

BY NOW anyone who loves good music and wine should have heard that Brian Schembri gave a recital in Malta in the middle of May as part of the programme for this year's visit here by members of the *Jurade* of Saint-Emilion, which consisted of five days of music, wine and good food.

The combination of these three essentials brought to Malta members of the *Jurade* from all over the world. We were once again honoured with the presence of Alain Querre from Saint-Emilion. Alain is a wine grower, wine philosopher and poet. During the recital I was sitting next to him when I realised that he was scribbling something. He wrote something along these lines: "The bird is free, he travels and seeks new experiences, he enjoys life. He delivers joy and happiness. He returns home. He is happy but yet there is anger in his eyes."

Did Alain have too much wine, or was Brian expressing his emotions through his music? Whatever the answer, I know that he was right about delivering joy and happiness.

The recital was followed by a reception with great food and service provided by Elia Borg Bonaci and a fantastic wine which we selected specifically for the occasion, obviously from Saint-Emilion. I am no music expert. I am not even sure that I am a wine expert, but one thing is sure, we needed no experts to persuade the people present that the combination of music, wine and food is a recipe for a great evening.

The spirit of music and wine continued last month in Saint-Emilion itself. The success of Brian's recital in Malta was very well accepted by the Saint-Emilionais and when I suggested we should induct him into the *Jurade*, they gladly accepted.

The *Jurade* of Saint-Emilion is the body that runs and controls the wines of the jurisdiction. Every year they organise *La Fête de Printemps*, which is a great festival of wine, food and art to celebrate the flowering of the vine and to proclaim the judgment on the new wine. As part of these festivities the *Jurade* honours people from all over the world who in their own fields have helped to improve the understanding and appreciation of life.

In front of 750 people, who included former Prime Minister Alain Juppé, Brian was inducted by Mr Gratiot from Chateau Larcis Ducasse, himself a music lover and organiser of many musical festivals in his chateau. The following is a part of the testimony read out to him. "Dear Brian, with your music you have fulfilled an artist's ambition. You enjoy life and you give joy to many people. This is the spirit of wine. We hope that the wines of Saint-Emilion will help you even further in your orchestration of life. Maestro, for your understanding of life, we are proud to make you a *Vigneron d'honneur* and *Bourgeois de Saint-Emilion*."

This year the *Jurade* honoured 54 new members. Brian received the longest speech and the biggest applause from the 750 guests present, who included 25 Maltese wine lovers who joined us in Saint-Emilion.

More music and wine



Jurade de Saint-Emilion

by Michael Tabone

The Maltese group was in South West France for a week-long cultural and gastronomic visit to Saint-Emilion and Armagnac. In seven days we tasted 105 different wines and visited some of the top Chateaux in the region and the world. The following list should mean Paradise to any wine lover's dream and for those who were present, Divinity itself.

My friend Pascal Delbeck set off the programme at Chateau Belair. Pascal is truly in harmony with his soils, wine and humanity. He is probably the best wine philosopher alive and a unique wine grower. He is also very good with a corkscrew and here we tasted 11 vintages which included the newborn 1999, the elegant 1986, the legendary 1982 and the mature and complex 1970.

Count Stephan von Neipperg is probably the most photographed wine grower in the world. And for

good reason. From his vineyards come two of the most sought after wines in the world: Ch. Canon La Gaffeliere and La Mondotte. Stephan is full of fun and his understanding of the present world of wine should make him even more photographed!

He received us at Canon La Gaffeliere and after tasting the 1999 vintage from four of the chateaux he owns (which included La Mondotte), we sat down for dinner with more fantastic wine. One of my very favourite vintages in Saint-Emilion (which now is on its way down) was 1986 and the Count very generously provided us with magnums of this vintage to finish off the evening.

Anne Marie Bertrand, Chateau Carteau Côtes Daugay, Chateau Franc Pipeau and the Bertrand family need no introduction in Malta. Their wines are loved and admired by many wine lovers. The evening with the Bertrands is the finest example of what wine means to me.



