

# Maltese *Għana*: Folksinging, Representation and Performance

Dissertation in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts in Mediterranean Studies

**Mediterranean Institute  
University of Malta**

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With a special dedication to my parents, all *Ghannejja* and *Kitarristi*, the *Ghana* community in Malta and the diaspora, and anyone interested in the study and appreciation of local cultures.



## Abstract

Malta's National Festival of *Ghana* (the name of a certain type of traditional singing performances), begun in 1998 and since rebranded several times, has alienated the very performers who embody the music tradition. Why? It is argued, based on ethnographic and archival research, that *Ghana* means different things to different people. To the *ghannejja* (performers) and guitarists, *Ghana* is a living tradition to be interpreted in what is an active field of cultural production; *ghannejja* do not 'sing' but rather perform in an intense representation and performance of self, to which guitarists and aficionados contribute, both during the performance itself and in intense discussions afterwards that contribute to an *Ghana* hypertextuality. To many "not born in *Ghana*", including some festival organisers, *Ghana* has the status of a folkloric artefact, not art; it is represented as part of a vanished world; and its performances need saving by finding new audiences — so *Ghana*, and the *ghannejja*, must change. The dissertation examines various aspects of these divergent views. It outlines how *Ghana* is an autonomous social field with distinct roles, a market and careers. It explores the history of the National Festival and shows how the successive artistic directors had different visions but a shared rhetoric about the identity of *Ghana*. It also shows how the logic of festivals promotes the idea of *Ghana* as an ethnic showcase and spectacle, while the *Ghana* community embraces a different aesthetic. The dissertation concludes with some general proposals for more creative dialogue between the *Ghana* community and festival organisers, and other cultural producers.

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*"Investing in human capital to create more opportunities and promote the well-being of society"*.



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Managing Director Inge Ceustermans, where a number of panel sessions and working groups were hosted.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This provided the opportunity to discuss aspects of this research project with mentors who have contributed to the development of this study, including participation in a research working group led by Prof. Brett Pyper, held at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

## 1. Introduction

This study of Maltese ‘folksinging’, as *Ghana* is conventionally translated, began as an attempt to address a puzzle. In December 2021, *Ghana* was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The decision was confirmed during the sixteenth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, held online between 13th and 18th December 2021. The news was carried and celebrated in most of the local newspapers. A morning programme on the national television station, TVM, discussed the application with the head at the time of the Cultural Directorate of Malta, Mario Azzopardi, and the *ghannej* (folksinger) and researcher, Charles Seychell *iz-Żorro*<sup>1</sup> (Micallef 2021, Vassallo 2021).

When the Cultural Directorate submitted the application for *Ghana* to be inscribed by UNESCO, it was entitled: *L-Ghana, lehen il-poplu Malti*, which translates into ‘the voice of the Maltese people’. Indeed, only a few months later, on the eve of a general election, the outgoing minister of national heritage was endorsed by a law professor who hailed the minister’s UNESCO success: “I can mention the acknowledgement achieved for Maltese *Ghana*, globally, so [...] we have Maltese *Ghana* which is unique, it is now recognised by UNESCO [...]” (translated from Maltese).

And yet, even during the preparation of the application it was evident that there was an unusual problem, which was partly acknowledged in the application itself:

The visibility of *Ghana* at the National Folksong Festival has been reduced because of the recent emphasis placed on international folk music, especially on the main stage in the Argotti Gardens. Responding to community concerns, the organising committee, Festivals Malta, part of the Arts Council, is investigating ways to address this problem. Possible solutions will be informed by research on the festival, for example that being undertaken at the University of Malta by one of the previous Festival directors, George Mario Attard. (Nomination file No. 01681, Section E.3.b.i.4 2020)

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<sup>1</sup> In Malta ‘a distinctive village nickname’ given by villagers is a term by which an individual could be referred to (Boissevain 1993: 37). It can be attributed to a whole family or a selected number, passed down through kinship as well as attributed to one individual, which can then be passed within the family. Within the *Ghana* community performers can also be referred to by these names which double as artist names, sometimes also signifying a renowned family of performers. When a name is generated from within the *Ghana* community it tends to carry meaning which could serve to project performing abilities in *Ghana*.

The result of the research referred to, of course, is this dissertation.<sup>2</sup> I will say more about the conduct of my research in the next chapter. What I wish to highlight here is the irony noted that, even as initiatives were being taken at a national level to give global recognition to *Ghana*, the genre was being given less importance in the one National Festival that, since 1998, was meant to focus particularly on the genre.

One could expand further on the irony. On the TVM programme discussing the UNESCO initiative, Azzopardi stressed that the UNESCO committee “seek applications which are represented and driven by members of the community.” However, as the Cultural Directorate well knew, that was not the sentiment expressed by the ‘community’. Even as the global recognition was being trumpeted as international appreciation of *Ghana*, the practitioners themselves were loudly complaining that they were not appreciated.

The difference between the organiser and the community reached its peak, in public, during an information session meant to share the process of the UNESCO application with the *Ghana* community held in December 2019 (See Figure 1). During this meeting a number of *ghannejja* (singers) and *kitarristi* (guitarists, virtually the sole *Ghana* musicians today) voiced their concern about the way the National Festival was being conducted.

The presentation sparked a discussion. Some questioned even the intentions behind the application, but most of the discussion was about the National Festival, with *Ghana* performers using the occasion as an opportunity to voice their concerns (See Figure 2). The atmosphere got tense when *ghannejja* and *kitarristi* raised several questions regarding the festival programming, the time allocated for each session, the exclusion of practitioners from the planning process and, above all, the lack of understanding of *Ghana* by both the organisers and the festival and generic audiences. Indeed, one *ghannej* claimed that if the organisers are more focused on presenting foreign artists, including local non-*Ghana* performers, the organisers should rename the festival as *Barraninfest* (Foreignerfest) as they, the *ghannejja*

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<sup>2</sup> Although this research project is mentioned in the UNESCO application, it should be clarified that the pursuit of this research was not commissioned by the organising entity of the festival and my position as an artistic director ended before realising one edition of the festival, as I shall explain further in the following chapter.

and *kitarristi* feel they are ‘strangers’ in their own festival. Another exclaimed that with the numerous musical styles performed at the festival it could be rebranded as ‘*Rockestra*’.<sup>3</sup>

Some *għannejja* claimed that the organiser of the National Festival does not regularly attend the *Għana* sessions which are organised by the community so that they could get a better understanding of the current scene and know who the contemporary active performers are. Here the community was also acknowledging that there is no formal selection process in place in the production of the festival. In fact, one female *għannejja*, Michelina Camilleri, also claimed that she tried several times to perform at the festival; however, she was never invited to perform. Some continued to stress that the programming of the festival does not reflect the nature of *Għana*.<sup>4</sup>

As soon as the discussion came to a close, some of the performers present participated in a *Għana Spirtu Pront* session. During this session intended to commemorate the potential recognition achieved through the enlisting of *Għana* in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list, one of the *għannejja* Emanuel Ellul *il-Begġ* expressed in *Għana*, how “*Għana* is becoming a business”. Kalcidon Vella *id-Danny*, performed a request in the form of a prayer stating that “*għannejja* need someone to take care of them”. Another, Jason Seguna *in-Nekus*, expressed his wish to be invited to perform at the festival. Whilst Anġlu Theuma *il-Kina* agreed with *Id-Danny* that “whoever takes the responsibility to take care of them is required to amend rather than instil further divide between them”. Another remarked that he was not in agreement with those who mix-combine *Għana* with song-singing. He went further and in dismay stated that they have been robbed of the National Festival, and that now it should be called *tal-Gegwigija* (chaos). *Il-Begġ* expressed that those who know, should pass on the knowledge to those who might not be familiar with *Għana*, in order to administer properly. A reply expressed that, even though knowledge has been passed it was ignored. Anġlu stated that in some cases *għannejja* are being ‘used’ for various motives and continued: “Don’t count

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<sup>3</sup> *Rockestra* is an annual festival organised under the Patronage of the President of Malta which celebrates popular classic rock songs performed by the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra together with local popular singers and musicians (Office of the President 2023).

<sup>4</sup> During the discussion *għannejja* emphasised on the importance that the duration of *Għana* sessions, should not be reduced.

us among those singers who repeat themselves. We are tradition. And if you want unity, we need a relationship.”

I have given some detail about a single discussion and performance in order to give a taste of what an argument between culture officials and academics, on the one hand, and *ghannejja*, on the other, can be like. It is personal, pungent, funny, may partly obscure personal agendas, and certainly goes off script. From the organisers’ point of view, it goes off at a tangent, while for the practitioners it was the organisers who were skirting the main issue.

For all the brio, the practitioners were making a point about alienation from the National Festival — part by exclusion, part by voluntary withdrawal — that is also reflected in the numbers. Below is a table which is indicative of a selection of editions of the programming of the National Festival. It does not include the workshops which started being produced as part of the festival programming. It focuses on music performances during the main days of the festival so the peripheral activities were not included in this analysis either.

Year	Days	<i>Ghana</i> sessions	<i>Ghana</i> performers	Local groups	International groups
1998	3	≈40-60	65+	0	0
2009	3	15	48	5	3
2010	3	18	60	5*	3*
2011	3	20	50+	4*	3
2018	2	16	42	2*	2
2019	2	≈15	≈25	4*	1
2020	5	4	9	5	0
2022	2	15	29	7*	2
2023	6	5	≈16	2	5

Table.1, 2023. A breakdown of participants at the National Festival. [Data Table] (20 July).

\* Means that one performance included the participation of *ghannejja* and/or *kitarristi*.

Many other programmes of the festival editions have been analysed, however the data of *Ghana* participants was not always published. Nevertheless the above data indicates the gradual shift that will be discussed in further detail in this dissertation. Performers were listed

as participants of the festival and multiple performances by the same performers were not counted either. It must also be noted that, by 2009, *Ghana Spirtu Pront* sessions at the festival were being performed by six *ghannejja* (instead of the more usual four) which is why the decrease in *Ghana* sessions is not reflected immediately in the number of participants. This however becomes evident in subsequent editions.

Activities produced by the festival organisers include press conferences which used to have *Ghana* sessions, as well as a calendar of special activities organised as part of the programme beyond the main festival duration at *Argotti Gardens*. These used to include *Imnarja* festivities at *Buskett Gardens*, *Bidwi Jsellem is-Sajf*, *San Girgor*, *Żejt iż-Żejtun* and activities in *Birżebbuġa*, amongst other peripheral activities designed as part of the outreach programme of the National Festival.

#### **Practitioners and festival organisers: explaining the gap**

For my research, I interviewed roughly equal numbers of practitioners, both *ghannejja* and *kitarristi* (18), aficionados and *dilettanti* (16) and experts, including festival directors (17). The gap between practitioners and organisers tended to be explained in one of three ways.

A first was favoured by the practitioners and stated that organisers and intellectuals did not understand the genre and did not make an effort to do so. They did note exceptions (such as the late poet, Oliver Friggieri, and folklorists Ġorġ Mifsud-Chircop and Charles Coleiro whom they spoke of with great respect). The basis of the explanation is not just personal, avoidable fault. The claim is that *Ghana* needs, so to speak, to be “within you”, *trid tkun fik*. ‘Outsiders’ needed practitioners’ help. (Indeed, one prominent *ghannej*, who began performing late in life, was sometimes also told that he was not “raised within *Ghana*”, remarked even during a performance by a *ghannej di natura; jien fil-lista tal-ghannejja u int fil-lista tad-dilettanti*, I am included in the list of *ghannejja* whilst you belong to the list of *id-dilettanti*.)

A second explanation was favoured by some organisers and intellectuals. The practitioners were at fault for not being interested in change and adaptation, both ‘necessary’ to attract new audiences to *Ghana*, and which is what the festivals were set out to do. This



understanding goes back all the way to the first two editions (1998 and 1999) of the National Festival, when the event had the format of a competition, and where the judges awarded prizes to singers who were not considered, within the *Ghana* community, as talented as those who lost out. Under pressure of wholesale withdrawal by the leading *ghannejja*, the competition aspect was not repeated from the third year on.

A third explanation finds favour with members in both camps. It identifies money as behind the disagreements, whether it is because the practitioners are “greedy” and demand payment (30–50 euro) for participation, which one organiser said he had been determined “to cut out”; or because the organisers discriminate between foreign participants and the *ghannejja*, taking the latter for granted; or because more funding is needed from central government, which is currently lacking, in contrast with funds available for participants in national music festivals such as the Eurovision Song Contest and *MużikaMużika*, among others.

All three explanations invoke failings that could be avoided. In this dissertation I will offer a different kind of explanation. I do not deny avoidable failings (and indeed come up with some policy recommendations in my final chapter). However I point out that there are structural issues as well, which individuals can do very little about without some policy changes.

These structural issues are three. As I explain in my next chapter, it was not possible to immerse myself in fieldwork without facing the music scene headlong. I point out a fundamental difference between the practices involved in the organisation of *Ghana* sessions by practitioners, and the practices involved in the ‘festivalization of culture’ (Bennett, Taylor, and Woodward 2020).

Both sets of practices are imbued with an ethos of ‘preserving folklore’ and ‘national identity’. The UNESCO bid referred to *L-Ghana*, a Maltese folksong tradition; *L-Ghana, it-tradizzjoni muzikali tal-folklor*. Most practitioners would identify themselves as ‘guardians’ of Maltese folklore (Fsadni 1993: 336, 347; Sant-Cassia 2000: 290–291). But practitioners have in mind a real tradition that has changed over the years, embedded in their social practices, and constituted as what Pierre Bourdieu (1993) would call a ‘field’, or a domain in its own

right. Second, festivals on the other hand, have in mind a tradition that, in some ways, would qualify as ‘invented’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). *Ghana* is in any case rooted in a different set of practices — a culture that has a whole repertoire of festivals, where the whole imparts a significance to *Ghana* that it doesn’t have among its practitioners.

Thirdly, I explore a difference of aesthetics. I argue that *ghannejja* and *kitarristi* have an unmistakable individuality, known to audiences. What is sung, played and experienced, is affected by the ensemble and the criteria by which a performance is evaluated, depends on the occasion and the fellow performers. Practitioners and aficionados do not judge singing and guitar playing on musical criteria alone. I look at the aesthetic of the *Ghana* festivals, which have changed over the years, but which always attempt to display *Ghana* in an ethnic showcase; the criteria are legitimate but different to those of *Ghana*. Some criteria do overlap but they are not the same. The aesthetic of a *Ghana* session is a presentation of individual self, even of manhood (Herzfeld 1985); the aesthetic of the festivals is a showcase of ethnicity — it is a ‘re-presentation’ of *Ghana*, outside its embedded context.

[...] “tradition” may well be located in, and embodied by, discursive practices—a way of talking about (and listening to) the past by reference to cultural practices (such as *ghana*) deemed to represent “tradition.” *Ghana*, like arabesk and flamenco, rather than *being* a “tradition,” can well *represent* tradition. “Tradition” thus becomes not just something invented in an identifiable (recent) past (as Hobsbawm’s contributors suggest), but a way of *talking* about the past (and the present) through the identification of certain practices that require *preservation*. (Sant Cassia 2000: 289)

I explore the performance as it occurs in *Ghana* sessions and festivals respectively. Several factors make *Ghana* sessions a dense, dramatic experience: the different possible relations between singers themselves and the guitarists; the singing itself is a hypertext, alluding to other encounters; the audience follows intently and when comprised by members of the community, the space is transfixed and *Ghana* takes hold of every individual. The prestige of the singer is at stake, a dramatic possibility that gives depth to the encounter in ritualistic behaviour. A festival is necessarily a spectacle, unlike the ritual-like encounter of *Ghana* sessions (Handelman 1998; Fsadni 1993), whose values — shorter singing encounters, control over ‘mishaps’, openness to strangers to *Ghana* — are worthwhile values but they also ‘flatten’ the dense encounter that *ghannejja*, *kitarristi* and aficionados expect to find.

In the conclusion I review the comparison implicit in the preceding chapters with a view to making some proposals that could bridge the gap of understanding between the *Ghana* community and festival organisers. The aim is to address a series of misrepresentations that are generated at the national level in hope that a better understanding of the music scene and its art, *Ghana*, will lead to increased appreciation and forge a better working relationship between the community and the organiser.

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Fig.1 georgemario, 2019. *The gathering of għannejja, prim-kitarri and kitarri at the Domus Hall in Zejtun.* [Photograph] (8 December, 20191208\_094914.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonèn Studios).



Fig.2 georgemario, 2019. *An għannej sharing observations with Dr Baldacchino during the UNESCO Meeting.* [Photograph] (8 December, 20191208\_104339.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonèn Studios).



## 2. Fieldwork: finding my way in the field

This dissertation is based on research conducted between 2019–2023. It was prolonged because no sooner was I ready to begin fieldwork that the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, bringing to an end all *Ghana* sessions effectively until 2022. The National Festival of *Ghana* was also affected, being held online one year and cancelled in another.

My academic and social background was also unusual given the topic. I have already mentioned in passing that I used to work for *FestivalsMalta*, the entity currently responsible for organising the National Festival and that this research project was mentioned in the UNESCO application. I also came to study *Ghana* with a varied background — in art, design and communication, classical musical education and as a Gozitan. All features came in useful to help me find my way in the field as I shall show. The only background I did not have was an *Ghana* ‘upbringing’ and previous study in social anthropology!

This research project knows its beginning in an art project where I was working on the Maltese language. The exploration of the various applications of Maltese led me to *Ghana*. As the community would say, I was not born in *Ghana*, so I started attending the *Serati Ghana* sessions; (“*Serati*” strictly speaking refers only to those held in the evening<sup>1</sup> but I shall sometimes, for simplicity’s sake, use the term to refer to morning sessions too). At the time I was keen to learn more about the music tradition and the way the native language was being expressed in music.

While I was exploring a variety of art forms to interpret the linguistic form into the material state, I kept being intrigued by the oral transmission and expression of the local linguistic-musical tradition. My musical background was founded on Western music notation, melody, rhythm and harmony (Trinity College London 2023), which was provided through private tuition at a local conservatoire, followed by pianists and musicians, leading to personal explorations in EDM and collaborations. Therefore, I was relatively new to *Ghana* and its

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<sup>1</sup> *Serati*, plural is derived from the Italian *serata* – *una sera*, a soirée, a festa in the evening; *Serata*, adopted by the *Ghana* community to signify the gathering for a public *Ghana* event taking place on an evening.

contemporary community. Particularly since in Gozo in recent years, only a handful of *Serati* were being held (most as part of a local village festa programme).

Between 2016 and 2018, the research on the native language led to the project, *Erbatax-il Vers*, where I collaborated with a number of artists working in a variety of disciplines, each interacting through their work with a range of applications of the Maltese language. As an artist I am interested in the process, the work involved in shaping ideas, the process of materials being shaped into another form. My work also explores the interplay occurring between the work in dialogue with different other expressions presented in any particular space. The subjects explored tend to concern social and environmental causes where I am interested in creating work which not only explores a subject but possibly presents some kind of contribution towards it. Hence research increasingly started being implemented in the process.

The independent research on oral poetry continued analogous with the periodical performances that explored written poetry. This project and research led to a temporary position with *FestivalsMalta* as a co-artistic director of *Ghanafest*, which commenced after the 2018 edition of the festival. During this period, research about *Ghana* intensified in the hope that the outcome would be included in the artistic content, which was being presented as part of the artistic vision for the National Festival. The aim at the time was to contribute the findings towards the artistic vision and generate the artistic content being proposed for the festival. Soon after, when I became aware that there was a discrepancy between what the festival organisers intended for the National Festival, and what the *Ghana* community sought in the festival, I left this position.<sup>2</sup> Gradually, I felt that this was an issue which was larger than any one individual and their choices. There are social structural and cultural issues at play.

The body of research that I had collected by this point, together with a series of questions that kept growing in number, led me to pursue this research project at the Mediterranean Institute, with the intent to pursue a multidisciplinary approach through an ethnographic method.

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<sup>2</sup> I had produced a report in 2019 about the festival sharing such observations. However it should be noted that the present research project does not make reference to the data presented to *FestivalsMalta*.

## Data collection and ethics

Perhaps being an artist may have contributed to the ethnographic observational skills required in the field. Noticing behaviour requires a certain amount of observational skills that is also required in the visual arts. My background in graphic design and communication also made me alert to promotional material, like adverts, posters and paid articles, and its iconographic choices. Having a musical background certainly helped when analysing the data gathered during the fieldwork and in the archives to identify certain musical processes involved, and although space has precluded reproducing that analysis here, it has certainly informed my judgements about the artistic and individual qualities of both *ghannejja* and *kitarristi*.

An artist develops and builds on observational skills. Although I had no previous background in ethnographic fieldwork, I have discovered that this process resonates with both my observational skills and artistic approach. I am increasingly struck by the similarity between the complementary disciplines of art and ethnography.

The ethnographic fieldwork was conducted mostly with the *Ghana* community (See Figure 3). It included the performers, the *ghannejja* and *kitarristi*, the *dilettanti*<sup>3</sup> and aficionados, and the impresarios of the music scene. As well as individual experts, including organisers, artistic directors, folklorists, musicians, local instrument builders, a professional instrument restorer and tuner, and a Speech-Language Pathologist. In all, over three and a half years, I conducted 49 interviews (27 of which were formal).

Appendix K gives a full account of the kinds of formal and informal conversations I had. Appendices A-B give a sample of the standard questionnaire, while Appendices C-I give a

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that *id-Dilettant* (in Maltese) in the *Ghana* music scene has a different meaning than that given by the English counterpart *dilettante*. On the contrary for the members of the community, *id-dilettant* is one who takes the subject seriously and is a committed follower of the music scene. Hence an aficionado is a better term that represents the *id-dilettanti tal-Ghana*, however in my writing sometimes a *dilettant* is also featured along with aficionados, this is because there are aficionados within the *Ghana* community who participate in certain *Ghana* sessions, alongside *ghannejja* and *kitarristi*. An aficionado is someone who regularly attends sessions and follows the scene with substantial intensity, who may recite from memory certain verses from past performances and may refer to specific *Ghana* sessions at will — contributing to the social memory of the music tradition; the hypertextuality of *Ghana*.



sample of the consent form. Appendix N is a detailed, though non-exhaustive, list of current practitioners — mostly local and does not include the diaspora.

Not all the people I asked to interview accepted. I soon grew to recognise the pattern of accepting to be interviewed and then sliding unobtrusively out of the commitment (even though I would have crossed the Maltese channel specifically for a meeting). I respected that choice. However, I can say that my knowledge of the field of practice is sufficiently detailed that I could compile — and for my own understanding of events did — a map of the alliances and groupings (referred to *gajjijiet*, plural<sup>4</sup>) of practitioners. I have not reproduced it here to respect the privacy and sensitivity of these informal factions.

Respecting privacy and confidentiality raises a special issue when dealing with an art form where individuals are well known and where *Ghana* sessions are public in several senses: in principle open to all comers, recorded on film, widely distributed and, increasingly, posted on social media. I should add that, with one or two exceptions, all my interviewees stated they would not mind being identified. I have decided to follow a mixed policy. When referring to any event or detail that is considered to be public knowledge and to do with *Ghana* performance, I identify a practitioner by name; but I do not use names when reporting things said to me in interviews.

Given my background in *FestivalsMalta*, and the tense relationship many practitioners had with it, I should make two things clear. I have not used any material that arose out of the research I conducted then. And I was always transparent with interviewees that I had a background at *FestivalsMalta* which then was part of Arts Council Malta within the Ministry for Culture. When temporarily working as co-artistic director of *Ghanafest*, I underplayed my position for ethical reasons: I was apprehensive about some people agreeing to cooperate in the hope of getting into the directorate's good books. Certain practitioners were said by informants to boast of their ability to get in touch with this or that minister, in hope that they

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<sup>4</sup> *Il-gaj*, singular, is a term adopted from the local labour workforce to describe a group of workers often related to the same profession or service, operating in industries such as construction and shipping. The term can also be employed in voluntary groups such as carnival teams and outdoor feast-decor teams. Therefore, a *gaj* is a group of individuals who can have different specialisations and work together to provide a particular service.

will get support for a *Serata* or to address a concern regarding the National Festival. In a post-pandemic scenario when I reentered the scene I described the nature of my research project inline with the recruitment letter, a sample of which is shown in Appendix E and F.

Apart from fieldwork, the research also included looking into archives of the Public Broadcasting Services. Films of the *National Festival of Ghana* and *Imnarja* (29th June festivities) in particular were analysed. This research included several other local programmes which featured *Ghana*. The National Library of Malta, in Valletta, the National Library in Gozo, Rabat, and the Melitensia Special Collections at the University of Malta, respective catalogues were also checked for print material. Again, a lot of the analysis of the artistic content cannot show up here, for reasons of space, but it informs my judgement.

#### **COVID-19: its related constraints and insights**

As highlighted earlier, a couple of months after this research project commenced, the COVID-19 pandemic reached Malta. Research had to shift online. Apart from the regulations issued by the authorities, I myself had to take extra precautions: for most of the pandemic's duration, I was in self quarantine due to a heart condition which rendered me in the vulnerable cohort (requiring periodical checks for which I am grateful for the dedicated teams in the respective departments at Mater Dei Hospital); even so, despite taking the necessary precautions, I too contracted the virus.

Hence during this period between 2020-2022, the research effort shifted and was conducted online, as a form of electronic-fieldwork. I tried to keep in touch with key individuals whom I had already established contact with. This was also done out of concern and employed as a measure out of respect, since some of the research participants identified earlier on were seniors, also considered 'vulnerable' in the unfolding pandemic scenario. So at the time I did not explore meeting with them physically when some measures were lifted in a quasi-post-COVID-19 pandemic scenario. The benefits of this dire period allowed me to focus more on my studies and conduct further research online, locating in the process a series of private collections of media in relation to *Ghana* which were made available on public domain. In the process, this helped me identify additional key aficionados as potential research

participants who were active with online profiles containing *Ghana* content. This content proved valuable to the analysis of the current transmission of *Ghana* and the music making processes of *Ghana* employed by members of the community. During this time I also surveyed any activity that was being produced involving *Ghana*. This included the online edition of *Ghanafest* and other local festivals which were presented on digital platforms or broadcasted on national television.

As previously highlighted the pandemic brought *Ghana* to a halt. Concerns within the community also revolved around the fact that community members could not meet to perform *Ghana* together. Two key hubs, where members of the community used to meet weekly and/or bi-weekly, every Sunday morning, were also affected. One closed down permanently; the other, after conducting a refurbishment of the establishment, refused to host the Sunday morning *Ghana* sessions in a post-COVID-19 scenario. Therefore, the music scene had to adjust and relocate to a series of newly identified hubs which incrementally I documented until the activities resumed, and the music scene re-established itself in a new context between 2022-2023.

As the COVID-19 restrictions in Malta started being lifted, the cultural activities incrementally resumed during the second quarter of 2022. Eventually as soon as I started participating in the Sunday morning *Ghana* sessions, I re-established contact with members of the *Ghana* community and started gaining their trust. Since then, I have enjoyed discussions about *Ghana* with most members of the scene. Much of the data presented here about sessions was therefore gathered between 2022-2023. Apart from interviews, it is based on fifteen *Ghana Serati* organised by members of the community, including some organised in partnership with and/or an initiative of NGOs, local councils and entities such as the Cultural Heritage Directorate within the Ministry for Gozo, and ten Sunday morning *Ghana* sessions.

During this research project I also attended a number of festival editions, primarily *Ritmu Festival* editions of 2022 and 2023, *Imnarja* celebrations of 2022 and 2023 at *Buskett Gardens*, and *Il-Festival Nazzjonali tal-Ktieb* (Il-Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ktieb 2021), amongst others. I also travelled for three days with two *ghannejja* and two apprentices who participated

in a one-day oral tradition event, the *XXIII incontro di Improvvisazione Poetica* organised in Pomonte, comune di Scansano, provincia di Grosseto in Italy (See Figure 4).

Having begun fieldwork so slowly and uncertainly, I now cannot keep up with invitations to *Ghana* events that are being organised.

### **Fieldwork relationships and social knowledge**

As I built relationships to study *Ghana*, I found that these relationships threw light on larger issues that are a central part of my argument. How I behaved during a session, with whom I socialised, and what I learned to avoid, all helped me understand matters that at first seemed peripheral to music making, but which I came to see were central. Particularly how the community of the music scene works, and how knowledge is shared, helping members ameliorate their skills in a collective endeavour, an aspect of participatory music making also noticed by Turino (2008: 97).

For instance, I quickly found that keeping a digital device for note taking in hand during an ongoing *Ghana* performance would make those around me think that I am not taking interest in what is going on. So fairly early on in my fieldwork I shifted to paper. Now that I am writing about it I realised that perhaps unconsciously, my notebook, made up of a series of loose A4 recycled paper, was gradually getting smaller as I continued carrying out my fieldwork, I folded my writing pad into A5 and eventually into A6. Hence taking notes became less pronounced and I learned to socialise whilst remaining participating as an observer, becoming more immersed and a member of the *Ghana* community.

From sitting alone I gradually started being invited to join aficionados and performers at their tables. At times this created a difficulty of its own since I wanted to maintain a healthy and neutral relationship with everyone, and not risk being perceived as affiliated to one *gaj* and not another by sitting with members of one particular *gaj* (group, with practical connotations of faction). However, I think that I have managed to maintain an inclusive approach and gradually gained respect with the community throughout the fieldwork — an aspect which should also reflect in my writing. My network within the *Ghana* community continues to grow and builds on the previous relationships established with members of the

scene, aficionados, performers, impresarios and *dilettanti*. The idea that I work while interacting with the members of the community without making the process pronounced was also being attempted while photographing and recording the performances. In time I understood what had to be done so that all this was done swiftly and without making participants conscious of this.

I learned the preferred process of recording *Ghana* sessions. When taking photographs I did not walk around the space and I planned my shots, so that I would try and sit in an area where I could do all of this whilst not obstructing the ongoing flow of *Ghana* performance taking place within any particular space. This was being done out of respect and I think that this also helped gain respect from the rest of the community. I was conscious that interference during the performances had to be kept at a minimum.

