



On a high note

Classical music stars, both international and home-grown, are flocking to the city thanks to the efforts of Dubai Concert Committee

There is a sea change taking place on Dubai's culture and arts scene, driven by a common desire to foster an engaging artistic offering that can be enjoyed by visitors and the local community alike. Galvanised in part by work taking place to prepare for Dubai Expo 2020, a host of new developments and initiatives such as Dubai Opera District and Dubai Design District are set to provide new homes for the talent already nurtured in the city and beyond. Established events such as Art Dubai, Design Days Dubai and Dubai International Film Festival have in recent years gone from strength to strength as cultural matters come increasingly high on the agenda.

It is against this backdrop that Dubai Concert Committee (DCC) has flourished. A not-for-profit organisation, it is made up of committee members who give freely of their time to bring classical musicians to Dubai. Each dedicated volunteer shares a passion for the art form and it is that drive that has seen DCC attract a host of big-name classical music stars to Dubai.

The idea for a concert committee first came from its original members and was supported by the then Emirates CEO Sir Maurice Flanagan. Considered a worthwhile enterprise, DCC was launched under the patronage of HH Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed al Maktoum. The first concert, from Dutch pianist Martijn van den Hoek, took place in January 1996. In the time since, DCC has gone on to organise more than 180 concerts for over 100,000 music fans in Dubai. In 2011, the organisation's efforts were recognised with a Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum Patron of the Arts Award.

A special dedication

The Committee’s members have changed over the years. It currently consists of Brigitta Dagostin, chairperson, Mark Hackett, treasurer and Irina Ginns, who looks after communications. Some are professional musicians, such as Dagostin, who has been an opera director and previously staged productions in Germany and Austria.

DCC treasurer Hackett explains how he became involved in the classical music scene. “Those of us of a certain age enjoyed music on seven and 12-inch circular pieces of vinyl. I discovered my first classical album by mistake. A well-worn Beethoven’s *5th Symphony* accidentally misfiled in my father’s collection of Beatles, Rolling Stones and other cool albums. I loved it.

“The same is true of coming to Dubai. I stumbled across Dubai Concert Committee by accident. What amazed me most was the fact that DCC was run by volunteers, by people with a passion for classical music, who want to share that with the Dubai community. I went to my first concert and was so impressed that shortly after I volunteered as treasurer.”

He adds: “Being able to see the organisation grow is one of the things that makes

the volunteering experience so special. To be able to contribute to decision making, whether it’s the choice of artists to invite, through to bigger decisions such as changing venues or working with new partners, it is very exciting.”

For Ginns, a lifelong passion for classical music began with her talented mother. She explains: “For me, classical music is a very special and personal matter. Raised in a family with a professional musician, I was exposed to live music from birth. My mother, who sadly passed away at a young



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1 Duo Transatlantique 2 Mark Hackett 3 Eduard Kunz





age, was a choir master, beautiful soprano and a piano player. She took me to classical concerts when I was little and she organised parties at home. I remember hearing a grand piano being played and people singing from my cot. Another one of my early memories is beautiful silvery sounds of a flute in the open air of our garden at dusk and the way all of nature seemed to quieten and listen to those magical sounds.

“Ever since my childhood, classical music has been present in my daily life. I listen to it on the radio all the way through my day, in the office, in my car or at home. None of the recorded music has quite the same effect as a live concert.

“Being directly involved in concert organisation means I work closely with musicians. It can all become quite hectic. Once the concert starts, however, and you are listening

to live music, it all seems totally worth it. The next day you wake up in the morning and have this overwhelming feeling that the world is perfect.”

Music to our ears

For each year’s programme, the committee seeks to cover a wide range of styles and artists. The result is a varied offering of composers, periods of music, selection of instruments and musicians from several countries. Performances range in scale from soloists to chamber orchestras and the period covered can be anything from the 12th to the 21st century.



4 The Scholtes Janssens piano duo
5 Calefax 6 Irina Ginns 7 Stefan Temmingh

“Dubai Concert Committee invites outstanding artists or those who are at the beginning of a world career, but we also receive around 500 applications each year from musicians looking to come and perform here.

“Often the performers also give master classes to music students here in Dubai, which has been a very beneficial experience both for performers and young musicians,” says Ginns.

Some recent highlights over the years include award-winning guitar two-piece Duo Transatlantique and The Scholtes Janssens piano duo from the Netherlands. Another successful two-man show came in the form of Calefax, a popular reed quintet. Last year, renowned recorder player Stefan Temmingh lit up the stage at the DUTAC theatre, Mall of the Emirates.



IN CONCERT

There is a series of exciting DCC performances to choose from between now and the end of the year, including:

October 17:
Hungarian violinist Joseph Lendvay

November 20:
Dubai-born piano prodigy Arsha Kaviani

Venue: One&Only Royal Mirage

Price: Visit dcc.ae for ticketing information



“There has always been a vibrant, buzzing environment around the concerts as well as great anticipation and interest from the musical community. Over the years we have enjoyed and appreciated the support of Dubai Culture and the local consulates, embassies and business councils who are always proud to support musicians from their respective countries. It has become a tradition to invite a guest speaker to open our concerts and usually this would be one of our sponsors, or an ambassador or consul general. The opening speeches have given a wider resonance in the local community to our concert series,” says Ginns.

8 Arsha Kaviani 9 The Alliage Saxophone Quintet 10 Julia Novikova

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Recently moved to a new home, One&Only Royal Mirage, new partner MPremiere has also come on board. The collaboration has helped attract an even higher caliber of musicians, such as renowned violinist Maxim Fedotov accompanied by pianist Galina Petrova, opera star Julia Novikova, famed pianist Eduard Kunz and The Alliage Saxophone Quintet who performed last month.

Looking to future progression for DCC and classical music in Dubai, Ginns adds: “The absence of a full-scale venue in Dubai and our limited resources makes it currently impossible to bring orchestras or organise a music festival. We have met with Dubai Tourism on the new Opera House project and are looking forward to it opening as it will provide a purpose-built venue, hopefully also for classical music. We are hoping that the new music hall will provide the perfect setting for events on a larger scale and that this will give a boost to the music scene in Dubai.”

