

NICOLA MALAGUGINI

My autobiography

I was born in Rovigo , a small town in Northern Italy, in 1977. In the midst of my not particularly enthusiastic Accountancy studies, at the age of 16, I was deviated towards the local Conservatoire. The seed had been sown by my first electric bass teacher, Franco Catalini, who was struck more by my potential than my “inner jazz soul”. A very cheap attendance fee and the fascinating opportunity of sharing the house (for free) with a resounding colossus sealed the deal. And so the adventure began. I abandoned the bass guitar and literally fell head over heels for “that giant piece of wood”, as my sister would call it. This newly born passion, however, had to respect the pole position of my “serious” studies, the bread-winning ones. When I finally completed my Accountancy studies with top marks, I embarked on the steep path of studying Business & Economics at the University of Bologna. I attended my University classes the least possible, yet it was decided I had to stay on track with exams, the price to pay would be my Conservatoire attendance. First year of University and third course of double bass. It can be done. March on. 2001, as well as a Space Odyssey was also going to be the year of my double graduation. It can be done. March on.

1999, my double bass teacher Federico Garberoglio, who guided me, supported me and believed in me all throughout my Conservatoire studies, suggested I prepare for the European Youth Orchestra audition. Milan, December, freezing cold and foggy, Rai studios: I resulted non eligible for the European, but eligible for the Italian Youth Orchestra. So the Fiesole adventure began. The Orchestra held workshops of more or less 20 days a month: studying Chamber Music mainly with Nannoni, scales and arpeggios with Milani and his “librazzo”, his little book with which he prepared the double bass section, studying symphonies under the stern (and chilling) eye of Maestro Faja, even in the role of principal double bass. Yet how marvellous! What beautiful Music! In the evenings, in my hostel room, I bent over my other books, Public Law, International Economics and Finance ... What about Harmony and History of Music for my Music Degree? Hmmm, I’m not so sure it can be done, but still, march on. 2001 arrived, History, Harmony, Music Degree with Honours and my University Degree. Errrm, no actually, no University Degree. My father threatened me with all sorts of punishment crying “Treason”, but an International Economics exam failed, more than once. I finally saw the light in 2002 with a not so glorious grade (96/110), but still, a Degree had been obtained.

In the midst of all of that, there were also two short but intense periods of studying in Frankfurt with Maestro Gunther Klaus, teacher at the local Hochschule, thanks to a small Erasmus scholarship from the Conservatoire. Orchestral passages from dawn till dusk, yet I still remember to this day every single one of his lessons.

Immediately after my Music Degree, I began specializing under Alberto Bocini, principal double bass of the Orchestra del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino. I studied with him for three years. I also began studying with Maestro Franco Petracchi at the Stauffer Academy in Cremona. This didn’t last long, because the Maestro threw me out, “tired out by my arrogance” (I must admit, he had his reasons). After a short time as a scholarship recipient with the Orchestra dei Pomeriggi Musicali, I began my career as a professional musician. For one year, I worked in the newborn Orchestra Sinfonica of Rome, founded and guided by Maestro La Vecchia and where I met Raffaella who was to become my wife two years later. I then went on to work in the Orchestra Città Lirica of Pisa, my first professional work experience in the role of principal double bass. In 2004, I was warmly and repeatedly invited by Maestro Bocini to go and audition for principal double bass at the Teatro Massimo Bellini in Catania. I didn’t want to go. Sicily, at the time, was way beyond what I thought I could sacrifice for the love of

my double bass... And instead, contrarily to what I expected, it was great! Two years later I was made permanent. I was bringing home the bacon, so I could put away my “serious” University Degree. I immediately got married and three children came along in rapid succession. However, I could feel the North of Italy calling to me, like the call of the wild and so I continued to audition. That is how, in 2007, I resulted eligible for a row position in an audition at Teatro alla Scala, so I also collaborated occasionally with the Filarmonica alla Scala. In 2012 I began my soloist activity and my concerts in a string quintet with some colleagues from the Bellini Theatre, mainly in the city that had by then adopted me: Catania. In between changing a nappy and a Tosca I also almost won the competition for principal at the Teatro Comunale of Bologna (I was the only finalist), and to my wife’s joy, I did go and play a couple of programs with them.

Alas, the time has come, to say a few words about the greatest success and the greatest failure of my career. In 2014 the Theatre of Catania saw a terrible crisis: after a very large cut in regional funds and a stop in funding for several months, salaries were being received as long as 5 months late. When the audition for Principal double bass at the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale of Rai, in Turin, was announced, I began what the poet Leopardi would define “uno studio matto e disperatissimo” (crazy and extremely desperate studies) because it wasn’t only a question of personal glory, a lot more was at stake: financial security for my family. I win. I go to Turin with my family, after the best summer of my life, leaving behind our home and our friends. And then everything started to fall apart: my leave wasn’t getting paid, the autumn of the Po valley, the position I perhaps wasn’t really ready for. I trip up a few times, maybe on purpose. To cut a long story short, it was already over before it even started, so we returned to Catania, where we had lived happily for ten years. Yes, because making Music is beautiful, but life is even more so! To celebrate life, we returned to Catania with a baby on the way (baby number four, in case you had lost count).

At that point in time, to avoid being haunted by regret, that often risks giving a bitter taste to life after a crossroads, I wanted to create something special, something celebratory. That's how the idea of a cd to celebrate Sicily and its traditions was born. A group of composers accept my invitation and, voilà, “Nova et vetera” released with the label Da Vinci Classics, my collaboration with Mirea, concerts all around Sicily and many other projects that will hopefully, little by little, see the light.

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