I gradually realised that the process of learning how not to be obtrusive, to be sensitive to the implicit rules of conduct, and to be hyper-aware of who and how I mixed with might have repercussions for relations with others. All of this was an education into how to experience the setting like an aficionado and indeed to realise it was part of the performance and its dynamics. It also helped me participate in the discussions. This was part of my ethnographic work aimed to gather data from fieldwork conducted within the community, which as Seeger highlights was a process of research, through which I participated, observed and reflected in my writing on the experiences of ‘the ways people make music’ (Seeger cited in Ciantar 2021: 9; also in Nettl 2005).

Another revelation concerned the depth and particularity of relationships. Being Gozitan was both a challenge in itself and perhaps a benefit, since it meant I was new to the Maltese scene I was meant to investigate, and thus had no previous affiliations or any particular reputation within the scene other than that of a researcher which could impact the participation and the data being gathered. It is likely to have taken more time to gain trust within a Maltese community. I noticed this also in the way I was hosted in Malta, which at first differed from that in Gozo. When I met a Gozitan research participant I was invited to their homes, whilst in Malta meetings were always held in public or work spaces. In Gozo I was also able to make use of my family nicknames, which perhaps quickened the process — it is

customary that upon being introduced people ask *minn ta' minn int?* A type of who's who approach where family nicknames transcend individuals and family members. Eventually after a couple of months I did get invited into Maltese households, to the point where upon leaving a *Serata* late at night, after the final session, some members offered to spend the night with them and travel in the morning back to Gozo. I am conscious that I must have passed multiple tests, some which I am possibly not aware of yet.

Maintaining contact with key members of the music scene during COVID-19 eventually facilitated my reintroduction when the activities recommenced. Another factor was that I started attending the Sunday morning *Għana* sessions. Here the *Għana* community is a more compact unit and familiarity increases fairly quickly. I mostly attended alone and this allowed me to join and eventually share tables, participate in discussions, exchange experiences and thoughts, hence over time becoming a member, after repeating this consistently. Eventually when the *Serati* resumed, I started attending the ones being organised by different impresarios and this I think also helped me gain respect particularly in the small intimate local ones, as the larger regional ones tend to attract larger crowds, hence my presence could go unnoticed. But probably one of the most key aspects in gaining trust was how one participates in the discussions, particularly when sharing experiences and expressing a genuine interest or asking knowledgeable questions. Once more I realised that what goes into '*Għana*' for practitioners and aficionados amounts to a lot more than can be picked up on video or from listening to a recording.

Although I am aware that in the minds of many I do remain an 'outsider', this is also applied to many active members of the community who were not 'born in *Għana*', the strongest link being through kinship. Eventually I think that the *tal-Kultura* tag that I may have had initially, faded, so much so that some members of the community in a post-COVID-19 scenario had openly, yet informally, expressed "*aħna lil dan ridna fil-kultura*", meaning "this is what we needed in culture," referring to the research project being conducted.

The data gathered from the fieldwork sessions made use of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, by including 'an element of *'giving voice'* (capturing and

reflecting upon the principal claims and concerns of the research participants) and ‘*making sense*’ (offering an interpretation of this material, which is grounded in the accounts [...]) (Larkin and Thompson 2012), aspects of which will be integrated in this dissertation. Rendering this research project being executed in the spirit of conducting ‘ethnography within a globalized world, [...] documenting the impact of large-scale processes on subjectives and communities, but doing so in a way that demonstrates the specific and evolving nature of local responses.’ An approach which ‘insists that documenting political and economic struggles, [...] individual and collective identities, experiences of disempowerment, spiritualities and world views demands commitment both to detailed scholarship (ethnography) and to analytical rigour (critical theory) (Moore 2005: 10).

To sum up, fieldwork was at first conducted under the difficult conditions produced by the pandemic. But since COVID-19 disrupted *Ghana*, not just my research, I was in a position to see what goes into getting the scene going again. I was able to appreciate how *Ghana* became a more dramatic, dense experience the more intimate it was and, therefore, better able to see the contrast with the altogether different experience of a festival. My background in art and classical music helped me notice and appreciate the individuality of *ghannejja* and *kitarristi* — against the lament one sometimes hears from non-familiar audiences that “*Ghana* is always the same”. The slow building of trust, and initial difficulties in learning what events were being held, to the experience of having many invitations come my way, all taught me that even the very attendance at a session is testimony of how *Ghana* is embedded in a wider network of social relations. Generating a body of work which reflects the structure of *Ghana* institution and the community which constitutes it, identifying in the process a number of struggles the community face, particularly being represented in contexts at a national level, an aspect which will be discussed in the unfolding chapters.

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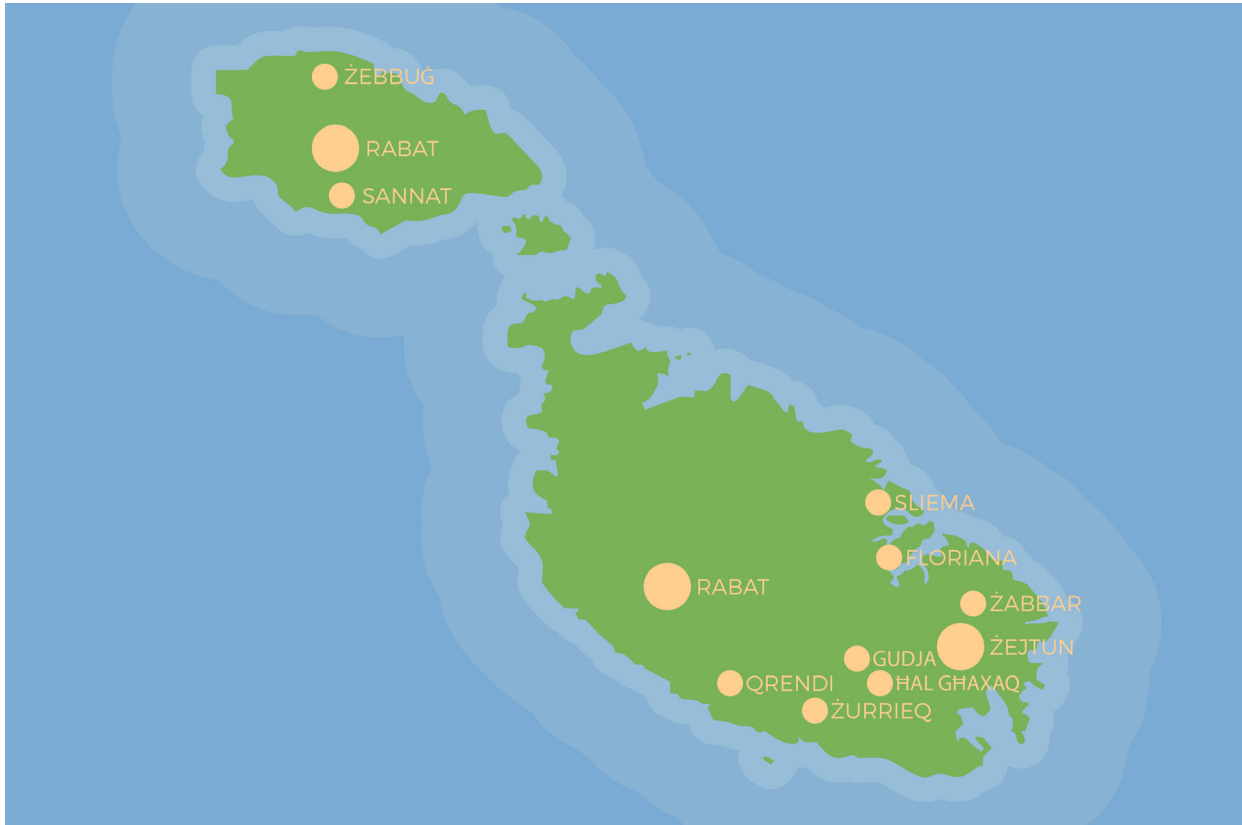


Fig.3 georgemario, 2023. A map of Malta and Gozo highlighting the areas where most of the fieldwork has taken place. [Graphic Image] (6 July, Fieldwork Map v2.JPG, Żebbuġ, Gozo: Ażegonèn Studios)



Fig.4 georgemario, 2022. Vince Carabott il-Bukku and Emanuel Ellul il-Begij performing in Pomonte, Italy. [Photograph] (4 September, IMG\_9367.JPG, Żebbuġ, Gozo: Ażegonèn Studios)





### 3. *Ghana's* contemporary forms

The focus of this study is contemporary *Ghana* and its relationship to certain cultural processes and practices within Maltese society. However, it is worth bearing in mind that some of *Ghana's* features resemble those of other Mediterranean musical traditions, as Bithell (2005: 160) has noted:

The sung improvised debate known as *chjam' è rispondi*, which is still practiced in Corsica today, [...] has parallels in the Sardinian *gara poetica*, the *ottava rima* found in mainland Italy and the Maltese *spirtu pront*.

Other musical traditions with similar characteristics, and which are still practised in the Mediterranean region, include the *Tsiattista* poetic duelling in Cyprus and *Al-Zajal* recited or sung poetry in Lebanon (UNESCO 2023). Some similarity, admittedly debatable, might also be found when comparing traditions such as the *Cantu in paghjella*, a secular and liturgical oral tradition of Corsica; the *Međimurska popevka*, a folksong from Međimurje in Croatia; *Fado*, the urban popular song of Portugal; and *Bećarac*, a form of singing and playing from Eastern Croatia (UNESCO 2023).

Such comparisons, however, should not come at the cost of forgetting the need underscored by Plastino (2005: 185), following Michael Herzfeld, to focus less on geographical region in itself and more on the processes of the production and politics of cultural identity. Similarities to other musical traditions raise questions not only about Mediterranean cultural cross-pollination but also about how to explain and interpret the particularity of each tradition and its historical transformations. And it is to the continuity and discontinuity in *Ghana's* tradition that I turn to now.

In the last 500 years of Malta's written history, we find several references to *Ghana*. There are documents which either describe events or allude to vernacular performances where early forms of *Ghana* may have occurred.<sup>1</sup> There is also material within the documents

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<sup>1</sup> Such as the documentation of the court case of cleric Andreotta de Bisconis and the Gozitan youth in the fifteenth century. (Wettinger & Fsadni 1983: 36, Ciantar 2021: 18, 20)

themselves which contain early forms of poetry written in early form of Maltese.<sup>2</sup> Between the eighteenth and nineteenth century, a number of accounts about *Ghana* shed further light into the social practice of the vernacular music in Maltese society, namely: Gio. Pietro Francesco Agius De Soldanis c. 1759, Count Giovannantonio Ciantar in 1772, François Emmanuel De Guignard, Count De Saint Priest in 1791, Andrew Bigelow in 1827, George Percy Badger in 1838, Giovanni Antonio Vassallo in 1851 and Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq in 1855 (Cassar Pullicino and Camilleri 1998: 1-2, 11-12). We can also take into consideration the report produced by Mgr Petrus Dusina during his apostolic visit in Malta in 1575 in which he makes reference to vernacular music practice emphasising the secular aspect of the music (Wettinger & Fsadni 1983: 34).

All this speaks only of *Ghana* as a common noun, covering a range of singing practices, which expressed themselves in rhyme, *taqbil*, a cappella, or performed accompanied by a selection of musical instruments. Whether reciting known poems or cantilenas from memory, or expressing themselves in extemporised musiking as Blacking would say (Reily 2018) these accounts are a testament of musical development in Maltese but not necessarily attesting to any strong similarity to the forms of *Ghana* today.

I myself believe that the forms I shall be discussing in this chapter are a reinterpretation of a living tradition, but it is also part of my argument that there are evidently significant discontinuities between contemporary *Ghana* today and that which is evoked by the historical documentation. *Ghana* as it is understood today is not simply a survival from the past. It has been shaped by modernity — industrialisation, nationalism, cosmopolitanism and contemporary cultural politics — whether in how it has been framed or even in its conventions.

The main purpose of this chapter is largely descriptive — to introduce the forms of *Ghana* today that make the word a proper noun, referring to very specific practices. I have a secondary purpose too: to offer an explanation for why a genre, called *Makkjetta*, not considered *Ghana* by practitioners but often understood to be such by ‘outsiders’, is so popular

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<sup>2</sup> Like the c.1485 Pietru Caxaru’s Cantilena discovered by Godfrey Wettinger and Mikiel Fsadni on 22nd September 1966. (Wettinger & Fsadni 1983: 11)

among the latter, but is not practised except as informal light entertainment on the periphery of *Ghana* sessions (if it is at all). In brief, my answer is that the *Makkjetta* is — aesthetically and socially — not rooted in a contemporary way of life and can easily travel across cultural boundaries. In contrast, *Ghana*, especially *Spirtu Pront*, is rooted in a particular social world, whose particularity we will turn to in the following chapter.

### The popularity of *Ghana* today

The UNESCO application gave the number of active *ghannejja* as circa 250. The *ghannej* and researcher Charles Seychell *iż-Żorro* gave a more modest 200 in the TVM programme discussed in Chapter 1. I am myself not confident in giving an estimate because I am conscious of how many practitioners I keep discovering, as well as how ‘counting’ *ghannejja* and *kitarristi* — active locally or in the diaspora, currently passive, or reactivating after varying periods (months-years), in part depends on whether they are evaluated, by the community at large, of being worthy of the name. Nevertheless an attempt has been made in Appendix N.

However, I can say that a modest Sunday morning session, in my experience, will attract a gathering as high as 75 people (and as low as 35) in summer and winter; a packed, strictly local evening encounter would number around 100-150 in summer and winter; and a regional *Serata* (meaning widely advertised typically produced in collaboration with social partners and with a distinguished line-up of *ghannejja* and *kitarristi*), in the summer, can attract anything from 200 to 1000 people.

Those are not small numbers for a niche activity in a country the size of Malta. The only reason they might appear to be small is because *Ghana* is a term given to the native tradition of singing and which historical records, travel accounts and iconography suggest was once ubiquitous enough for bishops, centuries ago, to demand that people not sing it in church (Cassar Pullicino and Camilleri 1998: 2-4).

However, the term *Ghana* was used to denote a wide range of practices embedded in past ways of life and trades. The singing practices disappeared, by the second half of the twentieth century, with the practices (such as doing the laundry in a communal basins, where the *Ghana tal-Banju* used to take place (See Figure 5); or the female trade of beating down a

roof, *Ghana tad-Dballit*). Accounts such as those documented by Stumme give us impressions of how *Ghana* was experienced in the past (Cassar Pullicino and Camilleri 1998: 19). *Ghana* as it is habitually practised today is associated with three particular forms (two especially — *Spirtu Pront* and *Fatt* — of which more below) that migrated from a wide social context to a niche practice associated with sessions in bars and specially organised *Serati*.

In the process of this migration, *Ghana* as a term was transformed from a common noun for a wide range of singing practices, to the proper noun referring to certain genres. Fsadni (1993) has suggested that the most popular form of *Ghana* today, *Spirtu Pront* (improvised singing bouts), was always associated with a narrower group of practitioners which came to prominence after other forms disappeared. He argues the form we have today is not just a survival from the past. Its formal conventions, setting, and thematic content have been shaped by technology and economy. Above all, there is modern cultural politics of the nation-state, which makes of *Ghana* an icon of the nation, while the largely working-class practitioners themselves are, relatively marginal in terms of ordinary social status.

Modernity has also seen the instruments of *Ghana* narrowed down almost exclusively to the guitar. Occasionally the use of other instruments such as a mandolin and a piano accordion were added to the ensemble of guitars; however, in my experience these can be considered as an exception and only occurring in more popular domains, such as festivals and other formal contexts. Archival research turned up other instruments were added to the performing ensemble of instruments. These included a piano synthesiser, a harmonica, *iż-żafżaf*, a friction drum, and the *żaqq*, the Maltese bagpipe; however these are not included in the contemporary *Ghana* performances.

For most of the current active members of the *Ghana* music scene, *Ghana* is a lifestyle, not an archaic one, but rather built around a modern life, work, meeting places and forms of entertainment. For the passionate performers and intense aficionados, *Ghana* is a substantial component around which life simply revolves. In my fieldwork I encountered performers and aficionados who listen to *Ghana* during weekdays (some also while working). During the week, some meet for dinner and perform afterwards, and then attend and participate in around two to three *Serati* per week along with the Sunday morning *Ghana* sessions. Sometimes, Saturday

morning *Ghana* sessions are also added. Some performers almost perform every day whether in private or in public — alone, and with close friends and/or amongst members of the *Ghana* community. Other occasions can be offered by bar owners, who might be regular hosts of *Ghana* sessions. This includes a number of local councils, local feast committees (See Figure 7), and various other local clubs — what we can consider the social partners of the *Ghana* community.

### The current forms of *Ghana*

The three main styles of *Ghana* still being practised today are *Ghana Spirtu Pront* (sometimes referred to as *Botta u Risposta*), *Ghana tal-Fatt* and *Ghana fil-Gholi* (also known as *La Bormliza*) (Cassar Pullicino and Camilleri 1998: 63, Fsadni 1993: 336, Sant-Cassia 2000: 282, Ciantar 2019: 32). The most practised within the community, involving most performers, is *Ghana Spirtu Pront*.

*Ghana Spirtu Pront* requires improvised replies, where the *ghannejja* have to express their thoughts in rhymed octosyllabic quatrains in reply to their counterpart in the session — within only a minute<sup>3</sup> (sometimes, in one arrangement, in a few seconds) to think up a reply.

*Ghana tal-Fatt*, Malta's ballad 'song', requires the *ghannej* to perform solo, a lengthy 'poem' which is memorised (often written by the *ghannej* or taught by a predecessor) based on facts from a particular event; often dealing with a historic, tragic and occasionally a comical aspect<sup>4</sup> (Borg Cardona 2014: 10; Ciantar 2019: 33; Vella Bondin 2016: 23).

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<sup>3</sup> In a *Spirtu Pront* session of four *ghannejja*, it takes approximately 60 seconds between a reply and a counter reply; one stanza, *ghanja*, takes about 30 seconds and the guitar interlude, *il-qalba*, takes another 30 seconds to be performed. This also depends on the tempo that the guitar players will set at the beginning of the session, however this will only create a variation of just a few seconds.

<sup>4</sup> According to the data gathered during the fieldwork of this research project, some *ghannejja*, *kitarristi* and aficionados have a number of pamphlets which used to be published containing a *Fatt*. *Ghannejja* who perform this style of *Ghana* or aficionados who used to accompany *ghannejja* who performed in this style explain that the process to produce a *Fatt* takes time to gather the necessary information to construct the *Fatt* based only on facts. I also encountered situations where an aficionado produces a *Fatt* and another *ghannej* performs it. Here one must also keep in mind that although in the past the *fattijiet* were being published, some *ghannejja* who did not read, in order to perform a *Fatt* which they did not produce, would have someone else read it out loud for them and then, they would memorise it.

*Ghana fil-Gholi* requires the *ghannej* to ‘sing’ in high pitched tones by developing diaphragm techniques and stresses certain syllables in melisma and glissando of a premeditated verse or stanza (generally the ending phrase) (Ciantar 2019: 36).

These styles, among others which faded through time for various reasons (Boissevain 1993: 112), were passed on from generation to generation, often within families safeguarding certain knowledge required in the performance of this local music tradition.

Each stanza, generally, in all styles of *Ghana* contains four verses; we can generalise that most *Ghana* is performed in quatrains with an octosyllabic structure. The fewer words an *ghannej* use to form a verse and convey meaning on a particular subject whilst rhyming (*iqabbell*), matching the last word of the fourth verse (d) with that of the second verse (b), is considered by the community as a well-constructed *ghanja*, *ghanja mibnija sew*.

Below is an example of a stanza that is considered well-constructed. It was shared by a veteran *ghannej* Ġanni Spiteri *l-Pisklu* from Xewkija, Gozo. Each word builds on the previous and is loaded with story, no extra words are employed to get a verse in rhyme. *Il-Pisklu* recited this stanza from memory after it had been performed over thirty years before. A female patient who was residing at Chambray Hospital asked one of the nurses for tea. The nurse who knew the patient was a *dilettanta* asked her to make a *taqbila*, as the nurse was under the weather and wanted to alleviate her thoughts.

*Chambrej mdawwar qisu villa,  
Bir-rixteilli tal-hadid,  
Hawnġew jixbġhu l-impjegati,  
Aħseb u ara l-marid.* (Ġanni Spiteri *l-Pisklu* 2022)

Fort Chambray was like a villa,  
Surrounded with wrought iron gates,  
Here even the employees get fed up,  
Let alone the patients of Chambray Hospital.

There are also formal linguistic features that are prized. The linguistic aspect of *Ghana* also includes the use of archaic language, knowledge of metaphors and idioms, awareness of wit (confrontational and background) and other vocabulary and dialogue that practitioners value and seek through performance.<sup>5</sup> This continues to show that at present in contemporary

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<sup>5</sup> In my fieldwork I often encounter this concern expressed by *ghannejja* ‘*ma jifhimnix u jbaxxini*’, ‘*Kif tista tiżvolġi s-suġġett ma xiħadd li ma jifmhekk?*’, How can you explore a subject when one does not

*Ghana* there appears to be a convergence in the community over the structure and a general aesthetics of *Ghana* across the practising community of the music tradition.

Some performers place a lot of effort into the meticulous construction of the verse and the *taqbil*, rhymes in every stanza and its analysis by aficionados. For instance, words which sound the same in Maltese but are written differently are also observed, where it is deemed more accurate to rhyme in words as they are also written, and to not take advantage of their pronunciation. Others see nothing wrong with *iżewġu*, combining words such as *qatt - ħadd*, both sounding: *q/ħ-adt*.

This follows the general structure of ABAB rhyme scheme, however ‘subtle’ innovations could also be observed when *ghannejja* push the boundaries of such expectations and construct a quatrain on AABA scheme (shown below — performed by one of the youngest active performers in the current scene), rhyming not two but three verses in an extemporised reply and counter-reply mode of performance. Talk about developments and innovation from within the community, an aspect which concerns a discussion explored later on in subsequent chapters.

[...]  
*Ikba-ar minnii, u ntik lezzjoni,*  
*Fl-Ghana židhaa l-aattenzjoni,*  
*Għax meta tkuun qed tghanni miegħi,*  
*Naf li ftit tirkbek, iit-tensjoni [...]* (Nordai Desira 2022)

[...]  
 You’re older than me and I’ll give you a lesson,  
 In *Ghana* maintain your focus,  
 Since when you’re performing *Ghana* with me,  
 I am aware that you’ll be overwhelmed with tension.

These types of contributions to the music scene could easily go unnoticed. It is the mindful and discerning aficionados that bring such observations from the performances into the unfolding discussions which are exchanged continuously among members of the community that keep *Ghana* thriving.

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understand you? It is perceived by some as an act which ‘lowers’ an *ghannej* when another performer does not understand what is being said in counter-reply.



### ***Ghana Spirtu Pront***

This is the most active style currently dominating the *Ghana* scene. It is performed in both the *Serati* and the Sunday morning sessions. Each event can include between three to five sessions of *Ghana Spirtu Pront*. One session of *Spirtu Pront* is performed between four or six *ghannejja* together with three *kitarristi*, led by *il-Prim*, the lead guitar player.

Most seasoned *ghannejja* prefer to perform in the formation of four *ghannejja*. However, at times, due to the high demand of eager *ghannejja* to participate in the ongoing sessions, in order to attempt to accommodate everyone, the organiser allows and/or adds another two *ghannejja* in a number of sessions. A *Ghana Spirtu Pront* session always work in pairs, where the participating *ghannejja* perform together, yet each *ghannej* is paired with another to discuss and explore a particular subject in *Ghana*, in *Spirtu Pront*. Meaning in an extemporised form of reply and counter-reply. So if a session consists of four *ghannejja*, the first *ghannej* will perform in dialogue with the third *ghannej* on the performing line, *il-linja*, leaving the second and fourth to follow suit; if six *ghannejja* will be performing they will be paired accordingly, 1-4, 2-5, 3-6; proceeding clockwise or anticlockwise.

Another form of *Ghana Spirtu Pront* is typically performed in informal settings, such as at the Saturday-Sunday morning sessions, typically after the final *Ghana* session, performers gather around (See Figure 8). Generally around a *kitarrist* who is still eager to perform oftentimes after over two hours of performance. A *ghannej* begins spontaneously performing an *ghanja* while teasing a *kitarrist* to continue, other *ghannejja*, *kitarristi* and *dilettanti* gather around in a ring formation and everyone performs at will, sometimes with or without a *qalba*.

### ***Ghana tal-Fatt***

A *Ghana tal-Fatt* is a type of *Ghana* which is performed by one *ghannej* where the performer leads the audience into a narrative style of performance which they are required to follow attentively. The *ghannej* builds the story incrementally, often giving detailed accounts of various scenes and characters within the *grajja*, the event. In fact this is one of the main characteristics of a *Fatt*, the ability to describe in minute detail and little known facts about the story — this is particularly important if the performing *ghannej* is the one who produced the

*Fatt*. A second is the ability to memorise a *Fatt*. These are two important characteristics deemed distinguishable from the rest of the styles by the practising *Ghana tal-Fatt ghannejja*.

A *Fatt* can be produced and performed by the same *ghannej* and it can also be produced by another *ghannej-kitarrist* or aficionado and performed by another *ghannej*. Whoever produces a *Fatt* takes pride in going into a sufficient amount of detail in order to present the audiences with a detailed account of what occurred in a tragedy, if it were a non-fictional subject that was being explored. The *Fatt* can take from forty-five minutes to an hour to perform; shorter *Fattijiet* were encountered during archival research and experienced at festivals where the *ghannej* was told whilst performing to cut the performance short, *sar il-hin!*

It is typically performed together with a formation of three guitar players where one would be *Prim*, the lead guitar player. However I have also seen *Fattijiet* being performed with two or even one other *kitarrist*, where the *ghannej* performing the *Fatt* would also be performing at the same time on the guitar (See Figure 6).

We can say that this is the only style of *Ghana* which used to be published (Abela 1988). In the twentieth century, *Fattijiet* used to be published separately on pamphlets and both performers and aficionados had access to purchase a *Fatt* from specific local stores. There are still those who own a collection of printed *Fattijiet*. These were eventually discontinued and today some are released directly on CDs. Hence some *Fattijiet* were being transmitted through printed matter or recordings. As one informant had told me he used to read a pamphlet to a *ghannej*, who could not read, who used to memorise it all in one reading. Others were neither published nor recorded and only experienced when performed.

A *Fatt* can deal with a known tragedy, a fictional event, a comic or historical event. There are *Fattijiet* that deal with the same event produced by different *ghannejja*, one such case was the COVID-19 pandemic, a collective experience which was the subject explored by the two currently active *ghannejja* who produce and perform their own *Ghana tal-Fatt*, Gużepi Spagnol *il-Kelba*, and Mikiel Cutajar *is-Superstar*.

### *Ghana fil-Għoli*

*Ghana fil-Għoli*, also known as *La Bormliża* is believed to be the oldest of the three current styles of *Ghana*. Some practitioners believe that the distinct melismatic characteristic of the style is derived from the *Adhān*, the call for prayer in Islam. A *Ghana fil-Għoli* used to be performed between two *għannejja*, however due to its decline a performance in the current scene is typically performed by one *għannej*. It is typically also performed together with three guitar players, one of which will be *Prim*, the lead guitar player — a structure which is constant among all three main *Ghana* styles.

At present there are fewer than five *għannejja* who perform in this style. It is a performance which requires a particularly strong high-pitched vocal chords, and the ability to project the voice at length with embellished melismas. A stanza in this style could take twice the amount of time to perform since the *għannej* elongates words at will, yet within the same framework of a quatrain, and a stanza could also be repeated.

During the National Festival of *Ghana* in 2001, two *għannejja* performed *Ghana fil-Għoli* and explained to the audience what they were about to perform. The first stanza below is the *taqbila*, and what follows is a transcription of how it is rhymed in *Ghana fil-Għoli*; notice how each syllable is elongated.

*Ħa nsemma leĥni u leĥnek,  
U dak li għandek il-ħanin.*

I will sound my voice and yours,  
And that which is gracious.

*Sem - ma - a - a - lel - ĥe - en, (Għannej A)  
La - a - a - a - le - e - en -*

*Ħne- e - ek - sal - vu - u - da - ak -  
Li - għa - a - a - an -*

*De - ek - ii - ii - il -  
Ill - ĥa - aa - ni - ii - ejn. [...]*

Among the currently active *ghannejja* who know how to perform *Ghana fil-Gholi*, we find Mikiel Cumbo *Lizgej*, Mikiel Cutajar *is-Superstar*, Anġlu Theuma *il-Kina*, Vince Carabott *il-Bukku* and Frans Azzopardi *iż-Żott*.

We can also consider *ghannejja* Mariele Zammit, a jazz singer who has been mentored by *Lizgej* to perform in this style. We can say that Zammit performs *Ghana fil-Gholi* with *Lizgej* whenever the two are invited to perform this style, typically in popular activities, such as the festival. This formation of male-female performance was noted by the organisers of the festival and has been promoted and included in the festival programming of *Ritmu Roots Festival, 2023*.<sup>6</sup> It is an example of an innovation that the *Ghana* festival has fostered.

Although I am listing five-six *ghannejja*<sup>7</sup> whom I have seen perform *Ghana fil-Gholi* in live and/or archival performances, it should be observed that only one is the most prolific *ghannej* who performs in this particular style, Mikiel Cumbo *Lizgej*. This is a result of two factors. Occasionally *Lizej* performs *fil-Gholi* in *Serati* organised by his son Vince<sup>8</sup>, along with other impresarios. And *Lizgej* is the current go-to performer favoured by most cultural entities and government bodies who seek to include this particular style in either of their cultural activities. It helps earn *Lizgej* the face of the *Ghana fil-Gholi* and to a certain extent the face of *Ghana* and the *ghannejja*.

