

Anniversary story: The Società Filarmonica Nazionale La Valette celebrates 145 years of existence

October this year marked the 145th anniversary of the founding of the *Società Filarmonica Nazionale La Valette*, better known as *I-Banda La Valette*.

This anniversary was celebrated with aplomb earlier this year, climaxing in *Ommaggio a Giuseppe Verdi* a highly successful concert which took place at the Catholic Institute on 9 November.

It all started, all those years ago, when a businessman with a group of young men, all keen on the feast of St Paul's Shipwreck which takes place on 10th February in Valletta, asked themselves what could be done to make the feast more important.

On 19 October 1874 after a meeting it was decided to set up the *Società Muzikali fil-Belt Valletta*. Two directors were chosen: Paolo Darmanin, now acknowledged founder of the society and Maestro Luigi Carabott.

The first 35 young people who played in the band undertook to purchase and learn how to play an instrument; they would pay for whatever was necessary as well as a regular fee and moreover play without payment.

Soon the band numbered 50 young people who took learning an instrument very seriously. It was not long before Maestro Carabott pronounced that the band was ready to make its debut. This it did, successfully, at the Manoel Theatre on 28th May 1875.

The first time the band played in the streets of Valletta was on the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel on 15th July of the same year.

The dream of these young *Paulini* was soon to be realised when their band participated for the first time in the feast of St Paul's Shipwreck on 10 February 1876.

The band also became well known abroad and it was regularly invited to play during feasts and competitions among them in Tunis in 1893; Catania in 1906, in Bona and Algeria. However, the musical competition which took place in Como on 27 August 1927 and the success achieved there are still mentioned with pride today. In the highest categories of the competition the band won hands down.

During World War II the band club remained open but there were few activities and between 1941 and 1942 the band had to be disbanded. Moreover a bomb hit the back section of the Club causing considerable damage.

It was Maestro Giuseppe Camilleri who with his talents and perseverance took the band under his wing after the war and went on giving his services until he retired in 1968.

Acting Maestro Edgar Lowell took up the baton for a short while and in

1970 it was passed on to Maestro Joseph Sammut.

In 2008 Maestro Dominic Darmanin took up the baton and programmes became more varied and were modernised and adapted to the world of today.

The bandclub continued to improve and expand its services to society by participating in national events and visits abroad: to Como, Palazzolo and last year to Gela.

Exhibitions were held including one during Holy Week.

The hardworking committee under the Presidency of Jonathan Grima is ensuring that the premises of the bandclub are improved and events which bring members together organised.

Perhaps one of the most important events in the annals of the bandclub is the success achieved at an international competition in Como in 1927. The committee specially set up for the purpose recommended that the band had achieved a high standard and should indeed participate.

So, on 26 August, 1927, the band arrived in Como. Two bands from Malta were participating: The King's Own under the direction of Mro Aurelio Doncich and the La Valette Band led by Mro Cardenio Botti.

The La Valette band was voted top in all categories and won several prizes.

A resume of this anniversary cannot possibly leave out Maestro Cardenio Botti who guided the band and led it to many achievements both here and abroad.

Maestro Botti was born in 1890 in Magliano Sabino, in Italy. As a twelve-year-old he sang at the Gregorian *Scuola Cantorum* and soon joined the Sistine Chapel as a solo singer. He later attended the *Conservatorio Musicale Santa Cecilia* in Rome where he studied composition and instrumentation. After his graduation he was conducting the works of great composers with critical acclaim.

