

**THE MALTESE
WIND BAND TRADITION**

Music, Continuity and Change

Abstract

Wind band music is one of the most popular music traditions in Malta. In almost every Maltese town and village one finds one or two, sometimes even three, band clubs with their own premises, paying members and a band affiliated to them. The highlight of the year for band music is the village feast (*fešta*) – the week-long festivities in honour of the village patron or secondary saint. This is the first book in English exploring aspects of continuity and change in the Maltese wind band tradition with special attention to how this tradition has adjusted itself to current trends in Maltese culture and society. For this purpose, the present study will rely on the theories and methods of ethnomusicology.

This book gives a historical overview of the Maltese wind band tradition. It presents the process by which Maltese wind bands flourished during the nineteenth century and evolved in various ways during the years that followed. This research explores the band club (*kazın*) from three aspects: (1) the band club as a physical space which hosts both musical and non-musical events; (2) the band club as a community of people that values the *banda* tradition and the contribution of their club to the social and cultural life of the town/village; (3) the band club as the producer of music both for the village feast as well as for other events. In all the three aspects one notes a very nice balance between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’.

This book will analyse the Maltese festive band march with special attention to how this changed over the years whilst preserving its identity. Such discussion will incorporate a range of extra-musical processes that place the music of these marches into a better perspective. This book examines the interrelationship of the Maltese wind band tradition and partisan politics in Malta. This link has existed since the beginning of the Maltese wind band tradition. The chapter will also show how this interrelationship has evolved over the years to reflect ongoing propagandistic intentions and strategies. This research explores the role of the recording industry in the recording of Maltese marches. The chapter will show the impact of recordings

on the appraisal of Maltese marches and how recording practices of the past can still be observed in today's *banda* tradition. Throughout the years, one can note that bands did not only participate in the *festa* programme, but they also participated in several other activities which are of great importance to Maltese society and culture. Two such instances are *ix-Xalata tal-Festa*, which is a day of entertainment held a day after the village feast, and Carnival. The final chapter explores the importance of the sound produced by Maltese local bands and how they differ from bands around the world. Specifically, this chapter focus on the Maltese march, which serves to present the continuity and change of the Maltese wind band tradition in relation to how composers compose with Maltese character. The conclusion will bring together and summarise the main points of the overall discussion while pointing out aspects of the tradition of our concern that require further research.

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Original name of band club	Locality (Maltese)	Name of band club in English (as used in this dissertation)	Locality (English)
Is-Socjetà Filarmonika Nazzjonali La Valette	Valletta	La Valette Band Club	Valletta
Is-Socjetà u Banda Ċittadina King's Own	Valletta	King's Own Band Club	Valletta
Il-Banda San Ġorġ	Bormla	Saint George Band Club	Cospicua
Il-Banda Vittoriosana San Lawrenz	Birgu	Saint Lawrence Band Club	Vittoriosa
Għaqda Filarmonika Prince of Wales	Birgu	Prince of Wales Band Club	Vittoriosa
Għaqda Mużikali Queen's Own	Isla	Queen's Own Band Club	Senglea
Is-Socjetà Filarmonika Pinto	Hal Qormi	Pinto Band Club	Qormi
Il-Banda San Ġorġ Martri	Hal Qormi	Saint George Martyr Band Club	Qormi
Is-Socjetà Filarmonika Anici	Hal Qormi	Anici Band Club	Qormi
Il-Kazin San Ġuzepp u Banda De Rohan	Haż-Żebbuġ	De Rohan Band Club	Żebbuġ
Kazin Banda San Filep	Haż-Żebbuġ	Saint Philip Band Club	Żebbuġ
Is-Socjetà Mużikali 12th May	Haż-Żebbuġ	12th May Band Club	Żebbuġ
Is-Socjetà Mużikali u l-Banda M.M. Gratiae	Haż-Żabbar	M.M. Gratiae Band Club	Żabbar
Għaqda Mużikali San Mikiel	Haż-Żabbar	Saint Michael Band Club	Żabbar
l-Għaqda Mużikali San Nikola	Siġġiewi	Saint Nicholas Band Club	Siġġiewi
Il-Banda Beland	Żejtun	Beland Band Club	Żejtun
Għaqda Banda Żejtun A.D. 1933	Żejtun	Żejtun Band Club	Żejtun
Socjetà Mużikali La Stella Levantina	H'Attard	La Stella Levantina Band Club	Attard
Socjetà Filarmonika Maria Annunzjata	Hal Balzan	Our Lady of Annunciation Band Club	Balzan
Kazin tal-Banda San Gabriel	Hal Balzan	Saint Gabriel Band Club	Balzan
L-Għaqda Mużikali Sant'Elena	Birkirkara	Saint Helen Band Club	Birkirkara
Kazin Santa Liena Socjetà Filarmonika Duke of Connaught	Birkirkara	Saint Helen Duke of Connaught Band Club	Birkirkara
Banda Sant'Antnin	Birkirkara	Saint Anthony Band Club	Birkirkara

Għaqda Mużikali Banda San Pietru fil-Ktajjen	Birżebbuġa	Saint Peter in Chains Band Club	Birżebbuġa
Soċjetà Filarmonika San Pietru A.D. 1990	Birżebbuġa	Saint Peter Band Club	Birżebbuġa
Il-Banda Santa Marija	Had-Dingli	Saint Mary's Band Club	Dingli
Is-Socjetà Mużikali Madonna tal-Karmnu	Fgura	Our Lady of Carmelitan Band Club	Fgura
Is-Socjetà Filarmonika Vilhena	Furjana	Vilhena Band Club	Floriana
Għaqda Mużikali Marija Assunta	Gudja	Our Lady Assumption Band Club	Gudja
Każin tal-Banda La Stella	Gudja	La Stella Band Club	Gudja
Għaqda Mużikali Mount Carmel	Gżira	Mount Carmel Band Club	Gżira
Għaqda Mużikali San Bartilmew	Hal Għargħur	Saint Bartholomew Band Club	Għargħur
Każin Santa Marija	Hal Ghaxaq	Saint Mary Band Club	Ghaxaq
Każin San Ġużepp A.D. 1874	Hal Ghaxaq	Saint Joseph Band Club	Ghaxaq
Is-Socjetà Filarmonika San Ġużepp	Hamrun	Saint Joseph Band Club	Hamrun
Għaqda Mużikali San Gejtanu	Hamrun	Saint Gaetan Band Club	Hamrun
Għaqda Mużikali Kuncizzjoni	Hamrun	Consumption Band Club	Hamrun
Soċjetà Filarmonika Sagra Familja	Kalkara	Sacred Family Band Club	Kalkara
Għaqda Mużikali San Ġużepp	Kalkara	Saint Joseph Band Club	Kalkara
Għaqda Mużikali San Leonardu	Hal Kirkop	Saint Leonard Band Club	Kirkop
Banda San Ġużepp	Hal Kirkop	Saint Joseph Band Club	Kirkop
Banda San Piju X	Hal Lija	Saint Pio X Band Club	Lija
Banda Unjoni	Hal Luqa	Union Band Club	Luqa
Għaqda Mużikali Sant'Andrija	Hal Luqa	Saint Andrew Band Club	Luqa
Għaqda Mużikali Trinità Qaddisa	Marsa	Holy Trinity Band Club	Marsa
Banda Marija Reġina	Marsa	Saint Mary the Queen Band Club	Marsa
Soċjetà Filarmonika La Vittoria	Mellieha	La Vittoria Band Club	Mellieha
Banda Imperial	Mellieha	Imperial Band Club	Mellieha
Soċjetà Filarmonika Nicolò Isouard	Mosta	Nicolò Isouard Band Club	Mosta
Filarmonika Santa Marija	Mosta	Saint Mary's Band Club	Mosta
Soċjetà Mużikali tal-Ġilju A.D. 1991	Mqabba	Tal- Ġilju Band Club	Mqabba

Soċjetà Santa Marija Banda Re Ġorġ V A.D. 1910	Mqabba	Saint Mary Band Club	Mqabba
Għaqda Mużikali Melita	Msida	Melita Band Club	Msida
Soċjetà Mużikali Peace	Naxxar	Peace Band Club	Naxxar
Każin tal-Banda Vittoria	Naxxar	Vittoria Band Club	Naxxar
Soċjetà Filarmonika G.M. Fra Ant. De Paule, Banda Kristu Re	Raħal Ġdid	De Paule Band Club	Paola
Soċjetà Filarmonika Lourdes	Raħal Ġdid	Lourdes Band Club	Paola
Każin tal-Banda Lourdes	Qrendi	Lourdes Band Club	Qrendi
Soċjetà Mużikali Santa Marija	Qrendi	Saint Mary Band Club	Qrendi
Soċjetà San Pawl, Banda Ċittadina Konti Ruġġieru	Rabat	Saint Paul Band Club	Rabat
Għaqda Mużikali L'Isle Adam	Rabat	L'Isle Adam Band Club	Rabat
Każin u Banda San Pawl	Hal Safi	Saint Paul Band Club	Safi
Banda San Ġiljan	San Ġiljan	Saint Julian's Band Club	St. Julian's
Banda Spinola A.D. 1985	San Ġiljan	Spinola Band Club	St. Julian's
Soċjetà Mużikali tal-Karmnu	Balluta, San Ġiljan	Carmelitan Band Club	Balluta, St. Julian's
Banda San Ġwann A.D. 1985	San Ġwann	Saint John Band Club	San Ġwann
Soċjetà Filarmonika Santa Venera	Santa Venera	Saint Venera Band Club	Santa Venera
Banda Stella Maris	Sliema	Stella Maris Band Club	Sliema
Soċjetà Filarmonika Sliema A.D. 1923	Sliema	Sliema Band Club	Sliema
Soċjetà Mużikali San Ġirgor	Sliema	Saint Gregory Band Club	Sliema
Għaqda Mużikali Marija Annunzjata	Hal Tarxien	Our Lady of Annunciation Band Club	Tarxien
Banda Queen Victoria	Żurrieq	Queen Victoria Band Club	Żurrieq
Soċjetà Mużikali Santa Katarina	Żurrieq	Saint Catherine Band Club	Żurrieq
Sigġiewi Festival Brass Band	Sigġiewi	Sigġiewi Festival Brass Band	Sigġiewi

Foreword

I am honoured to contribute a Foreword to Simon Farrugia's stimulating study of the Maltese *banda*, or wind band tradition. It's a striking and passionate music that stirs the spirit and demands attention—a publicly oriented music that proclaims not only that something is happening but also that members of a community are working together with great commitment to see it through.

I'd initially heard about this tradition from Philip Ciantar, one of Malta's most energetic ethnomusicologists and a long-time friend and peer. Philip had invited me to serve as an external examiner in music at the University of Malta, and knowing of my own background as a wind player and my active interest in band traditions elsewhere (principally the *beiguan* music of Taiwan), Philip kindly arranged appointments for me at a small number of band clubs on my annual visits to Malta over the several years I served as examiner. I was able to meet and converse with some senior bandsmen, take in the tight connections between the bands' musical work and societal cohesion, and admire carefully protected historical resources such as band halls and collections of music scores. I became an avid spectator at community *festas*, relishing the sensory overload as bands marched through decorated streets and squares playing their distinctive repertory to tightly pressed crowds of supporters. Philip's insights as a former bandsman and composer-arranger and as an adept social observer helped me understand what I was seeing and hearing. And, along the way, Philip also introduced me to this book's author, then a high-achieving graduate student and someone who already saw that the wind band tradition deserved respectful, in-depth analysis. It's thus a particular pleasure to see Simon Farrugia's work bear fruit in this present volume.

Farrugia's book inevitably contributes to numerous contemporaneous ethnomusicological research themes, as well as to several areas of enduring disciplinary interest. Among those that stood out for me were the ways in which Malta's wind band tradition represents an entangled multinational history embracing the localization of directly colonial imports (British military bands) and regional migrations (the incoming Italian band masters seeking opportunities to utilise their expertise at a safe distance from a troubled homeland). Farrugia's work can thus be read as a "global history", and as a gentle reminder too that Europe has its own subaltern music histories that are just as neglected in scholarly circles as those from elsewhere around the planet even as—and for very good reason—cries of Eurocentrism gain new ground.

Beyond its inherent interest as a subaltern global history, *The Maltese Wind Band Tradition* provokes thought as an example of an approach to a music that lies somewhere between conventional but always incomplete "traditional" and "classical" polarities. Farrugia's study here joins a rising body of work on musics that rest on notational and compositional practices that stem from the arena of classical European art music, and they draw, to some extent, on an associated set of educational principles and organizational systems. Such musics today cover a wide swathe of educational, worship, ceremonial, broadcast and entertainment situations but they have regularly been neglected by researchers despite their prominence in the everyday lives of broad populations. Ethnomusicologists have often looked for the most "authentic" folk music traditions in place of such examples. In our critics' eyes, we've tended to overstate difference. Musicologists, by way of contrast, saw the short-scale units of such music as offering, at best, only a pale imitation of the extended possibilities provided composers in more vaunted music "master"-genres like opera or the symphony. Collectively, then, music scholars have tended to overlook the middle-ground musics that nevertheless reflect very well the social conditions under which they were created

and sustained in a modern or modernising world. Clearly, we need studies of such genres to understand the expressivities and aesthetic values of the broader populations who engage with them.

That such an analysis comes from a researcher working in his own cultural milieu is likely no accident: such scholars have been at the forefront of expanding (ethno)musicological horizons by looking at the musical practices that are important to those around them, perhaps as distinct from overseas ethnomusicologists who may bring different expectations into play. This background can be seen in the topics chosen as chapter headings and indeed even in the ordering of chapters, with the emphasis on the recuperation of history and a close attention to the sound of the music itself. It is obviously also a step with its own set of methodological considerations and ethical responsibilities: Farrugia comes to the bands in the humble position of a student learner and sets up the expectation that he may become a long-term member in time. But as he works to expand his network of contacts and ensure the reliability of his analyses across the nation more widely, he risks being perceived as a someone who might potentially release valuable music scores to a rival band nearby. Meanwhile, he tried to learn from the inside, for instance through writing a new march, and so contributing to the tradition itself. On publication, Farrugia's work will certainly be critically assessed by many of those who supported its research and who remain alongside the author as neighbours and fellow musicians today. This equates a considerable burden for any author, albeit one welcomed today by socially responsible researchers worldwide.

In sum, this is a very welcome and pathbreaking study into a fascinating set of musical practices and repertoires and the circumstances within which wind band music reflects, informs and challenges Maltese society. Any good book leaves its reader wanting more, and the topics that we'd like to know more about now are typically related to our own recent or ongoing research interests. In my case, I found I wanted to learn more on gender

issues in and around the band settings, and particularly about bandsmen's ways of being together as men. What place does music performance take in the formation of a kind of public brotherhood or in shaping a public, group-oriented, expressive masculinity? I remain curious too about the senses of performance and fulfilment (or frustration) that a musician might experience across the various contexts assessed here. The exhaustion and the elation of a great march, perhaps, but also the hard labour of working in the high temperatures of Mediterranean *festa* performances, managing of a network of associate musicians and coping with the inevitable stylistic differences and rivalries. Perhaps even the feelings one might have as, say, a Labour Party sympathizer booked to play for a Nationalist Party procession or a musician caught between conflicting loyalties to family and to band membership. But it's not for me to commission Farrugia's next book! Let me end by congratulating him on this one, which I'm confident every reader will find as engaging and informative as I have.

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Introduction

Music as an activity is universal. Every person of any status, gender, age and class could go through some kind of musical experience throughout life and engage in it. Slobin (2011: 15) argues that ‘everyone can sing something sometime’. In that sense, he (ibid.) notes that ‘there are folksingers everywhere: probably not musically educated in notation but ready to be musical at the right moment’. Music is not only for the elite, for professionals or for highly educated people, but for everybody. Indeed, (ibid.) ‘this includes mothers crooning to babies, people singing to animals, or fans chanting football songs in stadiums’.

I have been interested in and observed the Maltese band tradition for quite a long time. It may be said that the band tradition is an intriguing phenomenon in Maltese villages, where the locals give it all the importance it deserves. This is clearly reflected in the enthusiasm, participation and passion that the locals show during the year. Publications regarding historical aspects of the Maltese *banda* (band), band composers, band clubs and other aspects have appeared over the years. However, the *banda* has never been studied in detail from an ethnomusicological point of view by a native Maltese. This research will be filling this lacuna. It will indeed consider several band clubs in the light of both continuity and change.

The present work investigates the wind band tradition in Malta with particular focus on the co-existence of the ‘new’ and the ‘old’ in a musical tradition that can go back to the first half of the nineteenth century. This work will show how ‘old’ trends are still preserved in a strongly diffused tradition and how the tradition itself creates mechanisms by which the ‘old’ is preserved to reach current social and cultural expectations. To investigate this musical tradition, the present study relies on the theory and method of ethnomusicology.

When travelling away from home, we find different *musics*, different cultures, most of which we do not understand. In the identification and recognition of these different cultures, music plays a seminal role because it is sometimes through it that we come to identify a

particular society and its culture. In this sense, music becomes a symbol of national identity. When used effectively and with a purpose, music becomes endowed with the potential to inform us much more quickly than the spoken or written language. When referring to this quality that music holds, Cook (1998: 3) states that advertisers, for instance, ‘use music to communicate meanings that would take too long to put into words, or that would carry no conviction in them’.

Each society and individual conceives different things by ‘music’. Cook (1998: 5) states that ‘music is a very small word to encompass something that takes as many forms as there are cultural or subcultural identities’. Indeed, music means different things to different cultures and even to different people in the same society. Cook (ibid.) continues to argue that ‘when we speak of music we are really talking about a multiplicity of activities and experiences’ in addition to a wide range of perceptions. For instance, music in Islam is looked upon with suspicion and, sometimes, even discouraged. Therefore the recitation of the *Quran*, for example, is not considered as *musiqā* (mainly understood in that context as ‘instrumental music’) but as *qirāha*, that is, reading that deserves utmost respect and adherence to rules of interpretation. Ethnomusicology as a discipline is very much concerned with *what* music means and *how* it comes to mean, as well as what it means in diverse societies and cultures, both western and non-western.

Malta and its Music

The Maltese archipelago is situated in the Mediterranean Sea and it is made up of mainland Malta, Gozo and Comino. Malta is a southern European country which lies 80 km south of Sicily, 284 km east of Tunisia and 333 km north of Libya. The country covers just over 316 km²; it is one of the world’s smallest and most densely populated countries. The population in Malta and Gozo amounts to around four hundred thousand. Comino is inhabited by only a few

people and occasional visitors. Several Maltese emigrated during the 1950s and 1960s, mainly to Australia, Canada, Britain and the United States.¹ The capital city of Malta is Valletta—a city that attests to the presence of the Knights of Malta with its baroque buildings and churches.

Malta passed under the rule of a succession of colonial powers, including Phoenicians, Romans, Moors, Normans, Aragonese, Habsburg Spanish, Knights of St. John, French and British. All these left a mark on Malta's musical developments (Cardona 2002: 15). After a long stretch of foreign domination, Malta obtained independence from the United Kingdom in 1964 and then became a republic in 1974. Malta's official religion is Catholicism. Usually in each and every town or village the parish church is located at the centre of the locality. Eventually, several localities around Malta built a second or third church. It is interesting that the total number of churches in Malta is three hundred and thirteen.² During World War II, particularly between 1940 and 1942, the *Royal Navy* and the *Royal Air Force* were bombarded by the military forces of Germany and Italy. In 1964, following a referendum, Malta became an independent constitutional monarchy. Malta became a member of the European Union in 2004.

The Maltese language is a blend of North African Arabic, eastern Arabic, Italian, as well as loanwords from English and French. Malta is highly attractive to tourists due to its thousands of years of history, its Mediterranean lifestyle and climate. The island also presents an active and intriguing musical life with festivals of diverse musical genres organised throughout the year both by private stakeholders and by state organisations such as the Malta Arts Council. Malta's long musical tradition can boast of an array of musical genres, ranging

¹ For further reading about the history of emigration from Malta see <http://museumvictoria.com.au/origins/history.aspx?pid=39>

² There are forty-six churches on the sister island of Malta, Gozo.

from folk music and wind band music to a strong tradition of sacred music and locally produced modern pop music.

Malta's folk music is known as *għana* (pronounced āna – the *gh* is silent in Maltese). *Għana* was a way to pass the time during hours of recreation or to accompany the doing of household tasks. *Għana* was practised by women singing on rooftops or at the 'old' communal wash-house, known as the *għajn tal-ħasselin* (spring of the washers). As in many other societies, while men went out to work, women used to perform household chores. In addition, *għana* encompasses three sub-styles of singing: *għana fil-għoli* (singing in high register), *għana tal-fatt* (narrative singing), and *għana Spirtu Pront* (improvised singing duels). The *għana tal-fatt* is Malta's narrative singing. It involves one *għannej* (singer), who recounts stories of both historical and contemporary events. The *Spirtu pront* is a quick-witted type of singing requiring the singer to duel in song with an 'opponent' singer in the form of a reply and counter-reply. In addition to *Għana*, one also finds the music produced by various folk groups playing Maltese traditional instruments, such as *iż-Żaqq* (a version of the bagpipe) *tanbur* (tambourine), *zafżafa* (friction drum), *flejguta* (cane flute) and *zummara* (reedpipe).

Folk dancing is another important aspect of Maltese traditional music, especially during carnival with the *Parata tal-Karnival* (Carnival Sword Dance). This dance evokes the 1565 Great Siege of Malta, when the Knights and the Maltese fought shoulder to shoulder against the Turks. Another traditional Maltese dance is known as the *Contradanza Maltija* (a Country Dance) or merely *il-Maltija*, which is also performed during Carnival days. In Gozo it is known as *il-Kumittiva*.

Apart from *għana* and folk dancing, one also finds songs for children, marine songs, lullabies, keens, laments, hymns and religious songs. In the domain of popular music, the media and the recording industry helped in the development of Maltese pop music. The 1960s and 1970s (that is, the post-independence years) were marked by the production of songs in

Maltese expressing the natural beauty of the island and the nice qualities of its people. More recently, the Eurovision Song Contest has become tremendously popular among the Maltese. It is also a great opportunity for singers who generally wish to promote their vocal ability in Malta and in other European countries. However, Malta has never won the contest.

In the domain of classical music, the post-World War II era has seen the emergence of composers who have inspired and taught local composers to produce ‘new’ classical music inspired by local folk music. Prominent among these are Carmelo Pace (1906-1993) and the cosmopolitan composer Charles Camilleri (1931-2009). Jones (2000: 642) claims that both composers ‘weave Maltese musical motifs into their works, Pace in his *Fantasia* and Camilleri in his *Malta Suite* and *Maltese Dances*’.

The Maltese *banda* (wind band) is also very strong in Malta’s musical domain, with several localities having more than just one band club. It knows its origin back to the late 1840s, when allegedly the blind musician Indri Borg set up the first wind band in the village of Żebbuġ (Ciantar 2013: 6). The tradition of the *banda* continued to flourish thanks to the presence in Malta of exiled Italian *maestri* who fled the political turbulences in Italy during the nineteenth century. These Italian *maestri* contributed greatly to the expansion of this musical tradition as will be explained in the first chapter. This tradition also benefited from the presence of British military bands that were frequently seen parading, especially in the harbour area. Band clubs flourished all over the island and became highly involved in the outdoor celebrations of their village feast (or *festa*, as it is commonly known in Malta) in honour of the village patron saint/saints.

The village *festa* is considered an important public entertainment in Malta. Several members of different committees dedicate a lot of free time in order to organise *l-aqwa u l-isbah festa* (lit. trans. the best and most wonderful feast) – if possible, the best village feast on the island. A village feast includes various activities: band marches, fireworks that brighten up

the sky, chaotic wine bars packed with people, and street decorations – all this to show superior devotion to their saint. Most of the villagers prepare and decorate their residence; they open it to their relatives and friends both from their village and outside. On the other hand, the church organises an entire week of indoor religious services that culminate in an outdoor procession with the statue of the saint on *festa* day, which normally falls on a Sunday.

The band club, later also referred to as *każin*, is an important institution in the Maltese society.³ A band club consists of the central committee and various sub-committees each with a hierarchical structure of its own. These committees and sub-committees consist of elected persons who meet and discuss various matters regularly during the year. The main activity of each of these clubs is the participation in the organisation of the annual village *festa*. In order to financially sustain their activity, band clubs organise several fundraising events all year round, such as bingo sessions, weekend breaks, barbeques during summer, tours abroad, and youth parties. Fireworks and street decorations are among the preparations that the club committee has to think about during the year. Since technology has become an important factor, band clubs are also following ‘new’ trends, such as having internet access in clubs, creating their own websites and providing radiophonic programmes during *festa* week.

The term *banda* is part of the daily vocabulary among the Maltese. This term incorporates a range of uses. For instance, some say *il-lejla għandi l-banda* (lit. trans. tonight I have the band playing) implying that they have an instrumental lesson at the band club; *ħa mmur nisma’ l-banda* (lit. trans I am going to listen to wind band music) meaning that the person will be attending a band parade, rehearsal or concert. The term *banda* is so diffused amongst the Maltese that it is sometimes used to describe a mood. Aquilina (1987: 69) describes ‘*bil-[band]a*’ as ‘fussy, noisy, exaggerating...’ and ‘*illum ġejja bil-[band]a l-*

³ The term band club (plural band clubs) is used interchangeably with the Maltese term *każin* (plural *każini*) throughout this book.

gurnata, said of children in a crying mood'. You may ask '*illum ġej bil-[band]a?*' meaning 'are you trying to be difficult or to pull my leg today?' (ibid: 69). Band aficionados claim that '*il-banda taġhna l-aqwa*', meaning that 'our band is the best'. All the above examples show the importance of the wind band tradition in the social and cultural life of the Maltese.

Continuity and Change

My focus on continuity and change in the Maltese wind band tradition dovetails well with Nettl's assertion that 'if there is anything really stable in the *musics* of the world, it is the constant existence of change' (2005: 275). Examples of the co-existence of continuity and change in the Maltese wind band tradition are several and include arrangements of modern pop and film music in a concert repertoire, adaptations of operatic selections, the free leasing of band instruments to band club music students and a mixed repertoire of 'old' and newly-composed band marches in the same music booklet that bandsmen play from. An informant told me that the memorabilia that one finds in these band clubs is treasured for its evocation of history.

The 'old' denotes legacy, a long musical tradition that has passed through different phases, all reflecting social and cultural changes. Several musical traditions around the world consider their link with the past as pivotal to the existence and continuation of their tradition. The Chicana tradition of the Mexican people living in America, for instance, experienced various changes, in which rituals, dress, community and music transformed into new shapes (Cantú 2002: 23). At the same time, the sense of continuity preserved the existence of the same tradition. In the context of music in the Mediterranean, one can still listen to the 'distant voices of the past' in the newly-transformed musical traditions of various Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities (Ginio 2013: 10). Disagreeing with this view, Shiloah (1992: 228) maintains that change is a misconception as 'what has been is what will be, and what has been

done is what will be done and there is nothing new under the sun'. However, Cantú's (ibid: 23) observation above seems to fit better in the Maltese band tradition. Indeed, the situation of the Mexican tradition is similar to that of the Maltese composer. This is clearly seen when a band composer confronts 'new' trends in composition while restricting himself to traditional forms.

Research in the Maltese Wind Band Tradition

The Maltese wind band tradition has strong roots in Maltese culture. A historical overview of this tradition is inevitable as the present can be interpreted better. This has led several authors, both Maltese and foreigners, to research and write about this tradition, which is being examined here. Indeed, many authors have contributed to this tradition through various publications such as books, articles and feast programmes. However, there are instances in such publications where authors gave incorrect information regarding historical dates, situations or past bandmasters. Indeed, the Maltese historian Joseph Grima claimed that there can be a huge difference between one author and another. Grima (1997a: xv) argues that when writing the history of the band club, some writers produce just facts and quote the primary sources. However, other writers are less accurate and do not quote their sources as they let their heart overcome the brain in a way that the history is not exposed well (ibid: xv).

It is important to note that apart from the endless number of books which are published by local band clubs, few are the publications that deal directly with bands in Malta. Indeed, my research made me go through various local newspapers, books (mostly historical), documents (such as old feast flyers and programmes), postcards, dissertations, and audio-visual resources. I also attended locally organised book fairs, asked people for relevant material and searched for what looked like promising material on online shopping sites.

Pietro Paolo Castagna (1827-1907), an elementary school teacher, later Head of School and eventually Director of elementary education, was a late-nineteenth century Maltese

historian who wrote about Maltese history in Maltese. Castagna also contributed to Maltese literature, mainly through works for the stage in Maltese. His first book was published in 1865 under the title *Malta bil Ghzejjer Tahha u li Ghadda min Ghaliha* [sic.] ('The Maltese Islands and what they went Through'). Later, Castagna gave a description of the band clubs that evolved during his time in his second edition of *Lis Storja ta' Malta bil Gzejjer Tahha* ('The History of Malta and its Islands') in 1888-1890.⁴ Nevertheless, what he wrote was very limited. Indeed, there is no evidence or description of the structure of band instrumentation and the experiences of band musicians.

Robert Mifsud Bonnici (1884-1967), a secretary and vice-president of the *Societa` San Vincenzo di Paola* and also one of the founders of the Catholic Action Movement in Malta, may be considered a pioneer as regards research of the Maltese wind band tradition and Maltese music in general. In 1951, he published *Mużiċisti u Kompożituri Maltin u Għawdxin tal-Bieraħ u tal-Lum* ('Maltese and Gozitan Musicians and Composers Past and Present'). This publication provides biographical information about several distinct Maltese musicians living in Malta and Gozo. Bonnici's main source was Ulderico Rolandi's publication, *Musica e Musicisti in Malta* ('Music and Musicians in Malta') published in 1932.

Mifsud Bonnici's first tentative writing of a historical overview of Maltese bands, which includes the formation of the later wind bands, was made in *Ġrajja ta' Mużika f' Malta – Dokumenti u Kummenti* ('History of Music in Malta – Documents and Comments') (1954). This publication provides information about philharmonic clubs, musical teaching and practice, the *Teatru Rjal* (the Royal Theatre in Valletta) and other theatres in Malta, as well as information about famous Maltese tenors.⁵ In his publication, Mifsud Bonnici provides a good

⁴Before the latter publication by Castagna, two things occurred in Malta: in 1839, Malta started enjoying press freedom and the publication of new Maltese newspapers started to increase; at the same time schools started to flourish and literacy spread.

⁵For further reading about the *Teatru Rjal* see Mifsud Bonnici 1954: 76.

picture of Maltese musical life in the middle of the twentieth century. His was a seminal work for authors who came later. In his writing, Mifsud Bonnici traces the origins of piques and rivalry in Maltese society by attributing them to rifts in the domain of sacred music which were evident in some Maltese parish churches, mainly between the *capella di musica* of Vincenzo Bugeja (1806-1860) and that of Paolo Nani (1814-1904) – two *maestri di cappella* who dominated the sacred-music scene in Malta in the nineteenth century, had enthusiastic rival supporters.

Mifsud Bonnici later published two volumes, *L-Istorja tal-Baned f'Malta* ('The History of Bands in Malta'), in 1956 and 1957 respectively. He believed that it is important that the Maltese appreciate and experience more the band tradition. Indeed in his introduction, he states that his main objective was that of promoting Maltese band clubs. The author included in his writings a huge number of remarkable references from various authors, from newspapers such as: *L'Ordine, Giurnal Malti* ('Order, a Maltese Journal'), *Il-Berqa* ('The Flash of Lightning'), *Portafoglio Maltese* ('A Maltese Portfolio'), *Mercantile Maltese* ('The Maltese Merchantile'), *Malta* and *Corriere* ('The Courier'). In *L-Istorja tal-Baned f'Malta*, Mifsud Bonnici relied on first-hand information he had obtained from band-club committee members. Consequently, some of the details might have been either inaccurate or opinionated.

Prominent publications on the setting up of Maltese parishes and, consequently, the social and religious activities that had taken place in these same parishes were published between 1992 and 1994. *Il-Purċissjonijiet tal-Ġimgħa l-Kbira f'Malta u Għawdex* ('Good Friday Processions in Malta and Gozo'), edited by Michael J. Schiavone, was published in 1992. Between 1993 and 1994, one notes the publication of a four-volume pack called *Il-Knejjes Parrokkjali ta' Malta u Għawdex u l-Festi tagħhom* ('Parish Churches in Malta and Gozo and their Feasts'). Each publication depicts Maltese cultural traditions, mainly by highlighting the way the Maltese involve themselves during festive occasions. Furthermore,

these publications stress the importance of the feast in Maltese culture and society and, by extension, the growing involvement of village bands in these communal events.

A more recent historical source on wind bands in Malta is a three-volume publication *L-Istorja tal-Baned f'Malta u Għawdex* ('The History of Bands in Malta and Gozo'). The first two volumes were published in 1997 while the third appeared in 1998. Each volume contains a brief introduction written by Joseph Francis Grima. The author gives a concise account of the history and development of Maltese wind bands in the context of Malta's social and cultural changes. These books also include useful information about Maltese and Italian bandmasters who pioneered the development of these Maltese bands. The third volume comprises a historical synopsis of seventy-five wind band clubs; this is similar to the work presented by Robert Mifsud Bonnici. In the editorial introduction to this volume, the series editor, Michael J. Schiavone, highlights the difficulties behind making several wind band clubs participate in such a publication. Some of the bands did not respond to the invitation to publish their history. This publication is a seminal work in the context of the Maltese wind band tradition since it gives the reader a quick overview of several bands and their clubs in Malta and Gozo. Since most of the history in these volumes was written by band club supporters, sympathisers and/or committee members, excessive glorification of the club aimed at adding prestige to it is quite common throughout the writing.

