

KAMRA TAD-DEPUTATI
PARLAMENT TA' MALTA



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

L-iSpeaker

The Speaker

Ftuħ Uffiċjali tal-Wirja “Puccini the Photographer”
għewwa l-Parlament ta’ Malta

2 ta’ Ottubru 2024

Diskors mid-Deputy Speaker l-Onor. David Agius

Colleagues

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me first to welcome you to the Building of the Maltese Parliament, a building built between 2011 and 2015, which in addition to being our place of work can also be described as a work of art in its own right.

Today, we gather to commemorate one of the greatest composers in the history of opera—Giacomo Puccini. More specifically, the subject of today's exhibition – Puccini the Photographer – could have come as a surprise to those of you who were unaware that opera was not the only art form which was of interest to Puccini. I was personally unaware of the fact that more than 100 years ago, when photography was not as easy as a mere quick snaps on a mobile phone, Puccini not only had an ear, but also an eye, for beauty. This can be clearly seen in the exhibition we are opening here today.

Thus, as we mark the 100th anniversary of his death, we are not only recalling his remarkable contributions to the world of music and the enduring power of culture to

transcend time, language, and national borders, but also to learn more about one of his lesser-known interests, that of photography.

Puccini's operas are more than just music – they are testament to the intangible cultural heritage of Italy, and the world. His works are among the most frequently performed and best-loved operas. *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly* evoke the deepest human emotions—love, loss, hope, and despair—and they continue to resonate with audiences more than a 100 years later. Through his genius, Puccini created art that is intangible yet powerful. Now we can appreciate not only his music, but also the beauty of his surroundings in Italy which he so masterfully captured in these photos.

However, amongst you there are those who have already spoken much more authoritatively about Puccini's legacy. My aim this evening is to emphasise that as we celebrate his legacy, we must also reflect on our responsibility to preserve and protect this cultural heritage.

This brings me, speaking on behalf of our Parliament, to the vital role of parliaments and governments in safeguarding our cultural heritage, including that which is intangible. Intangible cultural heritage, as defined by UNESCO, includes traditions, knowledge, practices, and expressions that are passed down through generations. Music, language, and art forms like opera are all part of this fragile heritage.

Parliaments have a unique role to play in the preservation and promotion of this heritage. It is in this building that the framework for protecting these elements of our culture is moulded. Through enacting laws, scrutinizing policies, and establishing funding, parliaments have the tools and the power to ensure that future generations inherit the same rich cultural landscape which we are enjoying today. Without the right and timely action, we put our cultural heritage at risk. For example, through their work, Parliaments can advocate for greater efforts to ensure fair investment in artists, composers, and performers to keep this art form alive.

In recent years, we have witnessed the growing importance of cultural diplomacy in international relations.

In this context, parliaments can play a role in ensuring that cultural heritage becomes a tool for diplomacy, promoting peace and mutual respect across borders – a tool which can unite in areas in which politics often divides. We are witnessing several wars. My appeal is for diplomatic solutions to be reached. Cultural diplomacy is a tool in this regard.

However, the responsibility of parliaments goes beyond setting the appropriate budget and enacting the right legislation. They have a responsibility to engage and educate the public. It is for this reason that the Speaker accepted with pleasure for Parliament to host this very interesting exhibition. Therefore, policies that promote arts education, encourage participation in cultural activities, and make cultural experiences accessible to all are crucial.

As we reflect on the life and works of Giacomo Puccini, we must also reflect on our duty to protect and nurture the intangible cultural heritage that defines us. As we cherish Puccini's work as a gift that has been passed down to us, it is up to us—through the actions of our governments and

parliaments—to ensure that it continues to enrich lives for centuries to come.

As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of Puccini's death and appreciate also his lesser-known work, we need to commit ourselves to the task of collectively safeguarding our intangible cultural heritage as this is the only way we can truly ensure that future generations will have the opportunity to discover this work, to be moved by it, and to be inspired by the beauty that he brought into the world.

Thank you.