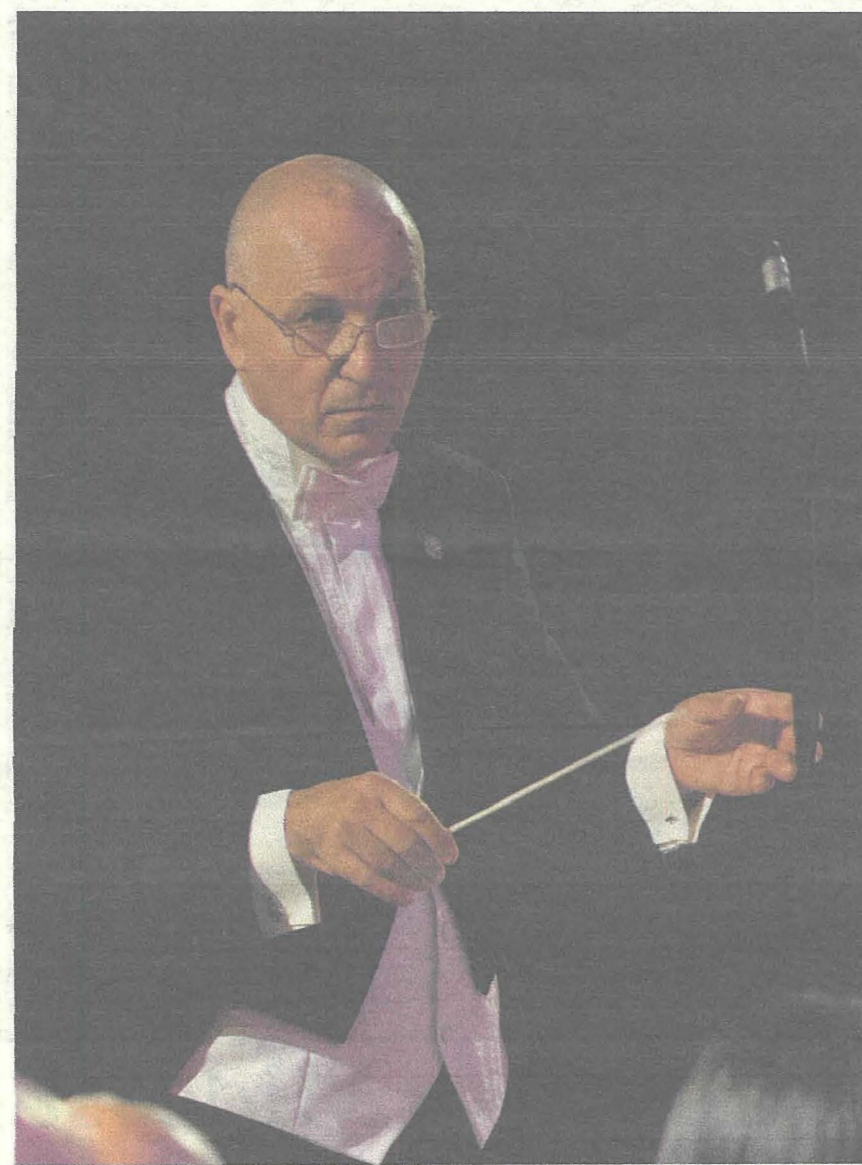
He soon came to Malta to teach and direct the band which greatly benefitted from the presence of this able and gifted maestro. He was here for some 22 years and left, against his will, in 1935 because of the political situation in Europe.

Once in Italy he directed the Teatro Felice di Genova and eventually the Teatro Massimo in Palermo.

The Maltese, ever grateful for his enormous contribution to music here kept in touch with him over the years. In 1926 it was Botti who led the band to Tunis, Palermo, Messina, Catania and Bona and eventually to the International competition in Como in 1927.

He once again visited Malta in 1962, for the last time.

He died in Rome in June 1973 at the age of 83 years.



Mro Dominic Darmanin who directs the orchestra at present



Mro Botti with the then Prime Minister Dr Borg Olivier and Mrs Borg Olivier (Undated photo)



The band in Algiers in 1912



Placing a laurel wreath in front of the statue of former PM, Dr Borg Olivier also President of the Society in Piazza Castille on 18 October 2019



Placing a laurel wreath in front of Grand Master La Valette's monument on 18 October 2019



The tenor Kaludi Kaludov and soprano Anna Dytry who sang at the 'Ommaggio a Giuseppe Verdi' concert in November

This text was liberally translated from the Maltese by Marie Benoit from the handsome programme of the concert *Ommaggio a Giuseppe Verdi*. She would like to thank Cav.Dott. Tonio Portughese, Charles Mangion, Karl Farrugia, Canon John Ciarrò who contributed to the research and/or provided the photos.)



An exhibition of the Standards of musical societies in Malta was held at the band club