A 1998 publication by Ġużè Cassar Pullicino and Charles Camilleri called *Maltese Oral Poetry and Folk Music* is divided into two sections.⁶ The first section was written by Pullicino and the second by Camilleri. This book contains some interesting material on Maltese folk

⁶Ġużè Cassar Pullicino (1921 – 2005) is a folklorist and historian; his interests include texts which accompany the melodies of lullabies, especially improvised *ghana*. Professor Charles Camilleri (1931 – 2009) discussed Mediterranean music, incorporated in his work authentic music, edited and transcribed several surviving Maltese folk-musical airs and other melodies. Compositions which include strains of Maltese nationalism are: the *Malta Suite – Village Festa* (1946), the Piano Concerto 'Mediterranean' (1948) and *Summer Nights in Malta – for two pianos and strings* (1960).

music, *għana*. It discusses the role of the *daqqaq* (folk musician) in past Maltese society, reviews the work of some of the main writers on Maltese oral poetry and folk music, and includes some 'new' material on Maltese folk singing and instrumental music. The importance of this book in the context of the present work lies in the fact that Pullicino dedicates a section of the book to the main features of the Maltese feast. He also refers to the presence of folk musicians during feasts before the setting up of wind bands.

In a more recent publication, Ciantar (2007: 79) presents some initial reflections on continuity and change in the Maltese band tradition, with special reference to a band in his village. In the same publication, there is a contribution by Jonathan Stock, who was on a visit to Malta a year before the publication. Stock reflects on the central position of Saint Philip's Band Club in Żebbuġ and the connection between the secular activities that take place in this building and the religious services and involvement of the villagers in the parish church, situated a few metres away from the band club. Stock notes that it is not that easy for villagers to be fully involved and committed in both as each institution is very demanding in terms of activities that occur throughout the year.

The Symbolism of Colours in the Maltese *Festa*

The Maltese *festa* is highly important in Maltese and Gozitan localities. Here one can find a band club or two, and some cases even the third one. The highlight of festivity produced by these bands is displayed during the summer months, where, amongst other traditions, one notices wind bands performing new marches, exceptionally decorated churches and streets packed with people. In several localities, a particular colour is assigned to one band club. This is highly evident in the Maltese *festa* - some using red and others blue, while others green and white so as to distinguish them from one another. So to say, the Maltese band club is a representation of the Maltese society but in a much smaller space. This depiction includes the committee (the president and the members forming the same committee), band aficionados and

the band which forms the club itself. As each country has a national anthem (patriotic musical composition), band clubs in Malta have an anthem which represents their society that evokes and eulogizes the traditions and its past experiences. In this context, the colour is even used to represent the *kazin*.

Colour is not only the characteristic of human visual perception which is described through colour categories (named as red, blue, green, white, orange and so on) but holds an array of meaning to people around the world with different cultural backgrounds and can inspire people's emotions. Additionally, colour denotes meaning in several religions. In fact, it signifies aspects of religion and it is even used in religious ceremonies, for instance the red which symbolises the blood of Jesus Christ and sacrifice.

The colour blue in the Maltese feast, for instance, represents the Blessed Virgin Mary. According to scholars, the colour blue signifies biblical roots, and is specifically mentioned in the book of Numbers where it refers to the people of Israel. This means that blue is a very important colour in the artistic traditions of Christianity and thus remind us of Mary's faithfulness and her privileged role in the history of salvation. Other colours frequently used in feasts are yellow/gold which symbolizes the Glory, faith and joy of God; and white indicating surrender, righteousness and conquest. If these two colours are combined (gold/yellow and white), they form the flag of the Vatican City. Nevertheless, colours do not always signify religious meaning to all Maltese, but represent other connotations.

The two colours, red and blue as examples, are used by several band clubs in Malta. In parallel, these colours are also used by Malta's two main political parties: red used by the MLP while blue is used by the PN. The use of these colours by the two political parties is very evident during mass political activities organized by the same parties. This distinction may be noted in several villages that have two or three band clubs. Underlying these colours used during the

fešta celebration there are past ingredients which have become part of the way in which we Maltese celebrate. These may have been integrated with the tradition since some band clubs have had relations with certain political parties. In fact, seventy years since the beginning of bands in Malta (circa 1860s till the 1930s) several band clubs in Malta have supported a political party or a specific politician. However, nowadays, club members are not to express political views in the club and the club cannot be used as part of the political campaign to display posters, leaflets and any other material related to politics. It may be a coincidence to have two band clubs in the same locality, one assigned to red and the other to blue. However, present is a continuation of the past, and thus the use of these colours may imply a belonging to one political party or the other.

Colours used during feasts indicates local communality among the people active in the same band club. Generally, people belonging to the same community speak the same language and have, more or less, a common cultural setup. Maltese band clubs are filled with people coming from different strata of society. They do not only meet in the club to discuss things related to the feast. The club is also a place where they can feel that they belong, a place in which their own relatives were also a part of. The club may also be a place to discuss national politics casually. Then, in *fešta* day, everyone waves the same flag and thus endorses the same mentality, beliefs and safeguards the band club's historical experiences. Therefore, the colour used during some of the Maltese feast celebrations is contingent, whose meaning, like language, lies in the particular context in which band club aficionados experience and interpret.

Undeniably, colours used during the Maltese *fešta* devour symbolism. To some, the colours yellow, white and blue signify biblical meaning, whereas to others the use of colours such as the red and blue represent a sense of communal belonging among the locals and representations of a reminiscence of past national politics which ended in partisan politics. However, this theory stands to be corrected.

Ethnomusicology and Methodology

Ethnomusicologists study music in its diversity and thus ‘all music, in its full geographical and historical extent, must be studied’ (Rice 2014: 2). Ethnomusicologists are expected to evaluate music beyond what they consider to be ‘good or bad music’ from their own cultural standpoint. Also, ethnomusicologists believe that all the world’s music, irrespective of class, gender and race should be given its due attention and, therefore, studied carefully.

When referring to what ethnomusicologists are interested in, Nettl (2005: 8) claims that ‘ethnomusicologists are supremely interested in music as a component of culture’. In this sense, culture ‘refers to all forms of human knowledge, creativity, and values, and to their expression in music, language, cosmology, religion, ethics, plastic arts, dance, the making and use of tools, dwellings, cooking, clothing, and body decorations’ (Rice 2014: 65). The ethnomusicologist ends up in a complex web of cultural symbols which s/he attempts to understand and relate to the study of the music under his/her investigation. Such understanding can only be possible after a period of fieldwork that gives access to a proper understanding of the people (musicians, audience, members and others) and the complex network of musical thinking, musical behaviour, and musical sound that these come up with (Merriam 1964: 32-33).

Ethnomusicologists believe in fieldwork as the main method of inquiry, and this will also be emphasised throughout this work. Indeed, throughout my research period, I experienced and lived with musicians and people coming from different social strata and professions. In this way I could understand better the musical tradition of our concern. Nettl (2005: 9) describes fieldwork as the “‘sine qua non’ of the ethnomusicologist’s own style of life and study’. In line with Nettl, Rice (2014: 31) asserts that ‘with the community selected, trust and rapport established, and with a plan for the ethical treatment of community members, fieldwork begins,

typically with four main activities: interviews; participant-observation of musical events and community life; music and dance lessons; and audio and video recordings'.⁷

Ethnomusicologists tend to be very involved in the community which they study. They strive to establish good rapport with their informants and acquire a good measure of acceptance by the community. There must be a healthy relationship between the researcher and the musician or the community he is studying. Nettl (2005: 14) observes that ethnomusicologists become attached to cultures which they study and with which they identify; they develop a special love for the *musics* they regard as ethnic or family heritage'.

Studying the Maltese wind band tradition along the lines proposed above was not an easy task for me since it was a completely new field. Even if I am a native Maltese and reside in Malta, I had never been so familiar before with band clubs or band musicians. At first it was difficult for me to carry out research in band clubs as, being myself trained in the classical piano canon, I felt these were not the 'natural' musical environments that I had been used to before taking up this research project. Nevertheless, this fieldwork opportunity, which was carried out over a period of five years, provided me with the opportunity to interview several band composers and musicians and understand not only the music that these produce but also the world that they come from and their way of thinking about music and the Maltese wind band tradition in particular. Throughout this work, data from the field will go hand in hand with other literature to assist in the interpretation of local practices and related musical processes worldwide.

Following an ethnographic research approach, I had the possibility to observe musicians and *banda* aficionados making and experiencing music. An important aspect in ethnomusicology is the presence of the individual 'when others are making music' (Bohman

⁷ Throughout the work I tried my best to combine the already published works and the word of mouth (interviewees) for a more accurate final analysis.

2002: 4). In fact, the sense of presence during rehearsals, live performances and band marching were crucial for me to understand this musical tradition more from an insider's point of view. Through fieldwork and ethnographic reporting of the events and situations that I had found myself in during my research, I could understand better the musicianship, personality and characteristics of Maltese wind bands and what all that says about Maltese culture and society in general.

In the course of my research I had to recall all sorts of past experiences, my own or my informants'. Most of these came to me as narratives which eventually helped in the shaping up of my ethnographic journey as presented in this work. All this was interwoven with an array of theories, mainly, from ethnomusicology. In addition to these fields I had to rely on theories from other disciplines such as anthropology and history. This was done by accessing various books, articles and dissertations.

As part of my on-site research I attended several band rehearsals, marching parades, open-air concerts, music lessons in clubs and other activities. I travelled from one locality to another around Malta in search of differences and similarities amongst these clubs. Most of these localities have between one and three band clubs, an aspect that shows how strong this musical tradition is on the island.

I became fascinated by the Maltese wind band tradition in Malta at an early age. It was my dream that someday I would research, live the experiences and write about this tradition which is being discussed here. However, although Malta is small in size, it is impossible to carry out interviews and fieldwork in each and every locality in Malta. However, I found that it is important to have a cross-section of Maltese localities. In fact, I rooted my work in both the Southern (as in Qrendi, Żurrieq, Żejtun and some other localities) and the Northern (such as Mellieħa and St. Paul's Bay) parts of Malta. At the central parts of Malta I employed myself

in the localities of Żebbuġ, Qormi, Birkirkara, Mosta and Balzan. Still, my writings refer to other localities around Malta which provided very useful information.

I have been interested in this tradition for several years. However, I felt the need to start interviewing, doing fieldwork, researching various band clubs and asking endless number of people who could help me in this field. This was done by attending various rehearsals and carrying out interviews and observations. In this way I got a grasp of both the historical background of the city and the nuances of the bands performing in Valletta.⁸ During 2013, I also attended performances and held a number of interviews at Żebbuġ.⁹ This choice was made since the locality is considered to have had the first formal wind band in Malta.

In addition to the central city of Żebbuġ, I was fortunate enough to meet a band musician in his nineties who had been active in the Nicolò Isouard band club of Mosta for a long time. Through these interviews I could better understand the changes that have occurred between his generation and the present one (after 2000). I also carried out fieldwork in the central locality of Balzan (Saint Gabriel band club) over a period of more than two years. In the southern part of Malta I devoted myself to fieldwork during the feast of Saint Mary and concerts at the Saint Mary band club in Qrendi.

I was given the opportunity to attend rehearsals and music lessons, besides carrying out an endless number of interviews with band musicians and composers from Queen Victoria Band, Żurrieq. I also did fieldwork in a northern locality of Malta, precisely at La Vittoria Band Club in Mellieħa.

⁸ The two wind band clubs located in the capital city of Malta (Valletta) are the La Valette Band Club and the King's Own Band Club.

⁹ Presently the locality of Żebbuġ has three band clubs: De Rohan Band Club, Saint Philip Band Club and the 12th May Band Club.

Learning to perform is another important aspect of ethnomusicology as through practice the researcher comes to understand things better. For that purpose, I started to build my relationship with the Saint Gabriel Band Club in 2012. I attended several rehearsals, made friends and also became familiar with the club premises. In addition, I started to attend compositional classes under the private tuition of Joseph Vella, the club's bandmaster, in an effort to learn how to compose a Maltese march and how such compositional skills are transmitted. Vella is presently bandmaster of three band clubs around Malta, a clarinet instructor at various band clubs, as well as theory of music private tutor with an experience of over thirty years. All these experiences helped me to understand better the tradition I am writing about.

John Blacking (1967) describes three phases during his fieldwork: firstly, he started to sing in order to understand tradition better; secondly, he had undertaken the role of drummer; thirdly, he involved himself as a dancer so as to understand better the African musical tradition he was investigating. Following Blacking's model, I attended rehearsals as an observer in order to understand better the Maltese wind band tradition; secondly, I started to play percussion instruments (mainly during rehearsals) with the Queen Victoria Band Club, Żurrieq; thirdly, I composed marches myself in an attempt to understand and evaluate such a compositional process.

Giving the interviewees the chance to express themselves while leading them with questions was a very interesting task. As already pointed out above, the people whom I interviewed ranged from a school caretaker to a bandmaster, all of them having their own particular experiences to share. For my fieldwork I used various devices such as video cameras for the recording of live events and audio recording equipment for face-to-face interviews. Videoing an event provided me with the opportunity to study people's gestures during a band marching parade, for instance, or observe instruction during a rehearsal.

Structure of the Book

The main objective of this book is to study the relationship between continuity and change in the Maltese band tradition. In all this, music serves as the medium through which the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ meet and coalesce with local communality, politics, religious practice and other interests, all aiming to sustain a tradition strongly rooted in Maltese culture and society. For this purpose, the present work contains five chapters.

Chapter 1 offers a historical overview of the Maltese wind band tradition, which started in 1860. It also refers to and describes the role of street musicians predating wind bands in Malta as we conceive them today. The same chapter highlights practices employed by Maltese wind bands in early times.

In chapter two, three aspects will be the backbone of the argument related to continuity and change in each sphere of the Maltese wind band tradition, namely, the physical space of band clubs, the people involved, and the music itself. The physical space concentrates on the *kazin* (‘club’), usually located in the centre of the village/town (generally close to the church). The second aspect focuses on the people that make up a band club; that includes the musicians as well as members of the club committee and supporters. The third focus of this chapter is the music itself, with special attention to instrumentation and repertoire.

Chapter three will present a better understanding of the Maltese festive band march. It also presents an analysis of fundamental musical elements which a band composer should take into consideration when composing a march. As regards the methodology, this chapter rests on observations and information derived from informants over a period of two years, during which I took lessons with Maltese band composers, particularly Joseph Vella and Andrew Coleiro, on how to compose a Maltese band march. The composition of this band march helped me to present the whole process of the production of a band march, from the creation of the melody to its actual performance. The same chapter includes an analysis of several Maltese festive

band marches from the earliest compositions. This will be done by presenting eight different periods, starting from the 1860s. Each period covers approximately thirty years and is presented through a series of *fešta* band composers prominent in each period. Such a chronological approach brings forth new compositional trends in each of the periods discussed here.

Chapter four investigates the interrelationship between Maltese partisan politics and the wind band tradition. The chapter provides an account of the political involvement of several Maltese bands through an illustration of past street demonstrations or even political conferences in band club premises. The politico-religious conflict of the 1930s seems to have affected Maltese bands – my own examination of Żejtun Band is a case in point. Continuity and change with regards to the two main Maltese political parties' bands will be another aspect presented in this chapter. This chapter will also shed light on aspects of continuity and change in this sphere that are still noticed in present times. The analysis of this last aspect will rest on fieldwork during the popular feast of Saint Gaetan in the town of Ħamrun.

Chapter five is specifically concerned with the Maltese wind band tradition in relation to the recording industry. The chapter will focus on and discuss: (a) early initiatives in the recording of Maltese band marches; (b) the use of hi-tech recording technology; (c) contemporary practices in the recording of *fešta* marches on CDs and existing practices in this domain which, in the present writer's view, marry modern technology with traditional values.

Chapter 6 deals with how bands participated during entertainment activities. In this attention is given to two important activities. The first activity is *ix-Xalata tal-Fešta*, a day of celebration at the beach with the aim of relaxing after the busy preparations for the feast. The second activity attention is given is band parades in streets during Carnival. Both activities reflect continuity and change in the Maltese wind band tradition.

Chapter 7 discusses the sound of the Maltese band music. Taking the Maltese march as the main focus of the chapter, one notes that Maltese band music has its particular sound, which

is completely unique and therefore different from sounds and music produced in other countries around the world.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the people who supported and helped me a lot throughout this time. Thankfully, I found great help along the way. I managed to include people from different social strata from whom I learned a lot. I am much indebted to these and to all the informants who dedicated countless hours to me, discussing with me, helping me and also referring me to various sources. These were many, and, therefore, it would be impossible to acknowledge them all by name. Still there are those contributors who must be identified.

Personal acknowledgements go to bandmasters and composers Andrew Coleiro, John J. Pace, Herman Farrugia Frantz, Lawrence Borg and Ronnie Debattista. A special thanks also goes to Joseph Vella and Ray Sciberras for their patience in sharing with me the compositional techniques of Maltese band marches. My gratitude extends to the Saint Gabriel Band Club of Balzan for giving me the opportunity to perform the march which I composed as part of the present research. I would also like to thank Mauro Farrugia for providing me with several opportunities to attend band activities at the Queen Victoria Band Club of Żurrieq.

My acknowledgements should also include University of Malta academics Dr. Francis Joseph Grima, Professor Oliver Friggieri and Professor Joe Friggieri for the fruitful discussions I had with them. I am also indebted to Pierre Quiriny (Royal Conservatory of Brussels) and Len Tyler, a British bandsman who has resided in Malta since the 1960s, for their interest in my work and disposition to discuss related issues.

I would like to thank all band clubs that have given me the necessary information and documentation to complete this book. Amongst these I would like to mention the Queen Victoria Band Club of Żurrieq, Saint Gaetan Band Club of Hamrun, Saint Gabriel Band Club

of Balzan, Saint Mary Band Club of Qrendi, Saint Mary Band Club of Mosta, La Valette Band Club of Valletta, Saint Philip and De Rohan band clubs of Żebbuġ, Żejtun Band Club, and Saint Mary Band Club of Għaxaq. A word of appreciation is also due to people at the *Archives of The Metropolitan Cathedral* for giving me permission to use scores preserved there. I am also indebted to Mario Degabriele. I would also like to thank Maltese broadcaster Peter Paul Ciantar for his assistance while working on issues regarding the recording of Maltese marches. Additionally, Tony Micallef and Jesmond Mansueto were also of great help in collecting recordings.

Also, I would like to thank former Prime Minister of Malta Dr Alfred Sant for the correspondence I had with him on issues regarding band music and politics in Malta. I would also like to thank the Mayor of Żejtun, Mr Joseph Attard, who provided me with precious information about the setting up of Żejtun Band Club. I should also thank the leader of the Maltese Nationalist Party, Dr Simon Busuttil, and the Maltese Ambassador to Belgium, H.E. Ray Azzopardi.

Finally, I must express my very profound gratitude to my wife Marysia Farrugia and our four children Julia, Luca, Maria and Michela, my parents and the rest of my family for providing me with unfailing support and continuous encouragement throughout my years of study and through the process of researching and writing this book. All this work would not have been possible without them.

Chapter 1

The Maltese Wind Band Tradition: A Historical Survey

In a 2006 publication, Reily states that ‘over the past few decades researchers within the social sciences have become increasingly interested in the study of historical consciousness, since the ways in which the past is remembered, conveyed and sustained are closely linked to conceptions of the present and aspirations for the future’ (p. 41). Indeed, in the same publication, Reily refers to a 1986 publication by Edward Bruner in which he notes that experiences call for interpretation, while interpretation will in turn inform experience, such that experience and interpretation remain in a continuous dialectical relationship (Reily 2006: 57). In this regard, Widdess (1992: 219) asserts that a situation that is not informed by a historical dimension is incomplete. In line with these assertions, the present chapter brings forth several important snippets that I consider important in the history of the wind band tradition in Malta. This will further help us understand the link between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ in the tradition of our concern.

Writing and researching about the historical past is not an easy task, since it requires several sources, of which many are lost. Useful sources in the uncovering of the past include newspapers, travellers’ memoirs and reports, as well as oral information collected from ordinary people such as enthusiastic band musicians, band aficionados, club members and other people that have observed the development of this tradition over a long stretch of time. Occasionally, misinterpretations of historical facts interfere with genuine and unbiased opinions. This happens, for instance, when an interviewee is more interested in boosting and ‘glorifying’ the band club that s/he belongs to rather than interpreting and sharing with others the historical truth. Generally, this situation prevails in localities with two or more rival band clubs. Usually, in such a situation one finds both clubs claiming to be the first established in

their locality if not also in Malta. In the course of this historical survey, I found myself fiddling around the intentions of interviewees who, sometimes, were more interested in presenting a glorified version of their band club's history rather than to state the facts as they really occurred. In most cases, I had to sift through statements made out of a sense of pride and weight them against real facts which sometimes even contradict popular perceptions. As I pointed out in my introduction, several publications were examined in the making of this survey. Indeed, the number of surviving old documents is meagre as some of these clubs were not so keen to preserve them.

The history of band clubs in Malta brings forth a kind of development sustained by four interrelated aspects: political, religious, sociological and economic. These four aspects have been playing an important role in the continuity and change of the Maltese band tradition. For instance, back in the 1970s the Dutch anthropologist Jeremy Boissevain had noted that Maltese bands belong to either the *Partit Nazzjonalista* (Nationalist Party) or the *Partit Laburista* (Labour Party) (Boissevain 1993: 108).¹⁰ In most localities, this division between Malta's two major political parties resulted in the split of one club into two. At this stage, it is worth noting that several local politicians used these band clubs to attain a high profile that would in turn help them in their political career. Such politicians were sometimes entrusted with an important designation in a band club committee with positions such as that of President. One such example is the figure of Malta's late Prime Minister Dom Mintoff who served as the President of St George's Band Club of Cospicua (a harbour city in the South of the island) from 1948 until his death. Figure 1.1 shows Dom Mintoff's message, as the Club's President, published in *Lehen Il-Banda San Ġorġ Bormla – Festa Tal-Kunċizzjoni 1972* on the occasion of the feast

¹⁰ Boissevain (1993: 108) claimed that most of the band clubs around Malta are identified with a political party.

in honour of the Immaculate Conception celebrated annually in the same town on the 8th of December.



Figure 1.1: A message by Malta's late Prime Minister Dom Mintoff

The President's Message

As in previous years, I would like to greet all the members and their families.

The people residing in Cospicua have always loved their hometown and I am sure that the interest they show will never subside.

I am sure that you encourage people to work together in the country's interest and to take care of what we have achieved so far. We have to fight vandalism which destroys what others have done, most of the time through personal sacrifice; we are also in duty bound to encourage and help those who wish to do something good for the country. Even the small things matter; for example,

planting a few trees will make a place look better. These small things change the way our country looks in a positive way. This band club has always kept its members' aims and efforts in mind, which include things which are related to the band and also to other areas. These are multiplying and getting stronger for the sake of all people living in Cospicua. Dom Mintoff. (my translation)

The present survey will stretch from the beginning of the nineteenth century until contemporary times and it will help us understand current practices in the context of a wider picture. The discussion will proceed by dealing with the new form of band music which emerged in Malta after the 1860s and its evolution along the years until our times. A discussion about bands before and after World War II will follow. Wind bands in the post-independence years (that is, after 1964) will also be discussed as the development that occurred at this time was very much influenced and modelled by the presence of British military bands parading in the streets of the island, especially in the Harbour area. This chapter will also include a discussion of more recent trends.

The Beginning of Maltese Wind Bands

It is important to point out that at the beginning of the nineteenth century several popular bands and street musicians (including fiddle groups) were performing in Maltese towns and villages. Indeed these musical activities were a prelude to the new form of wind band music which was created in the 1860s. For instance, the Maltese historian Pietru Pawl Castagna (1888: 238) notes that in 1777, when De Rohan was Grandmaster, there were several bands, such as the galley bands, the Grandmaster's band and *tad-dejma* band (Maltese militia). Musicians in these bands had to participate in the processions after being assigned by the Grandmaster. He later ordered that all bands should perform with the aim of generating peace rather than arguments against their government. Musicians forming these bands used to wear clerical garments.

Folk musicians were always welcomed on feast days. The Maltese folklorist Cassar Pullicino notes, for instance, that in the year 1738, during the feast of Saint Helen in Birkirkara, ‘[...] all that morning two drums and a fife went about playing in front of the Church’ (1998: 5). Another similar scene was noted between 1748 and 1802 at the village of Żurrieq. Cassar Pullicino (ibid.) reports that two musicians, one playing the fife and the other the drum, were hired to amuse the villagers. At around noon, these musicians accompanied with their music the statue of the village saint in a procession along the streets of the village. The author also claims that it was a tradition in this fishing village on such occasions for people to stay awake throughout the night singing and making music (ibid.): ‘a large number of boats assembled and (people) spent the whole night in music, playing and singing’ (Ignazio Saverio Mifsud 1761: 601-602 as cited in Cassar Pullicino 1998: 5).

Count Saverio Marchesi, a wealthy and intellectual Maltese, observed that at the beginning of the 1800s in the village of Żejtun one could find *l-Orkestra tal-Parroċċa* (the parish orchestra) or *l-Orkestra tal-Qassisin* (the priests’ orchestra) as this orchestra included a large number of priest-musician (Mifsud Bonnici 1954: 7). This orchestra used to perform music during sacred functions in the church and also during processions which were held in the same locality. For instance, in 1805, during the procession of Saint Catherine, *l-Orkestra tal-Qassisin* performed a hymn in honour of the Saint written by Count Marchesi (ibid.).¹¹ Mifsud Bonnici quotes his informants saying that this particular orchestra was then transformed into a band by Maestro Michele Ferraris. A rather similar activity occurred at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Żurrieq when an orchestra which performed for a long time during church services was then transformed into a wind band to accompany the procession with the statue of the village saint on *fešta* day (Vella Bondin 2000: 100).

¹¹ Saverio Marchesi was a nobleman who contributed strongly to the field of culture and education in Malta. For further information about Saverio Marchesi see <http://www.maltagenealogy.com/libro%20d'Oro/meimun.html>

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, strolling *vjolinisti għomja* (blind violinists) could be seen playing in Maltese localities (Vella Bondin 2000: 97). In 1847, for instance, in the capital Valletta there was the *Banda ta' Karmnu l-Għama* (the band of Carmel the blind), which performed during the feasts in Valletta and Senglea (Mifsud Bonnici 1954: 11). In 1864, during a visit by the British Governor Le Marchant on the sister island of Gozo, all the streets of Rabat (Gozo's capital) were occupied by several blind musicians performing in an ensemble (Mifsud Bonnici 1954: 10). In 1877 blind musicians started to perform outdoors, from four o'clock in the morning, breaching public peace (ibid.). These musicians performed in streets where families might have received good news, such as a new birth, a marriage or other happy events (ibid.). Most of these street musicians were old, poor and blind; they used to make music to earn money as an alternative to soliciting alms. Reports of such events point to the fact that some people did not enjoy this kind of music. Many families used to give money to these musicians not because they truly enjoyed their performance but to stop them playing and make them move away (Mifsud Bonnici 1954: 10) (see Figure 1.2). All such descriptions attest to the thriving musical life in Malta during this period.



Figure 1.2: An artistic impression of an early wind ensemble ¹²

Street musicians and popular bands played an important role in Maltese public events and celebrations. Such ensembles have contributed to the beginning of wind bands in Malta. It is a matter of fact that without the contribution of these musicians during feasts, processions and other communal activities, the new band might have never been set up. On the other hand, time seems to have been ripe for a new band set-up that would cater to the social and cultural needs of the Maltese village.

Maltese Wind Bands Up to the Second World War

Castagna refers to thirty-six band clubs around Malta which were already established towards the end of the nineteenth century (1888: 247). The names of several of these have changed while others have remained the same. Such bands were even known as *baned filarmonici* (philharmonic bands) to accentuate a communal interest in music (ibid.) and their interest in educating the citizens through music.

The author and journalist Herbert Ganado, in his second volume called *Rajt Malta Tinbidel* ('I saw Malta Change'), claims that 'L-ewwel noti fuq ir-ram semmagħhom lil pajjiżna dak ir-raġel għama li kien jismu Indrì' (lit. trans. 'the first notes by brass instruments were produced in our country by that blind man called Indrì') (1974: 16). It is interesting at this stage to highlight the life of Indrì Borg, who is believed to have been the first musician to set up the first formal wind band on the island (see Figure 1.2).¹³

According to Castagna (1888: 245), bandmaster Indrì Borg was born in 1818 and spent most of his life in Valletta. At the age of two he lost his sight. Despite this physical impairment, his parents encouraged him to start a musical life and so he learned to play the *flejguta* (fife)

¹² Figure 1.2 is reproduced from Mifsud Bonnici 1954: 9.

¹³ Figure 1.3 is taken from <http://www.bandasanfilep.com.mt/o/Maltese/Storja/Banda.html>

and later the clarinet under the tutorship of Maestro Rull (ibid.). In Malta, Maestro Rull was considered as one of the most popular conductors of his time; he also served as *Maestro di Cappella* at Saint John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta.

Castagna (1888: 246) notes that in 1854 Indri adapted for local use a hundred-fifty page treatise about harmony, score writing and counterpoint. Some informants claimed that this was written for him by an unknown musician. It is not known how Indri managed to do this considering his visual impairment. Moreover, it is believed that Indri composed polkas, waltzes, dirges, six sonatas, and five hymns for children with band accompaniment (Mifsud Bonnici 1954: 54). No written evidence exists that explains this musician's abilities, hence, one presumes that such information was orally transmitted.

When referring to the contribution of Indri Borg in the domain to Malta's wind band tradition, Castagna remarks that the first formal band in Malta was set up by Indri Borg in the village of Żebbuġ (Malta) in 1860.¹⁴ Regarding this, Bonnici points out that Castagna called Indri's group of musicians 'a band' due to the substantial number of musicians involved. In his writings, Castagna provides no details about the structure of this wind band, the instruments employed or the musicians forming it. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the possibility that this might have also employed instruments mentioned in the previous section, such as the fife. Whatever the case, informants have pointed out to me the fact that Indri Borg had locally established the four pillars of 'proper' band playing: organisation, discipline, teaching, and the socio-cultural role that bands should play in Maltese society. Only six months after the setting up of this band in 1860, the second wind band was set up in Rabat by the same Indri Borg.

Afterwards, Filippo Galea (whose importance in Maltese band tradition will be discussed later on in this chapter) formed the third band in Malta in the same locality, namely, Żebbuġ (Castagna 1888: 248). The author did not give any details regarding this third band,

¹⁴ It is not the aim of the present work to seek evidence for the setting up of the first band in Malta.

but it was possibly the second club that was established in the same locality. In 1861 the fourth wind band was established in Żejtun by Grazio Diacono, a well-known businessman both in Malta and Italy who directed the church orchestra since 1837 (Vella Bondin 2000: 97).¹⁵ The band at Żejtun performed ‘nella ora della processione in piazza’ (in the main square of the locality during the procession) (Debono Roberts 1997: 186).

Although Indrì Borg formed the first band, according to Castagna (1888: 249) the Maltese took quite a long time to look upon the wind band as a means of recreation. In fact, no more bands were established in other localities during the 1860s. It was only in 1874 that another band, under the name of *La Stella*, was established in Malta (locality not indicated by the author). The promoter and director of this band was Giuseppe Borg, son of Indrì. A year after, in 1875, the violinist Luigi Carabott formed another band, called ‘La Valette’ (ibid: 249), in Valletta. Castagna also remarked that during this period the government organised fifty-two bingo activities to support band clubs financially.

Another prominent figure in the formation of bands was Filippo Galea.¹⁶ Born in Żebbuġ on the 31st December 1829, Filippo was also assisted by his father Angelo Galea, who was also an important figure in Maltese band music (Vella Bondin 2000: 98). Talking about Filippo Galea and his father is definitely of vital importance when considering the establishment of Maltese bands. These two musicians were stationed in Malta and in the Mediterranean by the British military service. When only twelve years old, Filippo was already a cadet in regiment number 88, where his father was a bandmaster (ibid: 98). In 1848, while Angelo was conducting the Royal Malta Fencibles, his son Filippo played a magnificent variation on the clarinet in the presence of the tenor Giacchino Ramoni at the Manoel Theatre (ibid: 98). His virtuosity led to his promotion to bandmaster. In fact, during the year 1851

¹⁵ For further reading see Vella Bondin 2000.

¹⁶ There are articles discussing Filippo Galea’s facts. For further readings see Balzan: 2010a; Balzan 2010b; Camilleri 2010.

Filippo performed band music in Żebbuġ during the feast of St. Philip. Filippo spent most of his time overseas (ibid: 98). Indeed, in 1858, after having been in Malta for just three years, he was ordered to go to India and, afterwards, to New Zealand with Regiment 57. As regards the early stages of the local wind band he is considered as the most successful bandmaster.