### **Makkjetta: the telling exception**

I have not included the *Makkjetta* in my list of *Ghana* forms practised today, even though it is popular and many non-aficionados are likely to include it in their idea of *Ghana*. The features of the *Makkjetta* throw light on *Spiritu Pront* as an embedded social practice.

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<sup>6</sup> The pair were also part of the cast of the theatre performance *Lost Voices* led by Andrew Alamango, the current artistic director of *Ritmu*.

<sup>7</sup> It must be noted that here I am giving a variable number, since I will be making a distinction between performers who perform *Ghana* in certain events such as the National Festival, theatre productions, and on film, and *ghannejja* who are immersed in the scene who participate in the regular activities of *Ghana* such as the community organised *Serati* and the Saturday-Sunday morning sessions.

<sup>8</sup> Vince Cumbo *Lizgej* has also attempted to perform *Ghana fil-Gholi* and can be considered an ‘upcoming’ *ghannej* in this style.

A *Makkjetta* is a form of Maltese song that is derived from the Italian *Macchietta* which was being performed in local popular theatres in villages around Malta and Gozo around late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Slattery 2011: 2, 9). Today we can consider the *Makkjetta* as a form of hybrid song between *Ghana* and a Maltese ballad-song, as well as an ‘aesthetic hybridity’ (Baldacchino 2018: 57), which emerged from Italian theatre and was assimilated into Maltese culture. It is neither *Ghana* nor a local Maltese song in the strict sense. *Ghannejja* tend to be performers of *Makkjetti*, referred to as *makkjettisti*, which in itself the terminology already creates a distinction between *Ghana* and *Makkjetti*. Like a *Fatt*, a *Makkjetta* is also produced prior to the performance and a *makkjettist*<sup>9</sup> typically would perform their own *Makkjetti*. However there are some famous ones which are sometimes demanded even by *Ghana* audiences if requested, such as John Laus *il-Lajżer* aka *il-Laus*, and recordings of Fredu Spiteri *il-Lavarist* aka *ir-Reverist* (shared on bootleg CDs).

Unlike a *Spirtu Pront* session, the *Makkjetta* is often short and deals with the comical nature of life. It is composed and performed in lively-allegro and major chords with a comic-humorous content expressed in the Maltese language. In the contemporary scene the *Makkjetti* are performed either acappella or along playback tracks of prerecorded music — rendering them in a different category from *Ghana* altogether; all performers and aficionados insist that *Ghana* proper is all about live performance. Another aspect which supports this distinction is a reflection derived from the community organised events. The *Serati* tend to focus on *Ghana Spirtu Pront*, occasionally featuring *Ghana fil-Gholi* and *Ghana tal-Fatt*. The *Makkjetti* tend to be featured in cultural activities organised with local councils, part of feast celebrations<sup>10</sup> and the National Festival. It also featured prominently on national television competitions such as *Malta’s Got Talent* (Rossetto 2020).

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<sup>9</sup> Even though active *makkjettisti* will be participating in a *Ghana Spirtu Pront* session during a *Serata* they do not perform one of their own *Makkjetta*. Typically *Makkjetti* are performed in regional *Serati* or as part of the feast events, where the *makkjettisti* will feature in the programme of the *Serata*. Such events could also include a Folk Dance by either of the local Folk Groups, *Makkjetti*, and *Ghana Spirtu Pront* sessions, and/or *Ghana fil-Gholi*, and/or *Ghana tal-Fatt*.

<sup>10</sup> When *gajjjiet* collaborate with social partners to curate events, if they engage a known *ghannej-makkjettist* to perform *Makkjetti* only, they take offence.

I would argue the *Makkjetti* are popular because they require less investment in learning to appreciate the genre from the unfamiliar audience. The songs are short, the music and vocal expression do not call for an acquired taste and the humour is broad and can travel across cultural space. Hence familiarity is generated with less effort in less time. The *Makkjetti*, in short, are popular precisely because they are less embedded in specific social practices calling for a particular ‘habitus’, or cultural disposition, as Bourdieu would say (Bourdieu 1993). Injecting a ‘reciprocity of body-world’, as McDonald explains of Bourdieu, whereas Csordas ‘wanted the body to be seen not as object but as agent — as an experiencing agent’ (McDonald 2018: 186).

*Ghana fil-Gholi* is not popular beyond the ken of *Ghana*. It requires even more trained discernment to appreciate (indeed, to understand the very words) and its lyrics tend to be traditional, not composed by the singer, with a complementary relationship between the two singers (if two are featured). I would argue it is not often found in the *Ghana* scene because it calls for vocal ability that are not often found in men — it demands a strong vocal timbre in the high pitch range — while the setting of *Ghana Seratas* would be too male to make it congruent for a woman singer to sing regularly in such company.

Why then do we find *l-Ghana fil-Gholi* in festivals? I suggest it is for a combination of factors. Festivals are on the lookout to encourage the re-emergence of women singers; the leading *fil-Gholi* singer also happens to be the most festival-networked (some would say, politically connected)<sup>11</sup> performer and he can offer *fil-Gholi* as part of a wider repertoire. Finally, *fil-Gholi* is both short, without requiring the time of a proper *Spirtu Pront* session, and rare: festival audiences can enjoy it as a rare cultural commodity, a commoditised experience of something ‘dying out’.

Members of the *Ghana* community, on the other hand, do not experience *Ghana* as a commodity, but as a way of life; it is not rarity that they value but the drama of the genre they know well and which is sufficiently widespread to offer a range of personalities to dramatise encounters. Performers ‘[...] transcend their marginalised social position by becoming

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<sup>11</sup> This was also included in the official promotion of *Ritmu 2023* featuring a photo of the performer with the Prime Minister Robert Abela.

virtuosos and to demonstrate that inspite of the demands of a modern nation state which emphasises literacy, social mobility, education, etc., they are more able than their social betters' (Fsadni 1993: 335).

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Fig.5 georgemario, 2022. *Caterina has been visiting her nearby l-Ghajn tal-Hasselin at Triq tal-Ghajn since her childhood. [Photograph] (4 April, IMG\_7600.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeegonën Studios).*



Fig.6 georgemario, 2022. *Guzeppi Spagnol performing his Fatt at Imnarja. [Photograph] (28 June, IMG\_8309.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeegonën Studios)*





Fig.7 georgemario, 2022. A packed village square, *pjazza* of *Hal Ghaxaq* during the *Serata*. [Photograph] (5 August, IMG\_8668.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonën Studios)



Fig.8 georgemario, 2022. A spontaneous *Ghana Spirtu Pront* on a Sunday morning taking place at the end of the *Ghana* sessions. [Photograph] (22 May, IMG\_7983.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonën Studios)

#### 4. *Għana* as a social field

A perennial question asked about *Għana* — by practitioners and aficionados, on the one hand, and by Maltese ‘outsiders’ to *Għana* on the other — is whether enough is being done to ‘safeguard’ *Għana*. But what the question means is hardly the same for both sides. ‘Outsiders’ generally assume dwindling audiences and a dying tradition; they ask if new ways can be found to rejuvenate *Għana* and bring new audiences to it. Practitioners, however, mean something different; they ask if the authorities are doing enough to invest in *Għana* and its activities, the way other arts and traditions are assumed to be funded and promoted.

The rhetoric about a dying tradition that is, simultaneously, the unique expressive voice of the Maltese people, will be explored in the next chapter. Here I wish to delineate how *Għana* is a social field, a domain of an activity for its own sake, with clear roles, practices and organisation. The roles, although informal, are clearly to be distinguished from the powerful personalities that sometimes occupy them. The practices have informal but recognised rules about what is expected.

Therefore, in the terms delineated by the social theorist W.G. Runciman (1986: 1-11), the *Għana* of practitioners is an institution. In the terms delineated in various works by Pierre Bourdieu (e.g. 1993) is an autonomous ‘field’ with its own social logic, status system and prestige (symbolic capital), networks (social capital), market (for performers, recordings, and venue operators) and careers, all of which are independent of status and careers in mainstream social life. The relationship between *Għana* networks, especially the informal groups or clusters known as *gajjijiet* (singular, *gaj*), and wider social networks (such as links to politicians and to entities that might commission an *Għana Serata*) is more complex, and shall therefore be considered in some detail here.

The purpose of this chapter is simply to give a sketch of the framework and roles of *Għana* today. The argument will be that the practitioners’ *Għana* has a logic of its own when it comes to the organisation of events and their significance. My concern here is only social organisation. I will leave for a later chapter how practitioners reinterpret their living tradition

and how prestige shapes not just the individual performer's reputation but the aesthetics of *Ghana* itself.

### ***Ghannejja*, *kitarristi* and *aficionados***

There are several ways one can be born into and raised in *Ghana* (*imwieled u mrabbi fl-Ghana*), but only one way to be recognised as an *ghannej*. *Aficionados* and guitarists can be born into *Ghana* as much as *ghannejja* can, having the passion transmitted by their father or a favourite uncle when taken along to a session as part of growing up as a boy among men, or hearing it around at home, if only on the radio.<sup>1</sup> They might find a mentor, or older figure, who recognises or believes in their talent. Talent is considered something one is born with: one well-known aficionado who had two brothers in the top rank of *ghannejja*, has a great memory for *Ghana*'s 'hypertext' (great ripostes or exchanges that he can repeat verbatim), and will predict with pleasure the endline of a riposte a few seconds before it is performed; but he is the first to say he is not a *ghannej*. But it takes exposure, practice and, above all, performance to polish the talent and have it widely recognised. The process of learning through practice with others is also delineated by Csikszentmihalyi (2008).

Being an aficionado and a *dilettant* is not the same as being any audience member. It includes having an acquired knowledge not just of singers but of famous bouts, itself obtained through a collection of recordings and participation in discussion. Some *dilettanti* might even participate in informal *Ghana* sessions particularly during the Saturday and Sunday morning sessions. We might say that aficionados and *dilettanti* are ranked too, in the sense that they need to be recognised by their peers as having the necessary judgement to participate meaningfully in discussions about the worth of this or that performer, or this or that performance and events. Being a true aficionado therefore is not just about having knowledge of *Ghana* or even just assiduously attending sessions; it is also about regular participation in the social practice of discussing *Ghana*.

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<sup>1</sup> Radio used to play an important role in disseminating *Ghana* among aficionados which generated further outreach. Data gathered during the fieldwork showed that there is still interest among female aficionados that the weekly *Ghana* transmissions would resume.

The aficionados follow with the utmost intensity. They know that during a session they should maintain order and keep silent. They will only speak when they feel that they know what's coming, and so they participate with the *ghannej* and together perform a final verse or its ending phrase. Some could be seen uttering the words softly. Save for a few exceptions when a bravura (an act of sheer flair) is performed, they will refrain from clapping session up until the end. They know what it entails, what is expected of them, what constitutes the hierarchy of *Ghana*. They know how to communicate — the signs and signals (Eco 1979). This is what makes the institution of *Ghana* a series of discussions that keep everything in check and a collective endeavour (See Figure 9).

Borrowing Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital (knowledge of the culture of *Ghana*) and symbolic capital (the prestige of one's judgements), (Bourdieu 1993) we might say that the true *dilettant* is distinguished from someone who only likes it by the accumulation of cultural and symbolic capital. I remember with pride the moment when I felt my questions and comments were greeted with greater respect, as my interlocutors realised they were questions arising out of knowledge rather than sheer ignorance. Being an aficionado, properly speaking, is not just a matter of presence or attendance; it is not only a matter of rule-bound behaviour, especially when following the code of etiquette governing *Ghana* sessions (such as not clapping for any particular singer, being attentive and immersed in ongoing performances, and joining in active participation, particularly the discussions that ensue); it is a matter of social participation in an activity that might seem peripheral or incidental to an *Ghana* session but which is essential in generating the reputation and career of singers. Aficionados participate in more than just commentary. As we shall see later in this chapter, their judgements affect among other things, the fees of *ghannejja* and the character of future organised events. We might say the symbolic capital of aficionados contributes to the determination of demand, supply and performance fees.

Aficionados and *dilettanti* are ranked as a class, each possessing a substantial amount of indigenous knowledge. One either qualifies as a true *dilettant* or one does not. The *dilettant* could also participate in the casual *Ghana* sessions such as the Saturday and Sunday morning sessions. Within this class, rankings are roughly equal. With *ghannejja* it is different. That

range of strong personalities is ranked in a graduated hierarchy. There are no formal titles (although some artist names do reflect the character of their performance) and the judgements of practitioners and aficionados are certainly not official or open. But there is no doubting who is considered (using my own terms) an ace *ghannej*, a middling or good, established *ghannej*, veteran, an apprentice *ghannej* and some who leave audiences desiring more.

The verbal judgements are not usually stated in an *ghannej*'s face (not without risk of a brawl). But the judgement may still be called public because the signs are telling and often unambiguous: more invitations to perform; the type of sessions one is invited too are more prestigious; strong *ghannejja* are willing to be your counterpart in *Spiritu Pront*; aficionados discuss your performance and quote it from memory. Same applies to *kitarristi*, where aficionados can attend sessions based on the *Prim* and guitar players also. During my own fieldwork I saw something exceptional: a novice, Liam Gatt who eventually took on the artist name of *Liam tas-Samba*, who at just 11 years old shot to stardom in a matter of months in a post-COVID-19 scenario. There was no mistaking the collective recognition.

For most *ghannejja*, in order for one to transcend from one rank to the next requires time, commitment and dedication. There are *ghannejja* who have remained in one group for many years. Others manage to elevate their performance and the members of the community acknowledge their development.

Guitarists play a role akin to that of the *ghannejja* in importance of success. In all of the current styles, every performance begins with *Ghana* guitar music, and the session also ends with guitar music. All performances in all the three styles involve a continuous and uninterrupted *Ghana* guitar music session performed by three guitar players led by *il-Prim kitarrist*, the lead guitarist.

*Il-Prim kitarrist*, begins the session by performing an instrumental prelude which establishes the key of the session which is generally maintained throughout the session. During the *Ghana* sessions *il-Prim* performs the instrumental interludes in between every *ghanja* — a stanza — in improvised and semi-improvised *Ghana* guitar music known as *qalba*. At the end of the session, after the *gadanza*, a cadence, is performed by each *ghannej*, the lead

guitarist performs the *telgha*, a codetta which concludes the session in an instrumental solo. All this is happening while two guitar players are complementing these phrases with a repeated chordal accompaniment. Their performance is maintained through the interludes as well as the stanzas performed by the *ghannejja*. The relationship between *ghannejja* and *kitarristi*, as well as the *kitarristi* and the *Prim* is that rather than they *jakkumpanjaw* in the *akkumpanjament*, to accompany, they *jikkumplimentaw*, they complement each other in *Ghana*. Each performer is performing a part which concurrently is happening in relation to the rest of the performers (See Figure 10).

The *ghannej* and the *kitarrist* (guitarist) are interlocked together, one cannot function without the other, 'the nature of their interrelationship transpires as one of the main stylistic features of *ghana*' (Ciantar 2019: 34). They can perform separately, such as a *taqbila*, a short rhyme in acapella, and *Prejjem*, respectively. In *Ghana* one can also find a performance known as *Prejjem*, where the guitar players perform *Ghana* guitar music, in which the lead guitarist performs a number of guitar solos in improvised and semi-improvised instrumental guitar sessions.<sup>2</sup> These performances can be spontaneously performed during a *Serata* or morning sessions, as well in specific sessions typically organised in the national activities, such as festivals. However it is when they perform together that the two meet and reach their zenith. They complement rather than accompany each other.

The structure is as follows: the *Prim* together with the guitar players commence the performance and this allows everyone to gather and settle down. The *ghannejja* move in behind them *fuq il-linja*, in a line formation facing the audience and after the prelude the first *ghannej* performs the introductory stanza. This is followed by the first guitar interlude and then the second *ghannej* follows suit. This format proceeds until every *ghannej* participating in the session (four or six in total) performs a stanza, once one cycle is completed, clockwise or anticlockwise, it is repeated and continues up until the end of the session. This makes everyone participating in the performance in an interlocked position with the rest of the performers participating in a progressing and unfolding movement, from the moment the

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<sup>2</sup> *Prejjem* also have their own audiences, and as we shall see later on, due to their instrumental nature of performance, they tend to feature more prominently in certain national events.

*Għana* session begins, till the final *gadanza*, a double quatrain, which involves two stanzas performed in succession to one another<sup>3</sup>, followed by the concluding codetta of the *kitarristi*.

Tension does exist between *għannejja* and *kitarristi* because some of the latter believe they are not valued as much as the former. One source of discontent between the two groups of performers is audiences clapping for singers, disrupting the performance of the guitarists (also noted by a *Prim kitarrist* Ion Mifsud *Ta' Vestru* in Zarb n.d. [c.2021]). However when an audience is concentrated and the majority being aficionados, this is mitigated and it is known when 'social activity' resumes; — after the last notes of the guitarists are played.

The prestige of the *Prim* can be seen that sometimes, in promotional material of an upcoming *Serata*, some *Serati* only mention the *kitarristi*. These are typically *Serati* who are open for anyone (*għannejja* and *dilettanti*) to participate, and only the *Prim's* name is given with the other two guitarists listed as 'and his friends', *u sħabu*. One can refer to Appendix N for a list of performers, highlighting the *Prim kitarristi*, lead guitar players active in the current scene, however it should be noted that not all participate in the regular sessions occurring throughout the *Għana* calendar, some restrict their performances for specific contexts such as the National Festival and more regional-national contexts — an aspect which will be discussed in the next chapter.

### The market for events

An *Għana* session typically involves a performance area where the *għannejja* and *kitarristi* are set up facing the audiences. If a session is taking place indoors the performers will normally be placed in either the middle of the space or at the far end, against either wall of the *każin* or bar as a backdrop. The setup depends on the location of the bar and restroom within the venue. Some organisers tend to be cautious about this as it affects the dynamic of the ongoing performances. Based on how the space is designed some organisers would even refuse to organise *Serati* at *każini* and/or bars who invite them to hold a *Serata* at their premises. The aim is to avoid having audiences walking to or sitting at the bar with the potential of interfering with the ongoing performance. There are those who do not observe this detail and I

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<sup>3</sup> Some *għannejja* surprise aficionados by performing a quadruple quatrain. One *għannej* in particular Mikiel Cutajar *is-Superstar* is known within the community to perform elongated *gadanzas*.

did notice this interference occurs at certain spaces during an ongoing session and indeed it does obstruct the flow of performance (Csikszentmihalyi 2008).

Speaking schematically, there are four kinds of *Ghana* events apart from festivals. The character of an event is given by a combination of four criteria: the degree of formality, budget, scarcity (how frequently a particular *ghannej* performs or the rarity of a match-up between two particular *ghannejja*) and audience.

The most informal kind of event is likely to arise on a Saturday–Sunday morning at a bar where *Ghana* is known to be likely to take place. When a venue works for members of the *Ghana* community, it becomes a regular hub, and sessions will be held weekly or biweekly as was observed in a post-COVID-19 scenario, where the usual hubs changed and incrementally the scene adjusted. There may be enough *ghannejja* and guitarists<sup>4</sup> ready to participate without much cajoling; the event might have been organised by the bar owner or some other member of the community. But some *ghannejja* may need coaxing. Their reluctance might stem from the fact that they don't see a singer of their calibre among the others or else that they usually expect to be paid.

The event itself might also begin informally, with guitarists playing among themselves and comparing notes, or else one might be performing a *Makkjetta*, possibly with some colourful male humour thrown in, which could also start acappella bringing everyone together.<sup>5</sup> Then, the *Sirtu Pront* session would be ready to begin and would last for some forty five minutes to an hour, with the bar doing good business as, even if the audience is small, there is an ethos of buying others a round of drinks. One often sees aficionados with a considerable amount of beer bottles or a series of highball cocktail glasses in front of them. This typically happens because of a habit where members of the community to enjoy certain friendship relationships with other members take pride in offering rounds to those that are present. This in a sense creates a cycle which continues throughout the sessions that ensue.

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<sup>4</sup> Although due to the limited number of *kitarristi* who participate in the Saturday–Sunday morning, they tend to be engaged prior to the event.

<sup>5</sup> In this context it is considered as an entertaining type of performance in between or before the *Ghana* sessions and not included as a separate session.



At the most formal end of the spectrum lies an evening (a *Serata*) on a grand scale — what I call a local-regional encounter depending on the scale of the promotion and the prestige of the event (See Figure 14). It is usually produced outdoors during the summer season as a public cultural activity which takes place in a village square, *pjazza* whilst during the winter period the *Serata* shifts indoors at a particular venue generally in an urban setting (relatively spacious enough) to house a substantial amount of audiences, *kazin*. Occasionally a club with an inner courtyard is also used when it's good weather. During the winter *Serati* audiences are limited to aficionados and members of the community due to the limited space available at selected venues, whilst the summer *Serati* attract larger audiences and a more general public (See Figure 11).

In summer the *Serati* may also be organised as part of a village festa programme celebrated in different villages around Malta and Gozo. Summer is considered the peak season of *Ghana*, as the *Serati* are organised more frequently in outdoor public spaces such as the village square and public gardens. Multiple sessions can occur every week during summer.

We may say that these types of activities occur in spaces between the bar and the festival domains, still classified within the local space; however certain *Serati* attract local and regional audiences who join in with the *Ghana* community. The more modest version of this is the winter *Serata* held indoors in a more compact intimate local setting. During this type of *Serati* one tends to find that audiences are predominantly aficionados.

Often, *Serati* include Maltese culinary delights and dishes such as the *majjalata*<sup>6</sup>, whilst in winter assortments of nibbles and small platters are a must and shared around throughout. The atmosphere during a *Serata* is typically of a celebratory nature, particularly the ones attracting large crowds during summer — often the selection of *ghannejja* and *kitarristi* would generate interest with audiences. Most *Serati* are organised by community members, often led by performers and/or aficionados, the *gaj* leaders, and at times in collaboration with or acquiring support from NGOs and local councils, the social partners.

A *Serata* could include up to three sessions of *Ghana Spirtu Pront* (or more up to five), some *ghannejja* may perform in multiple sessions, whilst the formation of guitar players could

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<sup>6</sup> Often involving a whole roast suckling pig prepared by a local baker, *for*.

remain the same throughout the whole evening and in some occasions guitar players may also change accordingly. Apart from the scale of quantity, what distinguishes a *Serata* — indeed, what attracts the audiences and enables its budget — is the quality of the singers and combinations. A great *Serata* is one that features an *għannej* who limits his performances or a face-off between two *għannejja* who do not often perform with each other — although the sheer presence of the two at the same venue is exciting, even if they are not paired off — promotional material does not divulge how the formations will pan out.

A typical *Serata* would involve the following logistical setup and requirements:

- Microphones and PA system<sup>7</sup>
- Tables and chairs for audiences
- Bar (if not included with the venue)
- Food<sup>8</sup> (if the venue is not a bar or a restaurant one would need to cater separately — particularly if the *Serata* is promoted as a *Majjalata*)
- A small stage or a designated space which provides an elevated position for the performers (depending on the type of venue — particularly outdoor venues)
- Police - Local Council Permits (particularly for outdoor events)
- Poster (nowadays also shared on social media)

Through the above tentative list I have attempted to highlight the logistical requirements of a *Serata* that an organiser would cater for in a given context and space when organising the community social event. Some organisers would also go into the detail of instructing the sound technician how to set the equaliser when an amplified system is included in the setup of the performance. If a *Serata* is being organised by an entity (such as a local council) the logistics of a stage may be required with a more powerful sound system<sup>9</sup>, and

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<sup>7</sup> Depending on the type of *Serata* and its organisers (possibly also the venue operator - typically a local bar), indoor *Serati* could be organised without a PA system.

<sup>8</sup> In the local *Serati* organised by community leaders, including the Saturday-Sunday morning sessions, the bar owners offer a variety of finger foods throughout the sessions. Typically, plates of Maltese delicacies such as spicy sausages, octopus, horse meat, pork offal, stuffed snails, bruschetta, broad beans, cheeselets, baked pasta slices and sandwiches (*zalzett, qarnit, laham taż-żiemel, partijiet tal-majjal, bebbux mimli, bruxketta, fażola, għbejniet, timpana, panini*). Every establishment takes pride in particular delicacies. It must also be noted that this generous conduct is only given to clients who are purchasing beverages and offering ‘rounds’ of alcohol to those attending the *Ghana* session.

<sup>9</sup> This should not imply a large sound system, but one that is adequate based on space and audience assessment.

lighting among other logistic requirements — however it is often noted that the performance space is well observed and features in the surrounding double as a stage (often times avoiding the setup of a standard stage).

The audiences attending the *Ghana* sessions help create the atmosphere that stimulates the performers to perform engaging and vibrant *Ghana*. Often food and alcohol is involved in creating a celebratory feeling within the space (See Figure 12). Typically food is provided by the organiser who makes sure that nibbles in the form of platters keep flowing around the tables. Upon experiencing this flow of energy I have often felt this Bruegelesque appreciation of all that was happening around me: the way people transform and interact with the space, sometimes standing in a cramped and crowded space, the consumption of food and drinks, the music and the sound of audiences, the dense smell of cigarette fumes and the particular interior design, often having *Ghana* related decor, such as photographs of key performers and *Ghana* guitars on display — all elements creating the multisensorial atmosphere within the performance space.

In between the informal and most formal (in terms of organisation) is a scaled down version of the *Serata* — scaled down most probably by a limited budget. This type of *Serata* would typically make reference to a *Prim kitarrist* only in its announcement, inviting everyone to perform. The promotional material would name the *Prim* and announce *kullhadd mistieden*, everyone is invited (See Figure 13). It might not even mention the guitar players and simply announce that the session will be taking place at a particular venue and that everyone is invited to perform. These types of sessions are open for everyone: *ghannejja*, *Prim kitarristi*, *kitarristi* and *dilettanti* to participate and organise *Ghana* sessions at the venue during the *Serata*. So based on those who attend and will be interested in participating, sessions will be formed. As per any other *Serata* food platters will flow. They are mostly organised by the venue owners who may be aficionados, *ghannejja* or simply enthusiasts in a manner of the Saturday-Sunday morning *Ghana* sessions. These types of *Serati* typically involve no payment for participation, although it may be that the guitar players get paid. The guitar players, of whom few are available, are teased that they “always get paid” to which the guitarist retort that they always spend more at a *Serata* than they would earn.

These three kinds of events are distinguished from each other according to three criteria: degree of formality, budget and scarcity (of performance). There is a fourth type of event that is distinguished by those who commission it and their audience. These are evenings organised at the behest of local councils, local associations (such as regatta, pigeon and *boċċi* clubs), town feast committees (*każini*) and politicians (whether as ministers or as electoral candidates) and of course funded or co-funded by them. The audience here might be as big as that of a regional *Serata* but it might not necessarily be made up of enthusiasts, let alone aficionados. Hence this type of event attracts varying audiences in various intensities, depending on the occasion and in some cases the performers announced — when this occurs. Accordingly, the repertoire offered would usually include, apart from *Spirtu Pront*, *Makkjetti*, and possibly also a *Fatt* and *Għana fil-Għoli* and in some contexts Folk Dance. An exhibitionary element enters such presentations to cater for the audience's broader tastes and lesser discernment, although the *Spirtu Pront* is itself not staged but an authentic encounter.

I should underline the fourfold typology is a conceptual scheme that is often blurred in practice. Formal organisation and informality can coexist, as can differing agendas for events.

As an example consider the first *Serata* I attended in Xewkija, Gozo, after the pandemic broke out. To my knowledge this was the first official *Għana* activity organised in Gozo during the outbreak of COVID-19. The *Serata* was organised by the local council of Xewkija at *Ta' Blankas Olive Grove*. It was supported by the Directorate of Cultural Heritage of Gozo, and the Ministry for Gozo, which meant that the Minister for Gozo, Clint Camilleri, was present and gave a speech during the *Serata*.

Despite it being a cultural activity with a substantial part of the aficionados who travelled from Malta, the Minister delivered a rallying speech promising the locality further infrastructural projects — a stronghold of the incumbent Labour government. This meant that he perceived the audience as part of the electorate and the occasion as an opportunity to promote political propaganda and his candidature whilst targeting his party rivals competing on his electoral district with a general election on the horizon.

The activity was being advertised as a *Serata* offering *Għana Spirtu Pront* by Nordai Desira, *Żeppi n-Nizza*, Anġlu Theuma *il-Kina* and Emanuel Ellul *l-Begjig*, and *Makkjetti* by

JoeMike and Lydon Agius and Gozitan Mariah Agius — all distinguished in their respective genres and attracting their own audiences-followers. During the *Serata* itself, however, this programme was altered with an additional *Spirtu Pront* session, which included other *ghannejja* who were present in the audience and who, I believe, spontaneously expressed their interest to perform; they included JoeMike Agius *tas-Seba Rġiel* and Fredu Desira *L-Indjan*. This meant that the programme was adjusted by audience-performer relationships; the performance was negotiated over the course of the *Serata* as the programme unfolded.

Larger scale events usually involve payment and payment has also altered the frequency of some *ghannejja*'s performances. Some may limit their annual number of performances in order to increase payment (and possibly also increase audience numbers in their performance). It is intended to generate more enthusiasm in audiences and aficionados who would be eager to experience their performance. This status has been achieved by one leading singer who I was told demanded a flat fee of €1,000 in a pre-COVID-19 scenario and possibly increased to a higher amount in a post-COVID-19 scenario; he takes the largest cut and the rest is then divided accordingly between the rest of the participating performers, both *ghannejja* and *kitarristi*. A young prodigy is said to have demanded a fee of €600 in pre-COVID-19 and possibly increased to €800 after the cultural activities resumed. Other *ghannejja* are said to pursue a similar strategy although for smaller amounts. However, it is my understanding that €50 is achieved by the majority of ace *ghannejja* (*ta' klassi*) who are in high demand and is the regular fee for *kitarristi*, since in Malta, unlike Australia, only a handful of guitar players are active in the contemporary *Ghana* music scene.

