

November 11, 2004
Issue 7

AMRC Newsletter

Alexandro Malaspina Research Centre, Malaspina University College, Nanaimo, BC, Canada

Madrid Exhibition of Malaspina Drawings

José Luis Greco reports: A recent exhibition, hosted by the DeViaje bookstore in Madrid and curated by Mercedes Palau, included about sixty photographic reproductions of drawings from the Malaspina expedition.

At the inauguration José Manuel Alonso Ibarrola chaired a panel of speakers: former ambassador Carlos Fernández Shaw, Emilio Soler, Marisa Calés and me. The room was packed to the limit with about 200 people, all of whom judged the inauguration and exhibition a success.

Mercedes Palau

Emilio gave a condensed biography of Malaspina; Carlos spoke about his experiences in Australia in relation to the expedition; Marisa announced the founding of the Malaspina Forum within the Spanish Institute for Canadian Studies; I spoke about the future opera (*see below*), and read a fragment of Act II (which centres around Tadeusz Haenke, the Bohemian botanist and ethnomusicologist with the Malaspina expedition) of the libretto by Pierre Elie Mamou.



The exhibition can now be seen in Prague, its inauguration on November 5 having been a part of a symposium dedicated to Haenke.

Contact Info:

John Black
Liberal Studies Dept.
Malaspina University
College
900 Fifth Street
Nanaimo, BC
V9R 5S5
Canada

Tel: +1-250-753-3245
local 2171

Fax: +1-250-740-6458

black@mala.bc.ca

Malaspina Global Portal:
www.malaspina.org

Don't forget to sign the
Guestbook!

© John Black 2004

The Malaspina Opera

American-Spanish composer José Luis Greco, who kindly contributed the above report on the exhibition in Madrid and Prague, has been working for some time on an opera about the life and work of Alexandro Malaspina.

There is little doubt that the tragic life of the navigator lends itself easily to operatic treatment, and many will be grateful that the opera will be completed before the saga is taken over by Hollywood as the theme of the next blockbuster starring Russell Crowe (not that that's in itself a bad idea!).

José Luis, whose modern yet accessible music explores the effects of complex orchestration, has dedicated a previous work to Malaspina, namely his piano concerto "Geographies of Silence" (to use its English title). The current work-in-progress, developed in collaboration with librettist Pierre Elie Mamou, will be eagerly awaited by Malaspinistas worldwide.

Below, the composer shares some of his recollections of September's anniversary celebrations in Mulazzo.

AMRC Website: web.mala.bc.ca/black/amrc/index.htm

El Greco in Mulazzo and Pontremoli

The ride from the airport to Pontremoli was already enough to take your breath away: Lunigiana, one of the most beautiful landscapes I ever saw.

I had recently returned to Madrid from the U.S. and while I'd been away my friend and librettist of the future Malaspina opera, Pierre Elie Mamou, had begun his work. In between my return from the States and my leaving for Italy he'd shown me about the first 20 pages of his sketches. To say I was impressed is putting it lightly – moved and inspired comes closer. And more importantly, a project which up until that time had seemed like some vague future hope, had suddenly – for me – materialized into something palpable and close at hand. So with this bag of spiritual goodies in hand, I was on my way to my first 'official' Malaspina encounter.

I think John Black has already nicely summed-up in previous editions of this newsletter the events and congenial atmosphere of the 3-day Malaspina symposium in Pontremoli-Mulazzo-Fivizzano, so there is no need for me to repeat his account.

What was important for me, however, was to see how what I was doing fit into a network of what others were doing, and that my contribution was not only unique, but enthusiastically welcomed. Being there with the libretto on its way and under the influence of its potential beauty naturally gave me the self-assurance – as far as the opera project was concerned – to present the idea convincingly.

It also made more meaningful – for everyone I think – my presenting the score of 'Geografías del Silencio', a piano concerto and homage to Malaspina on his 250th anniversary, to Dario Manfredi and his Centro di Studi Malaspiniani. The performance on the last day of the gathering of my piece for piano solo 'Fugitive Pieces' (interpreted by the young Spanish pianist Héctor Sánchez) felt like a nexus between what Malaspina had meant for me up to that moment and what he was going to represent from then on. And this is all thanks to Mercedes Palau, whose idea it was in the first place, and to Dario, who arranged the intimate setting (the cosy music parlour of a Renaissance Palace turned hotel-restaurant) which provided the perfect context.



“The performance on the last day ... felt like a nexus between what Malaspina had meant for me up to that moment and what he was going to represent from then on.”



About two months have passed since then. Pierre has completed the 2nd act of the libretto, which continues to wield an enchanting power over me. Within the next month or two I'll begin composing what will be the climactic central scene of the opera and from there work my way backwards and forwards. If I don't get lost at sea or shipwrecked, there'll be more news forthcoming.

José Luis Greco