



We're very good at this!

Julie Thomas

Director of the Imperial Choir



We have had a busy and a very successful year since last year's festa.

Our concert with the band on the 2nd of September was a big success, even though I had to call in two helpers, Annette Vella and Julie McKellar, to aid us as one of our strongest singers had a bad fall, breaking her ankle and therefore could not join us.

Gail Borg, one of our newest members, made her debut as a soloist when we sang music from The Hunger Games Films: a mysterious piece called The Hanging Tree. Some members of the band accompanied her on sticks, drums and flute. It was something very different to what we had done before, and it was a hit! Our festa week finished on the 7th and the 8th of September, with our performances of the hymn to Our Lady of Victories.

The band and choir performed again on the 24th of September in the lower square, as part of the small feast for Our Madonna Tal-Mellieħa.

In November we sang with a group from the band at our usual remembrance service at the

Parish Church and this was followed by two hymns sung at the cemetery. Later in the month we were invited back to the beautiful St Catherine's Monastery in



Valletta

to sing for their festive mass. Sadly, unbeknown to us, this would be the last time our youngest singer, Kate Attard, would be singing with the choir as she died in March 2024 following a tragic accident. What a loss of such a musical, vibrant and beautiful young life who showed so much promise for the future. A poignant service, dedicated to her soul, was organised at the parish church of Manikata in April, by one of our altos, Maryanne Quattromani, and we were joined by many singers who had known Kate. Thank you,

Maryanne, it was a lovely gesture.

Rehearsals continued as usual, now working towards Christmas. We performed at two new venues this year. Our first was at the Mellieħa Holiday Centre (The Danish Village). This was a great evening as our audience had just finished their evening meal and were ready for some fun. Many joined in the singing and, indeed they were a lively and jolly bunch.

The second new venue was at The Pergola Hotel and Spa. Originally, they wanted us to sing near the pool bar but, as the





weather was cold and blustery, we relocated into the dining room (at a squash) inside the main hotel. Again, we had a wonderful audience, including a large group from Iceland who had had a lucky window for flights amidst the last volcanic eruption there. They were really into the Christmas spirit, and the children in the group loved playing the various bells and tambourines we had brought, during a boisterous rendition of *Jingle Bells!*

Our final Christmas performance was our usual Boxing Day concert at the Maritim Antonine Hotel, again with a very appreciative audience. We followed this with our traditional Christmas get together at the restaurant.

Rehearsals began again in the new year ready for our Palm Sunday concert. We were invited to sing at the opening of the Easter Exhibition at the club and chose our pieces from the sacred musical *Ikun li trid int*. We also sang a piece from this work at our Palm Sunday concert together with 'When I Survey The Wondrous Cross' with solo trumpet by Matthew Gauci.

After Easter, rehearsals began for the main festa concert and the build up to the Sanctuary celebrations of the 125 years since the crowning of the Madonna tal-Mellieħa in September 1899. Early in July we were asked to perform in a celebratory concert at the Sanctuary courtyard with many other acts from Mellieħa. It was a lovely occasion. Thank you, Marisa, for your beautiful rendition of William Gomez's Ave Maria. This concert is cause for another worthy mention. It was the first performance with the choir for two new members, Anett Levai-Lotte and her daughter Blanka, originally from Hungary, now living in Mellieħa. The choir marvelled at how quickly they worked hard to master the songs that we sang in Maltese. Well done both of you.

This year we have double the workload for September. As well as our concert on the 2nd, our choir and the band are joining forces with The Choir of the National Sanctuary of Our Lady of Mellieħa

in an exciting performance of a new oratorio on the 21st of September. Rehearsals, as we go to print, are going well for both.

The addition of our two new members from Hungary has made me look back at some of the pieces I choose for my ladies to sing, as well as those Surmast Anthony Borg asks us to perform, I realise that we manage to sing in a variety of languages very well! During last year's festa we sang in Welsh (my native language.) We regularly sing in Maltese, Latin and

English of course but the Maltese manage Welsh surprisingly easily and can sound very accurate. The 'll' pronunciation does give them a bit of trouble but, on the whole, they are very convincing. In the Palm Sunday concert we sang *Indodana*, a beautiful piece in Xhosa which is a branch of the Nguni language and one of the main languages spoken in South Africa. This was not our first time with this language. We sang *Senzenina* (with Mark Anthony Bartolo) in our concert in 2022. This has its own difficulties as it has more unusual pairings of consonants together such as 'Ngob'umthathile' and 'Nkulunkulu'. We have sung in German in the past and at Christmas time we sing many carols in Italian, and, recently, Marisa's beautiful Ave Maria was in Spanish. We have sung quite a few pieces by Karl Jenkins, such as *Adiemus* and *Cantilena*. He is well known for making up a language that is both easy to sing and beautiful to listen to. We are singing another piece of his during this festa concert, see what you think. Looking forward to Christmas I would love the choir to sing a song in Gaelic and, even further forward to festa 2025, where I really want them to do a piece I recently heard by the Latvian ladies' group 'Tatumeitas'. They sing a fabulously exciting song called *Raganu Nakts*. It would be in Latvian, but it is quite repetitive and involves lots of drumming. Also, with our new choir members, it would also be a good chance to try a Hungarian song. Annet has suggested some beautiful pieces that we could do for next Palm Sunday. After all, we now have expert help! Variety is the spice of life they say!

Thank you for all your support at our concerts throughout the year. A big thank you to all my ladies for their trust and dedication over the year and for the support of their family members. A massive thank you to my husband Geoff, who accompanies us on piano, organ and drums and anything really, and who has to step in to conduct as well from the keyboard when I have to sing if anybody is missing.

Best wishes for a very happy festa.

the Beach at Paradise Bay

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