In my experience most *Ghana* performers are cautious about fees in exchange for their performance. They would attest that they perform for free to express their passion (*ghax delizzju*). When they are commissioned for a *Serata*, the generic fee for *ghannejja* ranges between €20-€50 — more commonly €20-€30. Some reason that it is only fair that if some of the performers are getting paid, they should get paid too at the same rate established for that particular *Serata*. Others complain that this expectation is driving prices up even for the organisation of smaller local events. This creates an ongoing negotiation between the venue owner and members of the *Ghana* community.

### The control of events: impresarios and teams

The demand for large-scale events has led to the rise of organisers that fill the role of a kind of impresario (my term), who takes care of the organisation and adequacy of the set and sound arrangements. Some impresarios even go into the detail of how the sound should be set up and what the equaliser settings of the amplification system should be to ensure a certain aesthetic for the performance. Some impresarios demand specific requirements regarding stage setup, lighting and sound and unless they manage to gather enough support a *Serata* would not be organised.

The impresario also takes care of the curation of a programme and the engagement of interesting performers. The need to be able to draw upon the services of prestigious guitarists and *ghannejja*, capable of providing the right kind of evening programme for the particular audience, has also led, as we shall see, to the formation of affiliated groups of performers (some affiliations being looser than others) associated with different impresarios.

The impresario therefore ends up exercising two kinds of control: over a programme and over access to a performance — especially by the non-familiar audiences who may be strangers to *Ghana* as a social network and field — including access to particular performers. He also exercises influence over a performer's access to performance opportunities (more so in the case of *ghannejja*, of whom there are many, than of guitarists, of whom there are fewer). In short, if earlier we examined the dynamics of demand, the role of impresario enables us to take a closer look at supply.

The first function is to be a go-to person by a commissioning entity that is not an *Ghana* insider. On its own, this is a function that is sometimes carried out by leading guitarists. Since listening to guitarists play without *ghannejja* is easier for the unaccustomed and unfamiliar ear, some lead guitarists are also better known to 'outsiders'. So some of the lead guitar players become community leaders who facilitate the organisation of the *Serati* to entities not familiar with the active members of the community. It is a role that requires one to select and coordinate directly with the performers and produce a *Serata* together with the commissioning organising body.

The work requires judgement of the repertoire required and what is sought — usually performances less demanding of specific knowledge of *Ghana*. For example, Johnny *ta' Birzebbuġa* had expressed how he was approached by the local council of Xewkija and entrusted with liaising with the *ghannejja* and other *kitarristi* on their behalf to coordinate a *Serata* at *Ġnien Blankas* in Xewkija (the event mentioned earlier). Mario *is-Sufu* also shared with me his involvement in organising music performances in Valletta. His was a particular endeavour since it was addressing a particular market, that of selected dining venues which requested *Prejjem* performances. Here the repertoire of music also included local folk music and Italian Neapolitan Songs.<sup>10</sup> This type of collaboration is also explored by some performers with local agritourism operators who organise performances as part of a tour programme. Others, on the other hand, are even more selective in their participation in the social performances of *Ghana* and restrict their participation to special and national events — such as the National Festival. Some lead guitar players are engaged to participate at the festival (programme sections such as the *Prejjem* and performing with other *ghannejja* in either style of *Ghana*) in various editions of the National Festival<sup>11</sup>, such as Kalċidon Vella *Ta' Mustaċċa* together with his daughter Denise and son Mark.

Consideration of this function alone brings two issues to the fore. First, *Ghana* is a field sufficiently hived off from other cultural fields that it requires an insider to make the necessary introductions for 'outsiders'. Second, however, it is not an enclosed cultural field. The guitarists know, when needed, what repertoires to play for other audiences. Their performances at *Ghana* sessions cannot be judged in terms of ignorance or carelessness if it

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<sup>10</sup> During such performances, other instruments such as an accordion, also referred to locally as *organett*, possibly also a *żafżaf* (friction drum) were added to the ensemble of *is-Sufu*. In this case *Ghana* would not have been included in the performance, which was intended to provide live background music to the dining patrons in the capital city, Valletta. *Is-Sufu* is known to explore and include additional instruments other than the *Ghana* guitar in his ensemble.

<sup>11</sup> When the competition element of the national festival was discarded, performers were deprived from the possibility to perform at the festival based on their abilities by 'simply' enlist themselves in either section (by expressing interest to perform in either style of *Ghana*) of the programme — which allowed them to first enlist for the *Elementari* and then, if they make it through the elementary section of the competitive programme, they would be able to proceed to the main festival performances. This change in the festival programme was also reflected in the dynamics of participation that the performers of the music tradition experienced, as nowadays participation relies heavily on the networking capacity that a performer sustains.

seems that certain musical criteria based on the music industry standards are ignored during a performance; I will in a later chapter argue that it has to do with a different aesthetic, a matter of choice, understanding and appreciation.

The second function of an impresario is related to but separate from the first. It is making sure that people who want an event can have access to a variety of quality performers. The flipside is, of course, that a successful impresario might also exercise gateway control over access to performance opportunities.

The organisational solution to this functional need has been the formation of a *gaj* (work team, a term borrowed from port and construction labour practices; plural: *gajjijiet*). There are three leading *gajjijiet*, two associated with prominent *ghannejja* and another with a joint effort by a distinguished aficionado and a highly sought *ghannej*. The numbers vary from around five core members to ten to fifteen affiliate members each, including guitarists. According to my data, there are four other *gajjijiet*, none numbering more than half a dozen members.

The three leading *gajjijiet* can draw on talent to produce a programme that includes *Spiritu Pront*, *Ghana tal-Fatt*, *Ghana fil-Gholi* and *Makkjetti*. A *gaj* leader may commission a performer who is visiting from abroad<sup>12</sup> or encourage a veteran to perform; he provides a variety of profiles and careers by inviting individual performers, apprentices and veteran *ghannejja* to perform with the *gaj* in a particular *Serata*.

The leader-organiser also gets to select who is paired with whom, adding to the interest of a session but also controlling possible tensions. Some singers are never paired together in a *Serata*<sup>13</sup> leaving aficionados desiring performances by their preferred stars. Members within any *gaj* are engaged according to ongoing and burgeoning networking relations, the performing abilities of each respective *ghannej* and *kitarrist*, the requirements of each performer (among other criteria which will be discussed later). A *gaj* leader's choices will

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<sup>12</sup> Some could even enter into discussions with performers from the diaspora to perform locally in the regional 'high' *Serati*.

<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that not every *Ghana* organiser would choose the formations before the *Serata*, some organisers and *gaj* leaders leave this selection process open to be decided on the night and at times up to the *ghannejja* to decide right before a session of *Ghana Spiritu Pront* is about to commence. This type of impresario would only select the performing *ghannejja* and *kitarristi* to promote the *Serata*.



also determine the frequency with which he can organise popular *Serati* or be commissioned to organise an activity.

The dynamism of a *gaj* is determined by the aesthetics, ambition and criteria which the leader along with the collaborators employ in their practice. These factors create the characteristics of the group displayed through *Ghana* performances. For instance, if a *gaj* includes multiple *Prim kitarristi* and *ghannejja* who could perform in more than one style of *Ghana*, that would mean that when their *gaj* is commissioned to produce a *Serata*, the leader of the *gaj* could organise different *Ghana* sessions within the same programme; as a group of performers, the *gaj*, would be able to provide performances in different styles of *Ghana*. This would also include multiple sessions in the *Ghana Spirtu Pront* with the participation of different performers, eventually showcasing versatility in *Ghana* performance.

To have a clearer idea of what is involved in coordinating a typical *Ghana* session, I would like to highlight the number of performers required to produce a *Ghana* session in either of the current three main styles of *Ghana*:

- *Ghana Spirtu Pront*: six or four *ghannejja* + three *kitarristi* including one *Prim*
- *Ghana fil-Għoli*: two or one *ghannejja* + three *kitarristi* including one *Prim*
- *Ghana tal-Fatt*: one *ghannej* + three *kitarristi* including one *Prim*

Not all *gajjijiet* can perform with equal distinction. Therefore for certain commissioning entities a *gaj* may seem more attractive and convenient if they can provide a variety of styles to their cultural programme.

The subject of the *gajjijiet* is crucial for us to understand as it dominates most of the performances occurring in the contemporary scene. Needless to say it remains a sensitive subject to discuss — which is why I have avoided naming anyone. One never divulges out in the open a list of affiliate members of a *gaj*, partly because affiliations change and the dynamism of the group evolves.

Successful pairings entail judgement, not just knowledge of *ghannejja*'s reputation. Some impresarios take the decision of whom to pair and then sell it informally when promoting a *Serata*. Most however promote only the participating *ghannejja* and *kitarristi*, generating interest in the process where aficionados wonder how they will be paired. High

calibre *ghannejja* can always adjust to their counterpart, but, in *Sirtu Pront*, if *ghannejja* are not well matched in terms of calibre or *Ghana* skills, and interested in performing in the same style of *Sirtu Pront*, the quality of the performance risks being interfered–obstructed — ‘lowered’, not reaching its full potential. At the same time there are those who appreciate impresarios who commission *ghannejja* and manage the sessions — in the way they are paired — so that every session in the *Serata* is well balanced in terms of quality of *ghannejja*. Hence having ace *ghannejja* mixed through all the sessions and not grouped together in the final session. Given the allusiveness of *Ghana*, if the pairings are unbalanced, the two singers might not be able to understand each other. Equally, they may not be interested in performing the same type of *Ghana* — the style requiring a particular temperament (I address style in a later chapter): aggressive or amicable, nostalgic or controversial, or simply conversational. If this is not observed during the selection of the performance it also risks producing a non–engaging *Ghana* performance, as the performers would not perform in synergy with each other<sup>14</sup> — an aspect which is also up to the performers.

An impresario helps control or steer what might be an unruly *Serata* in one other way. During a *Serata*, some *ghannejja* who were not commissioned to perform, *maqlugħa*, by the organiser might put themselves forward and to an extent insist on performing — this generates tension. Therefore, if during a *Ghana Sirtu Pront* session of a *Serata* intended to present a performance by four *ghannejja*<sup>15</sup>, one *ghannej* (an audience member in that particular

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<sup>14</sup> The synergy between *ghannejja* and *kitarristi* as a requirement means that the performers are conscious that the performance is the outcome of a collective creative output shared between all — not only between the paired *ghannejja* (for instance *ghannej* one and three) but also a derivative of the subjects and musical performance given by all performing *ghannejja* (for instance if four *ghannejja* are performing two distinct performances are concurrently unfolding creating one whole performance together with the complimentary *Prejjem* and guitar players). All this needs also to be in sync with the guitar music performed by the *kitarristi*, where *ghannejja* and aficionados often note whether a *ghannej* is in harmony with the ‘guitars’, ‘*jaqbel mal–kitarri*.’

<sup>15</sup> According to data from my fieldwork, in the past (between 1950s and 1960s) *Ghana Sirtu Pront* was performed by four *ghannejja* and the six performing *ghannejja* in one session is a recent phenomenon. When discussing this subject, this increase was attributed to a change in attitude where performers of any style and quality express persistent interest in performing and therefore it was a way of accommodating the need of more *ghannejja* performing in a given session. So whether during a morning session or a *Serata* if each would have three sessions of *Ghana* in a span of three hours with six *ghannejja* performing in every session, an organiser would satisfy and maintain social relationships with sixteen performers rather than twelve. It should be noted that there are those who resist this and restrict the number of participants to four when organising their activities.

*Serata*) insists in performing, one way of solving the situation is by adding another and eventually six *ghannejja* perform — this may go unnoticed by the rest of the audience however there are practitioners who prefer participating in sessions with four *ghannejja* and detest such situations.

### The prestige of events

The *gaj* is not a formal association formed by a group of practitioners and aficionados of *Ghana*. It is known within the community which members are affiliated with whom and this collaboration between performers could remain and evolve by strengthening and maintaining the same performers.<sup>16</sup> Or, they could change over a period of time where other members can join while others disperse and join or form other *gajjijiet*. Indeed, one of the leading *gajjijiet* was formed recently, after the pandemic, in an alliance between a leading aficionado who reactivated in a post-COVID-19 scenario and a top *ghannejj*. Such changes happen in part because active performers of *Ghana* also change over time and can become passive for a number of years.<sup>17</sup> The network between the practitioners is also continuously changing and developing. So we must also keep in mind that networking between the members of the community is constantly taking place — most of the time outside of the performing area.

It is my understanding that this ongoing activity between the performers and their respective groups keeps the contemporary scene active and serves also as a motivational driving force to produce quality *Ghana* performances. Quality is dependent on the set of criteria which both the performers and aficionados set and define continuously in the practice of *Ghana*.

Another factor which shapes affiliations within the music scene is mentorship<sup>18</sup> and it can also be shaped through kinship. It is likely that novice *Ghana* performers and novice guitar

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<sup>16</sup> Some aficionados tend to also follow a particular *gaj* and in a way become closely associated with that particular group — kinship also plays a role in this. Some tend to follow devoutly a particular performer whom they hold in high esteem.

<sup>17</sup> This can also be caused by a death of a family member or a very close friend where a performer out of respect would refrain from performing for a definite period (months, even over a year or shift to a passive status).

<sup>18</sup> Mentorship apprentice relations are also evident in *gajjijiet* since it is closely linked to the networks that manifest in the affiliations leading to the performance space.

players maintain a good relationship with their mentor(s) and eventually it is the same mentor(s) that keeps guiding them, introducing them to perform in a *Ghana* session and eventually become affiliated with a *gaj* — likely to be the same *gaj* that the mentor is affiliated with.

A successful *gaj* needs to renew itself because over-control and dominance of particular events might, paradoxically, over time, reduce the dramatic interest of certain encounters. Currently, the *Ghana* sessions of the National Festival are the exclusive patch of one *gaj*, whose leader has good political connections, which has been given to me as one reason for its reduced interest among aficionados. It is, so to speak, too safe an encounter between ‘the same’ *ghannejja*.

In order to raise the interest and prestige of events, therefore, impresarios need to rely not only on the distinction of the permanent members of the *gaj*. They need associates who are not exclusive members and *ghannejja* who are ‘independent’ of any *gaj* and willing, as they say, to perform ‘with anyone’ of any *gaj* and any rank.<sup>19</sup>

This strategy can work well if the uneven match-up sees the superior *ghannej* adjust his style or mentor an apprentice in the very performance. The bout thus gains interest because of, rather than despite the difference in ability. The bout becomes a performance of tending carefully to talent with a rhetoric of cooperation rather than agonism. The match-up can backfire if the superior *ghannej* goes for a ‘safe win’ and exerts one’s influence by taking the role of ‘a social control agent of the group’ (Gaffin 1995: 168).

However, unaffiliated members experience a difficulty to be included in performances organised at the initiative of impresarios who are *gaj* leaders as they tend to feature their core and affiliate members of their *gaj*. The fieldwork has identified performers who are repeatedly left out of this system.

The second way in which an impresario can inject drama into an event is to set it up as a potential face-off between two *ghannejja* known to be rivals to the extent of having, in the past, organised *Serati* on the same night. Whether this works will depend on the context of

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<sup>19</sup> There are performers who despite being closely affiliated with one *gaj* are invited to participate in *Serati* organised by another *gaj*.

performance. A *Serata* organised by a local council may be more likely to attract rival *ghannejja* — such as when two known *ghannejja* who are closely affiliated with different *gajs* were performing together in a *Ghana Spirtu Pront* session (not paired together). In informal contexts, such as an unofficial-informal Saturday-Sunday morning *Ghana* session, where performers join more freely, one might see veterans Fredu Abela *iż-Żejtuni* and Frans Cassar *il-Bloq* performing in the same *Ghana Spirtu Pront* session (not paired together).

In other words, the setting up of the informal *gajjjiet* generates a dialectical need for their foil — performers who are independent of it — in order to renew and invigorate their own events. Because events too are ranked according to prestige, not just individual *ghannejja*. An *Ghana* session is a collective performance; it cannot be reduced to singing or music. It is a ritualised drama that involves the audience's active participation.

*Ghannejja* and aficionados are right to protest when someone suggests that an *ghannej* 'sings' (*ikanta*); they retort that an *ghannej jghanni* — a verb derived from *Ghana* but which, in this context, is not a redundant phrase. *Jghanni* means, I would argue, a presentation of self, in which singing plays only a part. The interaction with audience — during and beyond performance — and with fellow *ghannejja* and guitarists is also an essential element of a *Serata*, for the cognoscenti, and it is a topic to which we will turn later on.

## Conclusion

This chapter sought to sketch out why it is a misapprehension of *Ghana* to see it simply as 'folksinging' or even as folksinging at all, if one is to interpret what it means for *ghannejja*. It is more than singing. It is participation in a way of life by aficionados and practitioners who see it as an activity for its own sake. It is also more than 'folksinging' in the sense that, for *ghannejja*, *kitarristi* and aficionados, *Ghana* is a practice rooted in their contemporary life, which is also to a large extent organised around being a successful, skilful *ghannej*, *kitarrist* or aficionado. It is not simply the expression of a past way of life of an ethnic group. It is a modern practice that is a dynamic social field (Turner 1988: 74) — embracing careers, markets, supply and demand, networks, negotiation, politics (of participation) and symbolic and cultural capital. Reminding us that:

[...] consumption has become a key topic for contemporary anthropology, in part because consumption practices mediate between global processes of production and circulation and the local societies which anthropologists have conventionally studied (and which ethnographic fieldwork is best adapted to study). The very alignment of the articulation between the global and the local in this particular kind of problem is conducive to a particular anthropological response, which characteristically (and no doubt appropriately) emphasizes the local distinctiveness of the appropriation of global phenomena, and this is typically if not invariably expressed as cultural difference. (Thomas 2005: 264)

When *Ghana* is seen, instead, as the ‘unique’ cultural expression of an ethnic group, instead of the skilled expression of unique personalities, a very different kind of *Ghana* is presented, that of festivals, and it is to this that I now turn.

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Fig.9 georgemario, 2019. An attentive audience in front of Crazy Bar trying to follow Ghana happening inside. [Photograph] (November, 20191115\_211341.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeegonĕn Studios).



Fig.10 georgemario, 2022. Veteran prim kitarrist performing in the final session of Ghana Spirtu Pront. [Photograph] (3 November, IMG\_0179.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeegonĕn Studios)



Fig.11 georgemario, 2022. *The audience that gathered for the Serata in the piazza next to the Boççi Club.* [Photography] (23 September, IMG\_9725.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeegonën Studios).



Fig.12 georgemario, 2022. *The audience cheering the Ghana performers after the final session.* [Photography] (23 September, IMG\_9872.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeegonën Studios).





Fig.13 georgemario, 2023. Artworks promoting a local Serata open for participation (left) and one announcing the performers (right). [Visual Image] (10 July, Ghana Art 1.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonèn Studios)



Fig.14 georgemario, 2023. Artworks promoting a regional Serata (left) and a Majjalata – outdoor Serata (right). [Visual Image] (10 July, Ghana Art 2.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonèn Studios)

## 5. The Festivalisation of *Għana*

### Introduction: *Għana* as art and as artefact

For the *għannejja*, *Għana* is a term covering three main genres, calling for different kinds of artistic skill and performance, knowledge and practice, activity and dedication. For the aficionado, each good *għannej* is unique; for the impresario, it is a challenge to be able to combine different *għannejja* to develop a balanced programme of performances for a *Serata*.

*Għana*, however, is a polysemic symbol, not just a term. For the world outside the social field of *Għana*, it is a symbol of a lost world, an arcadian icon, as can be seen by the constant reproduction of Edward Caruana Dingli's *The Guitar Player* (cf Sant-Cassia 1993 for an analysis of the ideology of such idyllic iconography) (See Figure 31). *Għana* comes to stand for 'the voice of the people', the 'voice that makes us unique' (to cite some of the most repeated phrases). Here, for example, is the information published on *FestivalsMalta* online portal section of *Għanafest 2020 Online Festival*.

*Għana* is a traditional Maltese past time that has been passed down from generation to generation. Music has always played a strong part within Maltese folklore, evolving into the traditional music genre of *Għana*. Most likely inspired by traditional Sicilian music, and dating back to the time of the Knights, *Għana* was commonly associated with the working class, as they sang about their day-to-day life. *Għana* singers, referred to as 'Għannejja' commonly sing about simple or even tragic life events, depending the type of *Għana* being performed.

What for the *għannejja* is a hard-honed skill and God-given talent, is here presented as an attribute of an entire class. For the *għannejja*, it is the individual performer that is unique. Within a different kind of rhetoric, however, the individual *għannej*'s uniqueness gives way to the 'uniqueness of Maltese culture'. For *għannejja*, *Għana* is an art; within this alternative rhetoric, it is an artefact of a vanished or vanishing culture. The *għannej*, arguably, is reinterpreting a living tradition that is part of a certain kind of modern, working class life.

It is this dynamic that I wish to explore in this chapter: how *Għana* festivals held over a quarter century represent *Għana* differently from the way the *għannejja* project it, and how a performance in a festival is different from one in a *Serata*.

At the heart of this chapter is an attempt to explain the problem I introduced in Chapter 1: why is the participation of *ghannejja* in the National *Ghana* Festival falling? Not only is it falling. For several years there has been a virtual boycott by many *ghannejja* of the festival — and an alternative *Serata* has been held on the same weekend as the festival, including in 2023, with a new artistic director of the festival taking charge for his first edition.

It is not part of my argument that *Ghana* is, in itself, incompatible with festivals. As we know them today, festivals know their origin from a series of rituals that became an integral part of culture, where communities meet on specific occasions ‘to participate in order to affirm and celebrate various social, religious, ethnic, national, linguistic or historical bonds (Bakhtin 1984; Falassi 1987; Geertz 1991; Turner 1982),’ (cited in Bennett, Taylor and Woodward 2020: 1). At a local and smaller scale, occasions for gatherings happened during weddings and other communal functions, including funerals.<sup>1</sup> In Malta contracts between *joculari*, performers, indicating that singers and musicians partnered together to provide services on weddings and other occasions required by the community, were taking place by the mid-fifteenth century (Cassar Pullicino and Camilleri 1998: 3; Ciantar 2021: 19).

Feasts and festivities are a part of a social institution ‘important in terms of ceremonial systems [...] in which many important social relationships and transactions are revealed’ and reaffirmed (Seymour-Smith 1987: 113). In Malta, historically, there were several feasts and festivals with which *Ghana*, both in its broad sense, and perhaps in the traditional form out of which contemporary *Spirtu Pront* has emerged, and was associated with — like the *Imnarja* celebrations (Feast of St Peter and St Paul) and the feast of San Girgor. An account from 1748, highlights that the feast attracted people of all social statures, who would gather in

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<sup>1</sup> During my fieldwork I have also participated in a funeral service honouring a performer who passed away. Members of the *Ghana* community gathered in support of the family and also performed *Ghana* during mass — this followed the structure of a *Ghana* mass written by Oliver Friggieri, a prolific poet, literary critic and philosopher who passed away in 2020. After the funeral rite in *presente caDavere*, performers gathered outside the church and *ghannejja* together with *kitarristi* performed *gadanzi*, cadences in *Ghana Spirtu Pront* in honour of the departed. An informant also expressed how the members present contributed to the funerary expenses in support of the family — to respect privacy I am not mentioning the name of the member who passed away. It was a most touching experience to see the community come together and perform *Ghana* during such circumstances, however in terms of performance it was very interesting to see how *Ghana* was adapted within the church service and outside during such a personal moment.

Mdina, where celebrations went through the night (Cassar 2002: 123). Count De Saint Priest in 1791 observed that the Maltese rhymed the second verse with the fourth whilst performing in the native language. While Boiesglin in 1805, made reference to ‘local festivals’ that were taking place with the participation of locals ‘singing verses’<sup>2</sup> (Cassar Pullicino and Camilleri 1998: 11).

Feasts were also related to nineteenth-century politics. In the colonial period, the village feast became both a symbol of Catholicism, and a display of control to the government that the church had over the locals. The village feast gradually increased in popularity and intensity during the nineteenth century (Cassar 2002: 233-235) and *Ghana* played a part. Feasts as ‘characteristic social events of central importance’ (Seymour-Smith 1987: 113), remain a dominant village celebration to this day in Malta in most villages, and it is both an innovation and a sign of continuity that some local councils and feast committees commission *Serati* today.

One could say such festivals are an example of experiences of what Victor Turner (1969) called *communitas*, where participants through ritual achieve a collective state ‘where all personal differences of class, status, age, gender, and other personal distinctions are stripped away allowing people to temporarily merge through their basic humanity’ (Turino 2008: 18). Festivals provide ‘a space for articulation, performance and rediscovery of identity (Aitchison and Pritchard, 2007),’ (cited in Bennett, Taylor and Woodward 2020: 11) and ‘the contemporary festival therefore becomes a potential site for representing, encountering, incorporating and researching aspects of cultural difference’ (Bennett, Taylor and Woodward 2020: 1). The *ghannejja* would use a different language but they would not be averse to saying that an *Ghana* festival should represent such an ideal.

But the *Ghana* case is also peculiar. As has been widely noted (e.g. Bennett, Taylor and Woodward 2014, Merkel 2014, Mair 2019), contemporary European culture (among others) has been ‘festivalized’. That is, the production and consumption of festivals are an authentic part of culture. However, the *ghannejja*’s relationship to the *Ghana* festival, in its various

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<sup>2</sup> In this account it is not sure whether participants were performing in the native language or Italian. Nevertheless it is an indication that some kind of festivities–festivals with music performance of a secular nature were taking place with the participation of locals.

guises, is the source of discomfort within the contemporary *Għana* community. They feel alienated from a festival that should celebrate their art; they feel it does not represent them — more so as we shall discuss it potentially generates a series of mis-representations.

In brief, my explanation will be twofold. In terms of representations, the festival represents *Għana* as an invented tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) rather than the living music tradition that the *għannejja* and *kitarristi* interpret. And, in terms of performance, the festival frames *Għana* as singing and music, rather than the more dramatic performance of the self in the now, that (as I shall argue in the next chapter), *Għana* is for the current *għannejja*, *kitarristi* and aficionados.

In pointing out that festivals in Malta have an invented tradition in mind when it comes to *Għana*, I do not mean to denigrate the results but only to show that they need to be seen in the right way. It is part of an ongoing discourse when dealing with practice and presentation of music traditions (Nagel 1985: 1096; Turino 2008: 156; Slater 2020: 135). A culture of festivals is an authentic expression of a society that commoditises experience, including, as Sant-Cassia (2000) shows, with respect to *Għana*.

### Festivals of *Għana*, 1953-2023

The meaning of a festival is given also by the other festivals with which it shares a calendar, thereby creating context. In Malta, the national festivals produced by the Government entity *FestivalsMalta* include:

- Malta International Arts Festival
- Dance Festival Malta
- Malta Jazz Festival
- Notte Bianca
- The Three Palaces
- Valletta Baroque Festival
- *Il-Karnival ta' Malta*
- *Mużika Mużika*
- *Ritmu* (the current name of the National *Għana* Festival)

It is also relevant to point out that the entity that organises the *Għana* festival is also responsible for a number of other annual national holidays. On each occasion events are

created and this includes commemoration activities of Dun Karm, the national poet. Each event and festival within the entity's portfolio are allocated annual budgets for the respective cultural programme being planned. The National *Ghana* Festival fares among the lowest if not the lowest funded festival within the portfolio of festivals; in one edition being allocated 12.6% of the funds allocated to another festival (Parlament 2014).<sup>3</sup> This could also be observed when surveying the festival programme and the type of productions produced during the other festivals (FestivalsMalta 2023). It is easy to see how the production values and 'grammar' of some festivals might be applied also to *Ghana*, in spite of its peculiar features. Which brings to the discussion the hegemonic format and standard that the entity attempts to implement through its portfolio of national festivals.

The next thing to note is that the festival, whose first edition was held in 1998, had a 1950s predecessor, the *Ghana* competition organised for some six years by the folklorist Ġużè Cassar Pullicino during the *Imnarja* festival (See Figure 20). As Fsadni (1993) has shown, *ghannejja* have pointed out that festival as one that made a difference both to their public image — *Ghana* became seen as more 'respectable' because representing 'Maltese culture' — and to their very performance practices, since they adopted some of Cassar Pullicino's competition rules — which may have been inspired from Stumme's description mentioned in Chapter 3.

One other general observation needs to be made about the current National Festival. There have been successive name changes:<sup>4</sup>

- *The National Festival of Ghana*, 1998 - Ġorġ Mifsud-Chircop
- *Ghanafest - Malta Mediterranean Folk Music Festival*, 2008 - Ruben Zahra
- *Ghanafest Malta World Music Festival*, 2016 - Renzo Spiteri
- *Ritmu*, 2022 - Tiziana Calleja
- *Ritmu Roots Festival*, 2023 - Andrew Alamango

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the entity *FestivalMalta* was launched after this edition, however certain ratios of the allocated budgets per festival remain.

<sup>4</sup> The dates highlighted below reflect the rebranding launch and not the beginning of each respective artistic director's tenure, although in some cases this converges.

The festival name changes are tied to a sequence of branding (and rebranding), which concurrently reflects key changes in the artistic vision of the four artistic directors which shaped the festival along the twenty five year history.

*II-Festival Nazzjonali ta' l-Ghana: Ġorġ Mifsud-Chircop, 1998-2007.*<sup>5</sup>

As a folklorist and researcher, Mifsud-Chircop, deemed 'the father' of the National Festival of *Ghana*, followed in the footsteps of Cassar Pullicino, initially creating a competition. He expanded the number of categories of *Ghana* (essentially, creating sub-genres featuring a particular technique or creative constraint). In some cases he also encouraged, developed and explored new styles with the participation of *għannejja* and *kitarristi*. Mifsud-Chircop 'experimented' also with different types of *Ghana* which were developed specifically for the festival. These categories were initially presented in a competitive festival where a variety of forms of *Ghana* were categorised accordingly. There were about a dozen prizes, for both *għannejja* and guitarists, with prizes being named for historically renowned *għannejja*. The aim was to present a 'showcase', *vetrina* of *Ghana* in its many forms and styles, involving as many practitioners as possible (Mifsud-Chircop interview 2001). The programme of the first two editions of the National Festival centred around a competition which categorised *Ghana* in a number of styles aimed at showcasing a variety of techniques and abilities by its practitioners. Participants were invited to participate in the *Eliminatorji* which then led to the main performances at *Argotti Gardens* (See Figure 15). The competition element was eventually discarded in the subsequent festival editions as the judges were awarding prizes according to an aesthetic the performers did not share. This was met with certain resistance and caused tension within the community. The participation of international performances eventually started being featured in the festival programme. Mifsud-Chircop also encouraged the international participants to learn and perform *Ghana* or elements of it, exploring a cultural exchange through music.