The early development of Maltese wind bands was strongly affected by the political turmoil of the Italian Risorgimento. During the turbulent political upheavals of the Risorgimento during the nineteenth century, Italian refugees and exiles ended up in Malta. Some of these were intellectuals, journalists, and writers who contributed with their knowledge to local culture, especially in the fields of literature and music. Friggieri (1979: 37) notes that these refugees established new private schools, while others began to teach literature, with special attention to Dante. These Italian exiles sowed in Maltese society a strong nationalistic sentiment. Among these refugees we find Tommaso Zauli Sajani (1802-1872) from Forlì, a city in Italy, who lived in Malta between 1836 and 1847.¹⁷ Zauli Sajani published several works; amongst these was *Il Mediterraneo*, a Maltese newsletter which he started producing in Malta. In an 1838 issue of *Il Mediterraneo* we find Zauli arguing that in Malta there was a lack of a sense of association and so he proposed ‘le basi di un’associazione vasta, non dispendiosa, di facile esecuzione e proficua a tutti rami dell’ *umano sapere*’ (the foundation of a wide association, not financially burdensome, easy to run and useful in all branches of human knowledge). He was aiming at the setting up of philharmonic societies (Grima 1997a: x). This does not mean that philharmonic societies in Malta started at this point because similar associations were already in existence, but it helped the Maltese to become aware of the need to become associated members in order to improve their educational and cultural standards.

These Italians residing in Malta during this period had a strong impact on both the musical and the extra-musical aspects of Maltese wind bands. For instance, these Italians

¹⁷ For further reading see Grima 1997b.

started to transform band clubs into social clubs, which in turn were transformed into institutional organisations as we know them today. Indeed, several band club enthusiasts adulate their club on the basis of this social and cultural commitment.

Directly and indirectly, the presence of these Italian intellectuals in Malta kindled new attitudes in the local *banda* tradition. These were philharmonic societies of which they were members or even made it to serve as bandmasters. Ciantar (2013: 6), argues that these Italian bandmasters produced marches on the Italian style (in contrast to the British military marches performed at that time). Apparently, this became the preferred compositional idiom of marches for most Maltese composers who came after. Arrangements of operatic and symphonic excerpts became very common. Ciantar (2009: 148) observes that through the arrangements of classical musical pieces ordinary people were brought closer to classical music. In other words, the *banda* was popularising that music which was normally performed at the Royal Malta Theatre in Valletta and which so many villagers had no access to due to class divisions and economic means.

One should note that during World War II, when the Maltese were experiencing difficult times, a good number of band clubs still took initiatives to explore new forms of entertainment or leisure that they could offer to the Maltese population. During this period one notes the initiative of band clubs to introduce and create new activities. For instance, the Saint George's band of Cospicua (mentioned above) inaugurated a cinema theatre where several presentations, films, conferences and other activities were held (Aquilina 1997: 34). Also during this period in Cospicua, groups of mandolin players that performed in the same band clubs became popular (*ibid.*).

As was already noted earlier in this chapter, band clubs around Malta served (and still serve) as social centres. This was very evident in the past when most of the Maltese population was poor. For instance, during the 1940s, the Saint Michael Band Club in Żabbar asked for

permission to use the club premises for educational purposes, mainly by operating as a school (Ellul Galea 1997: 164). Żabbar was considered as a dangerous zone during World War II since it was heavily bombed. In order to reach that educational aim, the club's committee organised fund raising bingos. Another case in point is that of La Stella Levantina Band Club in H'Attard. In 1940 the club closed its doors because of the war. However, during that period the premises were temporarily used by sports and educational organisations. During the peak of World War II, the Saint Nicholas Band Club of Siġġiewi provided hospitality at their premises to many refugees from outside the locality (Bezzina 1997: 178). These are just a few examples of the generosity and solidarity that band clubs demonstrated during war time.

Over the years, the number of band clubs and affiliated bands in Malta increased substantially. A government census carried out in 1948 showed that by 1947 the number of Maltese and Gozitan band clubs had increased to sixty. It was precisely in 1947 that the Malta Band Clubs Association was established by Chev. M.A. Delia, who was a botanist. He later became the first president of the same association. Delia encouraged all band clubs around Malta to form part of this association. This initiative was very well received by the clubs. In fact, most of those invited accepted Delia's invitation to form part of this association. Later on, in 1975, the association's name changed to Maltese as *Għaqda Kazini tal-Banda*.¹⁸ This change was very much in line with the nationalist sentiments that reigned in Malta in the post-independence era.

Maltese Wind Bands in Post-Independence Malta

It is interesting to note that after 1964 several band clubs celebrated the 100th anniversary of their foundation. Most of the band clubs (as can be clearly observed in several published feast programmes) distinguished themselves from other newly set-up bands since they had been

¹⁸ For further reading see <http://maltaband.org/>

active for hundred years – a kind of certificate marking their importance in society. Most of my interviewees dedicated ample time to recall their experiences of these celebrations. The notion of ‘old’ and ‘young’ bandsmen working together for the good of the musical society to which they belonged started being expressed in the annual *festa* programmes published by these clubs such as the one called *Leĥen Il-Banda San Ġorġ Bormla Festa Kuncizzjoni 1972* (‘The Voice of Band, Saint George Feast of the Immaculate Conception 1972’):

In our society, as in a family, we have young and old people: we have young bandsmen and older ones: members of the committee who are young, others who are older. This should be the way forward for a society, a mixture of ideas. The most important thing is to understand one another because the objective is one: Saint George Club. That’s what these two photos show. The above picture shows the most senior members of the committee and bandsmen who have been playing with the band for nearly twenty-five years, in some cases even more, like the bandmaster and Mr F. X. Vella (second from left). In the photo below we can see the young element of the Saint George Band Club. (my translation)¹⁹

Maltese bands managed to overcome several challenges over the years, both socio-political, such as wars, as well as financial ones in the context of a national economy mainly reliant for its income on British military aid (even after independence) and tourism which boomed after Independence. Maltese band clubs had to explore new forms of revenue if they wanted to survive. One good example is that of M.M. Gratiae Band Club at Żabbar. Immediately after the World War II (i.e. 1946) the society started a new project (which took three years to finish) to build a new theatre so as to provide new entertainment and, consequently boost its income (Mercieca 1997: 153). Upon completion, it was named the *Blue Arena* (ibid). Its seating capacity was five hundred. The theatre as a concept was rooted in

¹⁹ Figure reproduced from *Leĥen Il-Banda San Ġorġ Bormla Festa Kuncizzjoni 1972*.

tradition but at the same time it represented the aspiration of the villagers for a more prosperous life.

Other developments in this period encouraged inclusiveness and, by implication, the participation of women. Until the early 1960s band music in Malta was a males-only activity. The turning-point came in 1965 on Good Friday when three female musicians played with the San Ġorġ Martri Band of Qormi during an outdoor pageant (Grima 1997b: 97). These three females paved the way for other female musicians in the following years.²⁰

The history of bands and their achievements is documented and preserved in framed pictures hanging on the walls of the clubs. The 1980s saw the spread of the practice of inviting national figures to inaugurate a project or preside over a ceremony taking place in a club. Before independence, it was the British Governor for Malta who used to inaugurate such projects and preside over ceremonies. After independence, in particular when Malta became a republic in 1974, it was the President of Malta who would be invited to such events. Such events have served to bring together representatives of the State and the Catholic Church in a place (the band club) considered essentially secular but nonetheless instrumental in fusing the authority of the state with that of the local church, the secular with religious, the social with the cultural, as well as the past with the present.

The *Banda* Tradition towards the End of the Twentieth Century

Every town and village in Malta has its band club and several localities have a second one. In certain villages that have two band clubs the first is mainly dedicated to the patron saint while the other (occasionally there is a third band club) celebrates the feast of another saint, which is called *fešta sekondarja* (secondary feast). Although during the 1960s several band clubs celebrated their centenary, new band clubs appeared even at the end of the twentieth century.

²⁰ Sisters Elizabeth and Josette Aquilina and Mary Mizzi were the three females that performed with the band.

Some of these clubs demonstrate pride, prestige, and financial muscle by adding several hired musicians. This is akin to what sometimes happens in Hindi films, where large ensembles composed of a huge choir and orchestra convey financial strength and cultural superiority (Morcom 2001: 70). Most of my interviewees claimed that during this period one notes the increased tendency to perform with extra, hired musicians. Hence, one notes the increasing trend of hiring musicians from other band clubs. In this way a *delegat tal-banda* (band delegate), a person whose role is to hire band musicians and assist the bandmaster, can form a huge band the more so if the number of resident musicians is very small.

As noted in the introduction, due to job shortages several Maltese emigrated in the 1950s and 60s to far away countries, especially Australia, Canada, Britain and the United States. In most cases, such Maltese communities abroad maintained the *festa* tradition by setting up a *banda* within their own community and even parading around with the statue of the patron saint accompanied by the playing of Maltese marches in the streets of Adelaide or Melbourne, for instance. Numerous Maltese band marches have been performed in these foreign countries. Some marches have even gained official recognition in countries with strong Maltese migrant communities. For instance, in 1979 the Maltese band march composer Andrew Coleiro (b. 1945) received an official letter of gratitude from the mayor of the city of Niagara Falls in Canada, Mr. Wayne Thomson, to thank him for naming one of his marches after ‘Niagara Falls’.²¹ This was possible through the mediation of Maltese migrants living in that city, who brought this fact to the attention of the mayor.

In the 1980s one notes a stronger commitment by the *Għaqda Każini tal-Banda* to bring bands closer to each other and to sustain more its existence. For instance, in November 1982 the *Għaqda Każini tal-Banda* started celebrating the feast of Saint Cecilia, patron saint of musicians. At Saint John’s Co-Cathedral in Valletta, an annual mass is celebrated on the saint’s

²¹ Courtesy of Andrew Coleiro.

feast day, which falls on the 22nd November, followed by a parade along the streets of Valletta. Each affiliated band is represented in the parade by a banner with several club members marching behind their club banner. The overall cheerful atmosphere is enhanced by an accompanying band performing Maltese marches for both locals who happen to be in Valletta and tourists alike. Since its foundation, the *Għaqda Kazini tal-Banda* has given a lot of importance to the teaching of music in band clubs, which is still given for free. Indeed, in 1957 the association established a competition among its affiliated clubs for the best music student of the year. In 1994 the *Għaqda Kazini tal-Banda* established a competition called ‘Bandsman of the Year’, which rewards the band musician that attends most band activities and functions.²²

Towards the end of the twentieth century Maltese wind bands started to explore new trends. For instance, some of these bands started to introduce modern musical pieces in their repertoire such as arrangements of popular songs, film music, rock songs, and other musical styles. This paralleled the efforts of local band composers to fuse contemporary musical ideas with traditional Maltese band music in innovative concert compositions. Several new instruments, such as the drum kit, synthesizer and the electric guitar were also introduced in Maltese band concerts, expanding the instrumentation of the traditional Maltese *banda*.

The wind band tradition in Malta was very much affected by the regular presence of foreign bands, particularly British ones, which visited the island to perform during the 1980s. Some of these bands were the *Jubilee Brass (Oxford) Band* (1983), the *Eynsford Concert Band* from Kent (1986) (see Figure 1.5), and the *Brilliant Brass* (1984, 1986 and 1988) (see Figure 1.6).²³ Mr Joseph Attard, the current mayor of Żejtun, who during the 1980s occupied the

²² This was organised for three consecutive years. This competition aimed at promoting and rewarding the most energetic and motivated bandsman amongst affiliated clubs. For instance, on the 2nd of June 2013 tuba player Dale Cachia was awarded the *Mro. Cardenio Botti Trophy* for participating in the greatest number of activities and functions. For the full article see <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20130602/social/Bandsman-of-the-Year.472234>

²³ The *Brilliant Brass* was founded by the British band conductor Dewi Jones in 1984 to participate in the Malta Arts Festival. In 1986, this band performed in several venues in different localities of Malta.

position of Director of Culture within the then Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was responsible for establishing cultural agreements with other countries and organising cultural activities both in Malta and within the framework of international cultural exchanges. He took various initiatives, which included the organisation of concerts and master classes in Malta by the above-mentioned bands.

A number of masterclasses and events were organised during this period, as for instance *Guitar courses, Korean Troupe Shows, French Choir, Jazz course* and also *Korda Jazz* (String Jazz). To these, one may also add the several band concerts given by the above bands especially in summer during *Maltafest*, an international arts festival organised by the Culture Division headed by Joseph Attard. Maltese bandsmen I talked to still remember attending masterclasses delivered by these visiting bands, mostly on brass instruments. These informants remember the importance that these British tutors gave to lip flexibility exercises and proper intonation. Considering the smallness of the island, these technical exercises and emphases soon spread amongst local band players and in some band clubs even became exercises for daily practice.

Another initiative taken by the same Division included the *Konkors Mużikali għall-Baned* (Musical Contest for Bands) which was launched in 1982. The festival for local bands was held for a number of years at the *Manoel Theatre* in Valletta, considered as the most prestigious venue for classical music performances in Malta. Each edition of the festival included from five to six bands competing for the best performance with a set piece which had to be played by all the participating bands.²⁴

In 1983, Joseph Attard proposed the setting up of a Maltese National Band (or *Banda Nazzjonali*, as known in Maltese) to the then Minister of Foreign Affairs and Culture, Alex Sciberras Trigona. A year later, the band was established under the musical direction of John

²⁴ The last *Konkors Mużikali għall-Baned* was held in 1986.

J. Pace. Again, the repertoire was mostly modelled on that performed in Malta by the above-mentioned British bands with, for instance, arrangements from soundtracks and classic jazz pieces such as *Superman* and Glenn Miller's *Pensylvanis 6-5000* respectively. The *Banda Nazzjonali* was disbanded in 1991 some say for political reasons.

In the late 1970s, Maltese band marches started being broadcast via the cable radio, which at that time was administered by the Rediffusion company and, hence, cable radio was referred to as Rediffusion. The Rediffusion company also provided out-of-studio services through its Outside Broadcasting Unit (OBU), which consisted of a van equipped for this purpose. Band marches started to be recorded using the recording services of OBU. The day of the recording session, which generally used to take place at the club's premises, was considered an important part of the village *fešta* programme of events. The session was marked by a strong attendance by band aficionados and club supporters. These used to listen to and, sometimes, even make their own recording on a recording device that they used to carry with them for the session.

Later on, during the 1980s, there was a change in the way these bands began to carry out recordings. Rather than using the OBU services, bands started to hold the recording of marches in private studios. This practice is still going on today. This brought with it the production of *fešta* marches on audio-cassettes which resulted in huge numbers of these cassettes being sold to march aficionados, club supporters, as well as to the general public. This helped in the diffusion and increasing popularity of the Maltese march amongst the Maltese. For example, renowned march composers such as Peter Paul Ciantar, Paul Schembri, Anthony Aquilina and Andrew Coleiro, took the initiative to produce their own marches as albums on both LPs and audio-cassettes.

New Trends and Directions

From the 1980s onwards one notes more local band composers arranging film music for a Maltese band setup. It is important to note that films became more accessible to people and in turn these became more knowledgeable about both film music and composers. It became a trend among Maltese bands to include film music in concerts. Such new directions helped the tradition to survive and to reach out to people of all ages and from diverse strata of society. Arrangements of selections from Verdi's *Aida* are still being performed alongside film music by Hans Zimmer.

Most Maltese band clubs give a lot of attention to the teaching of music in their clubs; they provide instrumental tuition and theory lessons for free. Generally, most students taking tuition in these clubs are trained either by experienced bandsmen or musicians who hold a high music diploma from a British music college.²⁵ An informant who is quite known in the local band environment once claimed that most Maltese band musicians are not up to standard to perform in public with a band even though they do so.²⁶ He also claimed that some band club committees are more interested in seeing the number of musicians increasing in their club rather than in improving the quality of these musicians. An informant commented: 'such committees are more interested in saving money on the hiring of extra musicians than in the quality of the performance'. In contrast to this, one notes that some band clubs organise regular conferences, seminars, master classes and workshops to provide further musical training to

²⁵ Such diplomas are awarded by music colleges represented in Malta, namely, the London College of Music, the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, and Trinity College London.

²⁶ Band clubs enable the learning of a musical instrument by children as early as the age of six. From the legal point of view, Fenech (2008: 83) points out that a child under the age of sixteen years should not attend a band club regularly if not for the purpose of musical education.

their band members. Initiatives in this direction are taken regularly by the Pinto Band Club of Qormi, just to mention one example.

A bandmaster told me that several band clubs are investing in new instruments. According to him this will definitely improve the overall sound quality and performance of a band and encourage band members to further their practical musical studies on a good-quality instrument. At this stage, it is worth noting that some musicians who received their musical training in band clubs have ended up reading for a university degree in music. Moreover, other band musicians, especially those playing a woodwind or brass instrument, have even been recruited as full-time musicians with professional orchestras both locally and overseas.

Competition and conflict are ingrained in the Maltese band tradition and thus they could be considered as a major characteristic of this tradition.²⁷ Numerous are the band clubs that are in a perennial state of rivalry with the other band club in the same village. In his study of the urban Anlo-Ewe musical tradition, Daniel Avorgbedor (1994: 86) notes that competition and conflict through music are highly significant to the social and interpersonal texture of Anlo-Ewe society. Similarly, in the Maltese band tradition this is significant, since there are underlying reasons mostly linked to historical pride. Consequently, several band clubs are after historical evidence to increase their prestige, for example by tracing historical evidence about being the first band of the village. Here, one may refer to the case of Żebbuġ, a village with two band clubs, both proclaiming to be the first in the village.

²⁷ During fieldwork in Għaxaq (summer 2013), a foreigner started to ask why the people were shouting in front of the statue. This is another Maltese characteristic which is highlighted during feasts. Several *iffissati tal-festa* (feast aficionados) chanted '*Viva l-Madonna tagħna għaliex int tagħtina s-sliem*' (lit. trans. Hail Our Lady because you give us peace) while the opposing band club members (of the same locality) claim that '*San Ġużepp l-aqwa*' (lit. trans. Saint Joseph is the best). Other instances that reflect devotion to the patron saint include the buying of solid gold necklaces or bracelets to be placed on the statue to be observed in public. Expensive flowers are also purchased by feast aficionados as an expression of devotion and love. All these are examples which show that the Maltese worship their village saint.

Historical disagreements, religious or political support and the popularity of the club in the locality are among the most important reasons why band clubs end up in conflict with each other. This causes friction between rival band clubs in the same town or village. Such rivalry between clubs is sometimes seen by the Maltese populace as that which triggers more motivation among supporters and club members to work harder for their club and the feast the same club supports. Boissevain (1993: 74) calls the divisions between band clubs as *festa partiti* (feast parties). These *partiti* result in *pika* (pique) between one another, namely, a kind of enmity these *partiti* develop towards one another. This *pika* denotes relations of ‘competition, ill-feeling, hostility’ between band clubs in the same locality (ibid: 74). A band club becomes a rival of the other club in the same locality, for instance, on matters of prestige, such as when they both claim to be the older, bigger and stronger in the village. This *pika* usually echoes different beliefs, even political (Cremona 2008: 120). *Festa* conflicts and political conflicts go hand in hand and since partisan politics are a hot topic in Malta, band clubs make it a point to discourage, if not prohibit, political discussions or party newspapers on their premises (Boissevain 1993: 108).

After the turn of the millennium various independent ensembles were established in Malta. These groups of musicians were and/or still are members of a band club but they created ensembles similar to a wind band. They do not belong to any band club; but they perform as a freelance ensemble. *Tikka Banda* (a little band), founded in October 2013, is one such ensemble made up of ten bandsmen (flute, two trumpets, B-flat baritone, euphonium, tuba, snare drum, bass drum and cymbals, auxiliary percussion and glockenspiel). The ensemble performs traditional Maltese melodies in various local events such as during Christmas and even as a support band during football matches. In order to maintain the traditional Maltese *banda* character, the members of the *Tikka Banda* wear a uniform similar to that used by Maltese wind bands. Other entertaining independent wind bands which owe their very beginning to band

clubs are *The Versatile Brass* (set up in 2000) and *The Big Band Brothers* (established in 2005). Both bands are highly active in the local entertainment scene with a repertoire for all occasions, from after *fešta* street parties to wedding receptions and performances in hotels. These are examples of bands that grew out of local band clubs and flourished through their ability to venture into new fields and repertoires.

Several Maltese band musicians gained exposure in the local musical context through the composition of marches for local bands. In some cases, this led these same composers to venture into larger works such as cantatas or oratorios for voices, choir and large scale wind band compositions. Present composers are even venturing into relatively new styles in their composition of marches, especially when such new marches are compared to the style employed in the past. Several band march composers commented to me that it is important for this new generation of composers to keep in mind that when composing a Maltese march there should be a nice balance between technical prowess and effective consumption, the latter made possible through catchy tunes.

Conclusion

In summary, the present chapter has brought forth some of the milestones in the history of Maltese wind bands and band clubs. It is a history which has been strongly determined by local and international political events, social changes, as well as the strong influence of the church on Maltese society. This tradition has in many instances found itself torn between Italian influences, mainly through the presence of Italian refugees who had escaped the political turmoil of the Risorgimento, and the impact of British military music and musical practices through the presence of the British forces in Malta.

The Maltese *banda* is a living phenomenon among Maltese villagers. It is a tradition in continuous transformation, always responding to the social and cultural needs of the Maltese.

Maltese band clubs have always served as catalysts for social integration. In this sense, the band club also serves as a meeting place for people to drink, play cards, attain popularity for political purposes, as well as to make music and participate in it in their own way. The history of the band tradition in Malta is another case in point where music can only survive if supported by other processes that one can label as extra-musical but which nevertheless have as their common denominator the lives and aspirations of people.

Chapter 2

The Past in the Present: Spaces, People and Music

Music is not static but a living and, therefore, changing phenomenon. It evolves and transforms itself through people's choices and interests. Consequently, musical repertoires and instruments change through time. Musical change is 'a highly complex phenomenon' (Nettl 2005: 277). The rate of change in music varies from culture to culture; the rate of change in some music cultures is faster than in others. That may be the result, for instance, of economic growth or a greater disposition to change in all the aspects of life, including music. In his scrutiny of the link between continuity and change, Heimarck (2003: 177) notes, for instance, that in the Indonesian Kecak (a form of Balinese dance and music drama) change was generated from processes which in themselves had nothing to do with music, such as growth in tourism and developments in technology. Nettl (2005: 280) notes that change in music may be noticed in the way certain world music traditions introduced harmony, electronic instruments, and other sophisticated sound technology. All these generated new sounds which native listeners got used to and, eventually, accepted as an intrinsic element of their music. Moreover, such innovations in a music tradition have brought with them new performance practices and, by implication, new aesthetic concepts and expectations.

In any change there is an element of continuity packed with flashbacks. The sense of continuity between the 'old' and the 'new' may be noticed in several world music traditions with examples ranging from mythical Chinese operas to the Maltese band tradition. The amalgamation of the past with the present in a musical tradition seems to be persistent and continuous. Sometimes, the 'old' and the 'new' seem to be opposite to one another, sometimes complementing each other. There are situations in some world music traditions, such as in the tradition of our concern, where both 'old' and 'new' trends live in complete harmony with each

other. In such a context, change is handled with a lot of discretion by the people within the music tradition so that the balance between the two is well-maintained for the benefit of the same tradition.

In this chapter I will be referring to material objects and practices which today are considered, mainly by the people within the Maltese wind band tradition, as remnants of a past loaded with deep nostalgia and pride. The sense of continuity in Maltese bands is manifested in the diverse aspects of this tradition, ranging from memorabilia showcased in a band club's main hall placed next to a recently purchased modern drum kit, to musical scores consisting of operatic selections alongside arrangements of modern pop music, all nicely displayed in the club's lavishly embroidered archive.

Any Maltese band club is made up of people, spaces, and the 'music itself'. Each one of these components offers examples of the coexistence of the 'old' and the 'new'. This chapter brings forth and examines several examples of this amalgamation. For this purpose, the first section focuses on the physical space, mainly the band club as a building and what it says about the continuity of this tradition. The second section scrutinises the importance of people in a band club (affiliated members, bandsmen and others) and how these bridge 'old' and 'new' practices and trends. The third and fourth sections will focus on the music played by these bands, with special attention to repertoire and instrumentation.

The Band Club as a Physical Space

The *kazin* is considered as one of the most important buildings in a Maltese town or village (Sammut 2005: 1). In most localities around Malta one finds from one to three band clubs, some of which with a long history that goes back to the mid-nineteenth century as shown in the previous chapter. It is important to note that between one locality and another, the distance is short as is the case between Mosta (a central locality) and its nearby locality, Naxxar, which

is only ten or so minutes away by car. However, it is intriguing to note how each locality developed its own history, feast, as well as band clubs, each with its own musicians.

Experiencing life in these closely situated villages, one comes to the realisation that each of these communities holds its own distinct character. In fact, 'each village is first and foremost a community of neighbours' (Boissevain 1993: 31) and, as such, villagers are in close contact with one another on a regular basis. Examples of such contacts include the way the village feast is organised and the relationship between the band club committee and the parish priest. The character of a band club may vary from one locality to another. Certain clubs, such as those of the capital Valletta, are traditionally known to attract people of high social standing such as professionals from all fields. In contrast, certain village band clubs are frequented by people coming from diverse social strata, ranging from professionals to people from a lower educational background. Who frequents these band clubs may also depend on the general occupation of the people residing in that village.

Usually, the village square or as it is known in Maltese, the *pjazza*, is predominantly taken up by the huge infrastructure of the church, with houses, several shops, restaurants and a police station occupying the remaining space (see Figure 2.1). In addition, one normally finds from one to three band clubs facing the church or situated close to it, thus sharing with it the same centrality. The fact that a band club is centrally located implies that its space is rather public and, therefore, everyone is welcome as if in a nearby shop or restaurant.

Villagers feel a sense of belonging at the thought that the club's premises exist not only to perform music during feasts or for entertainment but also to assist people in their social needs, for instance, by providing an opportunity for socialisation as they become a hub for gossiping or places offering assistance in times of distress. We have already seen in the previous chapter how during World War II band clubs provided a shelter to refugees escaping the strong Italian and German air raids on the three harbour cities of Cospicua, Vittoriosa and

Senglea. That sense of social assistance continues to the present day. Nowadays, one finds band clubs organising charity fundraising concerts in aid of, for example, *l-Istrina*, a national fundraising marathon taking place on Boxing Day in aid of a national fund that supports worthy social and medical cases. Donations for this purpose include money collected by club members which is then publicly presented to the President of Malta (as the Chairperson of the fund). Several band clubs around Malta get involved in this event with club representatives appearing on state TV to present their cheques.

Band clubs in Malta consider memorabilia (instruments, scores, uniforms, and others) as important to their club since these are evidence of the club's history and thus add prestige to the club. Once, an informant told me that it is risky to let people, especially strangers, go through old scores unsupervised as they may steal them and even give them to the rival band club in the same village. The older the history of the club, the stronger its presence and feeling of superiority in that particular town or village. Indeed, the building of a new club 'or refurbishment of an existing one, in a style which is linked to a real or perceived ideal past is an attempt to claim its inherent belonging there. It seeks to establish continuity with a 'glorious' past that may or may not have existed' (Sammut 2005: 32).

Musical archives and the memorabilia one finds in such clubs refer to past events made by people to people (Ciantar 2010: 111). I noted, during my fieldwork, that many of these band clubs have an archive with scores in their premises, and a showcase with memorabilia, including trophies, old instruments no longer in use and other important items presented to the club throughout its history (see Pictures 3.1 and 3.2). Through such memorabilia, each club could prove its glorious past. In addition, several band clubs decorate the main entrance of their club with pictures of past bandmasters and band musicians. Adjacent to the entrance there is a bar, serving alcohol, other beverages, nibbles and other snacks.

Nevertheless, informants claimed that without the amalgamation of new trends with traditional practices, the Maltese band tradition would now be extinct. Such new trends bring the young generation closer to the traditional elements of the *banda*. The preservation of old scores and instruments and the presence of memorabilia alongside contemporary initiatives and trends reaffirm the important and dynamic role that these clubs had and still have in Maltese life and culture (see Figure 2.2).

Upon entering the club, one notices a billiards table in a central position. This is a characteristic piece of furniture in most of these premises. Several tables and chairs are placed around the main entrance which most of the time are occupied by men playing cards or having a drink. Some band clubs are even equipped with computers so that this space could satisfy the modern needs of its members. Other recent trends include the organisation of teen parties in the premises. These are sometimes held in one of the halls in the club where one can also find the club's archive and the memorabilia showcase. Band club teen parties are also held outside, especially during the village *festa* week. Nevertheless, such mass activities are professionally organised with a well-stocked bar set up outside the club for the occasion, a disc jockey entertaining the youths with music coming from a hired professional sound system, coloured balloons floating around, and teens wearing T-shirts with printed slogans praising their club. Such parties are intended to raise funds for the club whilst attracting more young members. The latter objective is considered by band club members as a means by which the club can continue to exist and flourish. The social activities taking place in these clubs, mostly in the evening, have over the years supported the continuity of the Maltese band tradition as they offer financial support to the club. According to some informants, the continuity of this tradition would not be possible without the tinkling of glasses at the bar, the cheers of people enjoying themselves over a drink, and people playing billiards or the recently introduced

amusement machines. In this sense, non-musical activities held within the club premises are seen by most band club members as vital for the continuation of the same tradition.

In the summer of 2013, I attended the Mosta feast, a central locality that celebrates the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady on the 15th August. My intention was to experience and observe what a teen party organised by a band club actually is. Countless people attended this event which included youths from all strata of society. The event started at nine in the evening and continued till one o'clock in the morning. Centrally located was the deejay's spot, and behind it there was a bar. All people seemed to be entertained by the music and the general atmosphere it created. Initially, I was confused about what was behind such an event: was it being organised by the band club in honour of Saint Mary? Most probably not, as the patron saint in honour of whom the *fešta* was being celebrated was not even mentioned or referred to during the whole evening. Where was the sound of the *banda*, an icon of the Maltese *fešta*, in all this? It seemed to me that alien sounds are sometimes important to a musical tradition as these may support its existence by attracting new audiences who might not be that enthusiastic about traditional wind band music. Certainly, youth parties organised during the week leading to the village feast sometimes continue inside the club after the Sunday morning band march on *fešta* day. This instils a sense of community and belonging to the club amongst young supporters.

However, one learns of situations where such events have led to physical confrontation between rival band clubs within the same locality. In most instances the real source of this trouble is partisan politics. For instance, 'Over 30 injured in Hamrun band marches disturbance' the *Times of Malta* reported on Monday 10th August, 1987. The incidents involved two rival band clubs during a Sunday morning band march in the town of Hamrun as the parish was celebrating the feast of Saint Gaetan. The incidents followed a heated general election

campaign a few months before. Several informants claimed that the brawl was the result of the political tension prevailing on the island during that year.

A Musical Tradition Made Up of People

People belonging to the same community usually speak the same language and have a more or less common cultural set-up. It is a fact that each and every group, association or society is led by people and the way these think and view the world around them. Since band clubs are made up of people coming from different strata of society special attention should be given here to the people involved in these clubs and how modern and archaic mentalities and attitudes come together under the same roof.

As already stated above, a band club is made up of paying members as well as non-paying supporters that visit the club regularly or occasionally. Some of these are determined to preserve the club's glorious history whilst others are more interested in proposing innovation that eventually becomes a legacy for future generations. In this sense, a band club appears as a micro representation of Maltese society at large. It is in itself a place which reflects current trends in Maltese society and how diverse opinions and attitudes are reconciled to produce something beneficial for the entire community or society. In this sense, the Maltese band tradition and the music it produces become another social document which is as important as any other historical or anthropological document.

The *banda* tradition accommodates a wide spectrum of people of all ages and social backgrounds. Included in the Maltese feast are young and old, clergy and laity, active committee members and simple club supporters. Nevertheless, there are rules and guidelines which all should abide by irrespective of whether they are fee-paying members or not. A band club has its own statute, which is administered by the club's central committee. A typical

central committee is normally composed of a president, vice-president, secretary, assistant secretary, youth director, a representative of the women's section, a band delegate, treasurer, and an NGO (a non-governmental organisation) coordinator. Although the band club administrator does not form part of the committee, s/he is another important figure within the club. All the members of the central committee are volunteers who work for the club in parallel with their main jobs or professions, which may vary from blue-collar occupations to professional careers in law, medicine and architecture to mention a few. These come to the egalitarian set-up of the club with different views and mind-sets regarding procedures and practices. Some of these might be happy to conform to traditional practices while others are always at the forefront when it comes to proposing new ways of doing things. Nevertheless, most of the interviewees agreed that finally a committee is capable enough of coming up with one collective decision and, somehow, an agreement is always reached for the benefit (and glory) of the club.²⁸ Decisions taken by the central committee are then executed by the different sub-committees within the club such as the ladies' sub-committee, the sub-committee for youth affairs, and the band commission.

It is interesting to note how sub-committees in the same band club merge 'old' and 'new' practices. This is the case, for instance, when the ladies' sub-committee, which is normally involved in the making of curtains for the club and the provision of interior decoration, gives a helping hand in the organisation of tours abroad organised by the same club to raise funds. The youth sub-committee assists in the making of traditional street decorations and at the same time organises open-air parties during the days leading to the *festa* as described above. The sub-committee responsible for the *banda*, also known as the *kummissjoni banda* (the band commission), assists the bandmaster in sorting old music sheets in folders together

²⁸ One contrasting view is that of a young bandmaster who remarked to me that although he forms part of the central committee he feels he is not considered important.

with the recently purchased arrangements of modern pop medleys. These are just a few examples of the coexistence of traditional and modern practices within the same club.

