

**Lifestyle & Culture**



Marie D. *Diary*



# Celebrating the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Croatia and Malta

**C**oncerts at San Anton Palace are always such a pleasure. Grand Master Antoine de Paule, a son of Provence, built this majestic villa less than an hour's carriage ride from Valletta. It is a comfortable country house, an idyll and a worthy retreat from Valletta and city life. He created his *villegiatura* country retreat to suit his lifestyle. In those days Attard



Concentrating on Libertango

It was full house at San Anton

was countryside and not the congested town it has now become. De Paule was elected Grand Master at the age of 71. Clearly the Knights of Malta did not suffer from ageism as so many do here, labelling anyone over 60 as a dinosaur. Sheer ignorance of course. Adenauer built Germany after WWII when he was almost 70 years old. As for Dragut, he was 80 when he came to Malta to smash the Order of St John. Traditional societies revere their elders and for obvious reasons. I know some in their 40s and 50s who are so utterly boring and already bored of life that they may as well be dead. So although age is there and we cannot get away from it, what really matters is the quality of one's life, one's interests and what you bring to it.

It is recorded that on the day of his instalment de Paule entertained some 600 guests to dinner. It is also recorded that Mount Etna ice was imported in July and August, quite a luxury I would have thought.

San Anton is where the British governor Sir Alexander Ball amused himself with the entertaining company of Samuel Taylor Coleridge who, in 1804 was invited to stay at the palace.

One of San Anton's most illustrious residents was Alfie, Queen Victoria's second son as he was Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Squadron. He had married Marie, Grand Duchess of Russia and daughter of Tsar Alexander. It is at San Anton that Princess Victoria Melita (who would be known as Ducky) was born on 25 November 1876. A relative of hers was recently in Malta.



The gifted musicians and Dr Zerec



Dr Ivana Zerec and HE the Ambassador to China

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It is with this and more in mind that I attended a concert with Charlene Farrugia at the piano and her now husband Franko Božac at the accordion. I had heard this duo play before at the chapel on the Valletta Waterfront where concerts were held regularly but which, for some reason or another were stopped. Charlene needs no introduction. She started performing at the age of 13 and was the youngest soloist to ever perform with the then National Orchestra of Malta. After that there was no looking back and she has many awards and prizes to her name and has travelled the world performing.

Franko Božac is one of Croatia's most successful classical accordionists. He is currently an accordion professor at the Music Academy in Pula, Croatia. Like Charlene he has been applauded for his musicianship in many countries.

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This concert was held to mark the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Croatia and Malta, established on 30 June 1992. Indeed, Malta was one of the first to recognize Croatia's independence.

Our President was unable to attend but Mrs Dolores Cristina came to the rescue. She apologized for having to leave midway

as she was attending a concert in one of the villages. They must have been delighted to have her.

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The Croatian's Consul Dr Ivana Zerec was present for the occasion and also said a few words and highlighted the fact that Malta and Croatia have several things in common including a history dating back to the origins of ancient Mediterranean cultures and civilization. Although situated on different sides of the Apennine peninsula, both countries are bound together by their maritime identity and the Mediterranean culture, she commented. She said that in these challenging times

both countries will cooperate especially in the area of migration, Mediterranean cooperation, security as well as the protection of external borders. The problem of migration is never far off.

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The programme was after my own heart with at least 5 pieces by the Argentinian composer Astor Piazzolla. The musicians were generous with their encores and the last one they played was the much loved, the world over, *Libertango*. I loved Piazzolla's *Ave Maria* which I had not heard before. I've had it on You tube ever since.

One of Piazzolla's quintets was, interestingly, called *La Camorra!*

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The duo played Alexander Tartov's *Partita* and Bashkim Shehu *Atma Escape*. Modern and pleasant composition which are kind to the ears.

Italian composer Roberto Di Marino was also on the programme. Franko explained to the audience that the original Sonata composed by Di Marino was for orchestra but the duo liked it so much that they asked him to transpose it for accordion and piano. The result was most enjoyable.

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Another most pleasant evening. Possibly the last before I go into hibernation in the coming months. This intense heat takes away the pleasures of socializing. I look at my clothes and I don't really want to put any of them on. Even linen and cotton are simply not cool enough for this torrid heat.