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that Ġorġ Mifsud-Chircop passed away on 19th December 2007 (Gatt 2008), and although Azzopardi (2014) lists 2006 as the final year of Mifsud-Chircop's tenure, Caruana (2017: 40) notes the year 2008 as the beginning of Ruben Zahra's term as artistic director of *Ghanafest*.

We can consider that the first editions of the festival were created in the spirit of applied anthropology. Mifsud-Chircop applied his research and worked with the *ghannejja* and *daqqaqa*, the music players of local folk instruments and *kitarristi*, *Ghana* guitar players to create and programme the festival. Often involving discussions prior to the festival. Despite the competition element was discarded, a variety of *Ghana* categories remained in the festival programme for a number of editions. Some were also extracted from the festival and occasionally performed in other events.<sup>6</sup> Mifsud-Chircop also coordinated the participation of selected *ghannejja* and *kitarristi* in cultural events abroad (Gatt 2008; Azzopardi 2014: 66).

***Ghanafest – Malta Mediterranean Folk Music Festival: Ruben Zahra, 2008–2015.***

Zahra, a contemporary composer who also performed with local traditional instruments (Zahra 2023), further explored the international aspect of the festival and also expanded the local participation at the festival to other musical styles. This saw the participation of local performers being included in the festival programme. Therefore, *Ghana* was further presented with other genres of music at the National Festival (See Figure 16). The collaboration factor which was also introduced by Mifsud-Chircop continued under Zahra, where *ghannejja* and *kitarristi* were encouraged to perform with participating artists. One notable performance was between *kitarristi* performing together with Flamenco dancers. Zahra also introduced a number of stalls at the festival featuring a range of food, agricultural products and crafts. Zahra's interest in traditional instruments was also reflected in the choice of international artistic content as well as the local inclusion of folk elements — instruments and music styles that were explored in the programming of the festival. Zahra also continued with some experimentation and explorations in *Ghana*, commenced by Mifsud-Chircop — such as ending symbolically with a *Ghanja tal-Għeluq*. During this period we see the development of a festival programme becoming a standardised format for a number of editions; where a festival day would include a 'slot' for *Ghana*, followed by local performers, workshops by international acts, a second *Ghana* 'slot', leading to the performance by the international group. Within each *Ghana* 'slot' a number of different sessions in a range of

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<sup>6</sup> Such as the *Ghana* style: *Ghana fuq il-Kelma*, data from my ethnographic fieldwork.



*Ghana* styles were performed. In certain editions these components were scheduled at different times, however the format where the international groups close the evenings of the festival seem to have been set. And so a festival formula for subsequent editions was created — some components were occasionally shifted in terms of schedules; duration of performances for *Ghana*, local and international acts including workshops remained approximately the same. What this created simultaneously was the reduced time within the festival programme allocated for *Ghana* and respective sessions in turn were also reduced and replaced with other artistic content.

As an artist Zahra continued to encourage *ghannejja* and *kitarristi* to perform and collaborate with other artists that were participating at the National Festival in other styles. The aim was to create a fusion between the different styles,<sup>7</sup> a ‘new’ combination: style, which could inspire the practitioners to continue evolving beyond the days of the festival.<sup>8</sup> In fact it should be noted that there could have been some degree of influence from such collaborative performances with *Ghana* guitar players. Kalcidon Vella *ta’ Mustacća* and Johnny Saliba *ta’ Birzebbuga* often embellish their improvisatory *Prejjem* with melodic contours which display an influence from Spanish Flamenco and Italian Tarantella respectively. Therefore, we may say that Zahra, as the artistic director of the festival, promoted the music concept of fusion and advocated for the ‘development’ and ‘popularisation’ of *Ghana* through other styles.<sup>9</sup> The interest that Zahra had in local music instruments was also reflected in the choice of international performers that were invited to participate at the festival during his tenure. The number of international performers who were engaged to perform at *Ghanafest* differed also in style and region, Mediterranean, European including an act from India — some performances centred around instrumental performances and interpretations-adaptations of music traditions. During this period, Zahra also participated in the festival with one of his projects,

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<sup>7</sup> Such as Flamenco performers performing with *kitarristi* at the National Festival and *ghannejja* performing with local HipHop artists.

<sup>8</sup> Data from my ethnographic fieldwork.

<sup>9</sup> This is reminiscent of Zahra’s philosophy when speaking about his own work.

Nafra, as a performer. In one edition of the festival he also launched a research project about the lyre (Carabott 2013; Malta Independent 2013).

The various categories presented during Mifsud-Chircop's tenure continued for most of the editions of the festival until some were eventually discontinued and *Ghana* performances gradually decreased.<sup>10</sup> Such varieties described earlier, continued to fade away and the practice of *Ghana bin-Nofs Ghanja*, *Ghana bid-Denb*, amongst others ceased to be performed and are neither experienced in the *Serati*.<sup>11</sup>

#### ***Ghanafest – Malta World Music Festival: Renzo Spiteri, 2016–2018.***

Spiteri is a multi-percussion player and composer (Spiteri 2023). He explored further the presentation of *Ghana* with or amongst other World Music presented through the international aspect of the festival programme. This interest eventually developed into a separate festival in the second year of his tenure.<sup>12</sup> He continued to build on the presentation and inclusion of a more international artistic content at the National Festival. For *ghannejja*, *kitarristi*, and aficionados alike this meant that their art was threatened in their own festival. The international workshop feature by international acts was removed and replaced with increased time for local performers, not *ghannejja* or *kitarristi*. The festival audiences were exposed to a variety of music often showing a distinction between the festival audience — those who attended the festival to experience World Music and the aficionados of the *Ghana* music scene. What emerges is a distinction between the exotic and the brute, the polished sound and the raw timbre. The festival programme becomes an evermore varied one and promotion tends to focus on the international performers (See Figure 19). In 2016 a set of postcards featuring the international performers were issued as part of the promotional campaign for the festival. I can recall how when the main act of the evening went on stage, the atmosphere changed as audiences gathered in the main stage and started dancing.

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<sup>10</sup> Issues started being experienced by the organisers as the community started seeing a shift towards other elements and participation decreased.

<sup>11</sup> Once I did encounter an *ghannej* who mentioned that he performed with another in this style.

<sup>12</sup> The *Malta World Music Festival* was organised by the Arts Council Malta and eventually subsequently by *FestivalsMalta* for a couple of years (Depares 2018). It was eventually discontinued as Renzo Spiteri left his position as an artistic director both from *Ghanafest* and *Malta World Music Festival*.

***Ghanafest - Ritmu: Tiziana Calleja, 2019–2022.***

Calleja is a performing artist (with a repertoire of contemporary pop songs) and TV host. She also teaches musical theatre and performing arts at her studio (CentreStage 2022). Her background in theatre was also reflected in the festival programme where a number of theatrical performances were presented (See Figure 23). This included a number of *Ghana* workshops and competitions for children in the festival programme.<sup>13</sup> During her term as artistic director, *Ghana* continued experiencing a decline in prominence in the festival programme. With *Ghana* disappearing even from the name of the festival, a change which was noted by the *ghannejja* and aficionados, (some of whom also noted that in the 2022 edition, she ‘liked’ all the programme items on the festival’s Facebook page except *Ghana*). Such development did not involve any consultation or communication process with the *Ghana* community.

*Ghana* became even more marginalised within the festival space between 2019 and 2022 — the rebranding took place during the pandemic and together with the new name the festival was also relocated, all happening without the involvement of the community. She followed the same formula developed by her predecessors where the festival presented the live music performances on two separate stages: one main stage and a smaller stage set on the perimeter of the festival venue footprint — both at *Argotti Gardens* (See Figure 22) and even more so at *Upper Barrakka Gardens* (See Figure 21). The secondary stage presented *Ghana* performance throughout the days of the festival which eventually became commonly referred to as *Ghannejja’s Corner*.<sup>14</sup> In the 2019 edition of the festival the main stage commenced with *Ghana* performances, which led into other local acts and eventually ended with the ‘main’ international acts performing at the festival (See Figure 19). A format which became

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<sup>13</sup> Food is also another important element presented in the National Festival as it is deemed complimentary to the music tradition where audiences get to enjoy maltese traditional dishes such as rabbit stew, horse stew and oven baked pork. However, in recent editions of the National Festival fish dishes were also being presented and more refined cuisine was also presented online by celebrity chef Sean Gravina whose culinary palette could be perceived as venturing away from the traditional dishes which are usually associated with *Ghana*.

<sup>14</sup> An area which in both editions of the festival sustained interference from the robust sound setup emitted from the main stage which presented considerable difficulty to the performing *ghannejja* and *kitarristi*.

standardised at the National Festival with the international acts receiving more attention at the centre-main stage. The impression made on the *ghannejja*, *kitarristi* and aficionados was that the programme itself assumed (and ensured) that *Ghana* was less of a draw.

For example, one of the popular Maltese Pop bands, *The Travellers*, a Jagged House signed group, headlined the first evening of the festival. On the night, a substantial crowd from the group's followers attended their performance at *Argotti Gardens*. The group's participation did not necessarily introduce new audiences to the National Festival and/or *Ghana*, as most of the fans had gone specifically to see *The Travellers* perform; an aspect which concerns festival producers and which we will discuss in further detail here (Spring 2004: 62).

The 2020 edition of the National Festival was produced online due to the unfolding uncertainties that had gripped the islands and the world caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (See Figure 18). The only forms of *Ghana* presented in the online edition of the festival were *Ghana fuq il-Kelma* and *Makkjetti*. Joe Grech *Ta' Raħal Ġdid* together with Yvette Grech Buhagiar performed *Ghana fuq il-Kelma*, whilst the Pawney family: Jimmy, Etienne, Dorianne and James Pawney, and Jomike and Lydon Agius respectively performed *Makkjetti*, which were presented as *Ghana* in the official programme. Joemike and Lydon are a young father and child duo, who are very popular in the country at large; particularly due to their winning participation in Malta's Got Talent in 2020.

Presenting *Ghana* at the fore of the promotional material and not including either of the three main genres of *Ghana* is misleading to audiences and could generate its own mis-representations. A classification that displays the different understanding of *Ghana* that the organisers had as distinct from the *ghannejja*, *kitarristi* and aficionados. This official description underlines how much the organisers' understanding was at odds with that of the community the festival was supposed to represent:

Witness the regeneration of *Ghana* thanks to the talented Lydon and learn more about his love for this traditional pastime. (FestivalsMalta 2020)

What is being argued here is that having a main element of the promotional campaign focusing on *Ghana* and then eventually not presenting the main form practised today whilst presenting a hybrid form and an entertaining form, is a miscommunication that members of

the community would know and the generic public would be oblivious to. It is true that Lydon is one of the youngest prospective *ghannejja*, however at the moment under the guidance of his father they are at present pursuing a career in *Makkjetti*. The Festival was rebranded and launched in 2022, a couple of weeks before the Festival dates.<sup>15</sup> Along with the renaming of the festival itself, from *Ghanafest* to *Ritmu*, a new visual language for the Festival was also produced. This included the design of a new festival brand, a visual language, advertising campaign style, livery, merchandise and collateral material (See Figure 26). The tone of the brand also changed. Below is the description of the rebranding issued by the advertising agency entrusted with the rebranding of *Ghanafest*, published on Facebook:

Ritmu Music Festival (formerly Ghanafest) celebrates Mediterranean and national heritage through vibrant performance arts, crafts, cuisine and literature. The festival's refreshed identity needed modern and contemporary branding to demystify the event and attract Maltese youth, tourists and expatriates, while retaining past attendees.

We created a design concept from shapes and instruments hand drawn in a unique and fluid style, to represent the festival's energetic, inclusive atmosphere. The primary colours signal multicultural and artistic richness, achieving the exact tone and perception required. (Steves&Co. 2022)

It is also important to note the lack of communication in the Maltese language being implemented in the official campaign, save the name: *Ritmu*, meaning rhythm.<sup>16</sup> In essence all this continues to show that the rebranding of the festival was the final 'blow' to part ways and sever further the close ties established by the founders of the National Festival with the *Ghana* community. Paving way to relieve the representational obligation of *Ghana* that was set when the festival was created. As one *ghannej* told me, 'Now we cannot say anything.' The rebranding into *Ritmu* removes any direct reference to *Ghana*. It provides freedom and ultimately allows the organisers to continue to disassociate themselves from any obligation to produce a festival solely intended to showcase *Ghana* as a central product in its programme and festival experience. This action by the organising entity means that now the community is

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<sup>15</sup> For *Ritmu*, the Festival dates were also changed from what used to occur one week before *Imnarja* (28-29th June) meaning the 20-22nd June to 10-11th June. The former being the regular annual dates in which the festival used to take place at *Argotti Gardens* — save certain editions in which the festival dates were changed.

<sup>16</sup> At the time *Ritmu* was a buzz word generated around a popular Maltese song by Aidan which he co-produced and performed at *The Malta Eurovision Song Contest 2022* edition, where he placed second.

left without a platform which was created twenty five years ago intended to represent the music tradition to the national and international audiences.

***Ritmu Roots Festival: Andrew Alamango, 2023–present.***

Alamango is a musician and researcher (TeatruMalta 2023). In his first edition of the festival he produced an exhibition about the late renowned *għannej* Mikiel Abela *il-Bambinu*, for whom the festival was also dedicated. Alamango has worked with renowned *għannej* Frans Baldacchino *il-Budaj* on a number of *Etnika* productions (FilflaRecords 2023). He co-founded the group *Etnika* with Ruben Zahra which aimed to promote music explored with traditional local music instruments. Since its formation in 2000, the group has evolved and now explores fusion music (Etnika 2023). In 2017 Alamango launched the archival project *MagnaŻmien* which during the *Valletta2018* project, when Valletta was the cultural capital city of Europe, had launched a nationwide campaign to digitise analogue audio and visual recordings including photographs from private domestic collections (MagnaŻmien 2023). The project had also digitised collections of *Għana* recordings including the Mikiel Abela *il-Bambinu* collection which was donated by members of his family some of which were displayed in the exhibition and documentary viewings.

In 2018, in collaboration with *TeatruMalta*, Alamango had produced the theatre production *Ilhna Mitlufa, Lost Voices* which built a narrative from *Għana* recordings explored through a theatrical performance (Malta Independent 2018). A performance which included the participation of a selected number of *għannejja* and *kitarristi*. *Ilhna Mitlufa* was also the name of an ensemble of three performers (Borg 2021) and the title of a three publication series which included music scores inspired by *Għana* music composed by Alex Vella Gregory.

His first edition brought in a strong intellectual component to the festival: discussions, an exhibition and documentary film with material of these projects featuring at *Splendid*, Valletta and *Argotti Gardens* during *Ritmu Roots Festival 2023*. Although even fewer *Għana* sessions were included in the festival programme. The only *Għana* sessions that were held as part of the official programme were held outside of *Argotti Gardens*. A *Serata* which is typically held and organised by the *Lizgejs* was included as part of the official launch of the National

Festival. It attracted a noticeably less numerous audience when compared with the previous *Serati* housed there. The *Serata* included two *Għana Spirtu Pront* sessions and one *Għana fil-Għoli* session, where Mikiel Cumbo *Lizgej* and Mariele Zammit performed together. On another evening held at *Strada Stretta* in Valletta where an exhibition was held in celebration of renowned *għannej* Mikiel Abela *il-Bambinu*, two *Fattijiet* were performed in his honour outdoors. Another evening presented *Prejjem* sessions performed by the *Mustaċċa* family. At *Argotti Gardens*, one veteran *għannej* was invited to perform a sample of the three main styles of *Għana*, where Alamango also asked a series of questions about the past and future of *Għana* in a form of discussion.

Meanwhile, a few kilometres away, a big, successful *Serata* was defiantly organised to coincide with the *Argotti* event (See Figure 35 and 36).

### **The arc of the festival 1998-2022<sup>17</sup>**

To sum up, gradually between 1998 and 2022, from a National Festival which features a variety of *Għana* styles on the main stage at the centre of its festival programme through multiple performances, we see *Għana* incrementally moved from the centre to the periphery to an almost ‘unnoticeable’ state where its visibility and presence continues to diminish in the national domain — something which the practitioners and the *Għana* community constantly seek. The marginalisation is not only through the festival programming, relocation, rebranding and its communication, but also through the type of participation — the artistic content — that is presented to the festival audiences; the outreach to the *Għana* community is being reduced (See Figure 25).

The name of the festival was gradually shortened and ‘subtitles’ were added. Until the word *Għana* has been removed from the official name of the National Festival. *Għana* performances proper, were completely and officially removed from the main stage. The second stage location once the festival was moved to the much smaller grounds of the *Upper Barrakka Gardens* was colloquially ‘branded’ as *Għannejja’s Corner*: it was located in a space which is hidden from the main footpath and could have easily been missed by festival

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<sup>17</sup> The 2023 edition occurred too late to be fully included in my analysis.

audiences (See Figure 21 and 29). The physical space of the festival footprint was drastically reduced from that in *Argotti Gardens* — simultaneously reducing the performing and audience areas (See Figure 15 and 22). The official communication does not feature *Ghana* as prominently as other performers featured on the official festival website including the organiser's and festival social media profiles<sup>18</sup> (See Figure 23 and 24). The artistic content concerning *Ghana* presented in a number of programmes of the National Festival did not represent the full spectrum (styles of *Ghana* and qualities of performers) or even the core interests of the active *Ghana* community — therefore creating a mis-representation of the music scene. Indeed, in the rebranding exercise *Ghana* was represented as needing 'demystification', new energy and an ethos of inclusion.

The official communication issued during the promotional campaign, as well as the social media campaign featuring the festival was in English, not Maltese. This is part of the sign production which is then disseminated and consumed by respective audiences (Eco 1979). It was also evident that the compère at the *Ghana* stage during *Ritmu* was not one which the *Ghana* community would consider as being familiar with the scene. The individual kept announcing upcoming acts and introducing to the audiences the performers of the ongoing performances whilst the guitar players were still performing. In *Ghana* as highlighted earlier this is considered disrespectful towards the guitar players, much as it would be during a concert of classical music. During *Ghanafest 2019* edition, as a local act was about to begin their performance, the lead performer addressed the audience: '*Smajna hafna Ghana eh dal-lejl, imma, jiddispjaċini ngħidlkom anki aħna ħa jkollna nidħlu fiha issa*', (we heard a lot of *Ghana* this evening, but I'm sorry to say that even we need to perform it). That's as *ghannej* Anglu Theuma *il-Kina* was about to get up on stage to perform a collaborative song with them. At *Ritmu 2023* a festival team member expressed his frustration for having to listen to *Ghana* recordings being repeatedly played at the exhibition. All this shows a lack of understanding in *Ghana*.

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<sup>18</sup> In 2023 one *ghannej* also expressed his frustrations on social media regarding the lack of visibility of *Ghana* and inclusion of *Ghana* performances in the official festival programme.



Some of these misjudgements, misrepresentations and divergences of opinion could be described as avoidable mistakes. However, I shall now argue that there is an underlying ideology behind the festival, from its inception, that is systemically bound to represent *Ghana* in ways the *Ghana* community would not accept, and to foist performances (or constraints on performances) that are at odds with the *ghannejja* and *kitarristi*'s notion of a proper performance.

### **Representations: a rhetoric of a vanishing world**

It is no coincidence that the only *ghannej* and impresario who does well out of the festival — even though he too complains about the lack of consultation and the poor set-up for performances and representation — is someone who caters for the festival's presupposition that it is showcasing a vanished, or disappearing, ethnic world. He is a go-to impresario in part because he is ready to rent out to cultural organisers his little fleet of horse carts, suggestive of a world gone by. He is monetising the commoditisation of nostalgia (Sant-Cassia 2000) in furnishing 'attractions' at several feasts and festivals such as San Girgor feast in Żejtun–Marsaxlokk, *Żejt iż-Żejtun* and the National Festival *Ghanafest-Ritmu* at *Argotti Gardens-Upper Barrakka Gardens*. At least half a dozen informants have suggested to me that his political connections are also said to help (although I myself have not been able to verify this claim).

Mifsud-Chircop was an assiduous researcher keen on showing the vibrancy and activity of contemporary *Ghana*. But even his festival (partly broadcasted by TVM)<sup>19</sup> had a set design that presented an idyllic world that was pure fiction. For instance the 2001 edition included the construction of three main papier mache structures where the set was designed to give the impression of a village square.<sup>20</sup> At the centre there was a chapel facade with statues of St Peter and St Paul on either side, possibly highlighting a direct reference to the 'mother festival', the feast of *Imnarja*, or else meant as a national symbol. Four flags were hoisted on the roof of the chapel, one for each nationality participating in the festival at the

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<sup>19</sup> The programmes only featured some of the *Ghana* sessions and not all of the sessions held during the festival.

<sup>20</sup> This type of set design was a feature particularly explored in the first editions of the festival.

time: English, Italian, Spanish and the Maltese flag, in this particular order from left to right. To the right an open tavern with a sign *Ta' Kurun* — which happened to be the name of the bar in a popular collection of stories, *Wenzu u Roži*, which poked gentle fun at the cunning and innocence of 'simple' peasant folk. Drinks were being served, by a lady wearing a Maltese traditional costume, to the *ghannejja* who were onstage during the ongoing performances. The *ghannejja* themselves had been asked to dress as peasants — in dark trousers and waistcoat with a white shirt — even though it is difficult to find a leading twentieth-century *ghannej* who was an actual peasant; most were urban working-class.

The 2022 edition went further. In order to attend the festival, now transferred to Valletta's *Upper Barrakka*, I made my way around the Malta Stock Exchange, towards the main entrance of the freshly rebranded festival. Festival goers were greeted with women wearing folkloristic costumes<sup>21</sup> who handed out leaflets next to two horse carts, *karrozzini*, displayed on each side, outside the entrance of the garden.

Other horse carts were on display further down the footpath illuminated with festival lighting and adorned with signage. To the left of the footpath, behind the *Upper Barrakka's* permanent arches leading to the belvedere, overlooking the Valletta bastions, a small number of stalls were set up. One of these stalls displayed a number of local traditional instruments where local instruments builder Francesco Sultana displayed a *zaqq*, the Maltese bagpipe, the *tanbur*, a local hand drum and a number of *flejguti*, Maltese reed pipes and pan flutes. Sultana demonstrated how these instruments are played and explained to the interested audiences how he produced them.

Such a setting is perfectly logical if you believe *Ghana* is folklore, meaning an artefact from the past that is retrievable in the present. It is not just logical; it is powerful persuasion since the logic of representation suggests that the old-worldliness of *Ghana* goes without saying. It is, effectively, an unintended Disneyfication — not unlike the symbolic language used on tourist venues at historic sites where leaflets are passed to tourists by actors in 'historical re-enactment' costumes.

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<sup>21</sup> These costumes have become the traditional outfit of folklore groups performing folk dance and/or folk music.

As Foucault suggested, discourses—systems of premises and concepts that shape thinking about a certain realm—bring their own terms into existence and are sustained by the commonsense adoption of those terms. The symbols folk and traditional, as currently understood, make sense only in relation to the broader premises of the discourse of modernity. (Turino 2008: 156)

It is ironic given that the festival is also based on the notion that *Ghana* belongs to ‘all of us’ — a question which was brought up also during the 2023 edition of the festival. Its visual and dramatic language effectively changes the Maltese visitors into tourists in their own land. Using such symbolic language, how can *Ghana* be taken as seriously as the *għannejja*, *kitarristi* and aficionados do?

There was one *għannej* who had the measure of the event. Participating in the final *Ghana Spirtu Pront* session of Day 2, he was introduced as *L-iStar*. Within the *Ghana* community, his nickname is actually *Il-Ġurdien*, meaning ‘the mouse’. It is a nickname he is comfortable with because, among his peers, a mouse is an animal with the reputation of being cunning and difficult to catch and corner. In *Ghana*’s terms, it is a compliment to his agility and performance abilities. However, he clearly did not trust his *Ritmu* audience to understand the idiom. He treated them like strangers and opted, for the night, to be hailed as the ‘*Star*’. The cunning agile mouse, in the face of a rebranded *Ghana* festival, rebranded himself.

But whilst performing at *Ritmu 2022*, at *Upper Barrakka Gardens* he also remarked that the organisational ‘fault’ of the festival is not on the shoulders of the *għannej* but the entity responsible of the festival; *Tal-Kultura*. Twanny replied by teasing *Lis-Star* that participating at the festival is not going to get any financial gain whilst observing that as a *għannej* he did his duty by participating at the National Festival.

*Twanny lil Michael sewwa tafu,  
M’iss sa ngħid li ma tafux,  
Il-ħtija qieghda fuq tal-Kultura,  
Imma l-għannej ħtija m’għandux. (Michael Brignioni Lis-Star, 2022)*

*U l-għannej jitla’ w jgħati sehmu,  
U jgħamelek/hekk skond iċ-ċirkustanzi,  
Ma ngħamlux mod li qad tinkwieta,  
Għax sa jonqsulek il-finanzi. (Twanny Ta’ Kulajru, 2022)*

### **Performance: a rhetoric of the need to rejuvenate through new audiences**

During the course of my studies a pattern emerged, one where the general public who may know something about *Ghana*, but not aware of the current scene, tends to believe that *Ghana*, however vibrant as a genre, faces an existential crossroads. Artists who are not involved in the music scene tend also think of *Ghana* as being on the verge of extinction.

Hence in the documentary *Bidla*, local HipHop artists, in line with what the director-researcher Eke was exploring, advocated for change — *Ghana* must evolve stylistically into a different mode of expression if it is to survive (Eke 2020). This sentiment was also shared with the 2023 edition of *Ritmu*, the National Festival of *Ghana* where the artistic director Andrew Alamango has also posed the question: ‘*O Ghana Minn Hawn Ghal Fejn?*’ (‘Oh, *Ghana*, From Here to Where?’) through an ethnographic documentary film by Adrian Camilleri which also poses a series of questions: Where is *Ghana* heading? Who does *Ghana* belong to? (FestivalsMalta 2023) (See Figure 32).

The idea is that fusion could safeguard and present *Ghana* in another genre so that it can become accessible to new audiences. Therefore, the view that the tradition is a dying practice generates a sense of urgency to do something about it. Fusion tends to be the result most artists opt for. Often, it is a form of collaboration where both performers are not necessarily directly actively involved. Such as the adaptation of a recorded *Fatt* (Charlie Mangion iz-Zubina 2013) into a HipHop song, where the artist was inspired by *Ghana* music and infused the recordings of a *ghannej* and *kitarristi* performing a *Ghana tal-Fatt* which was sampled and remixed with digital instruments performing the baselines and melodies of a new song (Buzu 2020). So, the result often presents local HipHop artists in dialogue with pre-recorded *ghanjiet*. This is reflected in a variety of other styles also, where artists interact with *Ghana* music which is explored (transformed-adopted-translated-fused) in their respective musical language which is then shared with their respective audience.

I would like to briefly share an observation from a study I conducted on the leitmotif known as the *Lament* which is performed by the *Ghana* community and has been a source of inspiration to a number of musicians and composers. In Maltese culture it has been adapted

into a range of musical styles such as Rock music, HipHop, church hymn, and art music. The melodic composition of an orally transmitted music derived from *Ghana* was modified and transformed by different musicians, composers and performers, and performed in different contexts and in different styles integrating a variety of instruments. What I observed was that these adaptations reached different audiences but not necessarily created new audiences for *Ghana* nor safeguarded its community. The musical processes were happening away from the *Ghana* community. For instance I attended a classical music festival which performed an adaptation of the *Lament*. It was transformed into a new language and presented to an audience immersed in a different music scene, one which the *Ghana* community is possibly unaware of and similarly the festival audience, comprising mostly of expats, was unaware of the *Ghana* music scene.

An aspect also being explored through the *GhanaLab* series presented at *Ritmu 2023*. This meant that at the festival at *Argotti Gardens*, considered as the main footprint of the festival by the *Ghana* community, did not host any *Ghana* but only adaptations of elements from *Ghana* music through *GhanaLabs* and a display of *Ghana* where an *ghannej* was tasked to deliver a sample of the three main genres of *Ghana* and a short sample of *Ghana fuq il-Kelma*.

Interviews by the respective festival artistic directors also mention terms of ‘fusion’ and ‘world music’ which are integrated in the vision of the festival — becoming a central feature in the promotion of the festival (See Figure 24). Therefore, *ghannejja* and *kitarristi*, were eventually performing in a festival which presented different styles of music not necessarily practised as music traditions in other respective countries akin to *Ghana*. So even if a music performance is derived from a particular tradition, the performer that is engaged often presents an adaptation of the music tradition, as opposed to identifying traditions who like *Ghana* are still active in their respective communities — this changes the experience of the festival completely. Whilst in the process making *Ghana* appear out of context. It appears ‘folkloric’ when juxtaposed with local and international performances of fusion music. This was also reflected in a number of newspaper articles promoting the National Festival:

- ‘*Ghanafest 2016*’ with a more international outlook (Galea 2016)
- Traditional folk music given a contemporary touch (Malta 2012)

- Folk and fusion at *Ghanafest* (Portelli 2012)
- Nights of international music at Argotti Gardens (FestivalsMalta 2023)
- A pan-continental folk song festival (Editorial 2012)
- Recovering Malta's 'lost voice' (Vassallo 2023)

One of the most thoughtful and sophisticated of the artistic directors, Ruben Zahra, told an interviewer, Joseph Chetcuti a TV programme host, how he placed *Ghana* and Maltese music in a Mediterranean context, with the participation also of more “sparkling” Mediterranean groups, where in their research they are not only looking at the roots, but they are also looking at new influences. And that's why this “innovative ingredient” that he seeks, even in his own music, aimed at making the music more “popular and accessible to a wider audience”.