A shift in attention from groups to individuals may lead us to further observations. By nature, human beings want to feel important and recognised by other people for their talents and abilities. This is very much evident in the *banda* tradition. Band performances provide a context through which individual musicians stand out in a closely-knit village community. In this sense, band marches and band concerts become an occasion for the recognition of individual talent not only within the club and the village community. In this way band musicians perceive band playing as something worth doing as it adds value to their life and identity (Roberts and Farrugia 2013: 96). Sometimes, the fact that one is participating in a band, even by pushing the bass drum, which is normally carried along on a trolley, is of great value for that individual. The value lies in the very idea of association with a group of musicians engaged in producing the sounds of tradition.

Traditional and Contemporary Maltese Band Instrumentation

The amalgamation of the ‘old’ and ‘new’ is not only found in buildings or people’s way of thinking and behaviour; it can also be found in music, mainly in the repertoire and the instrumentation employed by these bands. When referring to the instrumentation of Maltese bands, Iacovazzi (2012: 245) notes that Maltese band instrumentation has seen significant changes. Iacovazzi (ibid: 247) also notes that such instrumentation followed the distinction between the *banda à l’anglaise* (English band) and the *banda à l’italienne* (Italian band), which in itself is a reflection of British and Italian influence in Malta, an influence which extended to the instrumentation of the Maltese *banda*.

The presence of exiled Italian *maestri* helped in the dissemination of the band tradition, particularly through the ‘assistance in the setting up and musical direction of newly established bands’ (Ciantar 2013: 6).²⁹ Amongst these Italian bandmasters, there was Alessandro Vessella (1860-1929), the Italian band conductor who founded and represented the Vessellian school of the Italian band and went on a tour in 1921, together with his wind band of Rome, of various European cities, notably Valencia and Barcelona (Grano 2012: 21). The Spaniards hailed him and his band as the best wind band ever performing in their cities. The administration of the La Valette Band Club in Valletta invited him to organise their *banda* and this was a great success.

Table 2.1 shows the band instrumentation that was generally used in the 1860s. This includes instrumental names in Italian. One also notes the use of instruments which are no longer seen in today’s Maltese bands, such as the double bass, which was used particularly during a seated concert and the E-flat piccolo. During the 1900s, the woodwind section changed completely from the 1860s in its composition, while few changes were made in the brass section.

Woodwind Instruments	
Italian Names	English Names
Ottavino	Piccolo
Terzino in Mi bemolle	E-flat piccolo
Flauto	Flute
Clarino in Mi bemolle ³⁰	E-flat Clarinet
Basso in Si bemolle (Clarone)	B-flat Bass Clarinet

²⁹ Alongside with marches, Maltese bands used to perform polkas, contra dances arranged for band, mazurkas and waltzes. The waltz, which is a dance music in triple meter, has remained very popular in today’s band performances. Waltzes are normally played by these bands during the Easter Sunday parade, when the band accompanies the traditional procession of the Risen Christ.

³⁰ An abbreviation to the clarinetto

Contrabbasso ad ancia ³¹	Ophicleide ³²
Brass Instruments	
Corno in Mi bemolle (Clavicorno)	E-flat Horn
Bombardino	Euphonium
Trombone d'accompagnamento	Accompanying Trombone
Flicorno Tenore ³³	Baritone
Flicorno Basso in Mi bemolle	Tuba/Bass in E-flat
Flicorno Contrabbasso in Si bemolle	Tuba/Bass in B-flat
Percussion Instruments	
Gran Cassa	Bass drum
Piatti	Cymbals
Tamburro	Snare drum/Side Drum

Table 2.1: Wind band instrumentation during the 1860s

Instrumentation in the 1930s was almost identical to that of the first decade of the twentieth century. However, during the 1960s all brass instruments went through a compensating process which was generally applied to lower brass instruments such the euphoniums and tubas. It was mainly the addition of tubes to ‘compensate’ for sharpness in the lower register.³⁴ It was during the 1960s that the trombone cantabile and the flicorno tenore,

³¹ The instrument is a bass reed which belongs to a family which is made up of various instruments from the sarrusophone. For further readings see <http://www.musicacolta.eu/contrabbasso-ad-ancia/>

³² In English it is called Ophicleide. In fact, it forms part of the bass part of the woodwind section. Nowadays it is transcribed on a Tuba or a Baritone Saxophone because it imitates the sound of the Ophicleide.

³³ This is nowadays understood as flugelhorn in B-flat (known in Italian as flicorno in Si-bemolle).

³⁴ However, the player’s problems with the intonation were resolved and s/he can thus play a low B-natural. In addition, the fourth valve helped the player achieve a better intonation.

amongst others, vanished from band instrumentation. This resulted in the introduction of the 1st and 2nd Althorn. A notable addition to the instrumentation of the 1960s was the saxophone, which originated in 1840. The soprano, alto, tenor and baritone saxophones were eventually added to the band instrumentation.

The change in band instrumentation becomes evident in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. In the 1970s, for instance, one notes the regular use of the drum kit in band concerts, firstly, by the Armed Forces of Malta band (till 1974 known as the Royal Malta Artillery) during its concerts, and lately by other bands around Malta. Other instruments, such as the bass trumpet in B-flat, E-flat and F, which used to serve as a nice link between the trumpets and the trombones, were phased out. Other instruments which became obsolete in the modern Maltese band instrumentation are the double bass and the contrabass trombone. These instruments were mainly used, until the beginning of the 1960s, by the two Valletta band clubs, that is, the La Valette and the King's Own band clubs.

The presence of British bands performing in Malta, particularly in the *Maltafest* during the 1980s, (as noted in chapter 1), brought about some innovations in the Maltese band instrumentation. The band aficionados did not always accept the new trends. An informant once commented that when one of the British bands performed with a drum kit for the first time, several Maltese band aficionados disliked it, and they still felt uneasy when it was introduced in the local wind band set-up.

Such changes were, and to some extent still are, viewed with suspicion since they are sometimes understood as overshadowing what makes these bands sound and look 'typically Maltese'. For instance, several elderly bandsmen told me that the change in instrumentation was not appropriate as so many instrumental timbres had been lost. Others explained how the nice sonic bridge between the trumpets and the trombones, for instance, was lost when the bass trumpets were phased out (see Table 2.2).

Woodwind Instruments	
Italian Names	English Names
Ottavino in Do	Piccolo in C
Flauto in Do	Flute in C
Oboe	Oboe
Quartino in Mi bemolle	Clarinet in E-flat
Clarino 1o Soprano in Si bemolle	Clarinet I in B-flat
Clarino 2o Soprano in Si bemolle	Clarinet II in B-flat
Clarino 3o Soprano in Si bemolle	Clarinet III in B-flat
Clarino Basso in Si bemolle	Bass Clarinet in B-flat
Brass Instruments	
Sassofono Soprano in Si bemolle	Soprano Saxophone
Sassofono Contralto in Mi bemolle	Alto Saxophone
Sassofono Tenore in Si bemolle	Tenor Saxophone
Sassofono Baritono in Mi bemolle	Baritone Saxophone
Corni in Mi bemolle	Horn in E-flat
Cornetta 1a in Si bemolle	Cornet I in B-flat
Cornetta 2a in Si bemolle	Cornet II in B-flat
Trombone d'Armonia	Trombone
Flicorno Sopranino in Mi bemolle	Soprano Cornet in E-flat
Flicorno Soprano in Si bemolle	Flugelhorn in B-flat
Flicorno Tenore in Si bemolle	B-flat Baritone
Flicorno Baritono in Si bemolle	Euphonium
Flicorno Basso Grave in Mi bemolle	E-flat Tuba

Percussion Instruments (Batteria)	
Timpani	Kettle Drums
Tamburro	Snare Drum / Side Drum
Gran Cassa e Piatti	Bass Drum and Cymbals
Percussione Tonale	Tuned Percussion
Castagnetti	Castanets
Tamburello	Tambourine
Cinelli	Glockenspiel
Triangolo	Triangle
Other Instruments	
	Piano
	Electric Guitar
	Bass Guitar
	Drum Kit

Table 2.2: Contemporary Maltese wind band instrumentation

The Modernisation of the Maltese Band Repertoire

The Maltese wind band tradition has also seen its repertoire of concert pieces adapting itself to modern trends, and this has brought about more changes in instrumentation. Traditionally, the Maltese band concert repertoire used to be loaded with arrangements of operatic selections, overtures, and symphonies. This repertoire started to change in the 1970s with the Malta Armed Forces band holding concerts in Maltese village squares and presenting arrangements from soundtracks like the *Sound of Music* and *Ben Hur* besides operatic and symphonic selections. This trend gained momentum in the mid-1980s through the presence in Malta of British brass bands performing during *Maltafest*, as already stated in Chapter One. The repertoire of these

visiting bands included soundtracks from *Superman*, for instance, and arrangements for brass bands of classic big-band pieces, such as Glenn Miller's *In the Mood*. Bands performing such pieces have even included instruments which are not considered standard in the Maltese wind band, such as the bass guitar, drum kit, electric guitar, and the keyboard.

The musical impact of these foreign bands on the local band tradition could be mainly noticed in the new repertoire of Maltese bands for concerts in village squares, with pieces such as *James Last in Concert* and *Highlights from Cole Porter* amongst others. This change of repertoire was adopted even by bands claiming the honour of being among the first in Malta. One such example is that of the Saint Philip Band Club of Żebbuġ, whose musical programme for the outdoor concert on the eve of *fešta* day has included, since 1986, more popular selections than classical pieces. Arrangements of Tina Turner's *Simply the Best* are nowadays performed alongside a selection from *Il Trovatore*. Nevertheless, some conservative bands still prefer a more traditional repertoire that, according to informants I interviewed, sounds more appropriate to the Maltese traditional village *fešta*. Such conservative repertoire is sometimes requested by the older members of the club, not only for the nostalgia that it evokes but also for the sense of prestige that the standard classical repertoire is endowed with as the backbone of musical proficiency.

Popular, rock, commercial, film and other contemporary musical styles are often interpreted by these wind bands during outdoor concerts. In some cases, the bandmaster, or a promising musician from the club, makes these arrangements himself even to help the club save money on the purchase of music published abroad. However, amateurish arrangements have led some of these arrangers to give to the clarinets, for instance, what in an orchestral

score is normally given to violins with no attention at all to aspects such as division of labour, range, and fingering constraints.³⁵

Turning to the Maltese march, one observes that today's Maltese march does not show the complexity characteristic of marches composed forty or fifty years ago. An informant once claimed that 'if the melody of a march is not memorised after the first time you hear it, to the extent that you end up whistling it [...] then the march is not good'. The emphasis is more on catchy tunes that make a *marċ tal-widna* (a march pleasing to the ear) rather than compositional prowess. Many *banda* composers believe that the local listener is after catchy tunes rather than compositional show-off. The same march may sound differently, depending on where it is performed (e.g. concert hall, street parade, etc.).

Maltese band composers of the twentieth century became very much inspired by foreign musical sounds. For instance Anthony Aquilina (1906-1985), who was very popular for his band marches, adopted the Spanish *paso doble* in his marches. His march *Melita*, for example, which was composed in 1979, reflects a Spanish character with frequent 'ornamentation' falling on the downbeat (see Example 2.1). In addition, Maltese band director Joseph Azzopardi included Chinese musical flavours in his marches, which are clearly traced in marches such as *Chinese Rose*, where consecutive fourths and fifths are prominent.



Example 2.1: A Spanish motif from *Melita* by Anthony Aquilina.

(my transcription)

³⁵ Usually, the transformation from orchestral composition to arrangement for a band expects the arranger to understand completely the instruments of the orchestra and those used by the band, especially the woodwind and the brass sections. Generally, music written for violins is given to B-flat clarinets, the sound of the violas is replaced by the alto saxophones, the cellos are interpreted by the euphonium, whilst the double basses are replaced by the tuba. The flutes, horns, cornets and percussion instruments remain the same since they are part of the band instrumentation.

Conclusion

The *banda* that emerges from this chapter shows that it has a central role in Maltese life and culture. Each band has its own premises in which music is made and decisions are taken. Most band clubs are situated at the centre of the locality, usually in front of the church or somewhere nearby. This attests a central role to the club and make it seem to be as important as the church. On entering a band club, one notes that in this physical space new trends coalesce with others considered as archaic. The music that is played there and outside is only possible if supported by fundraising activities which are not musical in themselves but nonetheless vital for the financial sustainability of this tradition. In other words, no music, neither contemporary nor traditional can be produced without income from diverse sources such as the hiring of the club's bar, amusement machines, and the organisation of tours to other countries, just to mention a few.

Band club members bring with them the love for tradition and the plans for the future but both aspects can coexist in a club. People who are diverse in age, social class, and profession come together not only to plan a forthcoming event but also to maintain their club's links with the past and leave a legacy for future generations.

The Maltese *banda* has seen changes in the instrumentation employed. Some instruments such as the bass trumpet are no longer in use. On the other hand, due to a change in the repertoire, the use of the drum kit in band concerts is becoming more common; this is sometimes complemented by the use of electric keyboards and Maltese pop singers singing modern songs to the accompaniment of a village band. The developments which took place in the 1980s through the presence in Malta of British brass bands were quite significant. Band concerts started to include pop music arrangements alongside classical pieces, the former appealing to the young generation, the latter to the elderly members of the club. The nice

balance between innovation and orthodoxy is fascinating and present in all the aspects of this tradition, which means so many things to different people.

Chapter 3

Innovation and Conventionality in the Maltese

Festa Band March

For most Maltese, the term ‘*tal-banda*’ (of the band) implies amateurish, if not also inferior, music making, especially when such music is contrasted with professional orchestral playing. Sometimes, Maltese wind band playing is seen as representing the musical participation and aesthetics of the working class. Similar associations have also been noticed in other parts of the world, such as with the wind ensembles directly derived from the Orphéon movement that appeared in the early nineteenth century (Dubois, Méon and Pierru 2013: 26).

An informant once told me that the Maltese band in a marching *festa* parade should sound ‘unrefined’, meaning out of tune and with plenty of emphasis on the outer parts and very little interest in the inner layers of a march, otherwise it would not sound traditionally Maltese. This observation echoes issues of authenticity noticed in, for instance, *salsa* music. In this regard, Marisol Berríos-Miranda (2002: 41) refers to the *salsa* musician Gerardo Rosales as saying that ‘*salsa* music is not authentic *salsa* unless the trombone plays a little bit out of tune’, a statement that not all *salsa* musicians agree with. The lack of attention to the internal layers of a Maltese *festa* march may be instantly observed from, for instance, the way accompanying chords are laid out in the score with root position chords being adopted where first inversion chords would be more effective. My informant further claimed that foreigners feel that the playing of Maltese marches provides a festive mood and that the lack of attention to aspects such as the above make them sound ‘traditionally’ Maltese.

This chapter analyses a sample of Maltese marches from different epochs. Such analysis is set against observations and statements derived from bandsmen, band composers, wind band aficionados, as well as authors who have written passionately about the Maltese *banda*. As

such, interviews helped me significantly with my musical analysis. Although there are no writings about the Maltese march per se and its development, information about it does exist and development over the years may be gleaned from the reminiscences of local bandmasters, bandsmen, and band aficionados.

During my fieldwork I noticed that several people active in these clubs live within their own niche and indeed find it hard to collaborate with outsiders, especially if these happen to be completely unknown to them.³⁶ Some of the archivists that I met in the course of the present research gave me the impression that these preserved band marches, which are rare to find and may sink into oblivion, are not accessible to outsiders (sometimes seen as intruders), not even for studying purposes. An endless number of scores are found in band clubs; however, I was not always allowed to work on them, as some archivists thought that I could copy the march and consequently put their club's sole ownership of the same marches at risk. Since I needed music for analysis, sometimes I had to transcribe music from recordings available on audio-cassettes, CDs and online.

During my fieldwork I always wondered about the popularity of certain *festa* marches. Some of these marches were composed decades ago but are still top of the list. This made me try to figure out why so many people are after such compositions. There are several marches which are extremely popular among the Maltese, so much so that they are described as *marċi popolari* ('popular marches'). Generally speaking, popular marches are divided into two categories: (a) popular marches which are only performed locally, that is, in the band's town or village; and (b) popular marches which are performed in most of the localities around Malta and, therefore, are widely known.

³⁶ One particular archivist asserted that the issue of Maltese band marches scores is quite intriguing. From experience he claimed that if his band club needed a rare score from another band club he would pass on one of his precious scores in exchange.

In the first category, one may include popular marches which are mainly intended to tease the opposing band club in the same town or village. These are normally marches with tunes pleasant to the ear and with matching text aimed at ‘offending’ or ‘insulting’ the other club in the same town or village. The popularity of such marches is better understood when set against the local context of pique and rivalry, though they may not necessarily prove of great attraction to people from outside the village. Several interviewees revealed that there are two processes behind creating and matching words to band marches. The first process is that where the words (or lyrics) are there before the composer starts to compose the music. Some of these words and tunes are then suggested to the composer and serve as the basis for a new march. Such words are intended to hit at the rival band clubs. In the second process the composer simply produces a march but later somebody adds lyrics to the march. Once, a bandmaster claimed that on one occasion he was surprised by the fact that his own march had been matched with insolent words directed at the rival band club in the village when it was absolutely not his intention to have such a situation materialise.

The second category of popular marches includes the ones loved and admired both by a large number of *banda* aficionados as well as by the Maltese public at large. It is interesting how marches in this category have maintained their popularity even if these were composed back in the mid-twentieth century. An example of a march in this category is called ‘Fiesta’, by the popular composer Anthony Aquilina.³⁷ This march was composed in 1979; however, it is still popular in most localities in Malta and is considered as *marċ brijuż*, that is, a march full of life and merrymaking.

This chapter should provide an understanding of the continuity and change in the music of a Maltese march. For this purpose, the chapter is divided into two sections. The chapter will

³⁷ Other band marches composed by Anthony Aquilina include: ‘Fiorentina’, ‘Il-Božen’, ‘Melita’, ‘Ta’ Gerrew’, ‘Bisso-As’, ‘Asswero’, ‘La Senora Rita’, and ‘Granada’.

start with an account of my fieldwork, during which I learned to compose a Maltese march as a way of approaching the understanding of its structure and overall production. In addition, I attended several rehearsals and played the bass drum at the Żurrieq Band Club. This has helped me to understand, through practice, the compositional process followed by the composer of a march as well as other related processes. It is a fact that Maltese march composers always try to meet listeners' expectations and keep them engaged. Such expectations include catchy melodies, fitting counter-melodies, as well as a nice accompaniment that provides the right backdrop to the other two musical components. The second section of this chapter deals with the continuity and change of the Maltese march within a period that stretches from the 1860s up to the present time. This will be done by scrutinising the different strains of a march as they have developed and changed over the years.³⁸ In this way, the Maltese march will be analysed in terms of sections with musical examples to support the discussion.

On Composing a Maltese March

This phase of my fieldwork not only provided me with the possibility to take lessons with these composers for more than two years, but also helped me to live and understand from the inside the *banda* mode of thinking. Interviews were conducted throughout the period of study, and this kept me more focused on the discussion. Discography was also an essential source that I had to become more familiar with during this phase. The sense of continuity and change could be clearly noticed in the several *fešta* marches I listened to.

The two band composers with whom I took lessons were Joe Vella (b. 1955), who is presently active as a bandmaster in four Maltese band clubs (in Balzan, Birkirkara, Qormi and Mellieħa) and Andrew Coleiro (b. 1945), a renowned local march composer (see Picture 4.1).

³⁸ In the present work attention was paid to the march since it is the most authentic and popular musical composition that indeed reflects the *banda* tradition.

Both composers were patient with me to help me understand not only the making of a march but also the world that adds meaning to it.³⁹ As a result, the present chapter will concentrate on a band march that I composed myself during fieldwork and which I named ‘Marcia Allegra’. This march was rehearsed and eventually performed in summer 2015 during the Saint Mary feast of Balzan.

When referring to the growth of bands during the nineteenth century, Stephen Rhodes (2007) notes that as soon as bands became more popular and grew in size during the nineteenth century, civic and professional bands were driven by two objectives: to serve military obligations and to perform music during civic occasions.⁴⁰ It was during this period that band marches intermixed with quadrilles, galops and polkas, and this became a popular trend. In this way marches did not serve only a military purpose but they were also used during celebrations in villages (ibid.). This could have also been the case with the earliest band music in Malta during the mid-nineteenth century, as I will show later on.

Most marches are composed in $2/4$ time; however, one also finds marches in $3/8$ time, expressing the lilting effect of a compound duple. Since bands are composed of woodwind and brass instruments the key used in band marches is normally on the flat side. The most typical key signatures used in Maltese marches are C, F, B-flat, E-flat and A-flat major which, when necessary, modulate to related keys. The form of the band march should follow a rigid structure typical of band marches. A band march should therefore consist of contrasting strains with catchy melodies and a trio which fosters further contrasts. A band composer should fulfil all such expectations so that the march could satisfy listeners. Questions started arising when

³⁹ On the 13th December 2014 Andrew Coleiro was appointed to The National Order of Merit and awarded the Medalja għall-Qadi tar-Repubblika. He was selected for the number of compositions he produced in his life for the *banda* tradition. I spent countless hours interviewing Coleiro and analysing his musical works at his residence in Sliema.

⁴⁰ For further readings see http://www.lipscomb.edu/windbandhistory/rhodeswindband_10_gloriousmarch.htm#characteristics

interviewing Maltese march composers, such as, “how can a march be pleasing to the ear?” or “why does a composer succeed in his compositions while others do not?” Most of the interviewees answered that the march should have a good melody which the people should absorb or memorise quickly. Others remarked that a march may be *sabiħ imma mhux tal-widna* (lit. trans. sweet but not pleasant to the ear) meaning that a march may be skilfully composed but still not appealing enough to listeners. Indeed, there are transmitted skills which composers must consider and preferably employ when composing a march so as to fulfil listeners’ expectations. As will be argued, most of the marches (especially those composed after the 1960s) have a good melody indeed, which could be sung along or whistled. Both composers with whom I took lessons stressed the fact that a good band march should have a good melody, good use of harmony, and should be easy enough for most amateur band musicians to play without excessive technical effort, as sometimes these marches are played at sight-reading. Apart from these technical factors there are other extra-musical considerations that may contribute to the popularity of a march. For instance, an informant told me that a composer succeeds with his march among the supporters because the band club committee decides to perform the march at the right place and at the right time, such as when the band passes by the premises of the rival band club or during the mass hysteria accompanying a Sunday morning march.

Once, an informant claimed that he could compose any march easily since he listened to an endless number of marches. This informant continued to say that after composing a march he would then realise that intersecting with his own march there would be other melodic snippets from other marches. This is akin to the process of intertextuality, very commonly employed (even if unconsciously) in Maltese marches. Intertextuality may be one of the processes through which the style of Maltese marches has been established over the years.

During fieldwork, I met several local composers whose first attempt at composition came through the composition of a march. At this stage, it is interesting to note that the Maltese band tradition gives novice local composers the chance to hear their music being performed in public. This is something which is not always possible with orchestras, where an expected high degree of ‘professional acceptance’ might hinder a work from being performed in public.

Curiosity led me to enquire how these composers ended up composing marches. In fact, I asked some band composers how they started to compose marches. Indeed, most of these interviewees claimed that they started because the band tradition was part and parcel of their family and, hence, there were members of the family who taught them how to compose. There was a particular instance of a band composer whose father is a bandmaster, his mother is a band club committee member and his two other brothers are freelance bandsmen. No wonder he ended up composing marches.

The standard structure of a march has been followed by most Maltese composers over the years, though some have also included new ideas or adopted new compositional features. From my interviews, I noticed that more than half of them compose band marches the way they had been taught by their family members, friends or music masters, that is, transmission that stresses strong adherence to tradition, possibly with minimal or no experimentation taking place. Fewer than half of the composers I interviewed insisted on finding the right balance between what was transmitted to them in terms of compositional techniques and the integration of new ideas. Quite a few others stressed the importance of being conscious of the fact that a band march should remain as it was transmitted to them and, therefore, there was absolutely no place for fiddling with an established tradition.⁴¹ My composition of the march falls within the first category. It follows the standard sectional structure as shown in Example 3.1.

⁴¹ For instance, during a discussion with Andrew Coleiro, he stated that he experimented with changing the structure. He changed the tonalities as seen in several marches, where he started the first strain with a minor mode leading to a major mode in the third strain and ending the trio with a major mode. Coleiro

Introduction	8 bars	
First Strain	32 bars	Repeat: a (16 bars) a' (16 bars)
Second Strain - Bass passage	16 bars	Repeat: b (8 bars) b' (8bars)
Third Strain	32 bars	As First Strain
Trio Introduction	8 bars	
Trio	36 bars	Repeat: c (16 bars) d (4 bar bridge) c' (16 bars)

Table 3.1: A typical structure of the Maltese march

The structure of the Maltese march accentuates symmetry. An informant remarked to me that if for example a composer decides to compose a seven-bar introduction to a march, both musicians and listeners would feel that there is something odd about the music. Shifting attention to the general structure of Maltese marches, one notes an introduction that has the entire band playing *forte* for 8 bars. The march that I composed during my fieldwork follows this practice. Then, in the first strain, the march is generally divided into two parts of 16 bars each. The first part (of the first strain) is normally played by the first and second clarinets, alto and tenor saxophones, baritones (B-flat baritones and euphoniums) with accompaniment on trombones, tuba, and French horns (see Example 3.1). The second instruments are generally harmonised in thirds or sixths with the melody.⁴² Generally, composers use the melody (in the introduction) in the low register *mezzo forte*. Sometimes, a glockenspiel is used to reinforce the

changed the structure of the trio by creating a variation on the clarinets with the euphoniums and horns as an accompaniment.

⁴² Most of the bandmasters whom I interviewed claimed that most musicians don't want to play the second part because they consider the first part as more important.

strain in a minor mode, leading to the third strain (after the bass passage) in the relative major and ending the trio in a major mode. An informant complained that nowadays some Maltese march composers are even composing *marči brijuzi* in the minor mode throughout when, normally, at least the trio should modulate to the major. According to him *marči brijuzi* should sound festive not dirge-like.

After the composition of the march, I went through the process of extracting the musical parts and preparing them for rehearsals and eventual performance. This required time and attention in order to avoid non-essential corrections during rehearsal time. I followed the procedure of the copyist myself, using a music-notation software.⁴³ First, I had to keep in mind that each printed part fits into one page of the musical booklet (known as *librett*) that musicians play from while marching. The parts should look legible to the musicians considering that sometimes these have to play in dimly lit streets and situations where it is very uncomfortable to play due to people pressing on the band. The music print should be as clear as possible as sight reading of marches by band musicians, especially those who play with various bands, is very normal.⁴⁴ A band musician complained that most of the march booklets are printed in very small font, making them almost impossible to read, especially in the evening.

The first rehearsal of my march was held on Thursday 25th June 2015 at the Balzan Band Club. Rehearsals at this club are normally held outdoors, in the band club's yard. In the yard there was a restaurant with tables and chairs where people that had brought their children for the rehearsal and other band enthusiasts could sit and have a snack. When the bandmaster gave out the music sheet of my march to the musicians, each player followed his/her part with attention, as normally happens in sight reading. As soon as the bandsmen started to play, the people present in the yard stopped chatting to follow the rehearsal. I was quite excited to listen

⁴³ Most band clubs still request the service of a copyist to extract parts.

⁴⁴ It is to be noted that most band musicians are very good sight readers.

for the first time to my march. During this rehearsal, I noticed that the players entrusted with the counter-melody were not pleased with their part. As soon as the rehearsal ended I wanted to know if there were any problems. A euphonium player replied that the counter-melody was ‘overloaded with too many notes’ (see Example 3.2). This, I thought, had to be changed and had to be transformed into something simpler and more melodious. In the interim between the first and second rehearsal of my march, I revised the entire counter-melody on the principles described above. This sounded much better in terms of both style and delivery by the musicians (see Example 3.3).

‘Marcia Allegra’ was performed on Monday 6th and Friday 10th July 2016 by the Saint Gabriel Band during a marching performance along the streets of Balzan.⁴⁵ All the marches performed on that occasion were marches of renowned local band composers, both past and present. Mine was a rather contrasting addition to the collection, considering that it was coming from someone who was trying to understand the tradition whilst, at the same time, putting etc. practice theoretical knowledge which had been transmitted to him by tutors strongly engaged in this tradition.

History of the Maltese March

This section will focus on aspects of continuity and change in the Maltese march, from its emergence in the mid-nineteenth century to the present. It will discuss individual sections in the light of information obtained from available scores, recordings, and interviews. Each section of a march will be analysed over a stretch of time in order to see more clearly aspects that resisted change or were more prone to change over the years. Each period covers a span of approximately thirty years and refers to composers popular at that period. Table 3.2 includes

⁴⁵ Balzan is a small locality situated in the centre of Malta. It is characterised mostly by old houses, a church and several bars and shops surrounding it. Balzan also has a second band club known as *Socjetà Filarmonika Maria Annunzjata*, which is much older than Saint Gabriel Band Club (1890).

the eight periods that will be covered in this section. It is important to note that the dates indicated after each composer refer solely to the birth and death of each composer.⁴⁶

Renowned Band Composers Active in Malta

		Giuseppe Micallef
Period 1	1860-1890	Tommaso Galea
		Francesco Zammit (1834-1898) ⁴⁷
		Vincenzo Camilleri (1821-1897)
		Giuseppe W. Malfiggiani (1828-1893) ⁴⁸
		Gaetano Grech (1855-1933)
		Antonio Miruzzi (1867-1944)
Period 2	1890-1900	Angelo Mellili (1856-1913)
		Emanuele Bartoli (1852-1933)
		Luigi Fenech (priest) (1837-1905)
		Carmelo Zammit (1850-1919) ⁴⁹

⁴⁶ The missing dates of several band composers were intentionally left out since the dates presented by Maltese authors in several publications did not match.

⁴⁷ In 1864, Francesco Zammit, was the conductor of the *La Filarmonica Del Żurricco*.

⁴⁸ Castagna (1888: 243) notes that Giuseppe W. Malfiggiani conducted several military bands in Malta.

⁴⁹ Carmelo Zammit was one of the band march composers who transformed an orchestra into a wind band as was done at Żurrieq in 1865.

		Antonio Micallef (1875-1940)
		Giovanni Giumarra ⁵⁰
		Salvatore Mallia (1872-1937)
Period 3	1900-1920	Carmelo Abela Scolaro
		Raffaele Ricci ⁵¹
		Lorenzo Gatt (1856-1926) ⁵²
		Aurelio Doncich ⁵³
		Ferdinando Camilleri (1859-1942)
		Ettore Mattioli ⁵⁴
		Cardenio Botti (1890-1973)
Period 4	1920-1940	Adeodato Gatt (1898-1966)
		Vincenzo Ciappara (1890-1979) (part 1)
		Francesco Gobet ⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Sicilian composer and conductor

⁵¹ Raffaele Ricci, who was not of Maltese descent, he was an active bandmaster and composer in Malta at Saint Helen and Duke of Connaught's Own Birkirkara, among others.

⁵² Lorenzo Gatt (1856-1926), was a musician and composer at the Mdina Cathedral. In 1888 he became bandmaster of *Banda L'Isle Adam* in Rabat. Apart from writing sacred music compositions, he composed symphonies, hymns and band marches.

⁵³ Aurelio Doncich from Trieste directed the band of Acireale between 1899 and 1908 and, occasionally, the orchestra of the Teatro Bellini of Catania. According to Hohenzollern Doncich, he was a 'very capable conductor' (Bonello 2014). Doncich produced numerous band compositions and was popular as a bandmaster at the *King's Own* Valletta.

⁵⁴ Ettore Mattioli was born in Emilia-Romagna (Italy). Mattioli was a composer, music teacher and conductor of bands in Frosinone (Central Italy), Pienza (a town in the province of Siena) and Palestrina (old city in Italy).

⁵⁵ Francesco Gobet, composer and bandmaster, is popular for the march *Ommaggio alla King's Own* for the King's Own band in Valletta.

		Angelo Pullicino (1904-1979) (part 1)
		Francesco Bugeja (1899-1973) ⁵⁶
		Vincenzo Ciappara (part 2)
Period 5	1940-1960	Emanuele Mifsud
		Joseph Azzopardi (1908-1970s)
		Willie Attard (1901-1970) ⁵⁷
		Carmel Sacco (1921-1984)
		Hector H. Dalli (1914-1980)
		Emanuel Bugeja (1923-2009)
		Joseph Maria Bilocca (1914-1996)
Period 6	1960-1990	Luigi Bongailas (1910-1985)
		Joseph Abela Scolaro (1910-1979)
		Angelo Pullicino (part 2)
		Anthony Aquilina (1906-1985)

⁵⁶ Francesco Bugeja (1899-1973) was a bandmaster and composer who started his musical career with the Queen Victoria Band of Żurrieq and later became a member of the Royal Malta Artillery.

