

Harp and soprano for Din l-Art Helwa

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The yearly music festival at the 15th century church of Santa Marija ta' Bir Miftuh took off with a precious cameo presentation by a duo from Germany, who call themselves Duo ArpaCantabile.

You could say it was a ladies' evening, hosted at the church dedicated to Our Lady, with two women artists as performers – Silke Aichhorn on her harp and soprano Christin Enke-Mollnar.

As if that were not enough, the evening opened with a rendition of the haunting *Ave Maria* by Caccini and closed with a humorous number by Martha von Wittich.

The Virgin Mary has inspired so much of our civilisation. Architecture, literature, painting and music, wherever we turn, hark back to her inspiration. If we were ever to take down her picture from our walls, she would still continue to breathe at us from stone and print and song.

We visited mostly German names, except for one Latin, two French songs and one Norwegian – the *Solvejgs Lied*. Ah, and there was Smetana with his *Moldau*.

The other names were Mozart, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Bartholdy, Clara Schumann trailed by Robert Schumann, Brahms, Salzedo and another woman to bring in the rear, Martha von Wittich. Yes, it was a ladies' night alright.

For many of us, the harp resonates with thought of the psalms that encourage us to praise the Lord with song and harp. Archetypically we may think of that master of the lyre, Orpheus, who enchanted the gods and animals, and who was allowed to visit Hades to try and bring back his beloved Eurydice.

The lovely duo bonded perfectly with perfect diction on the part of the soprano and sensitive accompaniment from the noble harp.

We had references to love and flowers, and stars twinkling in the night, and even a swan in swooning love with a beautiful lotus under the moonlit stars.

What would be the use of having a concert harp on stage if you did not give it a chance to show

off its game? So we had two very telling solos, the first of which was Smetana's *Moldau*.

How could you possibly get all that into a harp, I thought. It was a bit like St Augustine's little boy trying to pour the whole of the ocean into a little hole that he had made. It was a fantastic exhibition of what the harp can do under the deft fingers of a consummate player.

The highlight for me was a little piece by Carlos Salzedo called

Chanson dans la nuit, or song for the night. Short it may have been, all too short, but magically capable of colourful painting of lovelorn singing under a dark night, where nevertheless, the stars came to twinkle empathy, and the dreams began to roll like the unfurling of screens, and we heard the ticking of clocks as time passed and a soft silence fell to threaten the dreams or bring them to an end. I would go to the ends of the earth to hear that

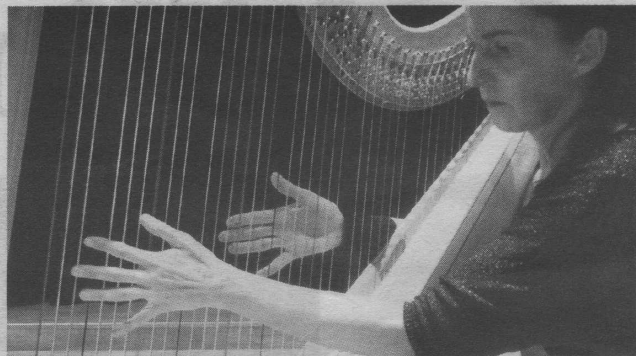
piece again the way it was played. A great deal of work goes into these annual concerts, very often supported by a handful of embassies. This time, the concert was supported by an anonymous

benefactor. One can only look forward to the next treat.

[HTTPS://DINLARTHELWA.ORG/HOMEPAGE/BIR-MIFTUH-INTERNATIONAL-MUSIC-FESTIVAL-2019](https://dinlarthelwa.org/homepage/bir-miftuh-international-music-festival-2019)

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