

Composer Profile

MARK AGIUS – *Composer and Conductor*

Mark Agius was educated at St. Aloysious College. He studied percussion under various tutors and later music theory under Ms Marthese Busuttil Cassar, furthering his studies in harmony and counterpoint and attaining his BMusLSM, with honours and FLSM, also with honours, under Ms Rita Psaila. He was also mentored in the writing of libretto and lyrics by his uncle, the poet and song-writer Mr Charles Mifsud and conducting by Mro Joseph Sammut. He graduated from the University of Malta with a Bachelor's Degree in Education.



Mark Agius has been responsible for conducting various ensembles including the St Cecilia Choir (1989-1995), the UC Concert Band (1993-1999), the Outreach Youth Choir and Orchestra (1994-2002) and the Academy of Praise and Worship (2002-2013) of which he was co-founder. In 2011 he was appointed music director to the newly formed LSM Keyboard Orchestra, becoming its director when it became an independent organisation in 2013 with its name being changed to Maleth Symphonia Keyboard Orchestra. He is also founder and director of the St Paul Chamber Ensemble and Maestro di Cappella at the church of St Ursula in Valletta as well as a being co-founder and CEO of the Medina Foundation for Music.

Since 2003, he has been responsible for the ceremonies of the Sovereign Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, Knights of Malta. In October 2007 he was awarded a Certificate of Merit for Outstanding Service to the Order and received Knighthood in April 2011. After serving as Secretary General and Deputy Grand Prior respectively he was promoted to the rank of Bailiff Grand Cross and appointed Grand Prior of the Grand Priory of Malta in 2017. His compositions include the international anthem of the Order, *Ut Unum Sint*, which is sung at all official services of the Order around the world.

His other compositions include three works for piano, five duets for harp, four string quartets, three overtures for orchestra, two oratorios and a mass besides other liturgical works. His first major work was a passion oratorio, *Ghalik*, composed for two choirs, soloists and orchestra on behalf of the Special Schools Network as its project for the European Year for Persons with Disability. His works for piano have been performed locally and abroad by Bulgarian concert pianist Ivelina Ivantcheva. A prolific Christian song writer, he has written theme songs for national and international worship conferences and participated in festivals such as World Youth Day Festival and L-Ghanja tal-Poplu.

Mark Agius also works in collaboration with Willow Publishing House of New South Wales, Australia, on the transcription, editing and setting of music for publication and has worked with well-known artists such as Rev Robert Galea and Amanda McKenna and with Richard Conolly, a composer of sacred music of international renown, amongst others.

Performer Profiles

Karen Gatt Darmania - *Soprano*

Karen Gatt Darmania graduated from the University of Malta with a BEd (Hons) in Home Economics in 2009. She is a piano teacher having started studying piano performance and theory of music from a young age and attaining her ALSM, Dip Rec LSM and Dip Mus LSM under the tuition of Ms Anne Marie Chircop. She was invited to perform a number of times during the annual college concerts of LSM both as a pianist and as a singer.



Karen started singing at an early age with *Cantores Sancti Juliani*, under the tuition and direction of Baritone Lino Attard, with whom she sang in various concerts both locally and abroad, including Rome (1999); Arezzo (2000); the Duomo, Naples (2003); the London Commonwealth pre CHOGM event (2005). She furthered her vocal studies at the Claire McCartin Voice Studio and is currently pursuing her studies under the pedagogical guidance of Soprano Andriana Yordanova.

Karen sings in church functions as both as part of a choir and as a soloist too. She joined the Maletth Sinfonia Keyboard Orchestra in 2013 where she was given the opportunity to perform a variety of songs mostly as a soloist. Karen was appointed Assistant to the Director and Executive Secretary of the orchestra in 2014. In 2015 she joined the St. Paul Chamber Ensemble, performing with the orchestra at the Solemn Investiture and Installation of HE Prince Sandor Hapsburg Lothringen as Prince Grandmaster of the Sovereign Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem as well as the commemoration of the 450th anniversary of the Great Siege of Malta and other recitals of sacred music. She is also a founding-member and deputy chairperson of the Medina Foundation for Music.

