

Malta Arts Festival

King of pain

King Lear
Argotti Gardens
André Delicata

television. Lear is a "King" in the modern sense of the word – he is a successful businessman with his finger in every pie – an Italian nod to Berlusconi, perhaps. The performance, which took on the guise of three TV shows on the Lear-owned station, at once linked one of the most central Shakespearean themes: contemporary preoccupation with how we appear to others and the public airing of often very personal views. Joseph Scicluna's Lear was a proud and self-assured personage, who demanded the respect and admiration of his employees and the furtive public eye got nothing but sycophantic pandering from most of those nearest to him. Guilelma De Bernardi and Alessandra Dell'Atti, who convincingly played Goneril and Regan respectively, fawned over their father in an initial and clearly false show of love in what was very similar to cabaret spectacle during a talk show hosted by Kent, played by an enthusiastic and eager to please Francesca Netto. In an unconvincingly accurate and ironic manner, the two elder daughters used the lyrics from popular Italian songs to tell Lear how much they loved him and this particular brand of dark humour created by infusing the play's darker moments with snippets and references to popular culture and music continued throughout, paving the way for the motif of the veritable media circus which our lives have become.

We cannot seem to survive without technology: a fact which shows how the power of information has taken over our sense of self entirely. TV has permeated our lives so effectively that distinguishing between what is on screen and what goes on after the camera has stopped rolling has become next to impossible. Peter Bunsutt's energetic and devious Edmund, Gloucester's bastard son, turns Ruggero Dondi's cynical/sceptical Gloucester against his legitimate son, Edmund's half brother, Edgar.



Katia Caputo as Cordelia and Joseph Scicluna as King Lear. Photo: Matthew Mirabelli

played sensitively and almost lyrically by Mario Gobetti. In a confrontational one-on-one interview which had Edmund playing host and interviewer to his father, by placing him on the hot seat and bombarding him with a barrage of cleverly edited sound bites from one of Edgar's previous speeches, making Edgar appear disrespectful to the point of dishonourance.

The same happened to Katia Kaputo's excellent performance as the playful and painfully honest Cordelia. Lear's youngest daughter, who incurred her father's wrath by trying to open his eyes to a reality which he does not want to recognise. This misguided paternal love is manipulated by both Edmund and Lear's elder daughters who use the powerful persuasive tools of the digital age to scheme against their earnest, good-natured and honest siblings and

get their aging parents out of the way – there is no space for the elderly or the weak in today's fast-paced, cutthroat world. The crazed Lear, having realised his mistake and having been ridiculed by Goneril and Regan, runs wild in a technology-starned wilderness and meets Edgar, now a roaming beggar. The two find solace in each other until a destitute Cordelia and a pennient and disillusioned Gloucester find Lear and attempt to persuade him to return to them – Irrespective of his now tarnished image as an incompetent old fool.

In order to make such a project work as well as it did, the creative and strong direction of Domenico Castaldo, assisted by Marra Laneri was crucial, and in a playful reversal of roles, the two played silent and unobtrusive attendants in the play itself, while in reality, they

were the puppeteers in control. Matteo Lanati's stage lighting, the numerous video and music clips by Francesca Bono and Fabio Ferrero and Nicola Zambelli's live camera work, added to the authenticity of the play used by hyper-real TV shows. The clarity of diction and crisp delivery of every single actor also made this

performance an exceptionally good piece of expressive dramatic acting as well as showing that Shakespeare's relevance in a contemporary setting has not waned. Edgar's final act of switching Edmund off and thus bringing about his digital death was as effective as an Elizabethan tragic resolution ending in the slaying of a physical body; for the death of a person's power of persuasion burnt on a high-definition external hard-drive is much more sobering these days.

Contemporary masterpieces

Twentieth Century
Wind Quintet Recital
Castille Courtyard

Maria Ghrlando

HE COSMOS Ensemble Wind Quintet - Bebecca Hall (flute), John McDonough (oboe), Godfrey Milisud (clarinet), Jose Garcia Guiterrez (horn) and Urike Bulhmann (bassoon) – gave an excellent account of themselves in the recital under review.

It is largely thanks to ensembles of quality like the Cosmos that the Maltese concert-goer is being familiarised with the music of our times. Following their performances earlier this year at the Manoel Theatre and Muriel's Altenhallen-Hofkirche, the Cosmos Ensemble returns to the Maltese stage with a concert of contemporary masterpieces for wind quintet. The group is a woodwind-based, flexible instrumental ensemble, committed to the performance of original chamber music compositions. With a repertoire

that ranges from Baroque to contemporary works, the ensemble makes particular interest in working with local composers and performance of new compositions. To this end, it has premiered works by leading Maltese composers Fabbon Zahra, Albert Garcia, Gordon Zammit and Mariella Cassar. The members of the Cosmos Quintet need no introduction to Maltese music lovers, Hilling from different countries – Germany, England, Malta, Canada and Spain – they all enjoy a busy schedule performing both as soloists and

in orchestras in Malta and abroad, apart from their appearances as the Cosmos Ensemble. For the occasion the ensemble was joined by clarinetist, Alison Hughes, who played the bass clarinet in a rare performance of Janacek's *Mládí*. The programme consisted of Jacques Ibert's *Trois Pièces Breves*, Leos Janacek's *Mládí*, György Ligeti's *6 Bagatelles for Woodwind Quintet* and Charles Camilleri's *Picasso Suite for Woodwind Quintet*. The pieces showcased some of the most magical music of the period, whereby the new format and traditional forms and genres

coexist harmoniously, giving expression to some of the most interesting representatives of the 20th century. There is much to be said on a positive note of the performance by the Cosmos Quintet, whereby five superb musicians had the means to project a cohesive effort which still retained its ability to shine individually. One looks forward to another performance by the Cosmos Quintet in the near future in the hope that it will inspire similarly talented musicians in other spheres to take more initiatives to this end.