union, and is granted annual funding under the budget line "support to organisations which promote European culture". The orchestra is a company registered in the UK and a UK charity.

It has inspired several young people, including Maltese violinist Nadia Debono, who formed part of last year's Eubo ensemble. Ms Debono is one of the members of the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra.

During Tuesday's concert, Eubo paid tribute to Maltese composer Michelangelo Vella by including his 'Sonata no. 2 in F major' in its repertoire.

The programme that Eubo prepared for last week's concert at the Auberge de Castille, entitled *Maladies and Melodies*, included works by composers Zelenka, Locatelli, Vivaldi, Muffat, Handel, Albinoni, Biber and Charpentier.

At the end of each year, the students move into the professional world; Eubo

has been so successful in its mission that there are now former Eubo students in every major professional Baroque ensemble in Europe.

The orchestra makes use of instruments as they would have looked and sounded when they were played in the 17th century.

Maestro Mortensen explained that Eubo uses copies or reverse reconstruction instruments, and the musicians are trained to imitate the way they were played.

In fact, Eubo invests time in research and knowledge, in a bid to understand the conventions of the Baroque musical era (approximately 1600 till 1750).

The instruments used include the violin, the viola, the cello, the oboe, the double bass and the bassoon, all of which are used in other orchestras. Eubo also makes use of the less familiar harpsichord (an early relative of the piano) and the theorbo (a type of lute with a long neck extension that is also sometimes called a chitarrone).

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