⁵⁷ Popular band marches by Willie Attard include 'Il-Famuża Koppla' (1956) and 'Innu Març San Gejtanu' (1947).

		Andrew Coleiro (b. 1945)
		Archibald Mizzi (b. 1952)
		Alfred Farrugia (b. 1960)
Period 7	1990-2010	David Agius (b. 1971)
		Raymond Sciberras (b. 1962)
		Anthony Camilleri (b. 1965)
		John Theuma (b. 1933) ⁵⁸
		Gordon Baldachino (b. 1977)
Period 8	2010-Present	Etienne Spiteri (b. 1978)
	day	Herman Farrugia Frantz (b. 1974)
		Jonathan Abela (b. 1972)

Table 3.2: Eight periods in the history of Maltese marches

Introduction

For the introduction some composers employed a fanfare (with four, eight or sixteen bars), which is sometimes performed in a *marcato* style, with its dynamics marked as *forte*. Since band composers of the first period (1860-1890) had already composed band marches, those of the second period (1890-1900) made use of their previous musical ideas while introducing new ones. Band composers during this period were mostly children of the composers of the first generation and Italian band composers and directors. These Italian *maestri* started to adopt band arrangements which existed in Italy and which later local band composers started to adopt.

⁵⁸ John Theuma, a composer, famous for his march called ‘Don Quixote’, which was also performed in Canada and Australia.

In fact, most of the repertoire during this period consisted mainly of arrangements by these Italian *maestri* (Ciantar 2013: 6).⁵⁹

After the 1890s, composers started to introduce new trends in local marches. For instance, local marches composed at that time sounded like adaptations of local popular dance tunes. One could even feel a sense of ambiguity about whether these were actually dances or marches. The dance character (which was of strong interest to the first generation of composers) remained prominent in marches composed between 1890 and 1900. One such example is a nineteenth century march composed by Indri Borg, mentioned in Chapter one, called ‘Il-Polka tal-Għasfur’ (The Bird’s Polka).⁶⁰

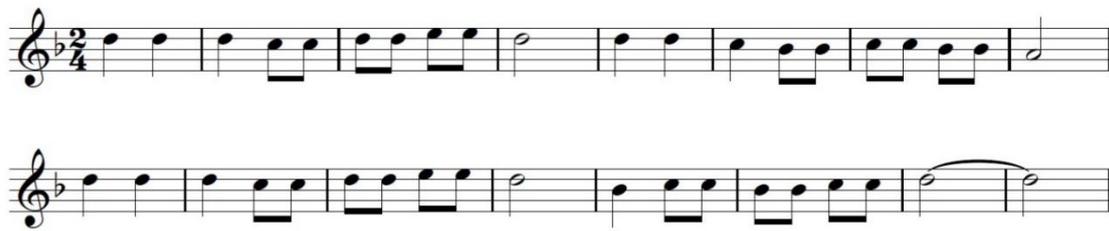
After the 1900s (mainly the period 1900 to 1920) the Maltese march experienced a new development. The introduction became more melodious.⁶¹ Between 1940 and 1960 most of the titles given to local marches were mostly pro-British, as for example ‘Brittania’ by Manuel Bugeja; however, the musical idiom was strongly Italian with emphasis on catchy melodies throughout. Between 1960 and 1980, some band composers, such as Joseph Azzopardi and Anthony Aquilina, introduced exotic influences in their marches; such influence became evident from the introduction of the march. Joseph Azzopardi’s march, called ‘Chinese Rose’, is a case in point (see Example 3.5). Joseph Azzopardi was a master of Maltese marches. Azzopardi’s marches are still performed by most bands in Malta and it is difficult not to

⁵⁹ Such composers included Paolo Miruzzi, Antonio Miruzzi (1867-1944), nephew of Paolo Miruzzi, Angelo Mellili, Giovanni Giumarra and Orlando Crescimanno (1861-1923).

⁶⁰ A clarinet part of this early composition is found at the De Rohan Band Club in Żebbuġ.

⁶¹ This characteristic could also be seen in several processional marches composed during the same period, such as ‘San Michele: Marcia Religiosa Processionale’ composed in 1921 by Salvatore Mallia (1872-1937). Mallia started his musical career as a euphonium player with the Royal Malta Artillery and during his life he served as a musical director at various band clubs. He served as a musical director of the Queen Victoria band of Żurrieq, L’Isle Adam of Rabat Malta, Union Band of Luqa, Saint Philip’s Band of Żebbuġ, Vilhena band of Floriana and Saint Nicholas Band Club of Siggiewi.

recognise his compositional style.⁶² Indeed, this is evident from the very first notes of the introduction.



Example 3.5: Introduction to ‘Chinese Rose’ by Joseph Azzopardi
(my transcription)

As already noticed in chapter two, Anthony Aquilina was another leading composer of local marches who distinguished himself between 1960 and 1990. His work had flavours of the Spanish *paso doble*, as one notes from the very beginning of his marches. In one of his marches, called ‘Il-Božen’, he introduces a twelve-bar fanfare reminiscent of the fanfares heard in the Spanish arena during a corrida (see Example 3.6). Such fanfares are then echoed from time to time during the march.



Example 3.6: Introduction to the march ‘Il-Božen’ by Anthony Aquilina
(my transcription)

Between the years 1990 and 2010 most composers of Maltese marches started to explore a rather more elaborate rhythmic content in their marches. For instance, ‘The Centenary March’ by Ray Sciberras and ‘Il-Tango Alla Marcia’ [sic] by Andrew Coleiro both indicate this

⁶² Some of Joseph Azzopardi’s band marches include: ‘Christopher Columbus’, ‘Coronation’, ‘The Golden Eagle’, ‘Corazon Gitano’, ‘El Torero’, ‘Lisbona’, ‘Victory in Arena’, ‘Rio Grande’, ‘Rio de Janiero’, ‘New York City’, ‘Ay Talavera’, ‘P.I.U In Chunking’, ‘Cairo’, ‘Napoli’, ‘O Bella Spagna’, ‘Persian Desert’, ‘Arabian Nights’, ‘Adios Muchacos’, ‘Spanish Rose’, ‘Fiori e Spade’, ‘Lights of Naples’, ‘Ta’ Bajri’ and ‘Toledo’.

tendency (see Examples 3.7a and 3.8a). The rather busy rhythmic introduction in both marches adds a greater sense of anticipation to the melody which follows in the first strain – something which does not fail to materialise (see Examples 3.7b and 3.8b).

First and Third Strains

Generally, the first projection of the main melody of the march is expressed in the first strain. It may also be noticed that, generally, local composers employ a contrast between the first and second part of the first strain by marking the first part soft and the second part loud.

The earliest marches were short, not exceeding a minute or so. They were generally composed in simple duple time and shaped in binary form. For instance, the marches by Vincenzo Camilleri are an example of such marches.⁶³ During the year 1849, Camilleri worked with the regiment of the *Royal Malta Fencible* as a drummer.⁶⁴ In May 1850, he joined the navy as a musician and later on was promoted to *klarinetista di concerto* (concert clarinetist). He ended his military service in 1859 in the rank of corporal. Following his military service, he continued his musical career with local Maltese bands, composing and conducting. At this time, one notes that most first strains contained a *cantabile* melody. Marches during this period became longer than the ones in the previous period. The introduction was in itself the first strain.

Other Maltese marches composed between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century were influenced by marches of the famous American conductor and composer John Philip Sousa (1854-1932). The contact with Sousa's marches was possible

⁶³ It is important to note Vincenzo Camilleri married Marija Grazzja Fava and had five children: Enrico, Ferdinando, Gavino, Emmanuele and Lucia. The three boys became composers and they also contributed to the Maltese wind band tradition. The Camilleri dynasty contributed a lot to the musical scene in Malta. For further readings see <http://www.freewebs.com/storja/iddinastijacamilleri.htm>

⁶⁴ Several band composers and directors in Malta gained experience with the Royal Malta Fencible Artillery.

through the presence of military bands in Malta playing his marches as well as local musicians playing in military bands. Although I found no written sources indicating that John Philip Sousa had an impact on Maltese marches, I noticed through interviews, observations and musical analysis that during this period, several Maltese band composers were modelling their compositions on Sousa's marches (see Table 3.3 for the layout of a Sousa march).⁶⁵ Evidence that corroborates similarities between Sousa's style and the style of early Maltese marches may be noticed in the second strain, in which the melody started to be shared by the baritones.

Introduction	Usually unison, careful attention to brass balance
First Strain	Typically serves as a type of <i>scherzo</i> , light and playful, with careful consideration to grace notes and ornamentation
Second Strain	More dramatic, to contrast with the <i>scherzo</i> -like first strain, but often contrasted with another <i>scherzo</i> idea
Trio (aria)	<i>Cantabile</i> , but careful, not to let melody influence the crisp style of accompaniment
Break Strain	Most harmonically inventive section, <i>marcato</i> throughout, sometimes called a 'dogfight' because the break strain often has two melodies working against one another, developing several tonal areas
Grandioso (aria)	Performed softly and <i>cantabile</i> – allows the double reeds to play out a bit here for a colour contrast
Break Strain	Same as before but with a <i>crescendo</i> into final <i>grandioso</i>

⁶⁵ The table is reproduced from Thompson 2006.

Grandioso No longer an *aria*, brass *marcato* throughout, carefully balanced counter-melodies on trombones and euphoniums

Table 3.3: The structure of a Sousa march (Thompson 2006)

For instance, Ferdinando Camilleri (1859-1942), a prolific Maltese bandmaster and composer, composed marches quite similar to Sousa's marches.⁶⁶ Like Ferdinando Camilleri, Salvatore Mallia also experimented with the Maltese march in the way he defined the three strains. His experience with the RMA (Royal Malta Artillery) led him to compose most of his band marches with a militaristic character. For instance, his 'San Michele', which was composed in the early twentieth century, is influenced by the sounds of John Philip Sousa. Its first strain matches well with the above description provided by Thompson.

Between 1920 and 1940 Malta went through a cultural struggle between those who were pro-British and others who were pro-Italian. The privileged classes of Maltese society wanted to promote the Italian culture in Malta (Douglas 2004: 73). This also raised the question of which language was to be taught in Maltese schools, whether English or Italian. A prominent Italian *maestro* residing in Malta during this period was Cardenio Botti. Eventually, Botti was deported from Malta by the British for his links with Fascist Italy. He was accused of spying for the Italians. As a bandmaster, Botti was offered accommodation at the La Valette Band Club in Valletta, the same band club where he served as bandmaster for twelve years, from 1923 till 1935. During his stay in Malta, he was instrumental in expanding the band both in terms of number of bandmen as well as in aspects of instrumentation and concert repertoire.

During the 1920s, several band composers residing in Malta, including Botti, composed marches in the Italian march style, with a cantabile melody which was easy to memorise. Most

⁶⁶ Ferdinando Camilleri, the son of Vincenzo Camilleri, started to play the flute and the violin at a very young age. He continued to study harmony with his brother Enrico Camilleri (1846-1929) and composed numerous marches for Maltese bands.

of the Italian composers living in Malta used a basic structure of relationship between the Dominant and Tonic harmony in their marches. This harmonic relationship and their insistence on it is evident, for instance, in marches such as ‘Monte Carmelo’, composed in the 1920s by Cardenio Botti (see Example 3.10). From 1940 to 1960 most band marches were strongly influenced by the Italian style. An informant explained to me that since the socio-political relations of the Maltese with the British were not good, some Maltese composers produced marches in the Italian style as an expression of ‘revenge’ or ‘dissociation’. Nevertheless, other local composers were still very pro-British, as one can observe in march titles such as ‘Saint Vincent’, ‘Thistle’, and ‘Victory March’, all composed by Vincenzo Ciappara, known locally as *ir-Re tal-Marċi* (The King of Marches). Other marches with a pro-British title included ‘Coronation’ by Joseph Azzopardi and ‘Victory’ by Hector Dalli.

It is worth noting that the Maltese composer Vincenzo Ciappara is considered by most of the interviewees as the one who introduced a new style of local marches. Ciappara is considered as the one who composed marches that sound ‘typically’ Maltese. Other interviewees suggested that Ciappara’s compositions reflected a high level of harmony and instrumentation. Maltese band composers whom I interviewed claimed that Ciappara was a highly admired band march composer by most Maltese and idolised by local march composers of that time for his skilful compositions, including concert pieces for band. Several informants explained that during the time of Ciappara, several band composers used to take their own newly-composed band marches to him so that he would correct and improve their work. Others claimed that there were instances where such compositions were so badly composed that Ciappara himself used to recompose the entire march. This might partly explain why some Maltese band marches sound very much as imitating Ciappara’s style. Other band aficionados remarked that Ciappara used to ask people commissioning a march from him to whistle a melody for him that he would later develop into a march. In itself, this could have given a

complex melodic content. Tango music generally starts in a minor mode so as to convey the serious and elegant character of the dance. The melodies grow and flourish through the use of chromatic passages.

Bass Passage

As observed earlier, the bass passage is found in the second strain. This section contrasts nicely with the previous one by employing a pompous melody on the low brass. The bass passage follows the first strain and generally employs tenor saxophones, baritone saxophones, trombones, baritones and tubas, which are also accompanied by other instruments that are more associated with the generation of the melody, such as clarinets and trumpets. The general effect of the bass passage is usually one of expectation for the next strain.

Early composers of known Maltese marches did not employ a bass passage. This is evident in the marches of band composers such as Ferdinando Camilleri in the early twentieth century. The technical improvement of brass instruments made it possible for several Maltese band composers to introduce and expand the bass passage in their marches. This occurred in the late 1910s and the beginning of the 1920s. The inclusion of the bass passage in Maltese band marches was very much inspired by the military marches of John Philip Sousa. It is worth noting the fact that a good number of Maltese band composers during this period were also serving as musicians or bandmasters with the *Royal Malta Artillery* band and therefore they had a strong exposure to Sousa's marches

An example of Sousa's influence on Maltese *festa* marches is the march 'The Sweet Vision' by Salvatore Mallia, composed in 1923. The bass passage, marked with *fortissimo* and *marcato* (as should be played by the musician), is composed of eight bars which are then repeated (see Example 3.14).



Example 3.14: The bass passage in the band march ‘The Sweet Vision’
by Salvatore Mallia (1923)⁶⁷

Later on, Adeodato Gatt (between 1920 and 1940) maintained the practice of including a bass passage in his marches. In Gatt’s band march ‘Queen Victoria’, for instance, composed in 1931, one notes that the bass passage consists of sixteen bars instead of eight and is marked with *fortissimo* and *marcato* (see Example 3.15). This shows that the bass passage started to gain more prominence, mainly by extending the number of bars. Additionally, this example highlights the use of chromaticism.



Example 3.15: The bass passage in the band march ‘Queen Victoria’
by Adeodato Gatt (1931)⁶⁸

Between 1940 and 1960, Vincenzo Ciappara introduced a new trend when composing the bass passage. He started to vary the dynamics of bass passages from *fortissimo* and *marcato*

⁶⁷ Courtesy of Queen Victoria Band Club of Żurrieq

⁶⁸ Ibid.

to *pianissimo* and *legato*, thus the melody became more *cantabile* and less military in character, a technique also used by Sousa. This is highlighted in the band march ‘Victory’, composed at the beginning of the 1940s (see Example 3.16). It was imitated by local composers in the 1950s and 60s, such as in the marches by Luigi Bongailas.



Example 3.17: Extract from the bass passage from ‘Standard of Victory’ by Angelo

Pullicino⁶⁹

The image shows a musical score for Example 3.17. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has two staves: Flute/Piccolo (top) and Euphoniums (bottom). The second system has two staves: Fl. (top) and Euph. (bottom). The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 2/4. The music features a complex bass line with many accidentals and dynamic markings like accents (>) and slurs. The Flute/Piccolo part has a melodic line with many notes and slurs. The Euphoniums part has a more rhythmic, bass-oriented line. The Fl. and Euph. parts in the second system are marked with 'etc.' at the end.

Example 3.18: Extract from the bass passage from ‘Melita’ by Anthony Aquilina (my transcription)

In the late 1970s, Emanuel Bugeja extended the bass passage to thirty-two bars, mainly by making the trumpets reiterate the material initially played by the low brass. The fact that he was a prolific bass tuba player may have made it more possible for him to venture into the creation of extended bass passages. This is notable in his march called ‘L-Ewwel Banda’. Example 3.19a highlights the bass passage whilst Example 3.19b shows the same melody as rendered by the trumpets.

The image shows a musical score for Example 3.18. It consists of two staves of music in bass clef. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 2/4. The music is a bass passage with a melodic line. The first staff has a melodic line with a slur over the last two notes. The second staff continues the melodic line and ends with a rest and 'etc.'.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Example 3.21: ‘Polka – Marcia alla Polka per Banda’ by Francesco Zammit

composed in 1865.⁷²

The trios found in the marches of Vincenzo Ciappara, Luigi Bongailas, Angelo Pullicino and Anthony Aquilina, that is, in the period 1940 to 1990, vary considerably from the earlier trios of, let’s say, Vincenzo Camilleri and Francesco Zammit (see Examples 3.24, 3.25, 3.26, 3.27). The trio themes employed by Ciappara, Bongailas, Pullicino, and Aquilina are more colourful when compared to those composed earlier, mainly due to their use of chromaticism and intriguing rhythmic content. The overall mood of these trios has also become livelier, suiting more the spirit of the Maltese *festa*, which through the years has continued to grow and gain more centrality in the cultural life of the Maltese.

One should also point out at this stage that in Aquilina’s marches the bass accompaniment became more interesting, seeking to add an element of burlesque to Maltese marches (see Example 3.28). Such bass accompaniment was also extended to trio sections. This was consequently imitated by other band composers during the time of Anthony Aquilina and also later.

⁷² Courtesy of Mauro Farrugia

From the analysis presented in this chapter, it transpired that most band marches imitated each other in style and structure, with particular features profusely employed within the same period as composers imitated each other's style and ideas. The structure of the Maltese march responded to several socio-cultural and political events. The impact of British military bands parading in Maltese towns and villages introduced Sousa's marching style to local audiences and, eventually, this was sometimes imitated by local composers. Moreover, the political struggle between pro-British and pro-Italian Maltese was also a leading factor that directed composers of Maltese marches to explore new avenues and, sometimes, opt for one compositional technique rather than another. After the Second World War one notes local composers experimenting with new musical ideas borrowed from foreign lands.⁷³ Also, the accessibility of popular foreign songs had an impact on the composition of Maltese marches, with new musical ideas and compositional techniques shaping their style. By presenting a diachronic account of how the different sections of Maltese marches responded to change over the years, one could appreciate the fact that in any instance the aim of Maltese march composers was that of pleasing their audiences and fulfilling the expectations of listeners who were also the consumers of the same music.

⁷³ This informant continued to argue that there were instances when certain composers literally plagiarised a whole band march which they had brought with them or received from abroad.

Chapter 4

Maltese Partisan Politics, Bands and Music

Music plays an important role in politics (Berger 2014: 215). Popular music, more specifically, is very effective in political propaganda as most political histories of the world show. It is evident that propagandists often use popular music in its various forms in electoral campaigns to shape the perception of the masses, as well as to draw sympathy and political attention (Ciantar 2016: 1-2). Maltese pop singers, for instance, have played an important role over the years, especially during local General Elections campaigns. In this regard, Ciantar (ibid.: 9) notes that the presence or absence of renowned local pop-singers in these campaigns had several meanings amongst the Maltese and even triggered huge political controversies and debates. Such debates and controversies are in themselves a way of musical participation. This is especially true if one considers Ruth Finnegan's (2013: 123) assertion that 'people participate in music in multifarious ways in the different roles they take, the occasion, or their own histories'.

This chapter aims to shed light on how Maltese wind bands and band clubs have interrelated with local political parties and, by implication, how band music has responded to such links. This will be done mainly by discussing examples of band clubs which were and, in some cases, still are, even if subtly, involved in local partisan politics. This chapter will scrutinise the nature of this interrelationship in terms of continuity and change by asking questions such as: To what extent are local band clubs linked to local political parties? In what ways has the music of these bands responded or still responds to such allegiances? Who had or still has an interest to maintain such ties?

In an attempt to answer these questions, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will present examples from Maltese political history in which wind bands played

a role. Notable examples of band clubs that have participated in political activities over the years will be discussed. The second section will focus on wind bands affiliated to Malta's two main political parties, that is, the *Partit Laburista* (Malta Labour Party, hereafter referred to as the MLP), a center-left social democratic party, and the *Partit Nazzjonalista* (Nationalist Party, hereafter referred to as the PN), a center-right Christian democratic party.⁷⁴ This section will show how these two politically distinct bands were used, maintained or, more recently, even dismantled. The third section deals directly with partisan politics during Maltese village feasts and how wind bands mix political affiliations with communal celebrations.

Bands and Politics in Malta

Frendo (1991: 123) refers to band clubs as a 'useful side-window from which to observe political allegiances at the popular level'. This proves even further that politics is embedded in the band club's everyday life. Political figures of stature in Malta's political history have led Maltese band clubs for years and this has sometimes led one band club to become associated with one political party or the other (Fenech 2008: 19). For instance, the former Labour Prime Minister Dom Mintoff (1916-2012) served for more than sixty years as President of Saint George Band Club of Cospicua while from the Nationalist camp former Prime Minister George Borg Olivier (1911-1980) served as President of the La Valette Band Club of Valletta for thirty years. Nowadays certain band club statutes bar political figures from becoming members of the central committee. For instance, one notes that the general statute of the Saint Anne Band Club of Marsascala does not allow the club premises to be used for political activities. The statute also specifies that club members are barred from openly expressing political views in

⁷⁴ Originally, it was known as the *Workers' Party*, founded in 1921. Throughout this chapter the three names given to the party are used interchangeably.

the club and thus no political posters, leaflets or other political material can be exhibited inside the club.

Apart from discussing things related to the *festa*, members of the club also meet to ‘feel a sense of belonging within a society that their families might have been affiliated with for years’ as well as ‘to discuss national politics’ (Ciantar 2013: 6). Even if the statutes bar the open political discussion of local partisan politics some of these club members still consider the *kazin* as another venue where politics may be debated informally and secretly amongst club members. This shows how politics is part and parcel of a band club’s environment.

Between the end of the nineteenth and the third decade of the twentieth century several band clubs in Malta supported political activities and demonstrations (Ellul Galea 1987: 62). For instance, in 1880, the Pinto Band Club of Qormi took part in a demonstration in support of the Maltese politician Francesco Decesare.⁷⁵ This took place near his farm. The following week he was invited as a guest of honour, to an activity being held at the same band club (Peresso 1997: 78). Also, in 1884, the same club invited the elected members of the national council from the anti-reformist (later referred to as PN) party, at that time led by Fortunato Mizzi (1844-1905), to its premises.⁷⁶ During the same period, one notes the participation of ten band clubs in a demonstration in Floriana following the 1888 victory of the anti-reform party to greet the newly appointed councillors of the government (ibid: 78).⁷⁷ These are instances where Maltese bands ended up participating in political activities.

⁷⁵ Francesco Decesare was an elected member in the council of government on behalf of the Reform Party, led by Maltese politician Sigismondo Savona.

⁷⁶ At this stage it is important to note that the present *Partit Nazzjonalista* (Nationalist Party) goes back to 1883, when it was referred to as *Partito Anti-Riformista* (Anti-Reform Party). Later, in 1903, it was renamed *Partito Nazionale* (National Party). In 1921, Enrico Mizzi came up with the *Democratic Nationalist Party*, aiming to keep up the ideals of the old party. It was in 1926 that the party became known as the PN. However, all through this chapter, *Anti-Reform Party*, *National Party*, *Democratic Nationalist Party* and *Nationalist Party* all refer to the same political party.

⁷⁷ The friction between band clubs was not always based on political disagreement. There were times when this was due to religious conflicts. For instance when the new band club was established in Qormi,

The period after World War I (1914-1918) led to the riots of the 7th of June 1919, known as the riots of the Sette Giugno. These riots strengthened several unions. At this time, one notes the emergence of new political parties such as *Il-Partit tal-Haddiema* (The Workers' Movement). The *Camera del Lavoro* (The Work Chamber) refers to a union set up with the aim of uniting people supporting the Workers' Party. Band clubs and other organisations were invited to send delegates to the Party's foundation meeting which was held on 15th March 1921; this coincided with the 30th anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (Chircop 1991: 7-8).⁷⁸ On the 24th September 1921 the Workers' Party organised the first meeting in which one notes the participation of the Saint Michael Band Club of Żabbar (Ellul Galea 1987: 63). This same band club was used by the Worker's Party for other political activities.

More examples of the early relationship between band clubs and local politics include band participation in political conferences held at the same clubs. For instance, in April 1921, the De Rohan band club of Żebbuġ invited Prof. Pier Frendo and Mikielang Borg, leaders of the *Camera del Lavoro*, to hold a political conference in their club (ibid: 15). Also, on the 24th of September of the same year, fifteen Maltese band clubs participated in a public political conference leading to the formation of the Workers' Party. Furthermore, several Maltese band clubs affiliated to the Workers' Party helped this party win the General Elections of 1921 (Azzopardi 1984: 131). Several delegates represented band clubs, which included the King's Own (Valletta), Vilhena (Floriana), De Rohan (Żebbuġ) and Saint Gaetan (Hamrun).

the relationship between the 'old' and the 'new' band clubs was not at all good (Grima 1994: 123). The titular feast procurator seemed to prefer the new band as it supported the bishop's view in the marriage legacies affair. The new band club was not set up because of political disagreement but due to religious disagreements within the same club (ibid: 124).

⁷⁸ The *Rerum Novarum* ('of Revolutionary Change') or Rights and Duties of Capital and Labour, was an encyclical issued by Pop Leo XIII on 15th May 1891 to address the conditions of the working classes.

The participation of bands in street demonstrations and mass political activities during the 1920s is worth noting.⁷⁹ For instance, in 1922 the De Paule band of Paola participated in a mass meeting during which this band club declared; ‘pur avendo principii Laboristi e per continuando a sostenere il Partito del Lavoro’ (trans. to have Labour principles and to continue supporting the workers’ party). In fact, documents show that the same band club collected funds for the Workers’ Party (Ellul Galea 1998: 113). Furthermore, during an extraordinary general meeting, one of the active members stated that each member of the band club could not support any political party other than the *Camera del Lavoro* (ibid: 113). In contrast to all this, one notes a 1924 declaration by the same band club in which it was stated that it was an apolitical institution and thus members should not participate in partisan politics. This U-turn might have occurred so that the members of the club would not lose that sense of unity due to political affiliations.

Politico-religious conflicts in Malta emerged in the 1930s, when Lord Strickland (1861-1940) was Prime Minister, and later in the 1960s with Dom Mintoff’s MLP. At the beginning of the 1930s, the continuous conflict between the MLP and the Catholic Church authorities in Malta also had an impact on band clubs. Indeed, a pastoral letter issued on May 1st 1930 by the Bishops prohibited people from supporting the Constitutional or Labour Party.⁸⁰ An example of the effects of this pastoral letter is the case of Żejtun Band Club (see Picture 4.2). This club was known as leaning towards the MLP. At the time, the church authorities banned MLP supporters from receiving absolution in the sacrament of penance. Because of this, the number

⁷⁹ It is important to highlight the dual conflict that arose after the 1920s, with the Nationalists supporting the Italian identity of Malta and the Imperialists proclaiming loyalty to the British crown. This was evident in several band clubs – where bandsmen from the same club disagreed with one another. For instance the two Valletta bands, Kings Own and La Valette, took part in an international contest which was organised in Como, Italy in 1927 (Farrugia 2013: 54). While staying in Como, several bandsmen described the La Valette as an Italian Band and the King’s Own as a British Imperialist band (ibid: 54).

⁸⁰ The pastoral letter instructed the electorate to vote for candidates who would guarantee the religious interests of Maltese Catholics (Chircop 1991: 89).

The Workers' Home, changed its name in September 1933. In fact, Figure 4.2 shows the cover of the *Ctieb tal Mesati* (book of fees), that highlights the political turmoil (it is the cover of the same book shown in Figure 4.1). Here, one should note the change from the name *Partit Tal-Haddiema* (1927-1933) to *Żejtun Band Club* (1934-1947). According to an informant, this was only a change in name as it did not change Maltese people's perception of Żejtun Band Club - they still identify it with the MLP.⁸³

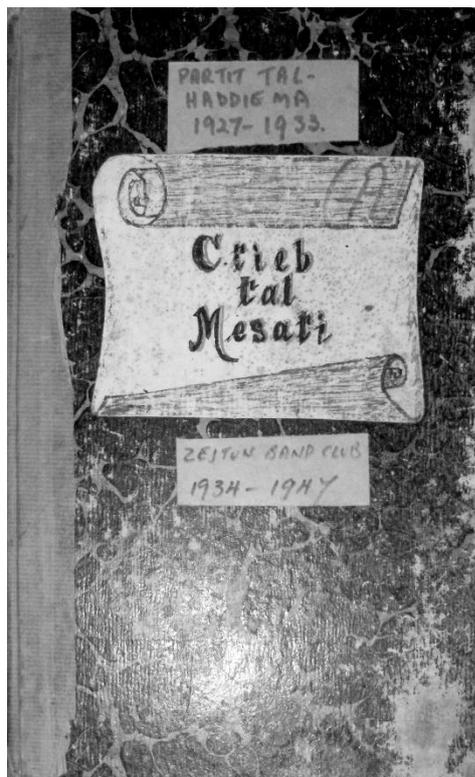


Figure 4.2: The Fees Book showing the change from *Partit tal-Haddiema* to *Żejtun Band Club*.⁸⁴

⁸³ At this stage, it is important to note that during an Extraordinary General Conference held in November 2008, it was decided that the Party's official name would be *Partit Laburista* (PL) instead of its former name *Malta Labour Party* (MLP). This explains the use of MLP instead of PL in some of the quotes cited in this chapter.

⁸⁴ Courtesy of Żejtun Band Club

Following the end of World War II, Maltese band clubs reopened their doors and started regaining popular appeal, mainly through their involvement in public celebrations. One of the first cases of such re-involvement is that of the 8th May 1945, when the King's Own band of Valletta took part in a huge celebration to mark the end of World War II. On that occasion, the King's Own Band played Vincenzo Ciappara's 'Victory' march (Portelli 1997: 22). On the same occasion, the Queen's Own Band Club of Senglea performed the French national anthem, *La Marseillaise* to express their appreciation of French support during the war (Pavia and Degiorgio 1997: 71).

The Party's Band

Both the PN and the MLP have had their party band. Indeed, the band of the MLP is still active. It is of utmost importance to highlight the origins of the parties' bands and to trace their history. Most of the following information was given to me personally by past active bandmasters and politicians; I also obtained documented information.

In 1928, one notes the setting up of the MLP band, which was known as the *Labour Jazz Band*. This ensemble consisted of only fifteen band musicians all coming from the Beland Band Club of Żejtun (see Figure 4.3). The band functioned as the MLP's band between 1928 and 1933 (see Pictures 10.1 and 10.2).



Figure 4.3: The *Labour Jazz Band (Żejtun)* in 1928.⁸⁵

Throughout its existence, the Labour Jazz Band participated in several political meetings, street demonstrations and other activities held by the Workers' Party. However, the same band was also active in other musical activities such as wedding receptions, theatrical shows, and entertainment events in dance balls. The band's repertoire varied from band marches, which served for political propaganda, to various arrangements of traditional popular Maltese tunes, *waltzes* and *foxtrots*.

An instance of a band march which served as political propaganda during this period was 'Pappa Neric', composed at the beginning of the 1930s. This composition, which remains anonymous, is intended to pass on a political message to the then Prime Minister and leader of

⁸⁵ Courtesy of Żejtun Band Club

the PN, Enrico Mizzi (1885-1950).⁸⁶ The word *pappa* was used by children to refer to food and found its place in the Maltese proverb ‘l-ewwel il-pappa mbaġħad l-umpappa’, which Aquilina (1998: 1032) explains as ‘one must work to earn one’s living and only then indulge in some hobby’. The message which this band march intended to pass on was that the Prime Minister should prioritise the Maltese people’s daily living.

The hymn of the MLP was composed by the Maltese composer Giuseppe Pace and its lyrics were written by the Maltese author Ġużè Ellul Mercer in 1926, only six years after it was founded. It was premiered on the 1st of May 1930 at the Saint George Theatre in Cospicua. Soon after World War II, Maltese composer Hector Dalli produced a new hymn based on the original hymn by Pace. It is still being performed up to the present day. It gives the impression of celebrating a victory after a revolution. It has a victorious and joyfuletc. melody which reflects the struggle of workers to see their manual work become more appreciated. Its melody is simple and goes hand in hand with the lifestyle of workers who are quite happy with their achievements. The lyrics are in Maltese which adds a more sense of patriotism to the same hymn.

The Maltese band march ‘Victory’ by Hector Dalli is another example of a band composition with a political message (see Example 4.3). It was composed following the MLP electoral victory in 1947. This march was popularly referred to as ‘twenty-four against four’ because in the general election of 1947, the MLP won twenty-four seats whereas the PN managed only four. This march was also accompanied by words that people sang while celebrating this victory. This band march is still performed during band parades, particularly in Żejtun, however, different words are used. This is a clear indication of continuity as this

⁸⁶ Several band compositions were not signed since according to an informant revealing one’s identity was risky because of the political tension.

band march was first used in a political context and now it is played during a village *fešta* with no political connotations.