Here we have a reflection of the personal artistic practice in the artistic vision of the National Festival but it also shares a wider set of assumptions. It highlights the approach towards the festival, Folk Music and *Ghana* that Zahra was exploring at the time, where inspiration from the local element is fused with “emerging influences” into a contemporary national-global style. The ultimate aim being “accessibility” and “popularity” with a “wider audience”.

Chetcuti also asked Zahra on how he incorporates Maltese music in his contemporary compositions and the answer we get (translated from Maltese) sounds a lot like the approach he took towards the festival:

I always feel that the local raw material, start from a local Maltese cheeselet to end up in a piece of music to present it on an international market it must go through that element of branding, and so to speak even through new influences that put that authentic ingredient that it is one hundred percent authentic but is placed in a context and an international dimension to appeal to a wide audience, so when these ingredients fall into place you will have a proposal that not only meets an agricultural community but a larger community that of an international audience. (Zahra 2015)

When Zahra was questioned about the renditions of his own music composition at international festivals he replied:

To link to the previous comment that when you have a product that does not rely exclusively on folkloric authenticity, but is flavoured with strong musical ingredients, then it will appeal to a wide public. That is, in my music, so to speak, I pay attention to achieve a balance between the authenticity that is coming perhaps from a Maltese instrument, however with a strong arrangement that musically will attain that impact with a larger audience. (Zahra 2015)

Here Zahra explains further his personal composition process in an attempt to find a balance between the authentic and an arrangement which attracts a 'larger audience'. This also reflects in his approach in the festival programming where the local music needs to be 'reframed' in a modern and contemporary mode. Zahra described how he personally networks with agencies to present his own music to an international platform — the community noticed and remarked also on this endeavour.

In this interview Zahra's replies show how he sought the *frizzanti*, the sparkling, fresh and exciting elements in the music groups and/or bands who were engaged as artistic content for the festival programme. Whilst in his compositions he seeks to strike a balance between 'authenticity' — approaching the roots, working from the ground-up — and influences from the external, — in an outside-inside process. He alludes also to a future where folklore cannot rely solely on the 'authentic ingredient', therefore in the process, the output — the expression, the result, the execution of the work — is seen as a 'product'. A process involving a substantial element of design — in the form of music production — which is branded in a way such that ideally it is appealing to both the 'agricultural' community and international audiences — the local and global. A transformation process set in motion through

[...] globalization—in this perspective a cover term for a world of disjunctive flows—produces problems that manifest themselves in intensely local forms but have contexts that are anything but local. (Appadurai 2001: 6)

So what we see here is something shared by the artistic directors who subscribe to the idea of fusion and change. This gradually transforms the festival into ground which attempts to on one end provide examples of how music tradition has been transformed through a number of projects with the aim of inspiring the local practitioners of *Ghana* to 'evolve'. On the other end is a folkloric setting within which *Ghana* is exhibited. These two poles were being presented in the festival programme, as opposed to focusing on representing what goes on in the community. This was sealed with the 2023 edition where a separation was established. The local remains in the locality, whilst the national platform is kept for the international and the transformation of the local.

Culture, of course, is to be found operating within civil society, where the influence of ideas, of institutions, and of other persons works not through domination but by what Gramsci calls consent. In any society not totalitarian, then, certain cultural forms predominate over others, just as certain ideas are more influential than others; the form of this cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as *hegemony*, an indispensable concept for any understanding of cultural life in the industrial West. (Said 2019: 7)

And it is the hegemonic approach in festival programming organisers must be cautious about. A reason often cited by organisers striving for new audiences, is financing. Over the years the National Festival has been modified by the organisers with the aim to attract ‘wider audiences to this festival and, hence, making it financially more viable’ (Ciantar 2021: 171). This is an issue present in live music events where organisers have been geared to ‘[...] expand the earnings potential of a live event [...]’ through merchandise and attracting wider and larger audiences ‘[...] by increasing the capacity of venues, by broadening the scope of ‘the tour’, and above all, by growing a new sort of musical event, the festival.’ (Frith 2007: 4-5). One must also notice the structural modification of the organisation over the years. This is also reflected on the structural levels of the organiser within the Ministry for Culture, which over time changed and objectives modified according to each entity entrusted with the production of the National Festival: *Is-Segretarjat Parlamentari Għaż-Żgħażaġh, Sport, Kultura u Arti*<sup>22</sup>, Parliamentary Secretary for Youth, Sport, Culture and Art; Malta Council for Culture & the Arts; *Fondazzjoni Ċelebrazzjonijiet Nazzjonali*, Foundation for National Celebrations; Arts Council Malta;<sup>23</sup> *FestivalsMalta*.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> One of the main aims of the Permanent Secretary who produced the first National Festival was to develop a professional system which organises Maltese *Għana* so that it will be recognised in Maltese society like modern Maltese music and international music, local feasts and band clubs, as well as jazz. The festival was the first step taken by the government towards this aim, ‘[...] rridu li l-*għana* Malti jkun organizzat b’sistemi professjonali u jieħu postu fis-soċjetà Maltija daqs il-Mużika moderna Maltija u barranija, daqs il-festi, daqs id-daqq tal-baned, u daqs il-jazz. Dan il-Festival se jkun l-ewwel pass min-naħa tal-Gvern għal dan il-ħsieb.’ (Cilia 1998).

<sup>23</sup> Two of the main objectives of Arts Council Malta are to ‘foster active and participatory citizenship in culture and promote cultural inclusion, equality, diversity and the freedom of creative expression; safeguard the dynamic development of those cultural characteristics, including intellectual, linguistic, traditional and folkloric, which identify the Maltese people.’ (ArtsCouncilMalta 2015).

<sup>24</sup> Four of the main objectives of *FestivalsMalta* are to ‘Provide the right tools and enablers including the introduction of an integrating ticketing system that works across festivals, events and public cultural organisations; Drive participation locally with more focussed and effective marketing tailored to each festival; Work closely with the Maltese travel industry to grow Malta’s image and brand internationally



Behind the discourse about funding is another unspoken idea about audiences outreach. In my research, I frequently encountered individuals who state that *Ghana* puts them off. Oftentimes their reasons rely on the music being described as “off” — meaning off tune. In my research I have observed that this dissonant factor is attributed to the unfamiliar modalities that are present in *Ghana*. It may be derived from the Arabic modes that are still explored in the *Ghana* guitar music. Or perhaps a somewhat hoarse *ghannejja*'s voice. Of course this presents a stark contrast with the understanding of any aficionado or *dilettant*.

In such a context, organisers might think that retaining the ‘original’ format of the performance, as it is performed in the community, increases the possibility of audience ‘alienation’. It is feared that this could decrease the tolerance to experience ‘new’ music for the unfamiliar audience — with an unfamiliar ear. In other words those that simply ‘don’t get it’. The ‘unfamiliar audience different to the one the performers were used to in bars (Ciantar 2000: 23). Therefore the issue of the *untrained* ear and the understanding of the performance arises. When describing the National Festival experience, Ciantar states that audience members may leave as soon as a *Spiritu Pront* session commences only to return to the sound of a *Fatt* ‘claiming that tal-fatt sounds more ‘civilised’ and comprehensible and, as such, more pleasant to their ears’ (Ciantar 2021: 75).

However, one should ask: if we are modifying the form with the intention of introducing and/or accommodating the untrained ear, the unfamiliar audience, only to achieve the same results and be faced with the same dilemma and difficulty of the distracted-disinterested audience, then why should we continue presenting a re-presentation, a modification, or a not so faithful presentation of what goes on in the social setting? Risking in the process, as we have discussed in this case study about the festival, that the community of the music scene ends up feeling under-represented in a festival which is meant to present them to the national and international fora. Above all what I would like to propose for the consideration of the festival organiser concerned with festival audiences is to consider engaging with the *Ghana* community. *Ghana* already has a following as we have seen

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as an expanding niche in cultural tourism; Make our festivals a platform for commissioning, producing and co-producing works at a national and international level. (FestivalsMalta n.d. [c.2017]).

in the previous chapters. Unless the redesign of the festival was intended to keep the *Ghana* audiences outside of the main festival footprint at *Argotti Gardens*.

The question is worth raising in the context of the staging of the festival. This rhetoric of finding new audiences was implied in the rebranded *Ritmu*'s talk about attracting new energy for the festival. This rhetoric too had its symbolism in the organisation of the festival. As we have seen when discussing the current music scene, *Ghana* has a following, it has its audience, the community members, and yet it does not qualify for the National Festival audience, it is not the festival audience the organisers seek to engage with and attract to the festival grounds (See Figure 33). Hence what emerges is, rather than presenting an extensive showcase of what goes on in the social setting attracting both the community that experiences *Ghana* as a lifestyle, and general audiences, in the festival domain *Ghana* becomes an artefact which is exhibited as object, a sample — one performance of each style, in a scripted performance, a theatrical performance, as directed by the organisers. This is also manifested in the context that *Ghana* is presented in, which is part of the festival experience. One which concerns us on how *Ghana* is presented within a festival programme, and as Slater aptly correlates

A specific practice only becomes 'Indigenous Culture', as Eric Michaels (1994) points out, once it is taken out of local networks of production, circulation and exchange. [...] mainstream formulations of 'culture' or cultural difference as an object or processes abstracted from its material and discursive relations. It is an arrangement that, on one hand, commodifies Indigenous culture as an aspect of the mainstream economy and, on the other, essentializes it as unchanging traditional practices that are a bad fit with modernity. (Slater 2020: 133)

It is this aspect of the festival experience that we will be focusing on next, one must also be sensitive to the festival experience being presented to the festival goers. This is also reflected in the number of stalls that are presented and set up on the festival footprint. In 2022 right beside the demonstration of traditional wind instruments, representatives of the Energy and Water Agency, a Government Agency within the Ministry for Energy and Water Management, provided information about water resource management as part of the *Water Be The Change* campaign. Another stall exhibited pottery works where members of the group *Alka Ceramics* held a series of pottery workshops particularly targeting the younger audiences attending the festival. Other activities targeted the young with colouring and powder painting

workshops, where a colouring wall was set up at the entrance of the stalls area. Whilst other stalls targeted the general audiences where Anna Maria Gatt worked Maltese lace, *Bizzilla* and showed enthusiasts the work involved; *Nemnem Candles* showcased hand carved candle designs; whilst *The Grow 10 Trees Project* provided information about a variety of species and an incentive to plant and support the growing of trees.<sup>25</sup> A number of students from the Mikiel Anton Vassalli College, Malta School of Art were working on their paintings en plein air.<sup>26</sup> As I walked around the stalls and turned to the right side of the belvedere, overlooking the Grand Harbour and the three cities, I entered the mainstage area. Here the *Mustacća* trio — a notable family of *Ghana* guitar players — were performing *Prejjem*<sup>27</sup> and other folk tunes to the accompaniment of dance performances by local Flamenco group, from the *Alegria Academia de Baile Flamenco*.<sup>28</sup> The *Mustacća* family were performing Flamenco music, *Prejjem* and instrumental Maltese Folk tunes, some of which were performed in medlies.

During this collaborative performance, between *Prejjem* (*Ghana* guitar music) and Flamenco dance performances, Anġlu Theuma *l-Kina* joined the performers on stage and performed a *Makkjetta*. It was also accompanied with (improvised) Flamenco dances, where during the performance the Flamenco dance was described to audiences by the compère as a ‘Maltese dance’. The *Makkjetta* may have been semi-improvised, in the sense that Anġlu may have shortened it and made it fitting to the festival audience. We must keep in mind that this was performed on the main stage and not at the *Ghana* stage; possibly here Anġlu felt compelled to adapt the ‘original’ version so that it may entertain *non-Ghana* audiences (See Figure 27). It is highly likely that Anġlu’s short performance would have been the only number in which an *ghannej* performed on the mainstage on both days of *Ritmu Festival*.

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<sup>25</sup> A local artist who featured as one of the highlights in the advertising of the festival, did not set up the stall during *Ritmu*.

<sup>26</sup> On Day 1 the students set up their easels next to the main stage overlooking the Grand Harbour due to the heavy winds. Whilst on Day 2 they repositioned to the original designated space behind the *Ghana* stage adjacent to the Malta Stock Exchange building.

<sup>27</sup> The *Mustacća* family had also released a self published album of *Prejjem* in 2003 called *Nirien Mal-Kordi*, literally translating to the burning of guitar chords.

<sup>28</sup> However this was not listed as such in the official Festival’s communication as this collaborative performance was not given prominence either.

Between the mainstage and the third stage — which was set in Castille Square — through the lineup of performers being discussed here, the festival presented a fusion of world music (Albaluna, *Prejjem* and Flamenco performances, and one may also consider aspects of the repertoire performed by *Is-Sufu* ensemble), calabrian and tarantella performances (Mimmo Cavallaro), local pop Maltese music (Bernie & Pod, SterjoTipi and Kantera), percussive music (Trakadum) and theatrical performances through a children’s choir (Centre Stage Choir) and re-enactment performances (Radju Dramm). Ritmu 2023 lineup also continues in this trajectory emphasising the international interest of the festival and local Maltese music (See Figure 28) — *non-Ghana* music and not one concerning a presentation of music traditions still in practice today like contemporary *Ghana*.

At *Ritmu Roots Festival 2023* a series of stalls were also set up at the festival. One featured photographs of *ghannejja* from the *MagnaŻmien* collection printed on t-shirts, another hosted by D’Amato Records featured records from *Filfla Records*, a silent disco, an art installation and a workshop on *Makkjetti* based on the *LostVoices* publication series delivered by a theatre performer — not a *makkjettist*. This is taken into consideration because it shows that the material culture of the contemporary music scene is not being explored and instead replaced with interpretations from *Ghana* of the past. Nor does the programme celebrate the performers of the present.

All this may well arguably be interesting and of cultural value. But it is not safeguarding *Ghana*, nor is it giving it a new lease of life. It is denying it life. It is even showing a lack of interest in getting to know if *Ghana* is really facing an existential crisis at all (other than from people trying to save it). *Ghana* is presented in a time capsule. A discussion which was publicly held during *Ritmu 2023* concerning the past and future of *Ghana* involved the participation of one *ghannej* only.<sup>29</sup> The display was void of any elements of performance being discussed here — it was lacking of liminality. I argue that this continues to build a narrative

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<sup>29</sup> This discussion took place at the far end of *Argotti Gardens*, during the first day, there in front of a audience which comprised of an elderly group who were brought specifically for this section of the programme, possibly from an elderly home, and the *ghannej* was tasked with performing in front of other onlooking crowd a short performance comprised of a stanza in all the main styles of *Ghana*, which in process created a considerable tension on the performer resulting in his voice failing him when being instructed to perform *fil-Gholi*.

around *Ghana* being “lost” and requiring salvaging, and that it has no future and “lost” its direction. Indeed the discussion during this presentation centred around how *Ghana* is not as it used to be and has an uncertain future, legitimising certain projects in the process. A rhetoric explored, as opposed to holding and presenting a series of discussions concerning the present to facilitate a better understanding and appreciation of what goes on in the contemporary community. Worse, with the latest edition of the festival the organisers seem to have sealed its fate outside of the main festival grounds, *Argotti Gardens*. As one organiser had told me, ‘they can continue doing their own thing in the village.’ When speaking with an artist who was commissioned by the organisers to produce work for the festival, about the *Serata* that was organised during the festival, the reply was ‘*dawk apposta jghamlu*’, meaning they do it on purpose. Therefore such discourse created around *Ghana*, operates in a

universal practice of designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is “ours” and an unfamiliar space beyond “ours” which is “theirs” is a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary. [...] It is enough for “us” to set up these boundaries in our own minds; “they” become “they” accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from “ours.” (Said 2019: 54).

It only serves as agency to explore desired interests and generate a sense that one is participating in something which is acting on safeguarding the practice, whereas on the contrary it is aiding in generating mis-representations of *Ghana*.

Upon reflection it was not an irony that a festival intended to find a new audience for *Ghana* made it difficult for that audience to find the right stage hidden behind a kiosk in 2022. Or that, for the first time in decades, the national broadcaster PBS did not provide an OB unit (outside broadcasting unit) onsite documenting the festival for later dissemination reaching television audiences, another form of presentation at the national level — and possibly online audiences like the ones explored through the 2020 online edition (See Figure 18). All this should be reconsidered. As this research has shown, the *Ghana* audience is not measured through attendance at *Serati*-festivals alone. Another audience which is still keen on the dissemination of *Ghana* through the main national channels remains television and radio,

sought after particularly by the female demographic (according to my informal conversations with several women aficionados).<sup>30</sup>

What we have been questioning here is not the individual aesthetics of the respective artists that were directing the festival, together with the entity organising the festival. But what emerges is that the personal aesthetics are often reflected in the artistic vision and festival programme explored in the respective editions of the National Festival: Med folk roots from Iberia to Mideast (Carabott 2012); A festival of worldwide folklore music in Ghanafest (Amaira 2016); Gypsy Jazz And Ghana: Ritmu Roots Festival Celebrates Traditional Music From Around The World (Borg 2023). This approach is not being challenged either, however it becomes relevant to us when we become aware of the meaning that a National Festival has to a particular community, in our case the *Ghana* community. Then a sense of responsibility becomes present towards that community that is affiliated with the festival, hence the festival space has its own heritage that organisers must be cautious about, and conscious in honing it. This research identified a very strong affection between the community and the venue of the National Festival, referred simply as *L-Argotti*. It is referred to by the space where it is held, indicating the meaning that the venue carries within the community. The series of rebrandings, lack of communication between the organisers and the community, types of programming explored and discourse move against such an approach. This is all part of the analysis of signs concerning ‘verbal and non-verbal devices to extend the notion of sign-function to various types of significant units, so-called signs, strings of signs, texts and macro-texts’ (Eco 1979: viii).

We have also discussed the concept of music fusion, as an approach, and the intuitive artistic approach to safeguard something through change and transformation. Offering a translation of the (creative) language spoken in the community into something aimed to be more accessible, so that it will be understood by an unaccustomed audience, presents its own set of dilemmas. However it is the idea that this process safeguards the subject in question that is being discussed here, since in the process the artist is modifying according to

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<sup>30</sup> Of course one can also consider social media for a wider outreach however research participants identified the traditional media channels and I am conveying that message.

exigencies of their own respective audience and personal expression. In turn this does not necessarily generate new audiences to the source of inspiration (See Figure 28). The result of this process produces a new work which generates a life of its own, it functions within its own space. Thereby generating its own meaning within a specific context, which often differs from the community that has provided the material to work with. Therefore, the process of expressing oneself in one's own respective artistic language is not being challenged either. It is the narrative, the approach which gives agency to artists who build on a discourse that a practice such as *Ghana* needs to be changed, transformed, adapted, translated into something else. It builds on the idea of

[...] "otherness," it is no longer an intimate otherness, but a part of an exotic otherness from the wider category of world music, and exoticised by its association with other examples of "traditional" music, dance, or even performance.

Nettl characterized this response as exaggeration: "a phenomenon resulting from Western listeners' expectation of great exoticism in the sound of non-Western music. In some non-Western cultures music appears to have changed in order to conform to the European and the Westernized natives' conception of what the tradition should be, stressing the difference and emphasizing what is, from the European viewpoint, an exotic musical sound" (1978: 132-33). In Malta listeners/consumers and producers are not distinct but belong to the same national (semi-peripheral European) society. The threatening otherness of *ghana* as representative of the private doubts of official national hegemonic models of "European" identity is neutralised through a detour of Western sensibilities' expectations of exoticism, and rendered more acceptable through recounting as "extraordinary" experiences of discovery. Through such recountings listeners weave their identities. (Sant Cassia 2000: 294)

### What festivals do well

This chapter has been very critical of various editions of the National *Ghana* Festival, especially the penultimate one. Three points therefore need to be underlined.

First, my major criticisms have not been of individual misjudgements, but of an underlying ideology — affecting both how *Ghana* is represented and how performances are programmed and structured — that is widely shared within the community.<sup>31</sup> It is clear, for instance, that artistic directors are partly chosen on whether they are considered competent and energetic enough to rejuvenate *Ghana*'s image and practice. It is also clear that the

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<sup>31</sup> Even by the few who are at present seen favourably and engaged with more than others.

ideology of *Ghana* as a survival from the past, and not a creative force in the present, is widely shared at organisational level and projected to general audiences.

The techniques and imagery of the festivals would not be out of place if they were directed at truly defunct genres of what used to be called *Ghana* in its widest sense — like the *Ghana tal-Banju*, the humorous genre sung by women doing the laundry at the communal washing basin, *Ghana tad-Dballit*, or *tal-Gideb*, among others. Instead they have been targeted at a genre that is artistically part of a vibrant living context.

Second, it should be underlined that festivals have been very good at stimulating activity where context was less important or even shackling. Under Mifsud-Chircop, a handful of women emerged on the national stage as singers — where the male-dominated environment of the bar would make their presence incongruous:

Women in bars listening to *ghana* have in many cases been considered as prostitutes. On the other hand, no one will make such a judgement in more public presentations where sessions are attended by mixed audiences such as during the traditional Maltese feasts of Imnarja or San Gwann (11). (Ciantar 2000: 6)<sup>32</sup>

Till today, some women perform mainly within events associated with the festival, whether as guitarists or singers. In today's contemporary *Ghana* scene, female participants have performed, *Makkjetti*, *Ghana fuq il-Kelma*, *Ghana fil-Gholi* and *kitarristi*, guitar players. The festival, for example, has given a stage to Mariele Zammit, a 'freelance singer, dancer and actress' who performed in the *Lost Voices* theatre performance which featured *Ghana* as a central theme, particularly archive recordings between the local and diaspora communities (See Figure 34).

Third, the idea that the *ghannejja* and *kitarristi* are hidebound and conservative and will resist any festival, no matter its format, is false. Mostly based on misjudgements and misperceptions particularly when organisers denounce the performers as difficult to work with, *dawk diffiċli taħdem magħhom*. *Ghannejja* and impresarios are very interested in innovation that enriches their own performative aesthetic. I was fortunate enough to be

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<sup>32</sup> In his latest publication, Ciantar specifies that the feast mentioned here of St John is celebrated on 24th June in Valletta (not San Gwann). 'The event at the *Upper Barrakka* used to be attended to by large gatherings of people from 'all' villages and, hence, served as a means by which people from different parts of the island could come together, express, and share their local village customs including rural dancing and music (Cassar Pullicino and Camilleri 1998: 6) (Ciantar 2021: 21).



invited by a *għannej-kitarrist* who was participating in a festivity abroad, and was given the opportunity to join and travel together to document this experience. This was of particular interest to my fieldwork, as it not only provided me with the opportunity to observe a local-regional event produced in another country, but it also allowed me to observe how *Ghana* can be experienced by an audience who is 'alien' to the music tradition. Needless to say this journey generated new data that could not have otherwise been documented. Here I will share some reflections from this experience.

I travelled to Grosseto with two *għannejja* and two apprentices who participated in a one-day oral tradition event, the *XXIII incontro di Improvvisazione Poetica* organised in Pomonte, comune di Scansano, provincia di Grosseto, in Italy. The event celebrated the extemporised verses of improvised poets in *ottava rima*. During our journey to Grosseto, the largest province of Toscana, Vince Carabott *il-Bukku*, played on a *Pupa* guitar design locally referred to *tal-qarn wieħed*, or *nofs qamar*, built by Ġorġ iż-*Żabliġan*<sup>33</sup> which he had brought with him to give as a donation to the association organising the event. At one point while travelling by train from Rome, the trains were disrupted and we experienced a delay of a couple of hours. While waiting on the train at around one in the morning, *il-Bukku* was still playing the guitar on a train full of passengers.

On the day it was raining heavily and everyone gathered under the main tent. The event kicked off with a discussion between the organisers, the practitioners of the music tradition, members of the community and the media. This alone already outlines the tone and approach that the organisers employ in the event. One of the organisers was Mauro Chechi who is both a performer and researcher of the *ottava rima* music tradition (Chechi 2016). He is known also as *il Cantastorie*, which is also the name of the first album released in 2016. Some members of the community of improvised poets are also members, *soci* of *Lega Italiana Poesia Estemporanea*, an organisation which represents the practitioners of the music tradition. During the meeting

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<sup>33</sup> Ġorġ Iż-*Żabliġan*, who sadly passed away during the course of this study, was a local guitar builder who had learned the trade from his next of kin, Indri Brincat *il-Pupa*. A local guitar maker who had developed the notable design of *il-Qarn*, a type of harp guitar. This version of the guitar is a modification which follows on Indri's guitars popular within the music scene. The *Pupa* guitars are part of the present iconography of *Ghana* featuring prominently in most promotional material of the community.

they exchanged ideas and observations about any difficulties that they were experiencing, and reflections about their practice, along with any initiatives that were being explored. The panel included representatives of the council and performers, and audience members participated in the discussion. Questions from the media were also addressed. During this session, some intervened in an extemporised verse in the *ottava rima*. Here Chechi also invited Vince Carabott *il-Bukku*, who performed on the guitar and in *Għana*, an improvised response.

Typically, this event presents other international participants; however during this edition only *il-Bukku* from Malta was officially invited to perform *Għana*. It had been five years since *il-Bukku* had been invited to perform at this event. We were also joined by Emanuel Ellul *il-Begġiġ*, Amber and Kurt, the daughter and son of Vince. *Il-Begġiġ* joined out of interest as he was keen to witness how the *ottava rima* rhymes — highlighting the degree of interest that he has in *Għana*. As soon as the meeting finished, some folk musicians played a couple of popular tunes in an ensemble of traditional instruments. Everyone gathered around, this was followed by a couple of improvised extemporised poetic verses by performers who were in the audience. All this was taking place under a tent in the countryside, adjacent to a church and a school. Whilst all this was going on, local wine, *Morellino di Scansano* and local beer were flowing. Eventually when the performances gradually ceased, lunch was also served.

In the afternoon the performances kicked off and members from the audience, the known *soci*, were called up on stage to perform. Groups of performers joined together to perform the extemporised verses in *ottava rima* on stage. The size of the festivity was akin to a typical summer *Serata*. Particularly when in the evening more people gathered and dinner was also served in between performances. At one point *il-Bukku* was invited to perform; he encouraged Amber, Kurt and Leli *il-Begġiġ* to join him on stage. Kurt the son of *il-Bukku*, was fluent in Italian and he joined to act as an interpreter. *Il-Bukku* performed a *Makkjetta*, *il-Paci*<sup>34</sup>, which includes adaptations of the verses which he performs in Italian, English and Maltese, a signature performance highly sought after in the *Għana* community. Vince and Amber then performed other *Makkjetti*. Whilst *Il-Begġiġ* then joined *il-Bukku* and performed a short *Għana*

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<sup>34</sup> This is a well known *Makkjetta* which *il-Bukku* performs and it is not the first time that when he is participating as a *kitarrist* in local *Serati* he is requested to perform *il-Paci* in between *Għana* sessions. It was also performed in a couple of festival editions at *Argotti Gardens*.

*Spirtu Pront* session. It was a surprise to see Kurt spontaneously joining in one of the sessions that *il-Begij* and *il-Bukku* were performing on stage — highlighting that the event in itself inspired Kurt to participate in *Ghana*.

Needless to say discussions about *Ghana* flowed continuously and as in the local *Serati* the event itself sparked interesting discussions between Vince, Kurt and Emanuel, everyone contributing full of enthusiasm about what can be done locally in the *Ghana* music scene.<sup>35</sup> This was a very interesting and unforeseen effect which was generated through participation in an event organised in another country. They appreciated how the event was being organised and also observed the importance that one should be conscious about when planning a cultural programme including the type of performances and musical styles being presented in the event. Which compared to the standard of festivals that local entities aim for is a very modest production, but nevertheless one that addressed the needs of the community. There appeared to be a consensus between the local participants that locally an association is required to represent the *ghannejja* and *kitarristi*. *Il-Bukku* also expressed his wish that a school of *Ghana* should be created, *fejn titghallem u timmatura*, (where one learns and matures), where anyone interested could learn about *Ghana*.<sup>36</sup> Offering also an opportunity for the established performers to continue developing.

So there are opportunities for festivals to perform a creative role in opening up new horizons for *Ghana* and not just be a brand name. Acting as part of a propaganda that projects the idea of ‘safeguarding’ and that the Government is there to protect and support local culture. But if organisers are to address contemporary *Ghana*, particularly *Spirtu Pront* then first what is needed is an appreciation of the drama that that performance is. One needs to be cautious about an attitude that is intended to instruct rather than adopting an approach to understand and appreciate what is happening in the present. This is what will be further explored in the next chapter.

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<sup>35</sup> Despite her young age, Amber also participated in the event and was enthusiastic about everything she was experiencing.

<sup>36</sup> *Il-Bukku* is a member of the community who does not resist the idea of passing down the oral tradition to interested individuals who are not bound by kin with *Ghana*. There are members within the community who think otherwise.



Fig.15 georgemario, 2018. *The audience at the mainstage on Day 1 of Ghanafest at Argotti Gardens.* [Photograph] (22 June, IMG\_0728.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonèn Studios)



Fig.16 georgemario, 2019. *A Spirtu Pront session with is-Sufu's ensemble on the main stage at Ghanafest.* [Photograph] (22 June, IMG\_5489.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonèn Studios)



Fig.17 georgemario, 2018. The main stage and festival furniture being set up at Ghanafest in Argotti Gardens. [Photograph] (22 June, IMG\_0719.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonèn Studios)



Fig.18 georgemario, 2021. The landing page of the festival Ghanafest on FestivalsMalta website in 2021. [Screenshot] (October, FM Ghanafest 2021 page.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonèn Studios).



