

FOCUS

Newsletter of the Malta Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce



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Joseph Calleja awarded the Gold Medal 2007



The President of Malta, H.E. Dr Edward Fenech Adami, bestowed the Society's Gold Medal 2007 to the Maltese tenor, Joseph Calleja, in a ceremony held at the Casino Maltese. The award was given in recognition of Joseph Calleja's outstanding international career.

The ballroom of the Casino Maltese was packed with close to three hundred people who attended the ceremony to acclaim the young Maltese singer. After a brief introduction by the President of the Society, Mr Paul Ascjak, who was also an international

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Open Day at Palazzo de La Salle

The Society was open to visitors on the morning of the 13th December. A large number of visitors called at the Society and apart from admiring the exhibition of students' works in various media and crafts, which included paintings, sculptures, carvings, Malta lace, ganutell, flower arrangements, glass paintings and embroidery, they also spoke to various teachers who had classes going on at the time. Many of the visitors liked what they saw and enrolled there and then for various classes.



Editorial

The Malta Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce will have a new President within the next few weeks. Mr Paul Ascjak, who has led the Society for the last six years will step down and a new President will be elected at the March General Meeting. Without doubt all members of the Society will recognize the very valid work put in by Mr Ascjak during his tenure of office.

The members of the Society will be electing a new President. Who it will be will not be known until March. One of the tasks facing the new President would be to consider the direction the Society should take. The Society has functioned in the same way for more or less fifty years and it could be that the Council would be content to have the Society continue in the same way. After all the results over the last couple of years were quite good as regards artistic activities and tuition. However, the role of the Society, as that of any organization, should be examined and reassessed on a periodic basis. Indeed, the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, which was the Society on which Malta's Society was originally based, has totally altered its mode of operation and is unrecognizable from its original mission. This does not mean that we should copy what was done in the UK, but serves more of an example as to how the UK Society has evolved over the years to meet today's needs.

The Society has mostly concentrated on the Arts and tuition giving the Manufactures and Commerce side of its name lesser attention. Over the years various other organizations have sprouted catering for this area of education. It is by no means suggested to neglect in any way the tuition side of the Society's role, particularly when it is known that the number of students attending the various courses is constantly on the increase. However, if one concentrates on the Arts and Tuition side, is the Society's role being played out well and what exactly should the Society's role be in this area?

These are points that should be studied in depth but in this respect it is important that members take a more active part in the Society. The number of members who attend the Annual General Meeting is usually very low. Members seeking election to the Council are few and often voting is not necessary. New ideas and new faces with new thinking are more than welcome and members are urged to attend the Annual General Meeting. If they feel that they can contribute something to the Society members can also arrange for their nomination to the Council or forward their views and ideas to the Society where these would no doubt be considered and assessed.

Art and Crafts Students' Annual Exhibition...

Students attending courses at the Society exhibited their works at an exhibition which was held in December at the Society's premises.

The exhibition featured a wide variety of crafts. This included flower arrangements, lace work, embroidery work, embroidery in gold, crochet, needle handicraft, soft furnishings, cottage craft, paintings on glass, ganutell and monastery work, parchment craft, tailoring, beading, as well as paintings by students in various media, woodcarving works, stone carving works, clay sculptures, manga art, portraits and figure paintings and cribs.

Art students also exhibited a number of their works which were painted in various media. Various arts and crafts by the younger students of the Society were also on display.

...and the Society's Prize Giving



The Annual Prize-Giving was recently held at the Palazzo De La Salle for students attending various classes in arts, crafts and music at the Society. Following a short speech by the Society's Director, Mr Joseph Spiteri Staines, prizes were presented to students by the Vice-President, Mr Joseph J. Mifsud. These were awarded to the top students for Malta Lace, Embroidery, Filigree, Art, Violin, Guitar and Pianoforte. In all 70 students were awarded prizes and certificates.

Following the prize-giving the large audience present was invited to view the many exhibits prepared by the various classes.



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Refurbishment of the Society's Halls



Work is currently underway on the upstairs exhibition halls at the Palazzo. The Society has contracted a lighting consultant to assist them in this process. The cost of the project is quite considerable but the Society is confident that the end product will more than justify the cost as the halls will boast of a state of the art lighting system which should enhance not only the exhibits that will be on show but also the halls themselves.