The MLP band started to perform in different locations around Malta. After 1933, the MLP band played in Ħamrun (where it became known as the *Isouard Labour Band*). In the 1940s, everything had to stop, including the activities of the MLP band, due to World War II.⁸⁷ During the war one notes the setting up of the dockyard band. The bandsmen in the *Banda tad-dockyard* (The Dockyard's Band) were generally MLP activists directed by the Maltese bandmaster Carmelo Sacco (1921-1984) until 1955. An elderly informant told me that the year 1954 was the only post-war year where the MLP band did not perform in public due to bickering within the party.⁸⁸ As from 1955, the MLP band started to meet at the Żabbar MLP Club, with most of the bandsmen coming from the Saint Michael Band Club of the same village. This is another example of the strong link that existed between village bands and political parties.

Later on, mainly during the 1970s, the MLP band started to hold its rehearsals at the *Freedom Press*, which was built during the 1960s. At that time, the *Freedom Press* served both as a press for the MLP as well as its headquarters. This place was also used by the party's band until the early 1980s when the party moved its headquarters to the historical fortifications known as the *Maċina*, in the harbour city of Senglea.

Several informants told me that the idea of having a party band was liked by many MLP activists, as was evident during the 1970s. During this period, when the MLP was in government, one notes the existence of four MLP bands performing in different localities

⁸⁷ Several informants disagreed with the dates 1932-1934 and suggested the years 1933 and 1934.

⁸⁸ An internal disagreement occurred in 1949 between Mintoff who favoured a hardline policy and Dr Boffa who showed more flexibility towards the British Government.

around Malta. These were: the *Banda Laburista*, which became known as *il-kbira* (that is, the main party band), the *Banda Laburista Għawdxija* (Gozo's Labour band), which was mainly composed of Gozitan bandsmen, the *Banda Laburista Rabat* (the Rabat [Malta] Labour band), which was mainly composed of bandsmen coming from the North of Malta, and the *Banda Għaqda Żgħażaġħ Soċjalisti* (the Young Socialist League Band), which consisted of bandsmen under the age of thirty-five. Various interviewees confirmed that these four bands were eventually dismantled and regrouped into one band which is still functioning. According to the same informants, Labour bandsmen were sometimes asked by politicians or MLP administrators to join one of these bands in return of a favour that they could have received from the party then in government.

During a concert I attended in April 2016 by the MLP band in Valletta, at the Teatru Rjal (Valletta's open theatre), I could note the mixture of 'old' and 'new' trends in this event. The 'old' was pointed out by the compère, when he highlighted the role of several past Maltese historical events and politicians. The 'new' was evident in various ways, such as in the participation of a solo performer playing arrangements of pop music on his electric violin, the appearance of local popular singers singing with the band and the inclusion in the programme of well-known pieces such as arrangements from the musicals *Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *The Phantom of The Opera*, *Les Miserables*, *Sound of Music*, *Mary Poppins*, *Don't Cry for me Argentina* and *Cats*.

On the same note, bandsmen's loyalty to the party's band should be considered as a positive element in the continued existence of the band.⁸⁹ For instance, before the 1st of May

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Bandmasters	Years of Service
Onorato Gauci (1885)	1928-1931
Ġużeppi Maria Dalli (1881-1948)	1931-1933
Ġuże Pace	1934-1939
Hector H. Dalli (1914-1980)	1940-1945

1996 Workers' day demonstration in Valletta the committee of the MLP band made a call for Labour bandsmen to participate in the band parade that had to accompany the demonstration. A middle-aged informant told me that the bandmaster only knew ninety bandsmen that could make it on the occasion; however, hundred and ten musicians turned up for this event so much so that there were not enough musical booklets and, therefore, musicians had to share the music. In 2002, during the 75th anniversary of the MLP band, the then Prime Minister and MLP leader Alfred Sant (b. 1948) said the following on his party's band:

F'dawn l-attivitajiet li qrib annversarju hekk sabiħ tal-banda tal-Partit Laburista ma nistax ma nħarisx lura lejn dawn is-snin twal ta' ħidma u impenn, snin li raw l-istorja tal-Partit Laburista tinkiteb, u tgħaddi minn waqtiet diffiċli imma wkoll waqtiet ta' suċċess. Dawn kienu snin li matulhom il-membri tal-banda taw sehemhom kull meta kien meħtieġ biex mhux biss jipprovdu mużika mill-isbaħ fl-attivitajiet tal-Partit imma permezz tal-mużika innifisha jwasslu l-messaġġ tal-Partit Laburista. Xhieda ta' dan huma l-membri stess li jiffurmawha. Minkejja d-drawwiet ġodda tal-lum u d-diversi forum ta' passatemp li ż-żmien

Carmelo Sacco (1921-1984)	1946-1955
Adeodato Gatt (1898-1966)	1955-1961
Luigi Bongailas (1910-1985)	1961-1965
Joseph Maria Barbara (1916-2004)	1965-1967
Espedito Deguara (1904-1994)	1967-1969
George Martin (1920-1991)	1969-1971
Emanuele Bugeja (1923-2009)	1971-1972
George Martin	1972-1978
Carmelo Schembri (b. 1930)	1978
Hector H. Dalli (1914-1980)	1978-1981
John Joseph Pace (b. 1945)	1981-1990
Ray Azzopardi (b. 1956)	1990-1999
David Agius (b. 1971)	1999 - present

modern joffri, xorta waħda l-banda tal-Partit baqgħet tigbed lejha membri żgħażaġh li bil-preżenza tagħhom stess jiggarrantixxu l-futur tal-Banda tal-Partit għaż-żmien li ġej (Sant 2002).⁹⁰

During these activities, which come close to the Labour Party's band anniversary, I can't fail to remember the long years of work, years that witness the Labour Party's history being written, both the difficult times and the moments of success. These were years when the band's members gave their share every time it was necessary, not only to provide good music in the activities organised by the Party, but also to pass on the Labour Party's message through the music itself. The members themselves that form part of it bear witness to all this. Even though nowadays there are loads of new hobbies that modern times offer, the Party's band still attracts young members who with their very presence guarantee the future of the Party's Band. (my translation)

Turning our attention to the development of the PN's band, we note the use of the La Valette band of Valletta, that performed the PN's hymn in 1932 (L-Istorja tal-Partit Nazzjonalista 1972: 40-43). Maltese composer Josie Mallia Pulvirenti (1896–1964) was the one who composed the *Inno Del Partito Nazionale* (The Anthem of the National Party) in 1932. He was born in Malta and studied music both in Malta under Maltese composer Paolino Vassallo (1856-1923) and in Milan under the supervision of Giulio Bas. Bas was of great influence on this composer as he was the one who introduced him to Fascist beliefs and musical styles often used by Puccini, amongst others (Farrugia 1998: 188). Pulvirenti's hymn's first rehearsal was held at the La Valette Band Club in Valletta and it was performed for the first

⁹⁰ For further reading see the *Programm Vokali u Strumentali fl-Okkażjoni tal-Ftuħ taċ-Ċelebrazzjoni tal-75 Sena tal-Banda*, 2002.

time in public in Valletta during a political meeting.⁹¹ The band which performed this hymn was mainly composed of bandsmen from the La Valette Band Club. This hymn, in the form of a march, is reminiscent of similar marches of the fascists in neighbouring Italy. It has a melodious tune in F minor quite easy to memorise due to its strongly sequential character (see Example 4.4). Its text is in Italian, signifying the pro-Italian stance of the party when Malta was still a colony of the British Crown.

Pa - tria bel - la, noi tuoi fi - gli del Par - ti - to Na - zio - na - le Ti vo
glia - mo da - gli ar - ti - gli - Del Ne - mi - co e da o - gni ma - le etc.

Example 4.4: Excerpt from the *Inno Del Partito Nazionale*

When referring to the politico-religious conflict in the 1960s, Herbert Ganado (1977: 335), who was a Maltese lawyer, president of the Catholic Action movement, editor, politician and author, claimed that Mintoff's conflict with the Catholic Church in Malta was the result of anti-clerical, socialist and, in certain cases, also Marxist ideological influences that were being diffused in Europe and, by extension, in Malta. The 1960s mark a period of great tension between the local Catholic Church authorities and the MLP.⁹² In response to Mintoff's anti-clerical attitude, one notes the formation of a coalition of several political parties as well as church movements to oppose the Labour party and its leader Dom Mintoff (Ganado 1977: 358). The coalition included amongst others *The Christian Workers Party* of Toni Pellegrini, a former secretary general of the MLP, the *M.U.S.E.U.M.* (a Catholic Doctrine Society), other

⁹¹ For further reading see *L-Istorja Tal-Partit Nazzjonalista* (1972) pg 41

⁹² The church was determined to keep Mintoff out of power due to his socialist and secularist ideas (Vassallo 1977: 238).

lay religious groups, as well as *The Christian Democrats* and the Nationalist Party. All these urged the Maltese electorate to vote only for those parties which were in favour of the Church (ibid: 358).

Parallel to the MLP band, the PN also had an official party's band between 1974 and 1987. The PN band knows its existence during these turbulent years. Before one of the 1960s coalition events against Mintoff, which was held in Paola, bandmaster Paolo Camilleri, with the help of Lawrence Borg, formed a band specifically for this event. From that time onwards, the PN band became involved in several political events especially, as already noted, between the 1970s and 80s when the PN was in opposition. However, the band had several ups and downs and, therefore, was not always consistent in terms of set-up and involvement.

Around the year 1974, former Minister Louis Galea (b. 1948), who at that time served as secretary general of the PN, contacted Lawrence Borg to regroup the party's band. Supported by several PN activists, Borg managed to regroup the party's band with about eighteen local band musicians, just enough to play band marches. It was in 1974 that their first performance was held in the popular *Hotel Phoenicia* ballroom in Floriana. Lawrence Borg himself recounts that a few days after this concert, a street parade was held where bandsmen found themselves amidst a violent confrontation with MLP supporters. During this same event, as soon as the band approached the MLP club in *Strada Rjali* (Valletta's main street), the whole scene looked like a battlefield. Terrified, the PN musicians ran off and, according to Borg, they 'left our precious musical instruments at the *Casino Maltese* (a posh club in Valletta) after seeking shelter there'. Eventually, the opponents passed through another street, allowing them enough time to flee Valletta. Furthermore, active bandsmen who formed part of the PN band emphasised that the PN band did not only produce music to keep PN supporters loyal; the

music also helped them pluck up courage, especially during direct confrontations, which were common during political activities.⁹³

Following this incident, the PN band started to evolve and, eventually, grew further. Lawrence Borg told me that people who attended mass political activities organised by the PN in the 1980s expected also to listen to the popular sound of Maltese band marches by renowned Maltese composers such as Anthony Aquilina. At this stage, music served as a mediator between the people and political interests. In this sense, John Street (2012: 45) argues that music is a powerful means of highlighting particular agendas thus creating in this context a sense of political relationship between the musicians themselves and listeners. The use of the party band generates a festive atmosphere in which allegiances between the people and the political party are strengthened. However, the PN band was dismantled in 1987 following the PN's victory in the general election. It was then regrouped between 1997 and 1999 through the initiative of bandmaster Clemente Sciberras. During this two-year period, the PN band, under the musical direction of Sciberras, performed a concert and also produced a CD recording of Maltese marches.

At this stage, it is worth noting that bandmasters who directed the MLP and PN bands were at the same time musical directors of local village bands. For instance, Adeodato Gatt who was bandmaster of the Queen Victoria band of Żurrieq (between 1928 and 1937), the Saint Philip band of Żebbuġ (between 1921 and 1961), the Victory band in Mellieħa (between 1948 and 1952) and Saint Michael band of Żabbar (between 1950 and 1964) also served as bandmaster of the MLP band between 1955 and 1961. A similar example is that of Luigi Bongailas, who

⁹³ In the Maltese newspaper *In-Nazzjon Tagħna*, in an article signed as 'Blu' (blue) (1988: 6), the author notes that 'għalina n-nazzjonalisti l-aqwa xogħol mużikali li kiteb Josie Mallia Pulvirenti hu l-Innu tal-Partit Nazzjonalista' (lit. trans. for us PN supporters, the best musical work by Josie Mallia Pulvirenti, is the PN hymn). The author goes on to state that owing to the music by Pulvirenti and the words written by Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici, the people who attended mass meetings 'żammew il-moral għoli fil-għieda għad-demokrazija li wasslitna għar-rebħa' (lit. trans. kept their morale high during the battle for democracy which led us to victory).

conducted the Saint Michael band of Żabbar (between 1964 and 1971) whilst also directing the MLP band between 1961 and 1965. More recent was the involvement of Lawrence Borg who was bandmaster of the De Rohan band of Żebbuġ (between 1978 and 1990) and at the same time bandmaster of the PN band (between 1979 and 1987).

By their nature, bands tend to focus on live performances rather than recordings (Reily & Brucher 2013: 2). In live band performances during a political activity, musicians serve as a bridge between the party and the supporters – their role becomes that of ‘sounding’ the political aspirations of both the party leadership and the supporters. However, continuity and change is reflected in the people’s attitude towards their party’s band. The party’s band is sometimes seen by these as something antiquated and hence a regressive rather than progressive artistic initiative. Applying this to Malta, an informant acknowledged the fact that even though the PN party band ceased to exist, it can still serve as a tool to help the party get closer to the common people, irrespective of social class and position within the party. On the other hand, others within the same party believe that the party can well do without it.

Band Music, *Festa* Celebrations and Partisan Politics

As discussed in the first chapter, most band clubs try to distance themselves from partisan politics and declare themselves as apolitical entities. This is sometimes recorded in club statutes as explained above. However, this is not always possible as supporters are sometimes carried away emotionally and use the band club to express their political allegiances, especially in the presence of prospective political candidates.

The Sunday morning *festa* parade in Ħamrun in honour of the patron Saint Gaetan is known among all Maltese as a colourful and boisterous celebratory event. The crowd during this feast creates a festive atmosphere, in which two colours dominate the spectacle, each representing the two marching bands: red, representing the Saint Gaetan Band Club, known as

‘tat-tamal’ (of the dates), and blue, the colour of the Saint Joseph Band Club, known as ‘talmiskina’ (of the regretful, pathetic). The colours used by these bands parallel the colours used by Malta’s two main political parties: red by the MLP, blue by the PN. The use of these colours by the two political parties is very evident during mass political activities organised by the same parties. This distinction may be noted in several villages that have two or three band clubs. However, not everyone may agree about this. In an online personal conversation with former Prime Minister Alfred Sant, on 2nd March 2017, he commented:

In my experience, in most cases, *festas* have remained outside the political give-and-take, even if some band clubs are labelled as more red or more blue. Indeed, you would find people from the two sides of the political side teaming up to work and support their village band. Some years ago, the analysis concluded that as most villages usually had two clubs and they would be in competition with each other, the older institution would tend to be blue as the "younger" would have been set up in protest, and would be predominantly red. I doubt whether this distinction holds any more today. Village *festas* should be kept completely out of the political struggle.⁹⁴

While today’s wind bands seem to be missing from political activity, this does not mean that partisan political traits have disappeared completely from local band music celebrations. Some of the music produced by village bands is still sometimes used to directly or indirectly communicate political messages during a village feast. One such example was provided during the feast of Saint Gaetan in Ħamrun (summer 2013).

⁹⁴ One of several correspondences with Dr Alfred Sant regarding the Maltese wind band tradition during 2016 and the beginning of 2017.

Although there is a whole week of festivities, activities reach a climax with the *març tal-briju* (cheering march) in which the two main bands in Ħamrun participate by holding their own separate street marches. The heat does not seem to discourage any of the aficionados as the activities start at around 11am and continue till 3pm. The supporters attend in big numbers, irrespective of age, and they wear costumes and even paint their faces in blue or red, according to the club they support. I noticed that both the band musicians and their supporters did their best to show that they were better than their rivals. The supporters brought big flags, danced and drank along the streets of Ħamrun.

The march started in the church area with each band taking a different route. The Saint Gaetan band stopped in front of the Saint Joseph Band Club and chanted humorous jeers addressed at their rivals. Although the police were present, they never had to intervene as the Saint Joseph Band Club accepted this mocking quite good-naturedly. When they were in front of the MLP club, the Saint Gaetan band (which is known as MLP-leaning) stopped and cheered along with its supporters, 'Viva l-Labour!' (long live the MLP). Supporters could be seen waving red festive flags and shouting as if in a political demonstration or mass meeting). In those circumstances, it seemed impossible to be a nationalist sympathiser while being a member of a pro-Labour band club. On went the two bands until it was the turn of the Saint Joseph band in front of the other band club to return all the taunts. Later, both bands stood in front of their own clubs in High Street (a main street in Ħamrun) along with their followers, who took the opportunity of treating themselves to some more fun at these last moments.

The signal for everything to come to an end was a fireworks signal and both bands entered their premises. I noticed that both bands seemed self-satisfied at this moment, probably believing that they had just confirmed that their band is the better one. This street march was a mixture of fun, madness, colour and sweat, which I believe is quite unique.

One informant told me that it is very normal for local politicians and aspiring political candidates to use occasions such as the one just described for personal publicity – they get closer to the band and use it as a medium through which they can connect with people in their constituency present at the *fešta*: this they do notwithstanding the social class they come from and, perhaps, their lack of interest in village bands. Although both political parties have better means by which they can divulge their political message (mainly through their radio and television stations, internet, and newspapers), band music and the occasions on which it is played are sometimes seen as an ideal opportunity to get directly in touch with people. This face-to-face encounter in which music can play a central role is irreplaceable and, therefore, highly effective for vote catching.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that throughout the years, the participation of Maltese wind bands included national events of a political nature and to others which were more propagandistic, and hence, partisan. Music performed by the bands of the two political parties created the right context for the integration of the population with political propaganda. The chosen repertoire would notably be a selection of popular Maltese band marches or arrangements of popular tunes. Furthermore, it seems as if the musical sphere is transferred from the listener's home town *fešta* to the political activity, which may serve better the interests of propagandists. This chapter has also shown how sometimes members and supporters of the same band club use band music to expose in public their own political allegiance and, by implication, the historical political allegiance of the band club they belong to. In all these situations, band music becomes a statement that may encapsulate sentiments of belonging and communality as much as an expression of national division and rivalry.

Chapter 5

The *Banda* and the Maltese Recording Industry

Recordings do not reproduce sound, they represent sound. According to the choice of recording location, microphone type, recording system, postproduction manipulation, storage medium, playback arrangement, and playback locations, each recording proposes an interpretation of the original sound. (Altman 2012: 229)

Slobin (2011: 77) asserts that through the power and immediacy of up-to-date technology, ‘live performances moved straight into rural and urban living rooms’. This applies as well to the Maltese wind band tradition. The Maltese band tradition soon adapted to the new trends in technological innovations. In this way the Maltese band is not only heard during feasts or concerts, it has also come to form part of the several recorded collections in people’s homes. Several band aficionados treasure huge sound collections of the *banda*; these are normally organised in a detailed catalogue. Such recordings include those recorded as long ago as the 1930s and stretch to the present ones. These recordings have cemented further the relationship between the *banda* and the listener, as the listener himself has become better acquainted with band music.

CDs of Maltese band marches are produced every year. Band clubs make such recordings whenever they launch a new set of marches. The sound of marches as performed by Maltese bands during a village *festa* parade is different from that produced on CDs, which are normally recorded in studios. Performing in a noisy street during a village *festa* is perceived by the bandsmen themselves as not requiring much precision, but the situation is different when the band performs on stage or in a studio. Here one notes three degrees of ‘attentiveness’ that band musicians get used to in their involvement with bands. The first, and perhaps the lowest,

is that when a band performs in streets during a parade. Here, musicians are ‘relaxed’ about their playing as they feel that the informal context of the *festa* allows for that. Then, there is the second degree of engagement, which is observed during a concert, both indoors and outdoors. Musicians are normally less relaxed here and hence there is more attentiveness to music playing. Finally, there is the highest degree of attentiveness, which one notes in a recording studio when, to avoid excessive takes, musicians adopt a more careful attitude to their playing. This will help them avoid staying for hours on and in recording studio.

This chapter aims to trace instances of continuity and change in the relation between the recording industry and the professional recording of Maltese *festa* marches. As this is a huge area it will only be possible to outline key events. For this purpose, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will focus on early initiatives by Malta’s public radio company in those days known as Rediffusion in the recording of band marches. For such recordings, the said company used its Outside Broadcasting Unit (OBU) at the band club’s premises. The second section will discuss the use of hi-tech studios in such recordings. These gradually replaced the recording procedures of the OBU as now bands started to hold their recordings in professional studios rather than at the clubs’ premises. The third section will evaluate contemporary practices in the recording of *festa* marches on CDs and existing practices in this domain which bring together modern technology and values from the past.

Early Recordings of Maltese Band Marches and Public Broadcasting

Cassar Pullicino and Camilleri (1998: 25-26) state that in 1931 the gramophone record was introduced in Malta. Being something totally new to the Maltese, this caught their attention and ‘for a moment it distracted people’s mind even from politics, and music shops in Valletta were soon selling Maltese records by the thousand’ (ibid: 25). An informant stated that the first recordings by local artists (78 rpm shellac records) were made by major record labels of the

day in Milan and Tunis. In fact, the very first records of Maltese music included folk and popular musicians who were sent to Tunis, due to low recording costs, to make recordings of their music there. In this regard, Alamango (2011: 56) states that by the mid-1930s, Maltese recordings had caught on. Anthony D'Amato, who was a prominent supplier in Valletta, had already established commercial relationships with companies abroad, and then became interested in producing recordings of Maltese music. Anthony D'Amato was responsible for finding and sponsoring the right musicians to go to Milan to be recorded by *His Master's Voice* (HMV).⁹⁵

During this period, it seems that Maltese bands were also interested in recording their music. In fact, I came across a very rare recording of Maltese band music which can be traced back to the 1930s.⁹⁶ It includes the recording of the *Inno del Partito Nazionale Maltese* by Josie Mallia Pulvirenti, which was composed in 1932, and the *Inno Marcia San Paolo* by Cardenio Botti. These two hymns were performed by the La Valette Band of Valletta.

In 1933, broadcasting in Malta came from the Naval Wireless Station in Rinella.⁹⁷ A year later, the Maltese Government and the *Rediffusion Group of Companies* signed an agreement to set up a sound-wired system in Malta and Gozo. When it was inaugurated in 1935, Rediffusion started radio broadcasting by a company called *Broadcast Relay (Service) Malta Limited*. The introduction of cable radio service in Malta had to 'counterbalance' the

⁹⁵ D'Amato contracted composer and director Vincenzo Ciappara to write musical scores and be in charge of the rehearsals. Peter Paul Ciantar noted during an interview that along with Ciappara, the entertainer Carlo Satariano (known as tal-Madalena) was in charge of writing the lyrics for the songs. There were also the bass Domenico Busuttil, tenor Giuseppe Cefai, baritone Ruggiero Falzon, Michele Smith and the *ghana* singer Manuel Cilia, who brought the guitar.

⁹⁶ The recording belongs to Fortunato Mizzi, a Maltese priest and the son of former Prime Minister of Malta, Enrico Mizzi, popularly known as Nerik (1885-1950). Nerik was the son of the founder of the Anti-Reform party, Fortunato Mizzi.

⁹⁷ Most people in Malta could not afford a radio set during the 1930s.

growing influence of fascism from Italy through the *Ente Italiano per le Audizioni Radiofoniche* (EIAR) broadcasts (Sant 2016: 43).⁹⁸

When referring to the 1930s, Sant (2016: 49-50), states that people living in Malta became familiar with the Rediffusion service thanks to an article entitled ‘*Rediffusion*’ published on 8th November 1935, attributed to ‘Radio Enthusiast’, in the *Times of Malta*.⁹⁹ The article informed the public that:

No matter what you are interested in, you will find it at its appointed times on the ‘*Rediffusion*’ system. In addition to all this, facilities are being granted for the local broadcast of our own entertainments: The Opera House, Programmes by local Bands and etc. The system, which has been fitted in 200,000 homes in England is coming to Malta where it will be known under the name of ‘*Rediffusion*’. (p. 7)

The broadcasting of Maltese music via cable radio was in the hands of the then leading Maltese broadcaster Effie Ciantar (1918-1973).¹⁰⁰ Ciantar may be acknowledged as the one who introduced and developed the recordings of Maltese band marches. He was a pioneering figure in the promotion of local music, including band music. In 1946, Ciantar became a programme manager with Rediffusion (Sant 2016: 72). It was during this period that Ciantar

⁹⁸ The EIAR was the only public service broadcaster permitted by the Italian government in Fascist Italy.

⁹⁹ Toni Sant (2016) published *Remembering Rediffusion in Malta: A History Without Future?*, which gives an understanding of broadcasting in Malta through the remaining memories of *Rediffusion* in Malta. Furthermore, during a radio programme on the 30th July 2016, *Ghandi Xi Nghid* (I have things to say), Sant was interviewed by the Maltese popular broadcaster Andrew Azzopardi who claimed that this was the first study to put Rediffusion in a historical context, adding that many people working in the same radio station do not realise the richness of such history – it is the foundation of what we have today. To listen to the full interview and other interviews by Toni Sant see <http://www.tonisant.com/Rediffusion/>

¹⁰⁰ Effie Ciantar is not related to Peter Paul Ciantar.

worked hard to ensure that concerts from several Maltese theatres and band clubs were broadcast with an appropriate commentary in Maltese (ibid: 72). There were also the broadcasts of commentaries during Holy Week in particular during the Good Friday procession, and the High Mass on *festa* Sunday (ibid: 72).

In the beginning of 1948, Effie Ciantar employed George Zarb with Rediffusion as a full-time announcer at the age of seventeen (Sant 2016: 95). During this time, interest started being shown in the broadcasting of Maltese band music on cable radio or Rediffusion, as it was more commonly known. In fact, Zarb was interested in the recording of such programmes from band clubs. Ciantar introduced live broadcasts from band clubs several years before Rediffusion brought the first tape recordings to Malta (ibid: 95). Unfortunately, these recordings do not exist anymore since the tapes were too expensive not to be reused (ibid: 95). The first radio broadcast that involved a live Maltese wind band took place during the Good Friday pageant of 1948, where the La Valette Band performed dirges in the streets of the capital Valletta (ibid: 96).

In 1955, the national radio broadcasting company changed its name to *Rediffusion Malta Limited*. This company was authorised by the Maltese Government to produce and broadcast radio programmes, both sponsored and ordinary commercial ones. Later on, in 1961, Rediffusion Malta developed even more after signing a contract with the government of Malta and *Malta Television Services* that enabled the company to operate a television station in Malta.¹⁰¹

An interesting thing during the period of Rediffusion was the recording of outside activities through the OBU.¹⁰² The OBU was made up of six people, responsible for outside

¹⁰¹ For further reading see <https://vassallohistory.wordpress.com/broadcasting-in-malta/>

¹⁰² The service of the OBU was extended to Gozo during the 1970s, with several OBU broadcasters transmitting band music from different band clubs in Gozo. The OBU crew had to travel to Gozo and remain all night there because the ferry service, popularly known as the Gozo Channel, did not operate during night. As a result, in this way several Gozitan broadcasters appeared during the mid-1970s,

live transmissions and recordings, which would be transmitted a few days later. The OBU consisted of a huge grey van, equipped with all the necessary recording equipment. Former broadcaster and *festa* march composer Peter Paul Ciantar (b. 1950) noted that all equipment, such as the main recording device, which was heavy to carry, had to be transferred to the site of the recording.¹⁰³ On the day, two one-inch-thick tapes would be kept on standby for something which could go wrong.¹⁰⁴ All members of the OBU used to have their own specific task.

The compère would introduce each recording by announcing the band which would be playing and the title of each march at the beginning of each.¹⁰⁵ The duration of the recording used to be precisely one hour and it had to be ready for broadcasting. For better quality, the speed of the recording system was 7 ½ not 3 ¾; for domestic needs, one would use the 3 ¾ speed.

During this period, several Maltese band clubs started to use the OBU for their recordings. Several elderly informants remember that while waiting for the OBU to come to their locality, everyone was excited and eagerly looking forward to this recording session. In fact, the recording session in a band club by the OBU became a part of the *festa* programme of

amongst others Dolindo Cassar, who used to present in particular the La Stella Band Club of Rabat (Gozo) and Vincent Theuma-Xerri of Leone Band Club from the same locality in Gozo.

¹⁰³ Most of the information was given by Peter Paul Ciantar himself at his residence in Rabat during 2016. Peter Paul Ciantar continued the programmes that had initially been produced by Effie Ciantar, who spent most of his life responsible for the transmission of band music on cable radio through recordings in all localities in Malta.

¹⁰⁴ It is interesting to note that several *ghannejja* (folk singers) used to refer to the tape as ‘zigarella’ (ribbon).

¹⁰⁵ Translation of a compère: On the occasion of the feast of Saint Philip at Żebbuġ, *Radju Malta* presents a programme of new marches played by the Saint Philip Band of Żebbuġ, under the direction of bandmaster Adeodato Gatt. In this programme, we will be listening to new marches that are being premiered on this occasion. We are going to start this programme with the popular hymn in honour of Saint Philip of Agira, composed by Ġużeppi Caruana, with verses written by Maltese national poet and Żebbuġ priest, Karm Psaila. The Saint Philip Band will be accompanied by the Hamrun Choir under the direction of Father Ġużepp Cachia. The band will be directed by bandmaster Adeodato Gatt.

celebrations. The OBU recording of marches was generally held on the Wednesday preceding *fiesta* week, and sometimes it was transformed into an event organised by the band club in anticipation of *fiesta* week.¹⁰⁶ It was common practice for bands to perform new band marches on the day of the recording. The recorded material would later be broadcast on cable radio during *fiesta* week, mainly on *fiesta* day.

Broadcasting band recordings through Rediffusion was considered as a highly important event on the annual calendar of the band club. After numerous rehearsals, a lengthy general rehearsal would be held on the day before the recording session, and for which bandsmen were required to attend. While waiting for the OBU to arrive, the whole band concentrated on refining their music so that they would not waste time on several takes of the same march. One elderly band musician remembers the bandmaster instructing not-so-good band musicians to hold back from playing if they were not sure of certain technically difficult passages. Most of the recordings were held in the band club's hall, while other band clubs that did not have enough space utilised other halls, such as the government school hall, a wedding hall or a parish hall.

Everyone was invited to attend the event but people were instructed to keep silent; even the barman, who used to be fully prepared with all sorts of beverages, was ordered not to make any noise, such as the clinking of glasses. Several band aficionados looked forward to the day of the recording since it served as an opportunity to personally record the newly composed band marches. A member of the Saint Joseph Band Club in Ħamrun explained to me that on recording day, a considerable number of people used to bring their personal tape recorder.

¹⁰⁶ An example of a programme of new marches: The Saint George band of Cospicua will be performing a programme of new marches for the feast days (6 and 7 December). These marches will be broadcasted from the Rediffusion on Tuesday, 8 December, from 3.00 till 4.00 p.m. One should also note that this year, the Saint George band will be directed by the assistant director, Maestro C. Ciantar, since the band director is currently indisposed. (my translation). Text taken from *Leĥen Il-Banda San Ġorġ Bormla A.D. 1862* programme 1970, p. 9.

People had to arrive as early as possible to occupy the best place from where they could obtain the best recording. This was allowed, so much so, that members of the same club would provide tables and electric power sockets to all those who wished to connect their own personal tape recorder or reel-to-reel tape recording device to the club's electricity supply.

The OBU sound engineer would often place the large microphone (the crew referred to it as the giraffe) exactly in the middle of the band so that they would pick up the overall sound. He would also place other microphones in front of the soloists or the choir during the singing of the band's hymn or the hymn of the patron saint. He would coordinate, amongst other things, the places and positioning of microphones and bandsmen. The preparation of the recording also included coordinating the session with the bandmaster by taking recording samples of each band section, and, when included, of the soloists and the choir.

Most of these recording sessions used to start with the singing of a popular hymn, usually the hymn in honour of the village saint, and end with the band's hymn. Finally, the band players would cheer their patron saint and clap rapturously, hoping to send a message to the supporters of the rival band club who might be listening from a distance to the band recording its marches. Exceptions to this sequence were also possible. For instance, the Saint Joseph of Hamrun usually started with the band hymn and ended with the popular hymn of Saint Gaetan. These two hymns were usually sung by the club's choir which was made up of girls and boys from the same locality.

After each recording, the compère involved in the recording session would ask for his fee (two Maltese Liri) from the band club treasurer.¹⁰⁷ Later on, the *Malta Bands Association* started collecting these fees on behalf of the compère with payment being effected annually. During the times of the OBU, only three bands were not in this association, namely, the King's

¹⁰⁷ Two Maltese Liri are equivalent to 4.65 Euro.

Own and La Valette Bands of Valletta, and Saint George's Band of Cospicua.¹⁰⁸ These used to pay the compère directly rather than through the Association.

OBU recordings included band marches and hymns in honour of the patron saint. Unfortunately, most of these recordings are now lost. Amongst the surviving recorded material one finds grand hymns referred to in chapter three and several band marches.¹⁰⁹ Unwisely, the recording of bands had to replace the previous recordings – in this way, at the radio station, only new recordings would be left. An informant claimed that it was not an easy decision to start deleting such dedicated work because there was a lot of hard work and energy involved. But the physical space to store each recording at the radio station was limited. The deleting of tapes started during the late 1970s. It may be the case that people did not realise the importance of such tapes then.