Fig.19 georgemario, 2019. *Sherazade et Lavion Rose*, a 'French folk group' performing at Ghanafest. [Photograph] (June, IMG\_5525.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonèn Studios)



Fig.20 georgemario, 2023. *The first Ghana Spirtu Pront session at Imnarja*. [Photograph] (28 June, IMG\_1391.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonèn Studios)

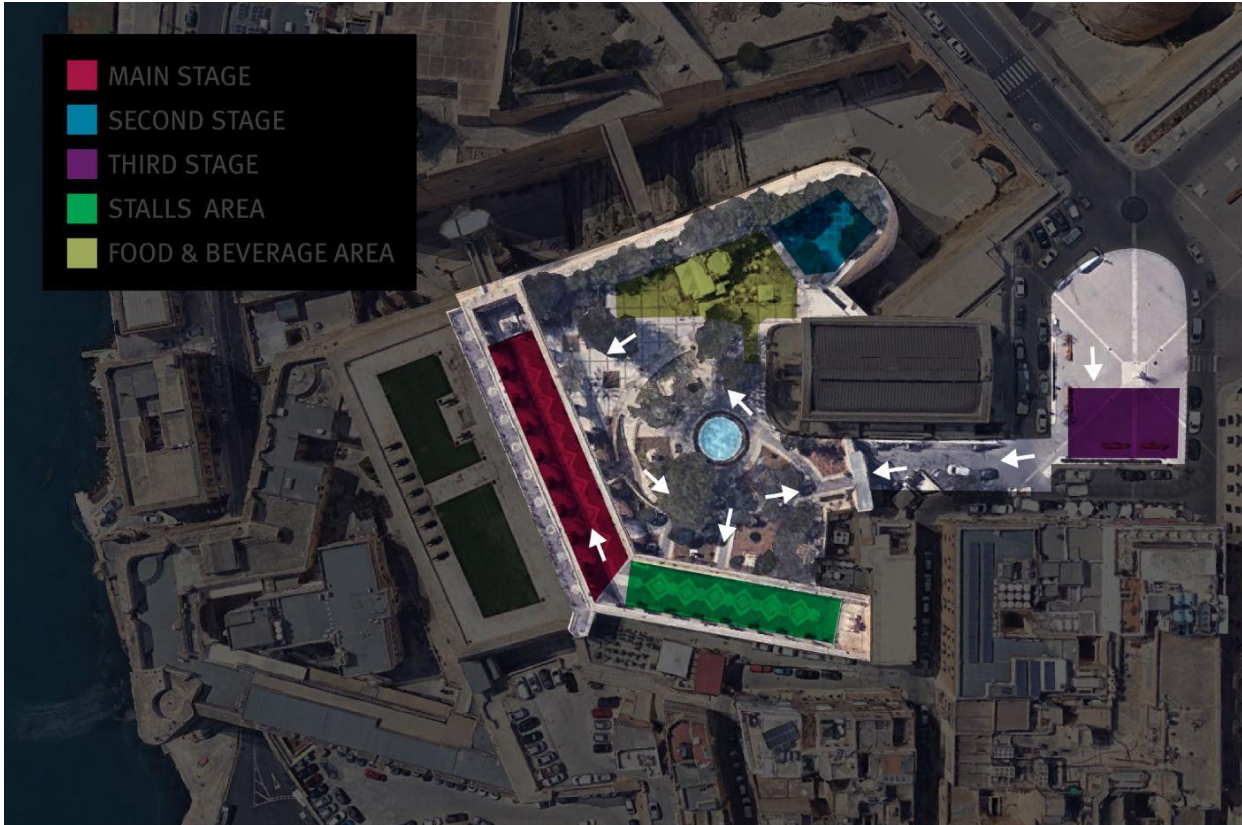


Fig.21 georgemario, 2022. *Ritmu at Upper Barrakka Gardens 2022 festival plan*. [Graphic Image] (06 October, Upper Barrakka Gardens 2.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeegonën Studios)

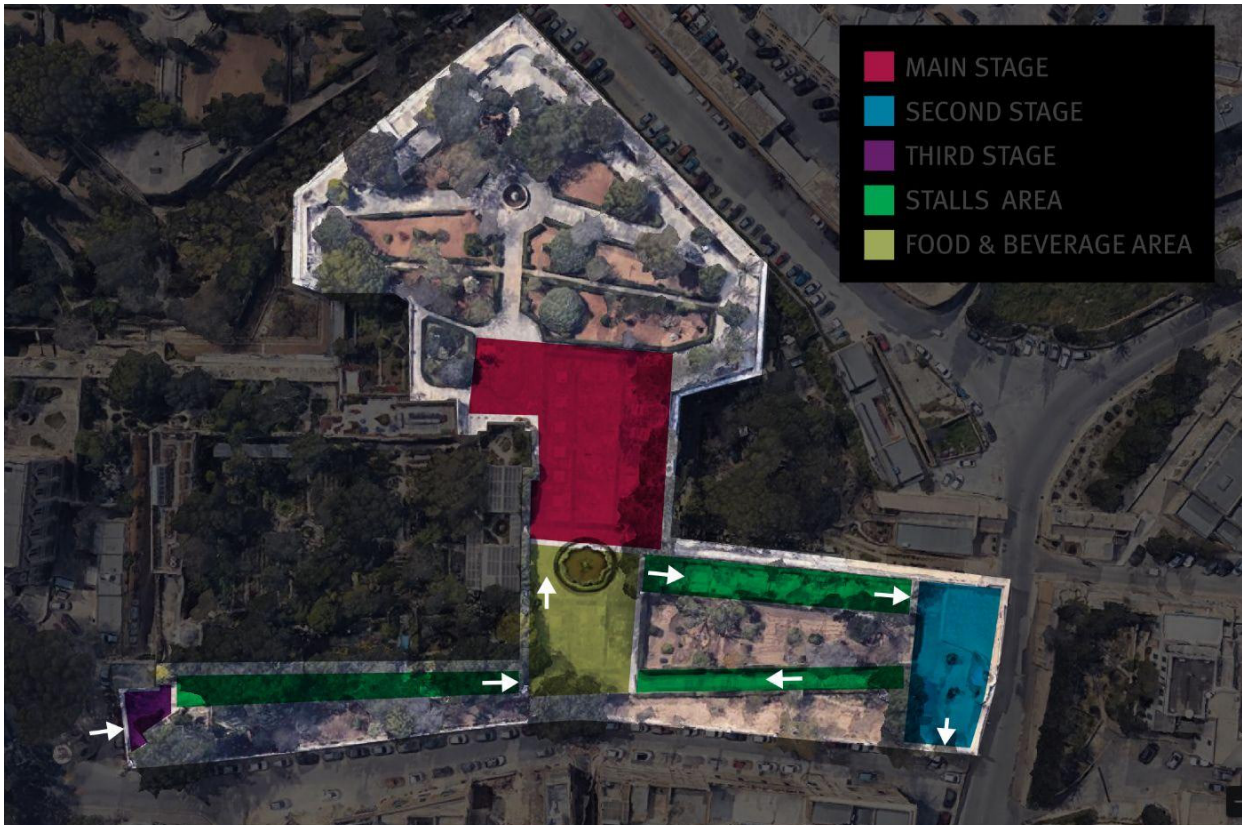


Fig.22 georgemario, 2022. *Ghanafest at Argotti Gardens 2018 festival plan*. [Graphic Image] (06 October, Argotti Gardens.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeegonën Studios)



Fig.23 FestivalsMalta, 2022. The main section of the website with photographs linking to separate pages with details on the participating artists. [Screenshot] (27 June, Ritmu Website Festival page 2.PNG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonën Studios)

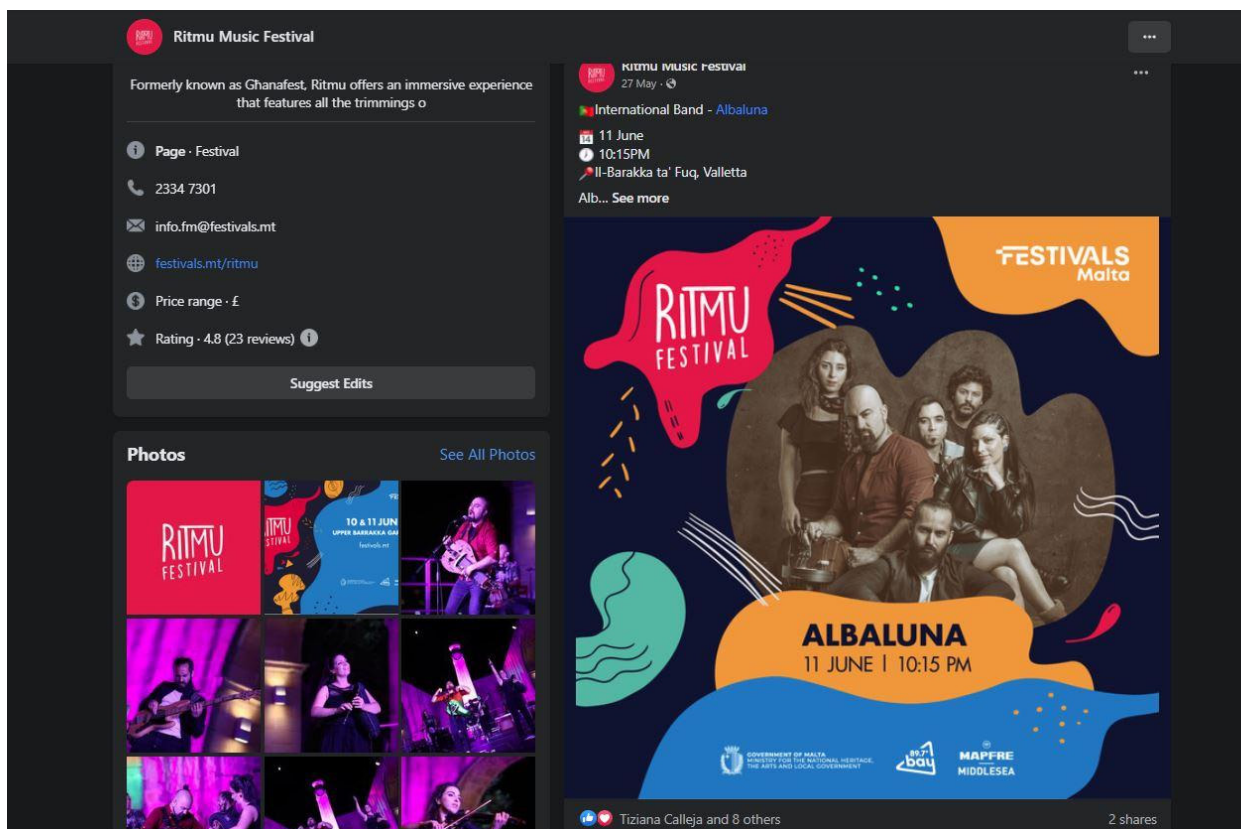


Fig.24 FestivalsMalta, 2022. One of the designed Fb posts promoting local and foreign acts at Ritmu. [Screenshot] (05 October, FM Ritmu Design Fb Page.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonën Studios)





Fig.25 georgemario, 2022. Outside folds of the festival brochure. [Scanned Image] (06 October, Ritmu Brochure 2.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeegonën Studios)

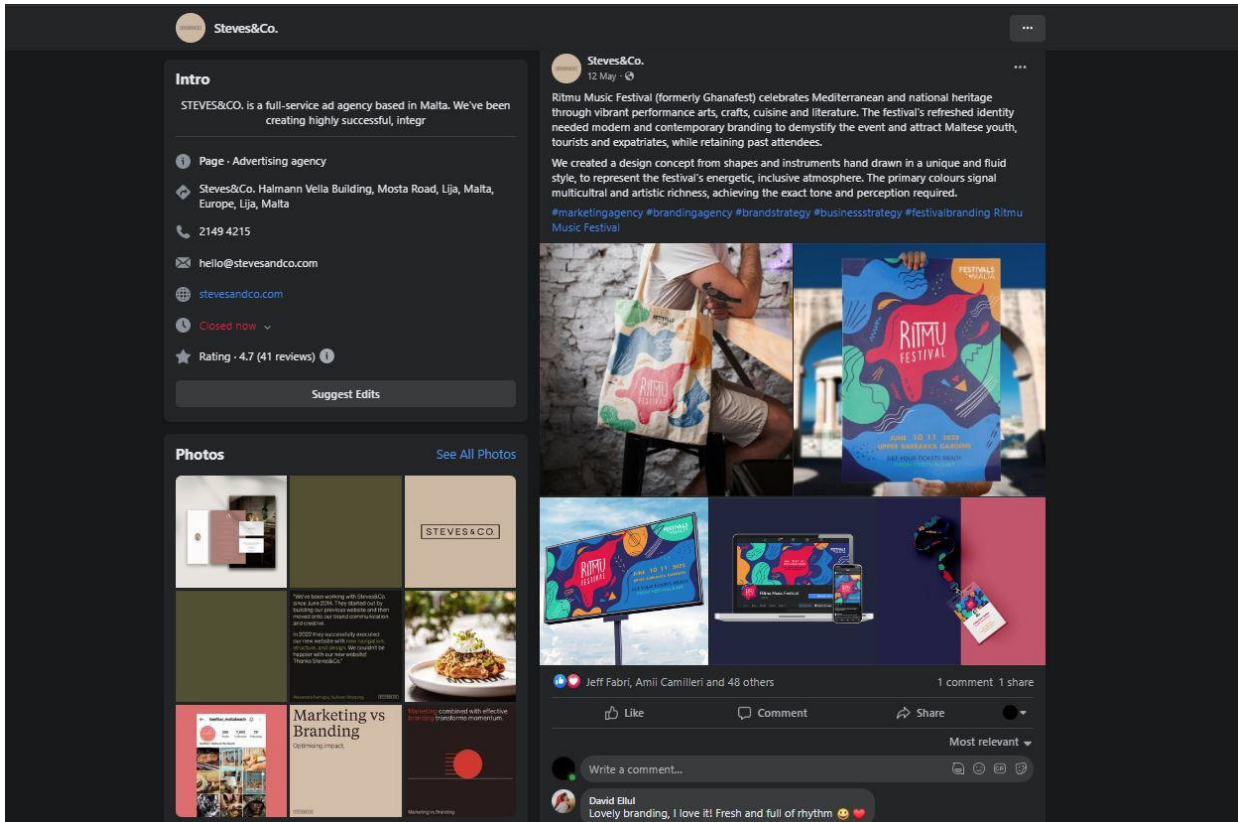


Fig.26 Steves&Co., 2022. The Fb post highlighting the proposed rebranded identity of Ghanafest into Ritmu. [Screenshot] (05 October, Steves&Co Ritmu.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeegonën Studios)



Fig.27 Agius, D. FestivalsMalta, 2022. A photo featuring the main stage published on the festival website. [Screenshot] (05 October, FM Ritmu Mainstage audience 2.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonèn Studios)



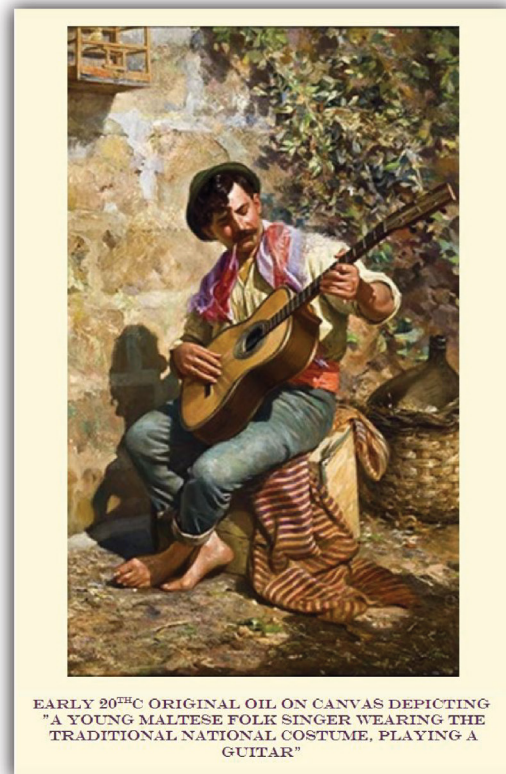
Fig.28 Agius, D. FestivalsMalta, 2022. The main stage audiences dancing to tarantella music. [Screenshot] (05 October, FM Ritmu Mainstage audience 1.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonèn Studios)



Fig.29 georgemario, 2022. *The audience at the Ghana stage on Day 2 of Ritmu.* [Photograph] (11 June, IMG\_8127.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeegonën Studios)



Fig.30 georgemario, 2022. *Young Liam, wearing the traditional costume, observes attentively the ongoing Ghana session at Ritmu.* [Photograph] (11 June, IMG\_8426.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeegonën Studios)



EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup>C ORIGINAL OIL ON CANVAS DEPICTING "A YOUNG MALTESE FOLK SINGER WEARING THE TRADITIONAL NATIONAL COSTUME, PLAYING A GUITAR"

Fig.31 georgemario, 2019. *The Caruana Dingli painting is juxtaposed with a Ghana activity poster.* [Visual Image] (June, Guitar Player Caruana Dingli Phoenicia.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeġonèn Studios).



Fig.32 georgemario, 2023. *An ethnographic documentary being screened at Splendid in Strada Stretta.* [Photograph] (6 June, IMG\_1268.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeġonèn Studios)



Fig.33 georgemario, 2023. *The festival audience at Argotti Gardens on the first evening of Ritmu.* [Photograph] (9 June, IMG\_1314.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonën Studios)



Fig.34 georgemario, 2023. *Mariele Zammit performing an adaptation of a Ghanja.* [Photograph] (10 June, IMG\_1380.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonën Studios)



Fig.35 georgemario, 2019. A typical Summer Serata Ghana at Kottoner public garden in Bormla. [Photograph] (June, 20190621\_231841.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeegeonèn Studios)



Fig.36 georgemario, 2023. Aficionados attending the Serata in Msida on the night of the festival at Argotti. [Photograph] (9 June, IMG\_5970.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeegeonèn Studios)



## 6. *Għana* as representation and performance of self

### Introduction: a poetics of *Għana*

I was often told: “We *għannejja* do not sing; we perform *Għana* (*ma nkantawx, ngħannu*.)” The action of *Għana* is conveyed by a verb derived from the name itself. The meaning of the verb, in this context, depends in part on a narrowing of meaning. The verb *jgħanni* can refer, in its dictionary sense, to the chirping or whistling of a bird, and can certainly be used to refer to human singing also. However, in ordinary Maltese use, the verb is never intended to refer to any singing other than that of *Għana* or of the spontaneous singing imagined to have been characteristic of common folkways in the past.

The *għannejja* and aficionados are not making a linguistic point. It is an aesthetic one. *Għana* is a performance. I shall argue, that calls for a presentation of a particular image of an individual with a heightened sense of self. It is a performance that is vocal, but also dramatic: the stillness of the *għannej* as he *sings*; the puff on a cigarette or sip of a local beer as he awaits his turn; the stylised *singing* position he adopts (some hold their ear, others cross their arms, others lean their back against the wall (also noted in Ciantar 2019)); the glance that catches the eye of the lead guitarist or a fellow singer, the exchange of signs and gestures, with perhaps a word exchanged in discrete tones while another is singing; the gaze in the performer’s eyes always looking in the distance to remain concentrated (See Figure 38), avoiding contact with the audience...

These postures are not an act. The best *għannejja* do not play at being anyone but themselves. Except at festivals, when they wear the regulation peasant costume of dark trousers and waistcoat with a symbolic red neckerchief, the *għannejja* wear their usual clothes, often as casual as they come (See Figure 37). *Għana* is a presentation of self, perhaps based on a poetics of manhood (Herzfeld 1985). As Ciantar puts it when analysing what goes into a performing *għannej*’s identity:

The components of such identity vary: from the character quality of the *għannej* himself to his popularity with the general public and from his superb ability to rhyme his quatrains to his often used melodic motive from one session to another; from his



vocal timbre to his life story and the many experiences that he has had [...] (Ciantar 2000: 13–14).

The tropes of exchanges between *għannejja* include compliments of the other, based on respect, and phrases that would raise eyebrows in other contexts, like “You loved me and I loved you” (*Int habbejtني u jien habbejtek*) — affirming relationships publicly through performance. Such phrases can be fillers, conveniently fitting the metre; being stock phrases, they can be turned on their head and pave the way for a barbed witty comment. But they are part of an aesthetic taken seriously: of a measured performance in which the *għannej* comes into his own treating of values, such as mentoring the young and advising a counterpart to stick to the right road — whether a life counsel or guidance on *Għana* itself.

In this chapter I shall consider the density of the performance, and how it is evaluated as a whole by the keen audience. There are so many factors that quality of voice alone, or the perfection of the music, the content that is being discussed through *Għana*, determine the quality of the performance as it is being embodied by the performers and aficionados. The interaction between the *għannejja*, the *kitarristi* and audience also counts, as does the hypertext — the allusions or memories of related encounters, the knowledge within the community, including the intertextuality that goes on within the performance — in giving a *Serata* its prestige. Therefore to judge a performance on just one or two of these criteria is to judge it according to an aesthetic that is not its own. Finally, I will compare the density of performance with that demanded by the organisers or a festival context, to show why the latter inevitably — through no fault of either performers or artistic directors — ‘flattens out’ the richness of *Spirtu Pront* in its setting.

### **The structure of *Spirtu Pront* encounters**

Fsadni (1993) suggests that *Spirtu Pront* encounters should be seen as having a quasi-ritualistic character. They have a pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal phase: the noise, as people are meeting and talking with friends whilst getting seated; the liminal phase eased in as the *għannejja* file in and stand in line facing the audience and the guitarists begin to play; the post-liminal phase after the guitars stop performing, the *għannejja* turn to each other and exchange a word and shake hands (sometimes avoiding it too), and then talk to

aficionados and join in social drinking; sometimes leading to further consumption and a spontaneous *Spirtu Pront* session. In the liminal phase, there are taboos on certain kinds of behaviour (talking among and clapping from the audience, for example; dragging in gossip from ordinary social life by the *ghannejja*). The performance is also patterned in a way that makes radical deviation frowned upon, while the lyrical conventions help create a mythic environment. The guitars performing the chords complimentary to the lead guitarist maintain tempo creating a sound pattern which pulls everyone within the *comunitas* state (Turner 1988), into an almost hypnotic state of mind allowing one to focus more and absorb what is being performed (Csikszentmihalyi 2008).

We can also take into consideration an extended part of the pre-liminal phase where excitement builds as soon as a *Serata* is made public either through the network by word of mouth or social texting or through the community produced artworks that are disseminated in key venues and on social media. When regional and ‘high’ *Serati* are organised aficionados contact impresarios to book seats and tables to secure a place, if this is offered. All this builds excitement and expectation towards the performance which is further enhanced when certain performers are announced in the promotion of the event.

In this chapter, I would like to focus on how individuality and uniqueness of *ghannejja* and guitarists are not stifled by this ritualistic character. On the contrary, it helps elicit unique character in a way other events, such as festivals, may not, unless given adequate attention.

Performatively, the liminal phase of a *Spirtu Pront* session is divided into three parts: the introduction, the main section, and the *gadanza*, the cadence. During the introduction the performers typically introduce themselves in *Ghana*, referring to the place, time and context it is being performed — useful when listening to recordings, it embeds the particular *Ghana* performance within the hypertext of a larger sequence of performances. This often takes about two stanzas, each leading the *ghannejja* to choose a subject, the theme that each pair of *ghannejja* will tackle as part of their joust. As some informants told me, one should not suggest a particular subject in the first two stanzas — it is part of the *Ghana* constitution. The subject suggested by either *ghannej* is explored from the third onwards — it should neither take too long, (more than approximately two other stanzas to secure a theme) some end up taking a

whole session and no one subject is locked and explored through *Ghana*, deemed as 'unresolved' *Ghana*. Within the main section the *ghannejja* must explore the chosen subject throughout the *Spirtu Pront* session. All this is relevant for our understanding of the performance of *Ghana* because when we dissect the session in this way it becomes clearer why *ghannejja* complain when organisers reduce the duration of the performance. *Ghannejja* become concerned with the amount of time that they will eventually have to develop and explore a subject in *Ghana*, therefore in their mind they're translating the duration of the performance into stanzas that allow one to explore a subject, *kif ha tiżvolġi suġġett?* Therefore, reducing sessions to fit a particular schedule would challenge the nature of performance and its conventions. The length of a session at a *Serata* is often determined by the organiser who, at some point signals the *ghannejja* and *kitarristi* to perform the *gadanza* typically giving a signal prior to a full cycle or two, before proceeding to the final round; this gives time for another or two stanzas each, and then they proceed to perform the *gadanza*. The *gadanza*, the cadence, is a double quatrain and marks the ending of the performance, where a *ghannej* is expected to conclude and share his final thoughts on the subject, often exchanging a final witty blow with his opponent, to secure a 'win' and maintain status.

The description of *Spirtu Pront* as ritualistic applies to the one format that most people would associate with the genre: the 'formal' sessions where the performing *ghannejja* stand in a linear formation, *fuq il-linja*, behind the *kitarristi* always facing towards the crowd.

In practice as we have mentioned in an earlier chapter, there is another kind, an informal one, the closest *ghannejja* get to jamming in freestyle spontaneous extemporised *Ghana*. It typically occurs after a local *Serata* or a Saturday-Sunday morning session is over — that is, in the post-liminal phase — and when the *ghannejja* (or others who had not performed including the *dilettanti*) are eager to continue and participate in *Ghana*. Someone typically sits next to a *Prim*, the lead guitar player, or a *kitarrist* known to perform such sessions, often exhausted after hours of playing continuously, and convinces the guitarists to begin. Once this kicks off, people tend to gather around the table. Other *ghannejja* and *kitarristi* tend to join in at will and an improvised, unplanned session kicks off.

Because it is informal, at times the number of *ghannejja* in this participatory form of performance could even exceed six and even end up in an odd number — an aspect which is never allowed in the ‘formal’ *Sirtu Pront* sessions. This can occur in this type of performance because those participating will be doing so as single individuals; the pairing of *ghannejja* here is not observed. It is one of the most intimate performances as typically it occurs when less people are around and it tends to create an atmosphere where everyone is immersed in *Ghana* as those that remain cluster together around the performers. Turn taking is not observed strictly, either. At times more than two *ghannejja* begin a stanza and one signals the other to give the lead and continue performing — an aspect which *fuq il-linja* never occurs due to the democratic format that is employed in the mode of performance explained earlier. The same individual might perform two quatrains in a row, but he might also then gesture to a keen audience member, who has never performed, and invite them to join in also. Some do since the reputational stakes are not high. I have met more than one *ghannej* who told me he realised he was one when he took the plunge in just such a session. This shows that aficionados and performers observe potential individuals and seek to nurture and explore their talents within the community.

This is a space where at times aficionados tend to find the *Sirtu Pront* most interesting, as they say, ‘strike gold’. At times, they witnessed the discovery of someone who would go on to become a leading *ghannej*.

When it comes to *Sirtu Pront* organised as a line-up, informality in other aspects, or degrees of informality, should not imply that the performers do not take it seriously. On the contrary one finds there is more intensity here — in the local hubs and *Serati* — than at the national events. Performers know that they must maintain their reputation and status (prestige) within the local community. So if the community members perceive the local activities in higher esteem than the festival, then the performers perform to a higher degree. Paradoxically, we may say that the ‘informal’ setting presents more of a challenge for an *ghannej* to maintain status, deliver quality *Ghana*, and keep up social ties with other performers and aficionados, than certain formal types of presentation which tend towards a

more ‘collaborative’ rhetoric between the two *ghannejja*, and less agonism, in the name of keeping a ‘united front’ before strangers in the audience.

The important point is that the structure of *Ghana Spirtu Pront* lends itself to the creation of unique performance determined by the various performers (including the guitarists and audience, as we shall see), who are urged by the prerequisite of the tradition, to build on what has already been discussed in *Ghana*, to react, improvise and reply in *Spirtu Pront*. This uniqueness in *Ghana* is generated with every performance, as it can never be replicated. That means that any encounter might turn out to be especially intense and celebrated. I shall now explore why.

### **The uniqueness of *ghannejja* and guitarists**

If the *ghannejja* insist that *Ghana* is performed, and not sung, several ‘outsiders’ complained to me that *Ghana* is “always the same”. Perhaps the distinguishing characteristic of an aficionado is the ability to tell, and enjoy, the ‘subtle’ differences that make good performances unique. There are three basic features to note: the personal identity of the *ghannej*; the qualities of the voice; and the uniqueness of the *Prim* guitarist. It takes time to develop a keen understanding, and aficionados possess a vast knowledge on the music process that goes on in the music scene.

*Ghana* is a collective endeavour, but despite this some *ghannejja* describe their participation as a solitary experience, one where they feel at ease with themselves. I believe this is witness to their state of concentration and experience of ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi 2008, 129), where they feel they are operating with confidence and with a heightened sense of self.

Some *ghannejja* feel their thoughts come to mind constructed in rhymes and often the good performers experiencing this state of mind would prefer to perform with fewer *ghannejja* (four as opposed to six in *Ghana Spirtu Pront*, and two in the spontaneous sessions), so that they have less time to perform in reply. More time would be distracting and break the spell of deep immersion. The most able *ghannejja* when concentrated are concerned with time and would feel more comfortable having less time to think of a reply than having to wait longer for

their turn to perform. It was also expressed that this is when they are most at ease in their life; whilst performing, one achieves a clear state of mind, *isserrah il-menti*. Meaning that,

Concentration is so intense that there is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant, or to worry about problems. Self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time becomes distorted. An activity that produces such experiences is so gratifying that people are willing to do it for its own sake, with little concern for what they will get out of it, even when it is difficult or dangerous. (Csikszentmihalyi 2008: 71)

I have witnessed a type of *Ghana Spirtu Pront* without a *qalba* (the *Ghana* guitar interlude) which starts between two *ghannejja* and others join at will in quick succession. There was no faltering. Two *ghannejja* sit in front of each other and perform acappella in reply and counter-reply in *Spirtu Pront*, it is in such contexts where one may experience *Ghana bin-Nofs Ghanja*. I have also been told of times when *Ghana* simply flows naturally to the absorbed performer: in dreams and also while performing other tasks — and not only *ghannejja, dilettanti* also, including female aficionados.