Work started in the first days of January when the old lighting system was dismantled. The halls are now being decorated. Then the electricity supply will be installed and the purchased equipment set up. Finishing touches will then be applied. The work should be finished by the end of March. Preparations are in progress for the official opening of the halls.

During the past few weeks the Palazzo's water system was also overhauled and new toilets together with hand-dryers and various sinks were installed.

The Society has spent thousands of Euro over the last couple of years on refurbishment and although more still needs to be done, due to certain constraints the Society will be slowing the momentum in 2008.

Tuition at the Society

Most of the readers of this Newsletter are artists and many of you attended art classes at some time or other. The Society has carried on this tradition and in fact the majority of students who attend classes at the Society are art students. Classes in art have evolved in various forms. Recently the Society introduced Portrait and Figure Painting classes under the expert tuition of artist Eman Grima. This proved quite popular with two well attended classes being held per week. The Society had also held an afternoon workshop by artist Jason Lu back in summer which was also well attended. It is the intention of the Society to continue certain art classes in a similar vein, although due to the large number of classes and students, space could be a priority.

The Society also holds a number of classes in other subjects, which although not as numerous in students as in the arts, classes are also quite well attended. I am referring to crafts and music classes. The Society has been teaching Malta Lace for over a hundred years now and although we do not have the 100 or so lace students of a century ago we still have a good number. The same applies to Embroidery classes and Gantull, Crochet etc. An important factor, besides the excellent tuition, is the low cost of each three month course, €20.96, which in this day and age is more of a nominal amount. Readers are encouraged to enquire about these courses and also pass the word round among their circle of friends. The regular feedback we get from students is that they are extremely good value for money.

Recently the Society introduced a number of new courses. Some were quite popular and took off whilst some others did not attract enough students to start. Among the latter we introduced Embroidery on Paper and Silver Paper Collage. Other subjects started, such as Filigree, Backstage and Paper Mache, did not attract sufficient students in subsequent courses. New subjects, such as Crib Building and Model Making appear to be seasonal favourites. Talks on the History of Malta by Vince Zammit have also proved very popular with two classes per week. It is our intention to be innovative and introduce a wide variety of courses. The problem however is often the fact that it could be difficult to find a suitable teacher. If you are competent in a particular subject and would like to teach it we invite you to contact the Society.

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held during the last week of March. A notice will soon be issued to invite Members to contest the election for the post of President and three Council Members. A separate notice stating date and time and agenda will be sent to all paid-up members. The General Meeting will consist of an Administrative Report drawn up by the President, a Financial Report and the election. All members are urged to attend this General Meeting.

6th National Arts Competition

The name of the artist Godfrey Xuereb with work 'Under the Sea' in page 4 of the previous edition of Focus was erroneously entered as 'Godfrey Scicluna'. We apologise to Mr Xuereb for our error.

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Tenor Joseph Calleja awarded the Malta Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce Gold Medal 2007

singer in his own right and who was Joseph Calleja's tutor and mentor. Professor Richard England, gave an eulogy on Joseph Calleja and on opera in general. He was followed by Mr Albert Storace who gave descriptions of Calleja's repertoire. Dr Abram Borg then showed and commented on video excerpts of some of Calleja's performances.

The President of the Republic then presented the Gold Medal to Joseph Calleja, who then crowned the evening by singing two arias which were enthusiastically received with a standing ovation by the audience present. A short reception followed where Joseph Calleja was besieged by many fans seeking his autograph.



Archbishop Cremona visits the Society

H.G. the Archbishop of Malta, Mgr Paul Cremona, paid a visit to the Malta Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. He was welcomed by the President of the Society, Mr Paul Ascik, and Council members. The Archbishop visited the offices and met the Director and staff of the Society and then visited various classes and talked to a number of teachers and students of the Society. The Archbishop saw lace makers at work, ganutell, embroidery and flower arrangement students as well as art students. He was presented with various gifts by the students and their teachers. The Archbishop also toured the Arts and Crafts Students exhibition and was impressed with the high level of work on show.