When referring to the impact of recordings on listeners, Naughtie (2007: 291) argues that attending a concert was not anymore the 'prerequisite for the enjoyment of live music' as the music lover had new ways and means to listen to music. In the light of this observation one may refer to an interview which I conducted with an elderly woman who still remembers her father bringing home recordings of band marches; he used to spend his Sunday mornings listening to music.¹¹⁰ This is a case of listeners who can stay at home and 'listen to their favourite pieces of music as often as they liked (on machines which were getting better every year)' (ibid: 291).

¹⁰⁸ In time, the King's Own and Saint George band clubs joined the association. However, the La Valette Band has stayed away until the present day.

¹⁰⁹ Surviving recordings, such as hymns, feature important soloists, such as the popular Maltese soprano Hilda Mallia Tabone (1932-1978), who was asked to perform on such occasions. Other Maltese soloists were bass singer Piu Zammit and tenor Andrew Sapiano. There were many other popular freelance soloists at the time of the recordings.

¹¹⁰ This particular informant referred to a grand march by the *Banda Municipale Milano* which was produced during the 1930s, amongst others.

During the 1970s, Maltese broadcaster Victor Aquilina, at that time head of programmes at *Radju Malta* (Maltese national radio), told Peter Paul Ciantar that several radio listeners requested a music programme which would transmit band music.¹¹¹ This was another opportunity for the Maltese people to listen to band marches, rather than having to wait for the village *fešta*. Maltese radio stations today represent a continuation of more than forty years of band music programmes.

Maltese Wind Bands in Recording Studios

During the 1980s, several bands started to produce recordings in private recording studios. Indeed one of the private recording studios that started band recordings was *Boffa Recording Studio*. Although the national radio station was still recording and broadcasting music produced by local bands, several band clubs came to prefer the professional set-up of the recording studio.

The beginning of the 1980s witnessed this new trend of recording in private studios. During this period, the recordings of Maltese bands on audio-cassettes had a strong marketing potential. One particular interviewee claimed that the Saint Joseph Band Club of Ħamrun had sold over six hundred audio-cassettes during the feast of Saint Gaetan of 1985. Still, Maltese bands initially kept their traditional recording practices. For example, the compère introducing each march, as featured on recordings by Rediffusion, was kept for recordings in studios though this practice was gradually phased out. Although the *Boffa Recording Studio* does not record

¹¹¹ *Radju Malta* was incorporated within the broadcasting company *Xandir Malta*, which replaced Rediffusion in 1975.

bands anymore, several other private recording studios have flourished in several Maltese localities.¹¹² This shows the continued strong interest of band clubs in the recording of marches.

Simultaneously with the studio production of band marches on audio-cassettes the 1980s witnessed a new trend. This was the production of Maltese band marches on LPs by individual local march composers. Until then, there had been only one case in this regard, which was in 1967. This was the recording of local marches on a 45rpm. The production was called *Souvenir of Malta* and it was mainly aimed at the tourist industry which, after Malta's independence in 1964, was developing very fast. In order to produce this disc, a group of musicians from the La Valette Band was selected along with the Ħamrun choir by the Maltese bandmaster Joseph Camilleri. This rare example presents lost traces of the sound of past Maltese band recordings. This isolated example shows that till the 1980s the recording of marches by the national radio through the OBU seemed to be enough and it was only later that the need was felt for recordings in private studios.

Nevertheless, in 1979, three LPs were produced: one was a personal initiative; another included different Maltese band composers; the third was of a political nature. In a collaborative production, in 1979, Maltese band march composers Paul Schembri and Peter Paul Ciantar produced a joint LP, together with Maltese engineer L. J. Rodo, entitled *Festival of Maltese Marches*.¹¹³ The recording of this LP was held at the King's Own Band Club in Valletta. According to Peter Paul Ciantar, they transformed a hall into a recording studio. He recounts that they covered windows with cloths so as to soundproof the ambience of the hall. Another LP featuring different Maltese band composers was produced during the same year

¹¹² Amongst other studios that record bands in Malta there are *Studio 7* and *Sky Light Recording Studio*. For instance, the Saint Joseph Band recorded a set of band marches at *Sky Light Recording Studio* on 3rd February 2017.

¹¹³ The music was recorded by *Eljayar Recording Studios* of Żabbar.

with the title *Festa u Marċi* ('Feast and Marches') by the Saint Joseph Band Club of Ħamrun.¹¹⁴ It was directed by Maltese bandmaster Philip Gatt. A political recording on an LP was produced in the same year by the Nationalist Party. This 45 rpm was directed by Lawrence Borg (as noted in chapter four) and included the Nationalist Party hymn and the Maltese anthem.

Eventually, such LP recordings led to the production of other individually produced LPs with Maltese marches. In fact, in 1983, Andrew Coleiro (mentioned in chapter three) produced an LP with his own marches called *Ġejja l-Banda* (the band is coming).¹¹⁵ Also in the 1980s, a two-volume LP entitled *Festive Memories* by Anthony Aquilina was recorded with his own festive band marches.¹¹⁶ Another LP was produced in the beginning of the 1980s by various Maltese band composers. This LP, which was entitled *Marċi Minn Malta* ('Marches from Malta') featured popular marches by various local band composers, including Anthony Aquilina, Vincenzo Ciappara, Joseph Abela Scolaro and Luigi Bongailas.¹¹⁷

More Recent Trends

One of the first bands to record its marches on CD was the Żejtun Band in 1995. This CD may be considered the first of several other CDs which followed suit. According to the information given to me by several band aficionados, apart from the unofficial and private recordings by band composers, most clubs have recorded a CD at some point or another – even if some produced a CD only after the turn of the millennium.¹¹⁸ Even the political bands ventured into

¹¹⁴ This LP was produced on 6th May 1979.

¹¹⁵ The production of the LP *Ġejja l-Banda* (1983) was the first volume.

¹¹⁶ After Aquilina's death, in 1987, another recording was produced in his memory, entitled *Happy Memories*.

¹¹⁷ Some of these LP recordings were also available as audio-cassettes.

¹¹⁸ One should distinguish between the official and unofficial recordings of the bands in Malta. The latter include the recordings of the early transmissions on cable radio and those works that several band aficionados (amateurs) recorded during a concert or feast, or from cable radio. On the other hand, official recordings usually hold a copyright.

the recording of CDs. For instance, in 1996 the MLP band recorded a three double albums as a part of the preparations for that year's general election.¹¹⁹ About eighteen thousand of these CDs were sold to the public. However, the purchase of so many CDs might have been due in part to political loyalty rather than interest in band music.

One also notes instances where Maltese band composers recorded abroad. In this way, Maltese band music becomes international. Apart from the recordings of Maltese band marches, one notes arrangements of classical pieces recorded abroad. For instance, in 1999, Ray Sciberras, mentioned in chapter three, recorded a collection of eight wind band compositions in England at *Doyen Recordings Limited* entitled *Millennium Salute*. A more recent CD recording by the same band composer is *Dolce Vita*, which consists of both band marches and classical arrangements and compositions.¹²⁰

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the recording industry appeared to be experiencing a dramatic change. The downloading of digital recordings via the internet, both authorised and unauthorised, have clearly impacted negatively the physical sales of the all-important hit recordings (Hull, Hutchison and Strasser 2011: 29). This period of development in the recording industry has brought about many changes which have also affected the recordings of Maltese bands. The recording of sound is considered one of the great 'conveniences of modern life' (Millard 2005: 1). Currently, music by Maltese bands is being digitally recorded in several recording studios. Thanks to professional sound engineering that helps arrange each instrument accordingly, sound quality has become much better. Now, recordings of Maltese bands tend to have a more refined quality when compared to earlier ones.

¹¹⁹ Another three double albums were produced in 2003 and 2008.

¹²⁰ *Dolce Vita* consists of three band compositions, 'Jeanphil', 'Ave Maria' and 'The Fall of Fort Saint Elmo'. It was recorded by *Hafabra Music* (Volume 38). *Hafabra Music* specialises in on wind band music recordings.

This was also noticed by an elderly radio listener who commented to me that there is a clear change from the recordings of fifty years ago; one can notice that they were ‘primitive recordings’. Today’s recordings may be transferred to different sound files, such as, *cda*, *wav*, *mp3* and *flac*, and later uploaded on the internet, (such as *You Tube* and *Facebook*).¹²¹ Although CDs have decreased in terms of physical sales, the use of the internet has made both past and new local band march music more accessible.

Presently, recordings of Maltese band music are much easier for people to access since they do not need to buy the record itself. During fieldwork, I met several band aficionados who showed me collections of overwhelmingly ‘old’ and more recent Maltese band music. As opposed to the majority of band composers of pre-World War II, who were not much exposed to foreign recordings, band composers who came after were more exposed to foreign sounds through imported recordings. A case in point is that of Anthony Aquilina (mentioned in chapter three), who during an interview, broadcast on TVM (Television Malta) in 1979, claimed that he was influenced by several imported recordings. Quick and easy access to band recordings is making several band composers widen their spectrum of compositional styles – writing a march displaying traditional trends and introducing compositional ideas from abroad at the same time, particularly because of easy access to the internet.

An informant commented that as soon as Maltese bands started to record in private studios, the original sound of the band was lost completely. Since the OBU recorded in different locations, such recordings had their individual sound ambience. Their sound was more ‘authentic’ as these sometimes contained occasional hushes coming from the people present, which were not edited. Present recording studios have brought about a change in the quality of recordings through more professional editing. Eventually, the final studio production of these

¹²¹ There are numerous sound files uploaded on *You Tube*, as for instance *Marċ Brijuz* (a lively march), that consists of an endless number of band marches by various Maltese band composers.

recordings, particularly after the 1980s, became more or less the standard quality and the acoustic environment of the band club was not an issue anymore.

Nevertheless, there still remains one particular band which continues to record its music as it did in the past. This is the La Valette band, which still records its annual new band marches at its club premises rather than at a recording studio. Another situation is that of Saint Joseph Band Club of Hamrun, that presently organises an event in the club with their band performing newly composed band marches. The people of Hamrun still refer to this event as ‘ir-rikording’ (the recording), which still evokes the time (1970s) mainly when the OBU carried out recordings at the club’s premises. The locals are invited to attend this occasion to listen to the band over a drink with friends. Whereas the people who used to attend the recording by the OBU remained silent, the people attending ‘ir-rikording’ seem to enjoy conversations over a pint of beer. The event comes to an end with the band hymn (as in the past) with band aficionados waving flags, lifting each other, as if in a street village *fiesta* celebration.

Through the recordings of Maltese marches, listeners started to understand the structure of the band march better. Band aficionados became more active listeners able to appreciate the aesthetic value of some of these marches with friends and family members. The repeated listening to recorded marches was a means by which these aficionados could improve their appreciation of Maltese marches. According to several informants, following the introduction of the recordings, several *banda* aficionados started realising the difference, for instance, between sections. They started commenting about marches and their aesthetic value, even if in a non-technical language. Such popular evaluations included discussions about whether a march has a good countermelody or a ‘bombastic’ introduction. Musical terms, such as ‘melody’, ‘countermelody’, ‘introduction’ and ‘trio’ were all used during several interviews I had with aficionados who had absolutely no knowledge of musical theory. It is interesting to note how these listeners could identify the countermelody of a band march and eventually label

it as pleasant or otherwise. After all, ‘the continuity of music depends as much on the demands of critical listeners as on a supply of performers’ (Blacking 1974: 11).

After the turn of the millennium, the request for recorded band CDs decreased drastically, since most of the recordings are now generally uploaded via the internet. For instance, the Mosta and Attard band clubs have not produced a CD since the beginning of the millennium. However, certain band clubs still produce CD albums for the sake of keeping up with other Maltese band clubs and to keep the tradition of recording marches alive. Presently, Maltese band recordings are being broadcast by several local community radios. Community radios are intended to reach a specific audience (mainly, the village locals) and are generally run by the community itself. However, since internet use has become more popular, community radios have widened their spectrum of listeners. Through the internet, one can listen to various radio stations, including community radios. For instance, the Saint Philip Band of Żebbuġ broadcasts several band marches during the feast month. Through the internet, it is not only the people residing in Żebbuġ that can listen to the band marches being broadcast, but also in other communities anywhere in the world. This helps the club establish connections with migrant communities, especially in Canada and Australia. It also enables the Maltese diaspora in these countries to stay in touch with the Maltese wind band tradition.

Conclusion

Early broadcasting of Maltese band music, particularly the OBU, was considered a form of popular entertainment. The villagers looked forward to the day of the recording. This was a service to the whole community. Just as church bells in Malta indicate that something is happening in the local church and therefore send a message, the OBU served as a broadcasting medium to the locals and gave identity to Maltese band clubs. Although the recordings of bands represent continuity, there were instances of change. For instance, the use of private

studios in the 1980s changed the way bands held recording sessions. This was counterbalanced, more recently, by bands holding an informal concert known as ‘ir-rikording’ – an event which evokes with nostalgia the days of the OBU in the 1970s.

The earliest known recording of a Maltese band goes back to the 1930s. Over the years, technological innovations in the recording industry helped Maltese band composers as it was thanks to the recording of these marches that these composers gained more public exposure and admiration for their talent. The local recording industry also helped create more interest in the aesthetic value of these marches. Due to repetitive listening and easier access to marches through recorded material aficionados were able to identify and distinguish between marches ‘pleasant to the ear’ and others which, even if technically sound, lacked those catchy tunes which give a march its character and, by implication, popularity. The recording of marches in Malta adapted itself to the different needs of Maltese society as well as to the advances in technology, which increased the love of and admiration for these marches, both locally and abroad, mainly amongst the Maltese migrant communities in Australia, Canada and the United States. For these communities, the easy access to Maltese marches via the internet has strengthened their bond with their homeland and, during *fešta* week, the thrill of sharing the *fešta* spirit with their relatives in Malta even if from faraway distant lands.

Chapter 6

Bands and Entertainment

In line with the stereotypical Mediterranean character, Maltese people are always up for having a good time. Indeed, V. M. Pellegrini (2004) states that the Maltese have a distinctly festive character (p. 157). This is even more evident when the town or village feast approaches. Every tradition changes over time and nowadays, new forms of festivities have taken the place of older ones. People also change, as well as their views on this kind of entertainment. This chapter will present a better understanding of two well-established events in Malta's annual entertainment calendar that the Maltese wind band tradition has participated in: *ix-Xalata tal-Festa* and Carnival. Continuity and change is evident in these events since both retained traditional elements while changing throughout the years. In this chapter, entertainment is presented as a core element in the Maltese character. The participation of bands clubs in these activities is also discussed. A particular attention is given to these activities' sense of continuity and change.

Ix-Xalata tal-Festa

Perhaps no event is as much loved in the Maltese islands as the village feast dedicated to the community's patron saint, a core tradition in Maltese culture. For some people, it is also the busiest time of the year since hard work lies beneath the festive programme of each locality. Several events are organised both inside and outside the village churches, fireworks light the Maltese sky, and outdoor decorations inject our streets with colour. The feast is a highly anticipated and a well-organised event, which is not over on the feast day of the patron saint. The celebrations continue the day after with the *Xalata*, a much-deserved day out at the beach with the aim of relaxing after the busy preparations for the feast. This day of bonanza that

follows the village feast is popularly known as *ix-Xalata tal-Festa* (roughly translated as ‘the feast holiday’), which is difficult to translate into other languages partly because it is so entrenched in Maltese culture.

Organised from months before, members of the band club leave the village by a bus decorated with palm leaves and colored paper to reach their destination: the beach.¹²² It seems that after the first half of the twentieth century, the bus was accompanied by several private cars, some of which were likewise decorated. Music was an important element during this day as the *xalata* seems to have been a musical festival of sorts, having a wide variety of music ranging from small bands to traditional music, such as the *ghana* (Maltese folk singing). Those who attended would participate by getting into the spirit of the *xalata*. Indeed, silence on this day was considered a sin, as it were, and nobody was allowed to remain quiet.

There is no evidence regarding when and how the *xalata* started. However, from the available documentation, it can be noted that in the beginning of the twentieth century, several band clubs had already been organizing the *xalata*. Ever since, the *xalata* has evolved through the years and it is still a well-loved tradition, which is evident in how most localities organise this event to this day. So, what was the *xalata* like in the past and how has it changed? What follows is a close look at the features of a *xalata*, some of which are essential parts of the tradition that have survived through generations, while others have changed to reflect the passage of time.

The *xalata* has been celebrated for years by the Maltese band clubs, even though there are certain band clubs which have never organised it. This annual activity has been celebrated

¹²² Notably, it was very common that on the morning of the *xalata*, the women would arrive to their destination earlier than the men since the latter would have stayed in their hometown or village in order to put away the street decorations and other props relating to the feast. After finishing this duty, the men would eat and then join the others to start a carcade.

by the locals of Floriana as early as 1915. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Floriana was one of the most industrial places in Malta, which means that one could have found different kinds of shops there, particularly those dedicated to various trades. Most of the workers would have done their best to enjoy the *xalata* by closing their trade shops after the day of the village feast. Nigel Holland (2018) states that on the day of the *xalata*, the buses and horse carriages would have been in the streets and ready to leave; all the employers would hop onto these vehicles along with their employees and go to Saint Paul's Bay in order to enjoy the *fenkata* (a traditional Maltese rabbit stew) and the wine at Tal-Vegġa'. Citing the 1995 editorial named *Il-Furjana: Lehen il-F.S.O.B.A.*, Holland recounts that the locals would have returned back to Floriana only when it would have started to get dark.¹²³ On their way back home, these Floriana locals would use paper lanterns in the carriages and buses in order to provide themselves with some light. Those who attended the *xalata* would be warmly welcomed by their relatives and by other locals willing to show their appreciation towards their hard work throughout the year.

In the Maltese language, the word *xalata* also has a metaphorical meaning, referring to the positive state of having a great time, probably full of entertainment with little to no work. After all, what is the *xalata* if not a day for people to let go of their worries and enjoy life? It is a day of celebration in the name of the patron saint, and a good excuse to forget all about work to be able to enjoy the

¹²³ *Il-Furjana : lehen il-F.S.O.B.A.*, Vol. I No. 9., March-April, 1955, p. 7

beautiful Mediterranean sea that surrounds the Maltese islands. The *xalata* reaches its climax when the members return to their home villages in a procession, honking and singing about how they are the best. In certain villages, this day ends with fireworks, the jealousy of all! (Sergio Grech during a personal interview).¹²⁴

The following section will investigate in more detail the way the *xalata* was celebrated in the past. It is based on the testimonials of people who attended the *xalata* in the past. Many people across the Maltese islands contributed, but most of the content was collected through interviews conducted with various activists from Saint Mary's band club in Għaxaq.¹²⁵ Various Maltese composers, politicians, academics, and historians also gave their contribution.¹²⁶

¹²⁴Interview with Sergio Grech on 10th July 2019. Grech is a writer, a researcher, and the producer of several cultural radio programmes on *Radju Marija* and *Campus FM*. He was the first executive director of the Maltese National Book Council (*Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ktieb*).

¹²⁵ In order to write this section, I interviewed more than fifteen people who are members of the Saint Mary's band club in Għaxaq, most of whom have been living in this village for a long time. The interviewees were mostly referred to by their nicknames: Pija Farrugia, tal-Ġiġer (il-Ġiġer was a prominent family in relation to fireworks); Twanny Mizzi, iż-Żaka (Twanny Mizzi built the whole club on a voluntary basis with the help of other associates); Rose Agius, ta' Mosè; Danjel, taż-Żambarett; Maria Dolores Abdilla, ta' Żarena (she is the cousin of Danjel taż-Żambarett, while her father Zeppi was the cashier for forty years); Maria Abdilla, tal-Iskarpan; Ġanna Enriquez, ta' Nerik; Danjel Camilleri, ta' Ġobb; Connie Agius, wife of Frans ta' Frangisk; Maria Barbara tal-Awstralja; Rita Farrugia tal-Bużżu; Maria Desira ta' Nerik. I would like to thank Dr John Agius, who made the writing of this section possible, especially with regard to coordinating the interviews held in Saint Mary's band club in Għaxaq.

¹²⁶ Various people contributed to the writing of this section. Special thanks to Andrew Coleiro and John J. Pace for their vivid anecdotes. I would also like to thank the historian Mario Coleiro.

The *Xalata* and the Perception of the Maltese

There is a good number of people in Malta who are not passionate about any particular feast. These people conceptualise the *xalata* as an event of the vulgar for those who do not have anything better to do with their life, an event which is targeted for people in the lower class of society. This perception has its own background and the elements which could have contributed to it will be discussed. Some years ago, however, a counter-movement was born with the aim of keeping the Maltese *xalata* tradition alive.

One of the elements which could have contributed to the negative perception towards the *xalata* is the fact that in the past, there was a substantial amount of pique between Maltese football supporters that made its way to the *xalata*. According to Nigel Holland (2019b), there were times when the Sliema and the Floriana football supporters fought considerably. A particular case in point was when once, on the day of the *xalata*, supporters displayed disagreement while the bus of the Floriana football supporters was passing in front of the football club. This will be recounted in more detail later on.¹²⁷

Historically, the *xalata* was not associated with those who could not care less about disagreements, but with those who wanted to show hostility towards their competitors. The *xalata* was a good enough opportunity to pass on a message to them. These arguments led to the formation of a movement in order to cancel the *xalata* (Holland 2018).¹²⁸¹²⁹ In fact, this is clearly stated in the 1965 editorial of the gazette '*Il-Furjana: Lehen il-F.S.O.B.A.*':

‘Għall-ġid u għall-prestiġju tal-Furjana hemm
bżonn li ċerti drawwiet dwar din ix-xalata

¹²⁷ For further reading, Nigel Holland’s discussion on this topic can be accessed through the following link: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2200554946722610&set=p.2200554946722610&type=1&theater>

¹²⁸ For further reading, Nigel Holland’s comments on this topic can be accessed through the following link: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1573923399385771&set=p.1573923399385771&type=1&theater>

għandhom jinqatgħu darba għal dejjem. Kull min jista' għandu jipperswadi ... biex din ix-xalata tispiċċa u nedukaw lil dawk kollha li soltu jieħdu sehem, biex jikkundannawha u jhallu dawn l-affarijiet għall-boloh u ta' rashom marbuta. Nagħmel appell lill-ħbieb kollha biex jużaw l-influwenza tagħhom biex jgħinu ħalli l-Furjana tkun tista' tieħu xejra iktar edifikanti, iktar kulturali u iktar progressiva. Dan jista' jsir billi dawk li jafu jgħallmu lil dawk li ma jafux.¹³⁰

(‘For the sake and prestige of Floriana there is a need for the removal of certain traditions once and for all. Every person who is able to should persuade... to end this *xalata* and educate all those who usually participate, to condemn it and to leave such things to the foolish and the stubborn. I appeal to all my friends to use their influence in order to help give Floriana a more edifying, more cultural and more progressive sense. This can be done if those who are knowledgeable teach those who are not.’)

¹³⁰ Extract taken from *Il-Furjana: leġenil-F.S.O.B.A.*, Vol. II, No. 21., 1965, p. 2.

Several writers included the *xalata* in their work, including Fr A. Born (1958), who seemed to believe that the *xalata* was for people who wanted some form of unlimited entertainment. In order to make fun of those who attended the *xalata*, he gave a detailed description of how it should be organised in a chapter of one of his novels.¹³¹ Thanks to his writings, a clear idea of the importance of the *xalata* for the feast aficionados can be obtained. In fact, Born reflects on how important the *xalata* was for Marirož, one of the characters, who attended this event because she was afraid that her friends would say things against her behind her back. Born mentions that the Maltese *xalata* has its own rules. Although these rules are not written anywhere, they still must be followed because otherwise, there would be no *xalata*. The author gives six rules, at first, and later on mentions a few more. He starts off by mentioning that the girls had to wear a pair of jeans for the *xalata* “jew biex niftiehm u aħjar dak il-qalziet bħal tar-rizzi li bih xebba tidher qisha kombin jew umbrella magħluqa u turi l-ġibda kbira tagħha għall-qliezet” (‘or in order to explain better, those kind of trousers similar to sea urchins’, which makes a young woman look like a bobbin or a closed umbrella and through which she shows off her attraction towards men) (p. 79). The second rule concerns boys, who are supposed to wear a very short pair of trousers, “qmis kollha ward u friefet maħruġa barra l-qalziet u fuq kollox beritta bħal tal-ġerrejja li jkollha pizz maħruġ’il barra” (‘a shirt full of roses and butterflies, worn untucked and above all, a cap similar to those worn by runners with a visor’) (ibid). According to Born, the bus should be decorated with lots of grass and palm trees “biex iġibha qisha biċċa ramla ta’ Hawajji[sic.] fuq ir-roti” (‘to make it look like a Hawaiiin beach on wheels’) (p. 80). Rule number four indicates that all those attending the *xalata* should take a whistle or *cuqlajta* with them to be able to produce sounds throughout their journey and attract the necessary attention (ibid). The fifth rule states that about five musicians should be invited,

¹³¹ Further reading on this subject through the following link:
[http://melitensiawth.com/incoming/Index/II-Malti/II-Malti.%20034\(1958\)3/06.pdf](http://melitensiawth.com/incoming/Index/II-Malti/II-Malti.%20034(1958)3/06.pdf)

one of whom should be a saxophone player (ibid). The instruments, Born continues, should play loudly and continuously to create an atmosphere of pique. Born's sixth rule refers to the attendees of the *xalata*, who should be prepared with many bottles of wine, soft drinks, and water (ibid). Moreover, those who are enjoying the *xalata* should make it a point to make the pedestrians happy.

Whatever the perception of the Maltese is towards the *xalata*, it is undoubtedly an event of great cultural value that has been held for a good number of years. Even though it changed through the years, it is still present today.

Pique or Entertainment?

Jeremy Boissevain (1993) stated that the origin of what he called *festa partiti* (a term invented by Boissevain which refers to feast parties) goes back to the 1850s and a bit later, when the following century started. Boissevain said that pique was very evident between both those who were interested in the titular feast and those who were not that interested in sacred matters (p. 75). Boissevain claims that pique indicates 'relations of competition, ill-feeling, hostility' (p. 74). In most feasts, there is unmistakable pique among the Maltese and it goes without saying that traces of this also appear on the day of the *xalata*. This is very evident between the clubs of Saint Mary and Saint Joseph in Ghaxaq, where various members, especially the keenest ones, attend the *xalata* so that they too feel that they are part of the community. Indeed, many members from Saint Mary's band club in Ghaxaq used to fight considerably. In fact, a particular sentence given in the Law Courts by Judge Dr. Antonio Mizzi (2008, p. 4) indicates that the pique between the band clubs of Saint Joseph and Saint Mary is very bitter and by chance, their *kazini* (band club headquarters) are situated in the same road,

with just a few metres apart.¹³² Ġanna Enriquez, wife of Nerik from Ġhaxaq, explains they would have barely even arrived at their home village when their competitors would start throwing chicks and hens painted in green towards them. There are others who remember that they sometimes prepared a lion made of paper beforehand (the lion is the symbol of Saint Joseph band club) with a firework inside. At times, the lion was confined in a cage by the members of Saint Mary's band club. They really enjoyed firing up the lion in front of the competing band club quarters. There were times when this pique resulted in a fight and occasionally, the members of the competing band clubs even threw objects at one another.

Around the 1980s, the *xalata* changed radically. As already stated earlier, pique was very central to the *xalata* and it made the day even more exciting. Making fun of one's rival band club was one of the characteristics of the *xalata* but as time passed, it became obvious that this could not go on. In various Maltese locations, the authorities had to intervene to keep order since there were many conflicts between rival band clubs. Sometimes, these rivalries even caused the cancellation of the village feast. For instance, in 1982 and 1998, the feast in Ġhaxaq had to be cancelled because of a fight that was so bitter that even the curia had to intervene and issue new rules. These rules were not only to be implemented on the day of the feast, but also in the *xalata*. For example, one of these rules stated that members of rival band clubs, specifically in Ġhaxaq, could not walk in front of the club more than twice. Those who did not abide by the rules had to pay a fine. In 2002, the feast was cancelled for a completely different reason. Marija Dolores Abdilla's nephew from Ġhaxaq, a firework maker, got hurt while he was working on the fireworks. Three years later, in 2005, a truck was delivering the new statue of Saint Joseph's Dream when it crashed into Saint Mary's band club façade. All those who

¹³² This sentence was presented during the hearing held on 14th October, 2008.

were interviewed agreed that after these accidents, the *xalata* was never the same but it changed entirely. Some of them claim that the *xalata* nowadays does not compare with that of the past in terms of celebrations.

The Bus

Anyone who can remember the *xalata* of the 1960s can easily note differences between the *xalata* as it is celebrated today and as it was celebrated back then, taking into consideration minute details which more often than not are overlooked nowadays. Without a doubt, this is because the contemporary bus is much more different in terms of design and style. The earlier bus used to be equipped with windows that had a sliding-function mechanism, which made it possible and easier for passengers to pop their heads and themselves out of the windows from inside. More enthusiastic persons, for whom staying inside was insufficient, would even at times be found on the roof of the bus to make a strong impression. The sound of the horn, too, was different when compared with today's. As a matter of fact, passengers remember that in old times, those who were close to the driver had the possibility to honk the horn as well. It is evident that in certain locations, there was also a sense of rivalry with regard to the number of buses owned. For instance, a person could easily be heard boasting that a certain local club has six buses as opposed to the other local club, who owns just three. The number of buses was at times even up to six for larger communities in localities such as Birkirkara, Mosta, and Hamrun. All buses used to be fully packed with people.

In the mid-twentieth century, people in some locations even witnessed buses lacking any kind of rooftops being used for *ix-xalata tal-festa*. Although this type of bus was not that very commonly seen in the *xalata*, there is a substantial number of people who have seen this type of bus without a roof. At times, the organisers made use of an old bus; others say that they used

to find an abandoned one and modify it by removing its rooftop. Unfortunately, this type of modified bus, which served to carry the feast supporters around Malta, can no longer be seen around.¹³³ Despite this loss, Figure 6.1 suitably illustrates this bygone bus without a roof, which is fully packed with partisans during a *xalata*.



An example of the modified bus, jam-packed with people ready for the *xalata*.

Music was on-going during the *xalata*. Several informants recall that even the members used to participate in the revelry on the bus by inventing lyrics with music or rhymes. For instance, Charles Borg, the Vice-President of the San Gejtanu band club clearly remembers that during

¹³³ On an interesting note, a certain man from Mqabba once claimed that whenever he comes across a double-decker bus, he thinks of former times, when joyous people used to enjoy the *xalata* using the bus without the rooftop, and is overcome with nostalgic sentiments.

a *xalata* in the sixties, people rhymed ‘*bus bus bus u x-xufier kemm hu gustuż*’ (‘kiss kiss kiss and the driver is so handsome’). Daniel Camilleri (known as ta’ Ġobb), who is a member of the Saint Mary Band Club in Ghaxaq, remembers that in the seventies, singing was an important element during the bus ride to the beach. Camilleri further recalls that the band that used to take part in the *xalata* organised by the band club was actually a small part of the band club’s wind players. Indeed, these bandsmen were members of the same band club, that of Ghaxaq, who were free to decide whether to attend. Turning our attention to Zabbar, the Maltese band master John J. Pace remembers that band aficionados eagerly expected this band at the *xalata* every year.

Other Maltese Traditions in the *Xalata*

There are many other Maltese traditions which were present during the *xalata*. Bingo was one of them. People used to enjoy playing bingo so much that it entertained them for hours. Interestingly, many numbers in bingo were referred to by certain phrases known widely in the community.¹³⁴ For instance, when the number ninety was drawn, it was referred to as ‘ix-xiħa’ (‘the old woman’), or ‘tuzzana bajd’ (‘a dozen of eggs’) was used for the number twelve. The phrase ‘ta’ San Ġorg’ (‘Saint George’s’) meant that the number twenty-three was drawn, while ‘żwiemel’ (‘horses’) was used to refer to the number fifty-five. Others include ‘Ġuda’ (‘Judas’), referring to the number thirteen, and ‘sorijiet’ (‘nuns’) for the number twenty-two.

The *xalata* was a day where one could show off his talents, even though some people were shy and stood back. Most significantly, remaining silent on such a day was considered a sin. A vast variety of music could be heard during the celebrations, including Maltese folk

¹³⁴ For an informative video about bingo, access the information through the following link: <https://www.facebook.com/tentufiet/videos/1810401469022708/>

music, like *għana*, and the repetitive sounds of the *ċuqlajta*. These were two folk musical elements, which were intertwined with the *xalata*.

Nowadays, *għana* is no longer included in the Maltese *xalata*. However, back in the day, *għana* was very popular with the Maltese and it was undoubtedly an important element of the *xalata*. For instance, an interviewee vividly remembers the participation of a prominent *għana* singer, Fredu Abela (1944-2003), who was better known as ‘il-Bamboċċu’. He used to participate in various evenings of the *xalata*. One also cannot fail to mention the *għana* musician Indri Brincat (1921–2010), nicknamed as ‘il-Pupa’, who was very popular and appreciated by his audience for his talent. In fact, Indri is considered as one of the most popular guitarists of the last century in Malta.

