

School of music administration to identify new base

by Annaliza Borg

The Johann Strauss School of Music administration yesterday started going round schools close to Valletta, assessing possibilities to set up a temporary base while renovation works take place at the school. While the process to identify alternative premises has only started, the school administration was “very happy” with what it saw yesterday, said the director for Life Long Learning, Mario Azzopardi, when contacted yesterday. Hopefully alternative premises to the Old Bakery Street premises, will be identified by the time applications for music courses are received and before the start of the new scholastic year. Mr Azzopardi confirmed that the Johann Strauss School of Music premises in Old Bakery Street, Valletta, will not open in October as works will be ongoing. Yet meanwhile, an alternative base will be identified for the service to remain unhindered as much as possible.

Addressing criticism that the process should have started much earlier rather than when applications opened, Mr Azzopardi said the number of music students fluctuates a lot from year to year.

“Unfortunately a good number of students stop taking lessons when they approach their O’ levels or A’ levels,” he said. “This culture should stop,” he added.

Further clarifying his intentions, Mr Azzopardi announced that a call for the recruitment of music teachers will be issued in next Sunday’s papers. The idea is to give all those willing to learn music the opportunity to do so, as long as teachers are available. Up till last year, students were subject to an audition before embarking on their music studies at the public institution and a good number of students were not being accepted. Contradictorily, a process of selectivity was in place, whereas the government was trying to make more educational opportunities open to all.

In a statement earlier on during the day, Mr Azzopardi said the Johann Strauss School of Music should become a central school of specialisation with a network of branches in various regions around the islands. In a bid to clarify rumours that the existing service will be hindered after structural maintenance works and a school expansion project were announced, Mr Azzopardi said the works and project to extend the school’s services to the community are separate projects which will be undertaken at the same time.

Understanding that the Johann Strauss School of Music served as a base where student musicians and professionals met to share skills and collaborate in orchestras and choirs, bands as well as chamber music groups, besides taking and giving classes, Mr Azzopardi said that ideally no more than three premises should serve as temporary bases. However, the decision was entirely within the school's administration and the head's remit, while he focused on implementing the government's policy.

As from the next academic year, the school of music will embark on a long-term project of expansion. The vision is for the various centres to start offering courses in music appreciation and music tuition at basic levels in various instruments as well as theory of music under the direction of the school of music. Successful students will then have the opportunity to audition and proceed to the central school to pursue their studies at more advanced levels.

This will first and foremost enable many families to benefit from music education opportunities which are closer to home, the statement said. More prospective students would eventually have the opportunity to further their studies at the central school, upon completion of their first basic courses offered by the new branches. The central school will then become a centre of specialisation.

One music centre is envisaged for every college around the islands. College principals have meanwhile welcomed the project and are looking forward to promote music courses within their own schools.

Being a historical building, the school needs structural changes due to its many interconnecting rooms, lack of space and facilities. Consequently, even if maintenance works are undertaken, the premises still would not meet the needs of a modern school of music and so a decision to relocate students and teachers while works are ongoing was taken.

Once work on the premises is completed, the school of music will be housed in a modern and adequate building, which will meet all amenities and be fully equipped with all the required facilities. Concurrently, the new branches would have started to give initial results, and hopefully, the number of students pursuing the school of music's courses around the islands would have increased both in quantity and quality.

The Johann Strauss School of Music is receiving applications for the academic year 2010-2011 till noon on Friday, 3 September at 74, Old Bakery Street, Valletta VLT 1456 – Tel. 2124-2549, email: jstrauss.music.sch@gov.mt. Further information on courses is available at: www.eveningcourses.gov.mt.

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