

TIMES OF MALTA

21 janvier 2011

Three of Malta's foremost church organs feature in a new special CD collection by French organist Pierre Mea, of Reims Cathedral in France, and John Aquilina, the Mdina Cathedral organist. Called "**Orgues de Malte**", the CD is a special gift of homage to Malta's historical organs by the French Embassy on the island.

Featuring some of the best organ classical composers in Europe, the CD is the brainchild of French Ambassador Daniel Rondeau who proposed this project to serve as further "testimony to the sincerity of our friendship". He confides that the idea struck him during a music concert organised by the embassy and Din l-Art Ħelwa at St John's Co-Cathedral in June, where Pierre Mea played the organ. The concert was held on the day the resistance movement known as Free French was born under the leadership of General Charles de Gaulle, 70 years earlier, in 1940.



Appreciating the impressive sound of Malta's historic organ in the cathedral, where so many knights found their resting place, Ambassador Rondeau felt that the occasion deserved remembering. He immediately set out to organise the recordings. Both Mea and Aquilina were invited to perform during special sessions on the two organs of St John's and the historic one in Mdina's Cathedral, the latter built in 1774 and restored in 2005.

Originally located in the Chapel of the Langue d'Auvergne, the oratory organ in St John's was built in 1579. The main organ of the Valletta sacred temple is a recent installation, having been designed by Ralph Downes in 1960. This was the first time a sound recording of the two historic organs, found in St Paul's Cathedral and the Oratory of St John's, took place. One of the best sound engineers of our time, Jean Yves Labat de Rossi, was entrusted with the audio recording. The locations were made available through the cooperation of the Metropolitan Chapter and St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation.

The CD brings together works by Spanish, English, German, Italian and French composers. On the collection the oratory's organ hosts works by de Arauxo, de Heredia, Cabanilles, Frescobaldi, Luzzaschi, Pasquini and Cavazzoni, while the one in St Paul's Cathedral in Mdina features compositions by Greene, Paolucci and Zipoli. On the main organ at St John's, Mea and Aquilina play Buxtehude, Bach, Balbastre and Dandrieu. The CD also includes some English anonymous popular pieces. The music dates back to the 16th, 17th and eighteenth centuries.

Recipient of a number of awards for his performances Pierre Mea became a laureate of the Yehudi Menuhin Foundation after having been substitute organist at the Notre Dame de Paris for 11 years. He has performed in various countries under famous orchestra directors, including Riccardo Muti and Kurt Masur. He is the official organist of the Reims Cathedral, professor of organ music at the Conservatoire National de la région de Reims and lectures at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris. John Aquilina, the Mdina organist since 2001, has given a number of solo recitals in Malta and accompanied choirs in major choral works. He is known to combine the re-creation of works in the organ repertoire with the spontaneity of improvisation. In 2009 he attended master classes with world-known French organist and composer Jean Guillou. On the launch of the CD both organists were the guest performers of the French Embassy in an evening of organ music held at St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta.

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