Lifestyle & Culture

Photos credit: Droorizz Photography. Solo photos taken at Palazzo de La Salle

A true virtuoso

■ Coryse Borg

I usually like to listen to music while I write. It helps me concentrate and puts me in the right frame of mind to work creatively. While I was writing this article on double bassist Gjorgji Cincievski, I had the perfect soundtrack – his CD entitled 'Goldberg Variations' – a true labour of love by this talented musician.

I first was introduced to Gjorgji after having watched him play during one of the fantastic Toi Toi musical events for children held at the Manoel Theatre, which I had taken my son to. Apart from his superb playing, he also had a natural affinity for children and, together with his fellow musicians and organiser/compere Rosetta Debattista, he helped make this even a great success.

Born in Skopje, Macedonia in 1981, Gjorgji began playing the double bass at the age of 15 at the State Music High School 'Ilija Nikolovski – Luj'. He continued his education at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester in 2001. At the RNCM, Gjorgji finished both his undergraduate and postgraduate studies with distinction. He was also awarded the Professional Performance Diploma, with distinction – only the fifth double bass player ever in the history of the RNCM to obtain this prestigious diploma.

After completing his studies, Gjorgji became the first ever Junior Fellow in Double bass at the RNCM, and later, became a Junior Tutor in Double Bass. He has attended myriad workshops and master classes with some of the world most prominent double bass soloists.

Gjorgji, who is the only musician based in Malta to be endorsed by Pirastro Strings, has performed with some of the world leading orchestras, including Radio Symphonic Orchester – Vienna and the BBC Philharmonic – Manchester. He has taken part in many festivals all around the world and has held numerous master classes and workshops in UK, Germany, France, Latvia, Cuba, Italy, China and Malta, with numerous awards under his belt.

He has just returned from the 2nd CCOM & Cadenza International Double Bass Festival in Beijing China 2015, where he was one of seven soloists and tutors, placing him in the very top elite of world double bass players. (or something like that). One of the compositions he performed was his transcription of Joseph Vella 'Elegy' (originally written for cello and orchestra).

Gjorgji moved to Malta six years ago and has been the principal/solo double bass player with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra since 2010.

His next endeavour is the completion of a project which is very close to his heart - the launch of his CD featuring his arrangement of what is considered one of Johann Sebastian Bach's best works, first published in 1741- The 'Goldberg Variations'. The work, originally written for harpsichord, and considered to be the most intricate composition ever written for this instrument - is named after musician Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, who may have been its first performer.

Gjorgji's transcription of this work for violin, viola and double bass is the first and only one of its kind in music history. On the CD, he is joined by Czech violinist Marketa Janouskova and Principal Viola with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra Nadia Debono.

"I was fascinated by Bach from a very young age," Gjorgji tells me, "His music is regarded as powerful and emotionally-stimulating, and his 'Goldberg Variations' is considered as a prime example of Baroque music . It is also a very difficult piece of music to play. In fact, recording it with three instruments, as almost as difficult as transcribing it."

The CD was produced by René Mamo and mastered by Eric James at Philosophers Barn in the UK. The CD sleeve (which features a photo of Valletta and also brings to mind the Maltese flag) was designed by Zoran Runcev. The introduction was written by one of the biggest authorities on the history of the double bass – Rodney Slatford OBE.

In his journey to have this piece of music published, Gjorgji says he encountered a lot of help from a lot of people and entities, most notably the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra (particularly MPO chairman Sigmund Mifsud, principal conductor Brian Schembri, librarian and viola player Matthew Fenech, violinist Philip Orlopp and co-principal double bassist Michelle Scicluna), photographer Andrew Rizzo and the Janatha Stubbs Foundation.

The CD of 'Goldberg Variations' will be launched at the Robert Samut Hall in Floriana on 20 December at 7pm. Tickets at €12 are available from the St. James Cavalier box office or online at *http://ticketengine.sjcav.org*. During the launch the CD will be on sale at a special promotional price. Concurrently, there will also be an exhibition of paintings by artist Thalia Stones and a complimentary drink afterwards.

The 'Goldberg Variations' will also be performed on 23 December at Mdina Cathedral as part of the Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale.

More information may be obtained from: www.cincievski.com