

2 February 2020, Mafra, Portugal

MESSAGE BY MAESTRO PLACIDO DOMINGO, PRESIDENT OF EUROPA NOSTRA,  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE INAUGURATION OF THE RESTORED  
CARILLONS OF THE BASILICA OF THE MARFA NATIONAL PALACE

*Honoured guests,  
Dear friends,  
Dear ladies and gentlemen,*

Eight years ago - when we held our Europa Nostra Congress in Lisbon - we had the unique opportunity of enjoying the magnificent sound created by the six pipe organs here in the Basilica of the Mafra National Palace. The concert was an incomparable musical storm and the majestic music flowed over me and the other listeners like a grand melodic wave. In 2012, the restoration of the pipe organs had just been awarded the European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award and I was so thrilled to be able to listen to the end result. It was a truly magical moment for me and all other music and heritage enthusiasts.

Alas, that day we did not have the privilege to listen to the world-famous carillons of the Towers of the Mafra National Palace. The condition of these carillons was just too fragile. This largest bell-set in the world was so close to being lost that, in 2014, we decided to include the carillons on our list of the 7 Most Endangered heritage sites in Europe, following a nomination made by the Centro Nacional de Cultura. A year later, Europa Nostra and our 7 Most Endangered partner, the European Investment Bank Institute, proposed an action plan. And now, with the help of so many - stakeholders, sponsors and volunteers, and with the financial help of the Portuguese Ministry of Culture, we find ourselves here, at the celebration of the restoration of the carillons. What an incredible journey and what an incredible privilege for the guests today to be able to listen to them after 20 years of silence.

I wish I could be there with you. Any musical instrument, even a voice, needs care and attention, maintenance and craftsmanship and the people who will play the carillons in this unique series of concerts are the best in the world. One of the musicians, Francisco Gato, can even trace his skills right back to the Gato family of the 18th and 19th century, who composed and cared for the Mafra National Palace Carillons.

I am so happy that these magnificent carillons will now join the six pipe organs in making Mafra a mecca for music lovers, especially with the opening of the National Museum of Music in the Palace. I think it is also marvellous that carillon and organ concerts will be held throughout the year to enable as many people as possible to enjoy this unique musical experience.

As President of Europa Nostra, I applaud the work that has been done to restore the carillons and save this UNESCO World Heritage for future generations. As a musician, I feel we are truly blessed that we can, once again, enjoy the great musical heritage of Europe through the crisp, clear and gentle sounds of the bronze bells.

I look so much forward to having the joy of returning to Mafra to celebrate with you the recent inscription of the Mafra National Palace on the World Heritage List of UNESCO.

Plácido Domingo



The Voice of  
Cultural Heritage  
in Europe

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