MICHAEL TABONE (right) and Brian Schembri with the Tour de Roy in the background



PART of the group of Maltese wine lovers who travelled to Saint-Emilion



BRIAN SCHEMBRI proudly wearing the insignia and holding the certificate of the *Jurade de Saint-Emilion's Vigneron d'honneur* and honorary citizen of Saint-Emilion



MARTINE LAFFITTE in 'Paradise'

Substance, generosity, continuity, friendship, joy, happiness. For the first time, Anne Marie received us in the absence of her famous father, Jacques. Although we missed him very much, if I were him I would not worry much about the future. Anne Marie can handle things just fine.

Another wine that needs no introduction is Ch La Bonnelle. Marielle and François Sulzer, who own La Bonnelle, were in Malta recently and have made many friends and admirers over here. They received us with open arms. Olivier Sulzer (the new generation wine grower) and his young family treated us to many vintages which included several of the wonderfully rich and opulent 1998.

Ask anyone who knows about Armagnac and three names immediately come to mind: Laberdolive, Domaine de Boingneres and Samalens. The producers of Armagnac talk about "the angels' share" and "paradise" and I tell you that tasting vintages that date back to 1888, 1942, etc. from these producers is like a dream come true.

Martine Laffitte from Domaine de Boingneres is one of the great personalities of Armagnac. She is full of life, with a passion for wine, food, friends and bullfighting. Her Armagnac is full of character too. After a wonderful lunch of *La Carcasse* (grilled duck bones) and lots of singing, Martine revealed the spirit of Armagnac. Direct from her barrels we tasted single varietal, single vintages, *eaux de vie* that started from 1995 and ended with the wonderfully round, smooth and complex 1968.

Laberdolive's Armagnacs are known as the finest in the world and I know that even here in Malta they are very much appreciated. Mr Laberdolive is now an old friend and over the years we have seen great generosity from him, but this time he was even more generous. We tasted 1988, 1982, 1979, 1976, 1964, 1946 and 1942.

I would need great generosity

from the editor for me to tell you in detail about all the people and wines we met, but I must mention the following. Mr Gratiot from Larcis Ducasse is a man with wine and Saint-Emilion in his heart. His wines have had a loyal following for many years, probably because they are quite unique. The vineyard has an exceptional *terroir* and exposition. The style of wine making is fairly old fashioned which produces wines to age. Mr Gratiot is also very good with a corkscrew and here we tasted the barrel sample of 1999, the promising 1994 and the just about ready 1982.

Other visits included Pierre Lurton from Cheval Blanc. The Chateau is being renovated and naturally Pierre is very busy at present. However he still managed to show us his 1993 and 1999.

A favourite of mine, and a good friend, is Viscount Patrick de Lesquen at Ch. Berliquet. This wine is one to watch and I think the whole world agrees that Berliquet's quality is leaping forward. Watch for the 1998 vintage, which is simply wonderful.

Max Pilotte at Ch. Grace Dieu les Menuts is very proud of his wine and it's aging potential. Last time I visited him he has started building a new tasting room and it was very nice to taste so many wines in the now completed building. Here we tasted 1998, 1997, 1996 and the complex 1986.

Wine is an expression of life, from a particular region, of a particular year brought to life by the wine grower. We enjoy wine because it gives an expression to life through friendship and unity. Sharing and understanding the diversity of soils, styles and characters of nature and humanity. Parker can score high or low, but what counts at the end is the memory of a beautiful evening among friends sharing the passion of wine, the energy of the music, celebrating humanity through the talents of wine and music genius (Brian's, not Jean's).

I leave you with a translation of the proclamation of judgment of the new wine read out to the whole town from the top of the Tour de Roy. If you understand the following, you can safely say that you understand wine: "Friends come from all over the world to celebrate Spring with us. Together we are celebrating. We celebrate the soil and the sun. Look at the vine. Its leaves are silently opening, embracing the sun. Our hearts beat slower. Their rhythm is in harmony with those of the soil. From the soil millions of roots wake up in search for the source of life. We wait. Let's all clap with joy. Saint-Emilion, Alleluia."