There were a good number of people who brought their *ċuqlajta* along with them for the day of the *xalata*. The *ċuqlajta*, also referred to as *ċoklajta*, is a traditional Maltese instrument which goes way back to Roman times. Unlike the *ċuqlajta* that was played in certain churches on Good Friday, the *ċuqlajta* that was used in the *xalata* is a manual one, made of a central handle and two joint flaps.¹³⁵ A similar musical instrument was used during certain religious ceremonies, but the one used for the *xalata* was chosen for its sound, specifically the loud noise it was capable of producing. It was a very suitable instrument for such a day due to its portability, since it was a very small instrument, and the loud noise it was capable of making, as explained. The *ċuqlajta* was also common amongst the British Football supporters and unsurprisingly, it was also seen in possession of public service workers in Malta

The participation of small bands

¹³⁵ This form of *ċuqlajta* can be found in various countries around the world.

During the second half of the twentieth century, several Maltese band clubs made use of small bands for the *xalata*, which were widely used in weddings. A typical band, commonly referred to as a 'jazz band', often comprised five or six musicians. The set-up of this kind of band was one or two trumpets, tenor and/or alto saxophone, bass drum, cymbals, and some other percussion instruments. Other instruments that also took part in these bands included the accordion, double bass, and even the guitar. The repertoire that these bands used to play was extensive, ranging from popular songs to arrangements of Maltese festive marches. The 'jazz band' primarily served to engage people into a more joyful atmosphere, not to mention pique. These bands were not affiliated with any Maltese wind band clubs since most of them actively played in Strait Street, Valletta.

Small bands' participation during the *xalata* was very popular as early as the 1940s. In *Strait Street Secrets and Stories From Behind Closed Doors* (2018) by George Cini, the 88-year-old Maltese musician Vinny Vella gives an interesting account of the *xalata* after the feast of Saint Dominic over the years 1944 and/or 1945. Vella remembers a man nicknamed 'il-Hamruni', a former organiser of *ix-xalata*, who used to bring a coach and set up an orchestra. Vinny used to play the saxophone with his brothers Duminku, who played the accordion, and Sunny on the drums. The two most competitive bands, according to Vella, which particularly used to play on this day were Twanny Chircop's *Hot Tuners* and Vella's *Velbros*. Interestingly, most of these musicians hailing from Valletta were connected through family relations. The bands' service was significantly not an act of charity; the person who organised the *xalata* used to pay the musicians. Vella remembers that when he used to spend a day at the *xalata*, the organiser would give him two Maltese Liri as well as free food and drinks: '*itik ġiex liri... tiekol u tixrob b'xejn*'.

The bands' repertoire used to include some songs that were popular in those times and even some festive marches. Music was on-going and it could be heard anywhere, even on the

bus. It goes without saying that people used to join in too. Bystanders were given the impression that they were listening to a choir of singers preparing for a concert. This type of band did not remain as popular in the *xalata* of the 1960s since it was phased out in various localities. However, Danjel Camilleri, nicknamed ta' Ġobb, from Ġhaxaq vividly remembers that in the 1970s, some band musicians used to attend the *xalata* in order to entertain those who were present. The reasons why not a full band used to be present were twofold: not all band musicians were from Ġhaxaq, but also it was up to the band musician himself to decide whether he wanted to attend or not. The number of band musicians who attended was not that large, but playing certain marches and other popular music suitable for the day of the *xalata* was enough. These small bands did not disappear completely; in fact, various band clubs in Malta still use them, like locality of Żabbar. However, it can be said that nowadays, this type of band has almost disappeared completely, although it is still used in certain activities such as during a football match, where it inspires supporters to support and motivate the team.

Carnival in Malta

Carnival in Malta has been around at least since the 1530s, when the Order of the Knights of St John (1530–1798) ruled in Malta, but it could have also been celebrated in the islands even earlier. Carnival is an important annual event, both from a cultural and a religious perspective. It marks the imminent beginning of Lent, since it is always celebrated five days before the liturgical celebration of Ash Wednesday. Indeed, 'carne vale' is the celebration of the last consumption of meat before the beginning of Lent. When the Order left the Maltese islands, a rich legacy of entertainment remained alive. During this festivity, the Maltese people become hedonist, particularly in the capital city Valletta. Many colourful floats can be seen decorating the streets of the capital, presided by *ir-Re tal-Karnival* (lit.trans. the King of Carnival), as well as a multitude of people wearing a wide variety of costumes. Masked balls,

competitions of the fanciest dress and the most grotesque masks, marching bands and extravagant parties also form part of the Carnival celebrations in Malta.

Historically, this style of entertainment goes back to the early 15th century and it was encouraged by the Grand Masters of the Order of St John. Carnival celebrations were held for the first time in 1535, ‘when the Christian armada was assembling in Malta harbor...’ (Cassar Pullicino: 166). Officially, the origins of the Carnival can be traced back to Birgu, the official headquarters of the Order, where a number of knights used to entertain themselves with different sorts of play, such as sword fighting and other tournaments. In the following century, however, Carnival started losing its popularity, especially even later, when Malta was under British rule. Notwithstanding the several disturbances in its occurrence, the tradition of the Carnival in Malta has not only remained alive but it has also sustained a strong sense of continuity up to present times. For this reason, the Maltese Carnival is culturally and historically rich.

During the reign of the Knights of St John, Malta witnessed several occurrences related to the Carnival which cannot be ignored. It is known that the Grand Master Piero de Ponte felt that the Carnival was being rejoiced with exaggerated celebrations. For this reason, in the general assembly of the Knights, de Ponte made it clear that he would not tolerate wild and excessive behavior any longer since the members of the Order were of a religious nature. Consequently, he came up with the idea of organizing tournaments and some sort of military exercises for the Christian Knights to entertain themselves while, at the same time, engaging in vigorous training for possible war against the Ottoman Empire. Additionally, later on, the Grand Master Jean Parisot de la Valette gave people permission to wear masks on their faces in public. It is worth mentioning that during this period, the Knights used to decorate their ships, where music and dance took place, and that a certain rivalry started to emerge, which

was not seen before in Malta. Later on, in 1639, Grand Master Paolo Lascaris prohibited women that participated in balls from wearing masklijew.¹³⁶

In the nineteenth century and towards the beginning of the twentieth century, the Carnival parade had also undergone some changes, specifically when Malta was a British colony. In fact, the British government forbade any form of satire relating to themes that were not popular as well as political figures. In 1936, this was extended when a law that prohibited political satire was issued.¹³⁷

The decree constituted the first sign of control over a festivity which the British had neither personally witnessed, nor knew much about it. It prohibited ‘all persons of whatever rank, sex or condition’ to wear disguises in the streets during the following four days of Carnival, given the situation in the country, in order to ‘avoid fight and all the inconveniences deriving therefrom (Cremona, 49).

Music in carnival

The Carnival festivities in Malta normally include well-attended late-night parties, masked balls, grotesque mask and dress competitions, costumed revelers, marching bands and a colorful parade of large floats. Notably, the orchestra did not participate in every outdoor function, but the Maltese wind band contributed to the entertainment of the Carnival and its participation Carnival became a tradition that never ceased to exist. A similar case to Malta’s can be noticed in north-eastern Brazil, where Crook (2005) insists that ‘[w]hereas the string

¹³⁶*Il-Karnival ta’ Malta se jsir bejn is-16 u l-20 ta’ Frar. Department of Information* (in Maltese). Malta (0139). 2 February 2007. Archived from [the original](http://www.doi-archived.gov.mt/EN/press_releases/2007/02/pr0139.asp) on 21 June 2017. For further reading, see https://web.archive.org/web/20170621225504/http://www.doi-archived.gov.mt/EN/press_releases/2007/02/pr0139.asp

¹³⁷ *Focus: Carnival - A brief history. The Malta Independent*. 16 February 2007.

orchestras of the elite shared the stage with the military bands for the indoor events', only the wind bands participated in the carnival (p. 50).

The *parata* is a dance which is annually included in the carnival's calendar of events. It aims to re-enact the Great Siege of 1565 in Malta, a significant event in Maltese history when the Muslim Turks sailed to Malta in order to fight against the Christian Order of St John and the Maltese, which resulted in a loss for the Ottoman Turks. This siege was considered as very important during the time of the Knights because it signified their military and religious power. This dance known as *parata* began to be performed with the permission of the grand master. Farmers and country people used to perform in this dance, who were later replaced by carnival companies of young dancers. They used to gather around the Grandmaster's Palace and wait for the Grand Master to give them the go-ahead in order to start this performance. In this period, without the *parata* there would be no Carnival; however, things have changed nowadays. Today, the dancers are mainly children and the *parata* does not hold any special historical significance as it used to.

Bands parading the streets

A substantial number of wind band clubs and philharmonic societies in Malta participate in the Carnival, and they have given their contribution since its very beginning. Localities such as Birkirkara, Mellieħa, Żejtun, and Ħamrun among others used to participate in the Carnival with their wind band and their *maskeruni* (themed floats). Talented musicians joined wind bands and later on, they had the opportunity to perform in the Carnival or in other celebrations dedicated to the patron saint of the parish (Cremona 2014, 192). Most of the times, in the Maltese Carnival, wind bands used to play popular operettas typical of that time while dressed in costumes characteristic of an opera.

The oldest band in Valletta wore costumes from Offenbach's opera buffa entitled *La Grande Duchesse de Gerolstein* and played various pieces from it in 1884 (*Il Patriotta* 6 March 1884, 35). Two years later, in 1886, this same band joined La Nazionale Vincitrice from Senglea, where the former band played pieces from *Donnal Juanita* while the latter performed pieces from *La Macotte* by Edmond Audran (Malta 11 March 1886, 2). These pieces were chosen because since they were popular and known by all, they attracted people from different social strata. People could buy seats to attend performances at the Manoel Theatre or the Royal Opera House depending on which form of entertainment they could afford. The inclusion of bands in Carnival events became quite important as time went by, to the extent that finding an available band to play could also be a problem. Bands were not always prepared to play jubilant music to fit the theme and atmosphere of the Carnival. Sometimes, bands ended up playing different marches that they usually played during the village feast of the patron saint. These were not considered very suitable for the Carnival (*Il-Berqa*, 23 February 1955, 2).

Nowadays, the Carnival celebrations are mainly held in Valletta and Floriana, a city close to the capital. However, various unstructured 'carnivals' are also held around the Maltese islands. In Nadur (Gozo), the carnival takes on a more grotesque and darker theme and atmosphere, where people dress up as members of the clergy or political figures, while skimpy clothing and various ghost costumes can also be seen. In Għaxaq, the carnival adopts a more traditional look, where locals wear masks and various old-fashioned clothes.

Conclusion

In summary, *ix-xalata tal-festa* is a day for the community to meet in order to celebrate and relax after long and intense feast preparations. People who looked forward to this day were

numerous; however, a good number of others who dismissed it as simply a day for those who wanted to be silly. One small detail, however, is very indicative: all those who remember the *xalata* in the past narrate their memories with fondness and with a nostalgic smile on their faces. With regard to the Carnival, in *A Description of Malta with a Sketch of its History and that of its Fortifications*, an anonymous officer resident on the island states that ‘the carnival also affords the Maltese a time of recreation’ (1801: 46). Indeed, even in relation to the Carnival, it can be noticed that the Maltese were very keen on participating in this particular activity. Members of the band club created a social chain between the band club and the community. The band club should indeed be credited for bringing together various people despite their differences because everyone is accepted and encouraged to participate in this form of entertainment.

Chapter 7

The Sound of the Maltese Marches

The Maltese village feast is considered as one of the most treasured events in the Maltese islands and it is a central tradition in Maltese culture. The band marches are so characteristic of the Maltese village that they are considered as synonymous with them.¹³⁸ The Maltese march goes back decades and has undoubtedly changed throughout the years. Richard Franco Goldman describes the Maltese march as a genre with the style of dance, which is very similar to the waltz or minuet. However, before the nineteenth century, the march had a different function than the one it serves today. The basic elements of the march have remained somewhat the same but it still has changed in certain aspects according to the times. Its history is intriguing partly because of how this phenomenon has changed in a continuous way, and yet, exploring the Maltese march's history is also crucial in order to understand its present. What was the aim of the Maltese march? How did it evolve throughout the years? These are significant questions that will be addressed in this chapter, which will investigate how the Maltese march began and how it transformed through time. A particular focus will be put on the sound of the Maltese march.

The beginning and the development of the march

Stephen Rhodes, a prominent scholar in relation to the development of bands, states that in the nineteenth century, bands did not only play marches during military services, but they also participated during civic occasions. Does this imply that before the nineteenth century, marches only served a military purpose? Were they fundamentally created for the sake of war? This is the case, since the march as a genre has a strong, regular rhythm that was originally written for

¹³⁸ For further information, refer to the interview with Sergio Grech on 8th June, 2019 aired on the University of Malta radio station.

military bands to play while marching.¹³⁹ The march formation changed with the times and in the nineteenth century, it adopted a different nature. However, I will first give a historical overview of the march from its origins until the nineteenth century, followed by a consideration of how it changed to become the march that we know today.¹⁴⁰

In the twelfth century BC, as told in the Old Testament's Book of Judges, the Israeli leader Gideon formed a superior force of three hundred men. Each man held a trumpet in one hand and a torch in the other. Later on, Virgil in one of his poems mentioned that the sound of the instruments during a battle motivates the army in the act of going to war.¹⁴¹ The cornu, tuba, and bucina were rum instruments used by the Greeks and Romans to help them pass a military message by using rhythmic calls.¹⁴² In the Middle Ages, after the Europeans came in contact with the Arab forces, they used wind and percussion instruments as war elements.¹⁴³ Even later, in the sixteenth century, Niccolo Machiavelli, an Italian historian, philosopher and politician, in his treaty *Libro della arte dell Guerra* (1521), he refers to trumpets, flutes, and drums. Machiavelli suggests that military music should be sounded while the soldiers are marching.¹⁴⁴

It is interesting to note that until the end of sixteenth century, marches were not written. Many experts in the field claim that up till then, marches were relatively simple. In fact, research suggests that they made use of percussion instruments and maybe included an improvisation by a musician playing the fife. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, marches were still mostly simple. Many composers of the time used to adapt pieces from operas, oratorio, or popular songs and transform them into marches. Two important composers were Jean-Baptiste

¹³⁹ Refer to Cambridge Dictionary by accessing <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/march>

¹⁴⁰ It is important to refer to the past since the past helps one to identify the roots of a tradition.

¹⁴¹ Publius Vergilius Maro was better known as Virgil. He composed the epic poem the *Aeneid* between the years 29 and 19 BC.

¹⁴² These calls used rhythm in order to capture the attention of soldiers. Many Biblical anecdotes mention the use of instruments to indicate the arrival of the enemy. Also, music in the Bible emphasizes the celebration and glory shown towards God.

¹⁴³ Refer to *Sarasens* as these were Arabs who lived in the desert surrounding Syria.

¹⁴⁴ In this treatise, Machiavelli suggests how the soldiers should communicate.

Lully (1632–1687), a French composer born in Italy, and François-André Danican Philidor (1726–1795), who was also French.¹⁴⁵

The nineteenth century marks a vital change in the history of band marches. This is due to the fact that bands gained popularity and various composers started experimenting in their musical writings, in so doing making quite a few advances in the composition of marches. This period was called ‘the Golden Age’, a century which gave birth to the best compositions with respect to band marches. Arnold Myres (1997) significantly observed that three important processes were taking place in the nineteenth century: firstly, the development in instrumentation, particularly brass instruments; secondly, the fact that instruments became more mass-produced; and lastly, the substantial increase in the popularity of brass instruments amongst the composers of the time, particularly composers of band marches.¹⁴⁶

The Maltese March

Maltese bands are capable of playing a wide variety of music, from arrangements of popular music to festive marches composed with the intention of being played in the village feast. Many Maltese people consider marches to be their favourite kind of music to listen to. In fact, some adolescents meet on a regular basis in order to listen to marches. There are five types of marches: Christmas-themed marches; funeral marches, which are played during the Holy Week; festive marches, which are mostly played during the village feast dedicated to the patron

¹⁴⁵ Philidor was also referred to as André Danican Philidor. He contributed to the development of *opéra comique* (comic opera) with the help of his compositions. For further information regarding this composer, refer to the *The Life of Philidor Musician And Chess-Player* by George Allen (1863) or access <https://archive.org/details/cu31924017593694/page/n9>

¹⁴⁶Arnold Myres further comments that ‘Keyed and valved brass and the remodelling of the slide trombone provided a varied palette of timbres: an instrumentarium of extensive chromatic compass in voices ranging from contrabass to soprano. The surge in brass playing in bands went hand in hand with the mass production of instruments at affordable prices’ (p. 115). For further information, read *Brass Instruments: Their History and Development* (2012) by Anthony Baines, particularly Chapter 8, entitled ‘Valve Era’.

saint; waltzes, which generally have a waltz tempo and are popular during Easter; and grotesque marches, which are played during Carnival celebrations. Undoubtedly, *inni di gloria* is a very popular musical genre with bands. *Inni di gloria* could form part of the genre of compositions called *cantata*, which is a type of long vocal composition aimed at instruments as well as both solo voices and voices which are accompanied by a choir. The relation between *inni di gloria* and bands lies in the fact that *inni di gloria* were compositions that were mostly prevalent with various band composers (Vella Bondin 2000: 202).

Not everyone's ear is synchronised in the same way. This is due to various reasons, such as cultural difference. Different countries vary with regard to both the level and the appreciation of music. Western Europeans, such as the British, the Germans, and the Scandinavians have a different band style than Latin ones, such as the Spaniards and the Italians. The band tradition in England is a very strong one, as can be observed by looking at various British bands. In fact, the sound of the Maltese band can be easily compared and contrasted to the British band when one attends an orchestral concert in the *Royal Festival Hall*, especially if the programme includes pieces that can be listened to in both countries. An English tourist in Malta – and even tourists coming from different countries – might be surprised with the sound of the Maltese band due to the fact that they are used to listening to the so-called brass bands which comprise an assortment of standardised brass and percussion instruments.¹⁴⁷ On the other hand, if Italians are used to listening to bands of small villages in Sicily, they might easily consider the sound of Maltese bands as being very similar to what they are used to listening in their country. Len Tyler, Alex Vella Gregory and Ray Sciberras comment:¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ The Maltese bands can be generally called symphonic as they include wind instruments (including saxophones).

¹⁴⁸ Len Tyler served as bandmaster to a British military band. Interestingly, Tyler was one of the last British military bandmen who resided in Malta. Ray Sciberras is a popular Maltese composer.

The Maltese band marches' sound is quite distinctive and for me as a UK resident sound quite Mediterranean in character. From the occasional bands I have heard (many years ago) from Mediterranean countries the sound is similar but Maltese band marches do seem to have their own characteristic style. (Len Tyler)

No one listens to the same kind of bands. Everyone is used to different sounds and cultures. If one is more familiar with British military bands, without any doubt, he will find the Maltese bands' sound a bit too harsh. This is due to the fact that the sound of the band changes according to its use. This happens in the Maltese context too where the band that plays a particular programme is different to that that we can listen to in the streets. Surely, the Maltese band's sound is an authentic one and is popular with the foreigners. When someone goes abroad he will enjoy listening to something different than what he is used to. The tourist comes to Malta to live its culture in its totality. (Alex Vella Gregory)

Frankly, I don't believe that there is actually a Maltese sound. For many years, our bands were formed according to the Italian band model. This helped our band adopt a more Italian sound. Although one should say that along the years, with the help of modern instruments and musical pieces, this sound changed and became more British. (Ray Sciberras)

The Maltese march is synonymous with the band tradition in Malta. Hundreds of marches are written annually by various Maltese composers. As previously noted, the types of compositions that are written for bands vary, although the march remains the most popular one in relation to the band tradition in Malta. The term *tal-banda* ('of the band') implies something inferior aimed at those who invent music for band aficionados, but this is not the case. When one

scrutinises these compositions, one can note their attention to detail. There are many considerations that the composer has to keep in mind while composing the march, such as keeping the musical structure that his predecessors used, while at the same time introducing new ideas so that his march sounds different from anyone else's. At the same time, the composer has to make sure that he is giving his listeners something that they are used to listening to. For instance, the introduction to a Maltese march usually has a bombastic and robust sound that the majority of the band participates in.

In the beginning, Maltese bands imitated various Italian and Sicilian bands. It is of utmost importance that Maltese bands are identified with the artistic idea of the Italian school, that is with civil bands that are made up of the people for the people. It is quite clear, however, that from the beginning of the 1920s up till the end of the 1930s, the Maltese band acquired a different sound. The Philharmonic Band La Vallette spent a considerable amount of money in order to bring the best Italian expert in band music, Alessandro Vessella, to Malta. He managed to reform the sound of the Maltese band with the introduction of many instruments that did not usually form part of it, like saxophones. With these drastic changes, which happened at the heart of the sound of the Maltese band, Vessella continued to emphasise the fact that every band should consider the number and the types of instruments it has while building a repertoire accordingly.

There were various other Italian bandmasters who assisted in the formation of Maltese bands.¹⁴⁹ Some of these were intellectuals, while others were journalists or writers who contributed to local culture, especially when with regard to literature and music. Italian bandmasters have not only influenced bands in their own time, but even contemporary bands.

¹⁴⁹ Friggieri (1979: 37) notes that these refugees stabilised new private schools, while others started teaching literature, just like Dante.

This is due to the fact that many of the compositions written each year by different composers include sounds which were introduced by those who ruled Malta in the past. As a result, the sound of the Maltese band is very similar to Sicilian bands' sound. The majority of Sicilian bands are not as numerous as Maltese bands, which have a larger amount of musicians. However, many interviewees commented that Sicilian bands produce a better sound as they make use of a complete instrumentation. The Italians influenced the Maltese march especially when in relation to the importance given to melody. This is still evident since there are many band aficionados who believe that a march is no good if it lacks melody, and it would surely be unpopular.

In a good number of nineteenth-century musical scores, the instrumentation of various marches which are not used anymore can be identified. At the time, Maltese bands included a vast instrumentation and the choice of instruments was aimed at obtaining a rich harmony. The first table presents an example of the instruments that were used during that period. On the other hand, the second table (Figure 2) shows a change through time, where the number of instruments used at the end of the twentieth century amounted to much less.

The sound of Maltese bands is different due to the fact that it is very common in Malta not to use all the instruments in the band. Peter Paul Ciantar and Andrew Coleiro indicate that:

Nowadays, our bands have become quite straight forward (clarinets, trumpets, etc.) and do not contain the whole family of instruments. This makes our bands sound empty musically, because the instrumentation is incomplete. (Peter Paul Ciantar)

One can note that foreign bands still make use of certain instruments which we do not use anymore here in Malta. (Andrew Coleiro)

Without any doubt, British military bands residing in Malta influenced the Maltese band tradition, which is evident in different compositions, particularly in marches, that adopted a more military style. This is particularly noticeable in compositions written around 1920. Presently, this influence was observed by various people who have both knowledge of and experience in Maltese bands.

Between the years 1960 and 1980, a few band composers, such as Joseph Azzopardi with the march entitled 'Chinese Rose' and Anthony Aquilina with his 'Il-Bożen', introduced erotic influences in their marches. Two other composers that must not be overlooked are Angelo Pullicino, another composer who came after the 1950s, who introduced original sounds in his compositions, and Joseph Abela Scolaro, whose marches were quite complex. Close to the end of the twentieth century, composers started paying even more attention to melody. Indeed, many marches, especially the festive ones, served a communicative purpose, where the people (more precisely, the aficionados) invented lyrics that matched the melody of the march in order to pass on a message. Composers, such as Andrew Coleiro, Archibald Mizzi, and Raymond Sciberras, created simple melodies with a catchy tune, so that the listeners would return home whistling the melody they would have just heard and subconsciously memorised.

After the 1980s, many British military bands were brought to Malta in order to perform in various concerts and master classes. These brought along with them a wide variety of new instruments, such as the drum kit, which have now been introduced to the contemporary Maltese band's instrumentation. The Eynsford Concert Band was one such British military band, which was invited by the *Taqsimu Kultura tal-Ministeru tal-Affarijiet Barranin, Kultura u Żgħażaġh* (the Culture Section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Culture and the Young)

and the *Għaqda Kulturali* (Cultural Committee) of the villages Paola and Tarxien.¹⁵⁰ This concert was performed on 1st April, 1986. A similar concert was also held on 8th August, 1988 in Valletta under the direction of Dewi Jones.

A typical sound that can be identified in many bands around Malta is that of the imbalance in instrumentation, which leads to a difference in sound. The lack of intonation of lots of instruments in Maltese bands aids in the production of strange sounds. An interesting characteristic of Maltese bands is that its musicians are considered to be good players with regard to sight reading, that is they are capable to play a piece of music on their first encounter with the piece. However, the fact still remains that in the majority of times, the music produced does not comply with what the composer originally had in mind. These factors, which can be considered as a lack of attention or professionalism, contribute to the Maltese band's distinct sound.

More recently, in 2018, hundreds of people claimed themselves to be bandmasters or band composers. One could say that in each town or village in Malta, a substantial amount of renowned composers can be found, as well as amateur musicians who aspire to become like the predecessors, and are extremely dedicated and motivated.

Both foreigners and locals form part of the substantial amount of composers and bandmasters in the Maltese band tradition. Without any doubt, these musicians played a major role in the formation of the Maltese band tradition. Indeed, nowadays the Maltese people still enjoy the Maltese band's heritage, which dates back to more than a century ago. On the other hand, the production of the band composers nowadays shadows that of the band composers of the past.

¹⁵⁰ In this band's official website, it is claimed that the "Eynsford Concert Band has gained an international reputation having toured Austria, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Ireland, Netherlands, Malta, Spain and Belgium as well as playing aboard cruise ships in the Fjords of Norway and the Mediterranean where we provided the on-board entertainment". For more information access <http://www.eynsfordconcertband.co.uk/about/>

Conclusion

This chapter presented an insight into the sound produced by local Maltese bands, especially the sound of the Maltese march, which is unique and particular. Indeed, this chapter gave an overview of the development of the march more broadly, which then developed into a discussion of the Maltese march in particular. As noted earlier, the sound produced by bands is particular to each country and it is therefore of great cultural value.

The sound of Maltese bands is a very interesting phenomenon as well as a multi-layered one since many factors contribute to such an authentic Maltese sound. As observed, the bands in Malta were formed with the assistance of many foreigners, who organised activities that helped to expand Malta's musical characters that can still be enjoyed nowadays. The Maltese band tradition's musical journey through different time periods resulted in a totality of sound that makes the Maltese band's sound particular and intriguing. Crucially, the Maltese band's sound is also significant because it represents a vital aspect of Maltese culture.

Conclusion

Ever since bands started flourishing in Malta, the locals have enjoyed the sounds produced. As already stated in Chapter 1, Castagna (1888: 248) claims that the first band in Malta was formed in 1860 by Indri Borg in the village of Żebbuġ. Probably, this marked the beginning of the Maltese band tradition. The *banda* has served people throughout the years and so, social changes have affected its tradition. In all this, the band club and its related activities (musical and non-musical) positioned itself between the secular and the sacred. By extension, the *banda* served secular communal needs as much as religious celebrations that, after all, enhanced collectively shared communal sentiments.

The Italian *maestri* that resided in Malta after the Risorgimento, that is, at the beginning of the 1900s, helped with the establishment of bands in Malta. These *maestri* implanted Italian trends in the tradition. Furthermore, British military bands parading in Malta, mainly in the three harbour cities, brought with them further influences in terms of musical style, instrumentation, and performance. For years, the tradition swung between Italian-leaning and British-leaning band music practices. More recently, new trends emerged during the 1980s as a result of the presence of foreign, especially British, bands participating in summer arts festivals held in Malta. The wind band tradition in Malta has never looked back and the number of band clubs in Maltese towns and villages has continued to increase.

Continuity and change in the Maltese band tradition have been shaped by social changes, the influence of the Maltese Catholic Church, national and international politics and, to some extent, the recording industry. Maltese wind bands have continued to evolve and while keeping old characteristics have come to manifest new ones. This kind of balance has kept the tradition evolving and serving a range of musical and extra-musical interests and tastes.

Continuity and change were identified in three areas: (a) the band club as a physical space which hosts both musical and non-musical events; (b) the band club as a community of

people that values the *banda* tradition and the contribution of their club to the social and cultural life of the town/village; (c) the band club as the producer of music both for the village feast as well as for other events. In each area, one could still notice the preservation of the past as it amalgamated with future aspirations. The physical space of the band club presents the contrasting elements of the ‘old’ and ‘new’ through the hanging photos of past bandmasters, showcases filled with trophies and documents which rub shoulders with the latest technological innovations. The *kazin* is generally situated in the middle of the village square in front of the church in order to have an equally prominent position. Band clubs attract people from diverse social strata whilst serving as a space for socialisation, recreation and, sometimes, even political debate. Thus, social and musical activities within the band tradition are akin to a huge social document equal in importance to any other historical or anthropological document.

The Maltese band march has been influenced by various new factors while at the same time preserving traditional characteristics. Malta’s political history influenced the Maltese march as well. During the time when Italy exerted a strong political and cultural influence in Malta, marches leaned heavily, in terms of style, towards marches composed in nearby Sicily and mainland Italy. However, the more British influence established itself in Malta the more Maltese marches ventured into new musical spheres that were mainly inspired by British military marches. All this had both a musical and political background.

Local bands also participated actively in both national and partisan politics. Throughout the years, bands took part in various street demonstrations organised by the two main Maltese political parties. Political influence also entered the physical space of the club since these clubs were occasionally used for political meetings. The band sometimes serves to mediate or establish the contact between politicians and the common people, for instance, during street parades.

Technological innovations left their mark too, this time on the increased popularity of locally produced marches. This happened mainly through the recording and transmission of marches, which became more available at any time and in any place. Consequently, listeners got more into the aesthetic value of marches with aficionados becoming not only able to distinguish one march as being ‘better’ than others; they also became acquainted with the different sections within a march even if they happened to have no knowledge of musical theory whatsoever. More recently, cassettes, CDs and the use of the internet have changed drastically the recording and diffusion of Maltese marches.

In summary, *ix-Xalata tal-Festa* is a day in which the community meets in order to celebrate and relax after long and intense feast preparations. People who looked forward to this day were numerous; however, a good number of others dismissed it as simply a day for those who wanted to be silly. One small detail, however, is very indicative: all those who remember the *xalata* in the past narrate their memories with fondness and with a nostalgic smile on their faces. With regard to the Carnival, in *A Description of Malta with a Sketch of its History and that of its Fortifications*, an anonymous officer resident on the island states that ‘the carnival also affords the Maltese a time of recreation’ (1801: 46). Indeed, even in relation to the Carnival, it can be noticed that the Maltese were very keen on participating in this particular activity. Members of the band club created a social bond between the band club and the community. The band club should indeed be credited for bringing various people together despite their differences, because everyone is accepted and encouraged to participate in this form of entertainment.

The unique sound produced by Maltese bands, particularly that of the Maltese march. It first outlined the development of the march in quite a detailed manner, and then moved on to a discussion of the Maltese march. The latter is culturally precious as each country has its own sound produced by bands, which makes the Maltese march identifiable, different and

unique. There are many factors which make the Maltese march sound authentic. Other countries also had an impact on the sound produced since there were many foreigners who contributed to bands in Malta, thereby leaving a trace of their influence. In fact, certain activities which they organised can still be enjoyed nowadays. The band tradition in Malta resulted in a very specific and captivating sound, the result of a long musical journey through different time periods. One cannot fail to point out that the sound of the Maltese band is significant because it represents an important aspect of Maltese culture.

The existence of the National Band and the performances of foreign brass and wind bands in the 1980s were attempts at presenting models of professional band playing. At this stage, one may put forward a proposal for the re-establishment of a professional national Maltese wind band on a full-time basis that parallels the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra (MPO). Such a professional band may serve as a model to and inspire other village bands to improve their musical teaching and performances. Another important aspect that should be taken into consideration is the editing and publishing of existing scores found in local band clubs. This can be done through a proper legislation for this purpose that safeguards the interests of both the band club as, sometimes, the sole owner of these scores, and the editor working on them. The same legislation should also detail the obligations of publishers if the club allows the dissemination of these edited scores.

The present research has focused on a number of insights; however, much more remains to be investigated regarding other aspects of the Maltese band tradition. One particular aspect that deserves much more attention and a wider analytical approach regards the compositional techniques employed in Maltese marches over the years and how these techniques changed as a consequence of other factors which were not necessarily of a musical nature. Further studies on the intermingling between Maltese band music and politics can highlight a broader dimension of music during political activities. Much more material on band music and partisan

politics in Malta is to be found in band clubs, awaiting further research. Finally, another research area that deserves more attention is the mutual relationship between the local recording industry and the diffusion and appraisal of Maltese marches. This and other aspects of this musical tradition may also be approached from an interdisciplinary point of view with, for instance, ethnomusicologists collaborating with political scientists, historians, and experts in communication and business studies, just to mention a few. An interdisciplinary approach to the study of the wind band tradition in Malta can shed further light not only on the music itself, the events and the people that make it but, also on the diverse strategies that both individuals and groups draw up to gain power, recognition, and other benefits that could otherwise be almost impossible to achieve without the mediation of *banda* music.

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