May Caruana – *Contralto*



Contralto May Caruana started studying music at a very early age, with her first instrument being the piano. She later started her vocal studies with Mezzo soprano Claire Massa, and is now continuing her vocal and musical development with Ms Juliette Bisazza.

May has sung as a guest solo artist during several concerts organized, among others, by a number of Local Councils, Parishes, Musical Societies, Friends of the Manoel Theatre, Malta Arts Events and Their Excellency the Presidents Emeritus Dr Edward Fenech Adami and Dr George Abela. In opera, May participated as a chorister in a number of important local productions, such as *The Magic Flute* and *Norma*.

As a soloist, she has sung the roles of 'mother' and 'grandmother' in the children's opera *Little Red Riding Hood*. During the 2013 Opera Season May played the role of Mamma Lucia in *Cavalleria Rusticana* at the Manoel Theatre under the baton of Mro Damiano Binetti, which she was selected to repeat during a competition in Italy. She also played Ines in *Il Trovatore* and Giovanna in *Rigoletto*. She has sung various sacred works, premiering a number of local composers' works such as Alex Vella Gregory & Etienne Spiteri, at St John's Co-Cathedral, St Julians Parish Church and Paola Parish Church

amongst others. May has a first degree in Psychology and a Master's Degree in Health Services Management.

Charles Vincenti - Tenor



Charles Vincenti is a graduate with a B.A. (Hons) in Music Studies and a P.G.C.E. in Music from the University of Malta. He studied vocal technique with mezzo-soprano Claire Massa. In summer 2000, he attended master-classes at the Kodaly International School in the UK with Hungarian soprano Eva Andor.

Currently Vincenti studies with Juliette BisazzaZanni. His operatic repertoire includes Rinuccio (*Gianni Schicchi*), Spoletta (*Tosca*), Goro (*Madame Butterfly*), Pang (*Turandot*), Roderigo (*Otello*), Tybalt (*Romeo et Juliette*), the Governor/ Vanderdendur/ Ragotski (*Candide*), Aeneas (*Dido and Aeneas*), Monostatos (*Die Zauberflöte*), Edoardo (*La Cambiale di Matrimonio*), Turiddu (*Cavalleria Rusticana*), Nikol (*Il-Wegħda*) and Nemorino in Donizetti's *L' Elisir d' Amore* during the 2007 BOV Opera Festival.

His non-operatic repertoire includes Saint-Saens' *Oratorio de Noel*, Mozart's *Requiem* and Coronation Masses, *Arias* and *Evangelist* of Bach's Christmas Oratorio and *Matthäus-Passion*, Haydn's *Paukenmesse*, Gounod's *Messe solennelle de Sainte Cécile*, Paolino Vassallo's *Messa da Requiem* and *Messa Grande*, Nani's *Requiem*, Carmelo Pace's *Trionfo di Fede* and *Te Deum*, Albert Pace's premiere *Songs of a Lonely Man*, Joseph Sammut's *Canticles of St Luke*, Nicolo Isouard's *Liturgical Works for St. John's* and *Tenebrae: 19th Century Liturgical Works for Holy Week*. Performances overseas include Ireland, Birmingham, Bastia and Bombay in India.

Ivan Vella - Baritone

Ivan Vella began his musical career with the group Act React under the direction of Ray Mangion. He then participated in multiple concerts with the Amadeus Chamber Choir and was featured soloist during their tour to Poland. He was part of the Manoel Opera chorus for the production of *Aleko* under Maestro Brian Schembri.

Ivan appeared for the first time as soloist with Christ the King Band Club in a concert in Paola. He was subsequently invited by Maestro Joe Fenech to perform as soloist for the *Souvenir D'Italie* concert at the Salesian Theatre. Following that success, he was asked to take on his first major operatic role as Dulcamara in the Donizetti opera, *Elisir d'Amore* and performed to a full house for the Malta Cultural Institute under the baton of Andre Paul Huber. Lately he joined the TMYO (Teatru Manoel Youth Opera) where he did various concerts.

Ivan began his vocal studies with Ruth Sammut and Brian Cefai, and furthered his studies with mezzo-soprano Deborah Harrison and has appeared as soloist in her "Deborah & Friends" Christmas concerts at St. Patrick's Church in Sliema. He currently studies with soprano Miriam Cauchi and is a member of the St Paul Chamber Ensemble.