If *Ghana* flows into dream life, it is truly entwined with the most personal aspects of the self. And personal identity is also poured out into *Ghana*. It does not come out through the recounting of personal experience, although audience members will often know salient aspects of an *ghannej*'s biography which are reflected in the performance — identity. It comes out in the character of the performance and in the known history that has taken place with other performers — hypertext. All this adds to the drama witnessed by the audience and feeds their expectations of what could come next, in the particular circumstances of the encounter. Once, a veteran *ghannej* known for his antics and comical character epitomised this during a *Ghana Spirtu Pront* performance. He was taunted for being a 'miser' by the *ghannej* he was paired up with during the performance, and he replied without hesitation by reaching into his pocket and when addressing the issue threw a bundle of paper notes to everyone's amusement; whilst finishing the stanza a considerable amount of money was swaying down slowly in front of all the performers. It was an aficionado intense audience, and all it took was a few gestures for everyone to stay put until the end of the performance.

Second, at the heart of *Ghana* (although not exhausting it) is an encounter between the guitar and the human voice (also observed in Ciantar 2019: 34). I cannot reproduce here a

voice timbre analysis I have conducted of a sample of *ghannejja* which were also analysed with a Speech Language Pathologist. But here I can illustrate the variety and rich diversity of voice in *Ghana* — challenging the notion that it is always the same, by showing how a variety of musical explorations are performed reflecting individual artistry within the collective mode of performance. The variety covers the musical element that *ghannejja* bring into the performance. Highlighting an aspect of what the aficionados also notice in the musicality of the *ghannejja*'s voice.

In *Ghana* we find a variety of vocal styles that are employed by *ghannejja* according to varying exigencies that are peculiar to each performer. What follows is not a definition of all the performers but an attempt to describe what was observed from the range of *ghannejja* that were studied, the following type of performers were observed: performances in the high register, mid range and low register. *Ghannejja* performing in the high register possess a very strong voice projection, which remains consistently strong throughout the *ghanja*, the performing stanza. It is often embellished with melismas in a wide vocal range reaching high pitch. Some *ghannejja* also incorporate the *Ghana fil-Għoli*, *La Bormliża* melismatic characteristic in this style. Performers in the mid range typically start with a strong projection developing mainly in the midrange which gradually unfolds with certain accentuations in the mid range following a strict syllabic delivery. Whilst *ghannejja* who perform in the low register possess a soft projection expressed in the low register performed in a strict and contained established motive.<sup>1</sup>

The ability of voice projection (strength) and timbre (vocality or tonality) is also considered an asset; however, there are cases where *ghannejja* who do not possess a strong vocal projection or timbre may bypass these criteria thanks to their linguistic abilities (say, of rhyme) and the community would still consider them among the most respected *ghannejja*. This is one reason why even *ghannejja* with hoarse voices (like *Fredu Abela il-Bamboċċu*) have been considered aces — hence *Ghana* allows one to transcend according to the respective

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<sup>1</sup> This study could serve as a foundation to further research in the subject which analyses further the voice timbre that *ghannejja* perform with in *Ghana*.

qualities that one employs in the performances and the engagement that is achieved with audiences.

Focusing on the beauty of the voice alone would be to employ a criterion that *ghannejja* and aficionados themselves would never consider on its own. Yet it complements. Some would say *komplut*, being complete, possessing all qualities. Ability is not just technique; it fosters expectation and anticipation from the audience that this *ghannej*, rather than that, will sooner or later take a lyric and, as it were, really make it sing in his signature way. Camilleri hints, in fact, at an exchange that can occur between the performer and ‘the composition itself’, leading the performer to a particular alteration of ‘tone or tones in an improvisatory manner’ (Cassar Pullicino & Camilleri 1998: 68).

The various aspects of voice, in different combinations, already begin to give an individual profile to an *ghannej*. Individuality is also marked by a personal style. Within the ‘formal’ type of *Ghana Spirtu Pront* there are two distinct styles that *ghannejja* subscribe to: the rhetorical and aggressive.

The former is also called *Botta u Risposta* (punch and counter-punch) and refers to a stylised way of carrying out an argument, often through role-playing. Stock roles include cat and mouse or woodcutter and tree. Each *ghannej* adopts one role and tries to best in a comical-narrative argument his opponent, occupying the other role; there is always an underdog in this pairing and performing well when having such a role is itself a sign of skill. In fact one could argue that it is this specific ability that the *ghannej* exceeds any expectation to animate and explore the most mundane and inanimate objects such as a *karkur*, sandal. This rhetorical style, partly by being conventional, and so less ‘personalised’, has a collaborative dimension, because the two opponents have a vested interest in creating a memorable encounter that rises above so many others that also adopted the same roles. It is nevertheless that which attracts a more generic audience towards this style, and deemed more palpable by the cultural entities.



[...]  
*Għande-ek xortii rajtni u xammejtni,  
mal-li għaddejt minn maaġenbek,  
ta' xejn qiegħed għassa mat-toqba,  
għax jien hawn nilbghab wara denbek. [...]* (Jesmond Galea *il-Kalora* 2022)

[...]  
You could barely see me or feel my scent,  
As soon as I went past you,  
It is futile, you're surveilling that hole,  
Cause I am here playing behind your tail.

[...]  
*Int ja-a ġurdien minn ta' limrammaa  
isma xqeighed ingħidlek jien  
jien qattuus mis-sijamiżi  
ma jiskappa leebda ġurdien [...]* (Ninu Galea *ir-Rajsu* 2022)

[...]  
You, ye house mouse,  
Listen to what I am telling you,  
I am a Siamese cat,  
No mouse ever escapes.

The aggressive style (*imqanqal*, or turbulent) is personal in the sense that the *għannej* tries to dominate his opponent, if necessary by criticising and taunting the other's ability and praising his own. It adds considerably to the dramatic tension since whether the aggression can be contained within *Ghana* cannot be taken for granted.

[...]  
*Marju għannej ma tkunx tisseejjah,  
jekk ix-xaġhra ma tfittixiex,  
x'jiswa li tkunu pulukarja,  
jekk il-kelma ma twassaliex,  
  
għax lilek il-Begig b'hekk ħadek,  
Marju lilu it-tlumux,  
għax il-lupu ibiddel sufu,  
imma għemilu ma jibdlux. (Leli il-Begig 2023)*

[...]  
Mario you wouldn't be considered an *għannej*,  
If you do not seek to find the needle in the haystack,  
Why act tough,  
If then you would shy away to speak up,  
  
If I did act like so towards you,  
Do not take offence,  
As although the fox changes its fur,  
It doesn't mean that it has changed its behaviour.

There are *għannejja* who have become synonymous with one style, whilst there are others who fluctuate between the two depending on the context of the performance (whether

formal-official and informal-unofficial, whether the audience includes non-familiar audiences or the familiar *Ghana* community).

The final major component of uniqueness concerns the personality of the guitarist. Just as *ghannejja* have genealogies connecting them to other *ghannejja* (kin or mentors), guitarists too have a genealogy and a lineage of distinguished guitarists who introduced new guitar shapes or ways of tuning up. The legendary, self-taught Indri Brincat *il-Pupa* did both.

When discussing the guitar with Johnny Saliba *ta' Birzebbuga*, aka *l-Ghawdx*, one of the most sought after contemporary lead guitar players, (partly also due to his dedicated investment to the scene where he performs frequently and with many of the current performers), he told me quite seriously that for him the guitar is the second wife:<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes I also have had arguments with my wife because of the guitar [...] I love to play the guitar [...] I love *Ghana* guitar music [...] I learned how to play *Ghana* guitar music and I started to perform for *ghannejja* [...] you study a bit [...]’ (Johnny *ta' Birzebbuga*, *l-Ghawdx* 2019)

This intensity of relationship, which is not unique, enables the improvised playing, responsive to the demands of performance, that we shall see in the next section. *Prim kitarristi* not only follow the melodic contours being performed by individual *ghannejja* all while also performing improvised and semi-improvised interludes; they also perform in response to what is being said in *Ghana*; and, as *ghannejja* have declared to me, lead *ghannejja* to greater heights of performance thanks to their inspiration — *kitarrist tajjeb jghidlek xi tghid*.

### **The combination of *ghannejja* and guitarists**

*Ghana* performance as a structure provides space to all of the performers to perform in dialogue and complement each other. It applies to the dynamic of a particular combination of *ghannejja*, it applies to the guitarists creating music together, and it also applies to the ongoing interaction of *ghannejja* and guitarists. Contrary to a common impression, there is no hierarchy between *ghannejja* and *kitarristi*; both are equally important.

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<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately prior to publishing this research project his wife passed away.

### **L-Għannejja**

The particularities of any performance depends on the decisions taken when the *għannejja* were invited. If an impresario was involved in the programming, then the criteria of choice would have included (apart from availability), a variety of vocal tonality (aesthetics), personal history, and personal style of curation. Each of those criteria would draw on knowledge that the aficionados would themselves be familiar with and hence the choices would imply dramatic scenarios to be anticipated (even if the pairings would not be known up until the end prior to beginning a performance allowing a degree of freedom to the performers, unless instructed by the impresario). In fact, you never quite know if an *għannej*, uninvited but in the audience, will insist on participating and in so doing change the dynamic or be spontaneously called by someone walking towards the performing line.

A *Spirtu Pront* session can both unfold clockwise and anti-clockwise. This is often a strategic negotiation between the organiser and/or the performers or purely the performers discretion which occurs right before the *Spirtu Pront* session is about to begin.

Certain 'first division' *għannejja* are cautious with whom they perform so that they maintain their rank, position and status. This may be achieved by performing with *għannejja* from their own *gaj* and/or other *gajs* whom they consider inferior, of a lower rank or from the 'second division'. This is so that they may ensure a safe performing environment and secure a 'winning' outcome — maintaining prestige. The performers who are conscious of this, tend to prefer knowing with whom they will be performing prior to the session, even at the stage of accepting whether to participate in the *Serata*. Therefore, we may consider this as a means of 'status security', a non-musical aspect of myth making in the performance process. It shows the degrees of intensity placed in the artform.

In contrast with the previous point mentioned earlier, there are performers who seek a 'fair fight', who take pride in confronting an opponent considered by the community at par with their performance skills — of the same level or 'category'. Therefore, these types of performers are aware of what it entails to perform with those of the same calibre or higher. This aspect is reminiscent of what keeps an individual motivated and interested in learning

from those who are better skilled presenting an element of competition ‘It provided a sense of discovery [...] It pushed the person to higher levels of performance, [...] it transformed the self by making it more complex. In this growth of the self lies the key to flow activities. [...] It is this dynamic feature that explains why flow activities lead to growth and discovery. [...] the desire to enjoy ourselves again pushes us to stretch our skills, or to discover new opportunities for using them (Csikszentmihalyi 2008: 74-75).

Another source of dramatic tension can come at the very end, with the *ganza*. The cadence is performed in two stanzas succinctly in succession by each *ghannej*. Hence the end of the performance is shaped by the very beginning, the pairing and formation on the line including whether the performance flows clockwise or anti-clockwise. This is why the choice of line-up is so strategic and so is the direction of proceeding. Typically the final cadence allows the performer to proceed to the final counter-reply and perform a *bravura*, where *ghannejja* are expected to excel to their utmost in their performance towards the last of the session, particularly in the final stanzas. Thus going last is considered an advantage.

Within this tense moment lies another. There are *ghannejja* who spontaneously extend their cadence by another two stanzas, occasionally by more. Mikiel Cutajar *is-Superstar* is an *ghannej* known to occasionally extend his *ganza*, cadences, by a long stretch, some of them leading to an extraordinary forty-five minutes of solo performance together with the guitar players. It thrills the audience but not necessarily the performers he overshadows by flouting the rules.

### ***Il-Kitarristi***

Although there are conventions in *Ghana* music which the *kitarristi* as well as the *ghannejja* adhere to, this should not be taken to mean that *Ghana* performances are limited to a strict repertoire that constricts the performers in the exploration of their feelings and thoughts in music. It is true that the community may react unfavourably when certain explorations venture further than what they may deem acceptable to *Ghana*, such as the employment of synthesised sounds, however what I would like to present here is that an *Ghana* performer (both the *kitarrist* and *ghannej*) still has plenty of room for artistic freedom.

The lead guitar player picks on a set motif or phrase referred to as *passaqġ*, and incrementally throughout the performance continues to develop and elaborates through improvisation and semi-improvisation, particularly during the interludes of the performance (also noted in Pace 2016). This continues to set the mode for *ghannejja* and as some even state in their *ghanja*, they feel inspired by the *ħoss tal-kordi*, the sound of the *Ghana* guitar strings. Gradually this type of flow continues to fuel both the *kitarristi* and *ghannejja* with creativity in a continuous feed; a cycle which builds on through the entire *Ghana* session. This is likely to be more evident when there is a synergy between all of the performers while sharing individual expressions through music dialogue in a collective performance.

This type of interrelationship between the *kitarristi* and *ghannejja*, also occurring between the performers, audiences and organisers, can also be displayed through an observation of a particular musical phrase performed by Johnny Saliba *ta' Birżebbuġa* which I had noticed being performed in a number of different *Ghana Spirtu Pront* sessions. Highlighting how the *kitarrist* is attentive and responsive to the *ghannejja*. Consider the example I shall call 'Johnny's phrase'. This particular phrase is mostly performed in response to what is being said in *Ghana*. So far I have identified three distinct contexts where Johnny performs this phrase (although I have not had the opportunity to see what he thinks):<sup>3</sup>

- When a *ghannej* compliments or express passionate remarks towards the *Ghana* guitars and/or the *kitarristi*
- When a *ghannej* addresses the audience to maintain order and keep quiet during an ongoing session
- When Johnny agrees with something being said in *Ghana* and performs this phrase as an indication that he agrees and affirms with what is being said

The music transcription that follows is an example of the third instance.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately I was not able to discuss my observations with Johnny as in the later period of my fieldwork he had temporarily withdrawn from his participation in *Ghana* due to family commitments.

<sup>4</sup> I am greatly indebted to Prof. Philip Ciantar for his considerable help with both music transcriptions.

# Għana Guitar Interlude

Serata Għana Żejtun Pigeon Club

Prim Kitarrist: Johnny Saliba ta' Birzebbuġa

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 75$

I

4

V7

6

9

I etc.

Table.2 georgemario, 2023. *Johnny Saliba's Interlude preceding the Għanja*. [Music Sheet] (25 July, Żejtun Serata - Interlude.JPG, Żebbuġ, Gozo: Ażeeġonën Studios).

# Ghanja

## Serata Żejtun Pigeon Club

Għannej: Anġlu Theuma l-Kina, Prim Kitarrist: Johnny Saliba ta' Birżebbuġa

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 68$

Acoustic Guitar  
Lead Guitarist

Voice

Li jie-na wie-ħed mil-l ġen - wi - ni, Jaq-bel  
I

4

Guit.

Vo.

mie-ġhu kull sem - miegħ Lil xul-xin m'aħ - niex se  
V7

7

Guit.

Vo.

nweg-ġgħu, Għax ma nie-ħdux tim - bru sa - biħ etc.  
I

Table.3 georgemario, 2023. A sample music transcription of Johnny the Prim Kitarrist and Anġlu l-Kina l-ghannej during a Serata Ghana in Żejtun organised by Nordai Desira. [Music Sheet] (25 July, Żejtun Serata - Ghanja.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ażeeġonèn Studios).

These three contexts show that the *kitarrist* is attentive and responding in a call and response mode of musical expression. It shows that the *kitarrist* is responsive and is not performing on his own, alienated to what is being discussed in *Ghana*. It should be acknowledged that there are those who do so, but here I wanted to present the most clear example available to date, 'Johnny's phrase'. Therefore, a *kitarrist* can perform a response to what is being said in *Ghana*, a *kitarrist* can adapt and perform along the melodic contours of a particular *ghannej* as well as inspire *ghannejja* to follow the melodic interludes by the *Prim kitarrist* together with the complimentary *kitarristi*.

All this continues to show that the *Ghana* performance as a structure provides space to all of the performers to perform in dialogue and complementary to each other both in *Ghana* as well as through *Ghana* guitar music. This analysis showed that there can be no hierarchy between *ghannejja* and *kitarristi*, both are equally important. Similarly all *kitarristi* complement each other particularly when syncopation is applied as a stylistic motif by the *Prim kitarrist* as otherwise it simply would not work. I have been in performances with just one guitar player, and the dynamic presented when three are playing together is unmatched. As Ciantar puts it:

The socio-musical processes in action during [...] performances functioned within a musical form that in itself offered all the necessary 'liberties' for these same processes to evolve and give rise to something unique. (Ciantar 2000: 23)

### **The active role of the silent audience, *id-dilettanti***

Ciantar has noted the active participation of the audience during a *Ghana Spirtu Pront* performance:

[...] the type of audience and the various kinds of pre-existing social ties that may exist both among the performers themselves and between performers and members of the audience can influence, and in certain cases determine, the execution of this kind of event. [...] these social relationships, considering them as active agents behind a series of socio-musical processes that can vary from one context to another, making out of every *spirtu pront* session a unique experience for both the performers and audience. (Ciantar 2000: 1)

The elements observed above shape the content and form of the performance. The form is shaped by the programme, context, viewer-listener-participant and performer:

[...] in a *spirtu pront* session the type of audience and pre-existing social ties could develop a number of socio-musical processes which may affect the course of performance. (Ciantar 2000: 23)



Each performer could attract personal audience members who are attracted to their type of performance and regularly follow them in support. Sometimes the presence of members generate a dynamic perhaps more visible in the *Għana Mqanqal*.<sup>5</sup>

The main *Għana* performances organised by members of the *Għana* community would require audiences to remain attentive and keep quiet during the performances. A performance is considered finished, once the guitar players led by the *Prim kitarrist* perform their final phrase and close the session.

The silence is not passive and the audience needs to be contrasted with the typical one found at a festival, where many members of the audience might not even be enthusiasts.

When analysing the feast of *Imnarja*, Ciantar takes note of the lack of interest from the audience or rather the distracted audience: ‘As Blacking puts it: “people’s interest may be less in the music itself than in its associated social activities” (1973: 43)’ (Blacking cited in Ciantar 2000: 14).

He notes the different dynamic of an audience of *aficionados* in a bar:

In bars things take a different shape: the audience sits close to the performers; the bar is relatively a small place in which the loud singing is more a means of persuasion rather than an acoustic exigency and above all the bar as an environment is less formal as is evident by the liberties the *għannejja* take in drinking between one quatrain and another. All this was missing from the session at Buskett. (Ciantar 2000: 14)

Some performers bring with them the casual attitude to the stage, whilst others subscribe to the theatricality described earlier. As we have also noted when discussing the more popular (high local-regional) *Serati*, we also observed how *aficionados* and *Għana* enthusiasts together with more generic audiences mix together in the performance space. This presents its own dynamic. Certainly more so at a festival setting such as *Imnarja*. For instance in the 2022–2023 seating was not available, which suggests that the audience was expected to stop only for a short while, as they are walking through from one stall to another.

During the more intimate performances where the majority are *aficionados*, the quiet attention is a rapt attention. There is a substantial level of detail that *aficionados* absorb

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<sup>5</sup> In this style the presence of certain members in the audience serve to encourage a performer to taunt, tease and perform more aggressively. Possessing a confident feeling, knowing that if anything goes off script, there is support and so this is displayed in a more at ease and yet agonistic mode of performance.

during a *Ghana* performance. Certain reactions are acceptable such as a burst of laughter when a particular bout is given. It affirms the audience's attention, similarly to a live comic sketch performance. Audiences can choose who to follow in a *Ghana Spirtu Pront* session: which narrative to prioritise, for example which pairing to follow with more intensity, if a session of four *ghannejja* is underway. However, most aficionados keep up with every subject being explored in *Ghana* as well as the guitar players. Most do not only follow what is being said in *Ghana*. They identify any reference to previous performances; whether an *ghannej* addressed someone else simultaneously (*id-doppju sens* — double meaning); they follow the musicality of the performance, the voice and guitar. They also break each verse into syllables and analyse whether the *ghannej* replied in octosyllabic verse or not. Some would also participate actively by guessing how it will rhyme. This would call for an evaluation of whether an *ghannej* is in some difficulty or attempting to corner their counterpart with a strategic composition; a well constructed verse and choice of words employed in a *Ghana* reply which is exploring the chosen subject whilst making it difficult to their counterpart to rhyme with the words used — that takes skill. As Kelinu *s-Superstar* expressed in the ethnographic documentary launched at *Ritmu 2023*, '*Ghana* is like a game of chess.' (Camilleri 2023).

At their disposal, aficionados have an extensive vocabulary with which to think and discuss, of which this is a non-exclusive list:

- *Doppju sens*: refers to double meaning when an *ghannej* performs a quatrain with a coded message intended for someone else present in the performance
- *Msellfa*: a borrowed verse or phrase, that is, the *ghannej* is repeating himself
- *Imlaqta*: a reply that rhymes but does not make sense in the context that it is being used in
- *Inrossok/Rassu*: when a performer continues to provoke or employs certain words with the intention of making it difficult for their counterpart to rhyme
- *Bravura*: An excellent performance, when one outshines another performer and overcomes challenges by performing a winning (in the eyes of aficionados) performance
- *Ghana Maħsub/ġie bil-maħsub*: when a *ghannej* performs pre-thought replies in *Ghana Spirtu Pront* or starts off with a subject that generates suspicion that it was premeditated

- *Ammożz*: when a *għannej* performs *Għana* replies in a *Spirtu Pront* session and displays a lack of understanding about the subject being discussed and/or did not understand the previous reply or a word employed (archaic) strategically in the *għanja*

This vocabulary gives an idea of the degree of attention that is being dedicated to what is said and its elaboration is a marker of the energy that goes into narrative fluency about what has been witnessed and how it links up to the history of this *għannej* and that. The continuation and distinct performative quality of one type of *għannej* is part of an ongoing discussion held between members of the community who assess and reassess each performance they experience and the numerous recordings that circulate within the community. For this is an important component present in between the multiple *Għana* sessions analysed and discussed beyond the *Għana* performances. It is such knowledge that would qualify one as among one of the intensive ones<sup>6</sup> among active participants in *Għana*. *Aficionados* interpret various details from each performance and this also contributes to the image created as an identity of each *għannej*, thereby creating an identity of the music scene as well.

It is this kind of activity that generates what we might call the hypertext of *Għana* and its resources of allusion, which occurs beyond the physical space of the performance.

The relationship between audience and performers also plays out at the immediate level. Audience members try to anticipate the rhyming word of the fourth line by the third line and some even utter it softly. If they guess, it's a satisfaction. But an *għannej* can be cunning, luring them to think he is headed one way only to catch them out, so to speak, by coming up with a surprising rhyme that works and outwits them all to the great satisfaction of the audience itself. This outwitting of the audience by the *għannej* shows that there are other challenges that are taking place apart from the obvious one with the counterpart with whom one is paired, and these exchanges can affect the course of the performance itself. Talk about

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<sup>6</sup> Performers, aficionados and *dilettanti*, who follow regularly the Saturday-Sunday morning *Għana* sessions, the *Serati*, continuously hearing the contemporary recordings of *Għana* sessions and key recordings that circulate from prominent performers from the past.

seeking a discerning crowd, it is there, it awaits organisers to engage with it. It is the *Ghana* audience. This echoes the analytic stage of listening, appreciation and understanding music:

The most complex stage of music listening is the analytic one. In this mode attention shifts to the structural elements of music, instead of the sensory or narrative ones. Listening skills at this level involve the ability to recognize the order underlying the work, and the means by which the harmony is achieved. They include the ability to evaluate critically the performance and the acoustics; to compare the piece with earlier and later pieces of the same composer, or with the work of other composers writing at the same time; and to compare the orchestra, conductor, or band with their own earlier and later performances, or with the interpretations of others. (Csikszentmihalyi 2008: 111)

*Ghana* is not a recital, meaning that the content performed is not rehearsed before and presented as scripted or scored.<sup>7</sup> *Ghana* is a dramatic performance that feeds on spontaneity.

### Conclusion: Why festivals flatten performance

To sum up the discussion so far, we might say that an *Ghana* encounter can be stretched back to before the day of the event itself, with the announcement of the *Serata* and the anticipation and discussions among aficionados. The event itself begins already coloured by the prestige of the performers, their known personal and interpersonal history and the hypertext of past encounters.

The organisation of space (discussed in an earlier chapter) is also important. No matter how casual and informal the setting of a *kazin*-club or summer *Serata* may look, care has been taken (under very specific instructions from an impresario if one is involved — lack of it can affect the outcome of the performance) to make sure the acoustics are adequate and that neither guitars nor *ghannejja* drown out the other, as has sometimes happened in the National Festival and other events.

In a *kazin*-club setting, the place for the line-up of the *ghannejja* has been chosen to minimise disturbance if people in the audience need to get up (and they will themselves observe restraint where in some venues, members serve drink and food around so that the majority will stay put through a series of signs exchanged between aficionados) and to allow the encounter to be filmed and recorded on audio devices, itself a statement of the importance

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<sup>7</sup> An aspect which has been explored in *Ritmu* 2023 edition, which further enhances this presentation-re-presentation duality.

of the event and a reminder that this event will live on in recordings, sold on the market or ‘advertised’ and shared online, discussed and dissected by the audience and others, generating dissemination, sharing knowledge, with consequence for the market of reputation and prestige.

Even in the formal *Serati*, the bar setting is also intimate with *ghannejja*, guitarists and audience members, when the latter is made up of aficionados, all largely known to each other and influencing each other’s behaviour. A guitar player might respond to what is being said in *Ghana*, and *ghannejja* speak of rising to the occasion thanks to the guitar. Concurrently the audience is also actively leaving its marks on the ongoing performances. Familiarity between performer and audience creates a friendly atmosphere where ‘both the aspirations of the audience and the various kinds of friendships were in their natural context and could easily be negotiated and transformed.’ (Ciantar 2000: 13). When seen in ‘a more macro-structural level, this brings out the good balance and dialogic relationship that exists between the instrumental and vocal components in *Ghana* singing’ (Ciantar 2019: 37). This is also reflected in ‘the political significance of certain rituals and how they integrate both the micro and macro levels of politics.’ (Fsadni 1993: 336). It is through the ‘socio-musical process’ and the ‘macro-structural level’ that aficionados shape *Ghana* together with the performers and the organisers.

Contrast this setting with the one encountered, inevitably (discounting any accidental error of organisation), at the National Festival and certain other occasions. The performers are dressed to play someone not quite themselves, an iconic “peasant” in formal attire (See Figure 37). They are presented within a context that makes it appear they are representing *Ghana* of bygone days. They are on a stage at some distance from the audience, which may be seated in rows associated with shows not an intense quasi-ritual in which the audience participates, rather than spectators. As Ciantar puts it, when the performers step on a stage presenting them to an unfamiliar audience, the stage becomes a platform from which the performer sees the audience as ‘curious “strangers”’<sup>8</sup> (Ciantar 2000: 8). Indeed, in the *Ghanafest-Ritmu*

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<sup>8</sup> It is worth pointing out that in the article *From the Bar to the Stage: Socio-musical Processes in the Maltese Spirtu Pront*, Ciantar refers to the stage at *Imnarja*. In today’s music scene, a stage is also used outside of a festival context, in the village square and other public venues. In outdoor events, a stage setup, which

setting, the audience might just be passing through, browsing first one stage, then another — when this was the case. In this context, audience members might speak to each other and be ignorant of *Ghana* etiquette and immune to any strictures. Or worse, when sound from another stage keeps interfering with the ongoing *Ghana* performance.<sup>9</sup>

Space and venues shape context in another way. For logistical reasons, the time allowed for an *Ghana* session in certain events such as festivals is usually considerably shortened. What we get is a truncated encounter. The *ghannejja*'s relative prestige might not even be known to the audience. There is certainly no hypertext to give additional meaning to what is sung. Indeed, most likely what is sung is collaborative, not agonistic, a display of *Ghana* as a genre. Without all this, *Ghana* becomes singing, not a more three-dimensional performance.

Most ironically, the more a festival makes use of a limited number of *ghannejja*, and it has sometimes just been one, the more his uniqueness is downplayed — a representative within a misrepresentation. Performance is reduced to a display. His presence, in costume, without the depth of hypertext, is there to testify to the uniqueness of a form of ethnic singing, not to the uniqueness of his personal identity as *ghannej*. A concern which is analogous to how

[...] the state recognizes autological — modern — subjects if they conform to the Western imaginary of agency, citizenship and responsibility (Preaud 2009: 57). Concurrently, the state perceives others — in this case, many Indigenous peoples, whose agency, responsibilities and humanness derive from alternative sociality and order, human and more-than-human world — as beholden to tradition, so thus not being autonomous, fully modern agents. (Slater 2020: 136)

In short, the logic and exigencies of festivals thin out the density of *Ghana* and flatten a three-dimensional performance into a two-dimensional one. The prestige of the *ghannej* is removed from the equation as is the factor of hypertext. The links between *ghannejja*, guitarists and audience are broken. The normal criteria of judgement are suspended, as *ghannejja* are putting up a united front before strangers, not engaging with each other, and the

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includes a public address system (PA) are part of the logistics the organisers cater for when organising a *Serata Ghana*.

<sup>9</sup> Experienced in more than one occasion in the formal events, some *ghannejja* also comment about it during the performance.

shortened bouts cannot give full scope to agonistic talent. They are cautious because of a widespread attitude towards *Ghana* by the general public that *Ghana* is perceived to only centre around fights and brawls.

Indigenous festivals, as Rosita Henry (2008) writes, have grown in tandem with state policies that foster the celebration of culture as a further means to govern people. For all the positive aspects of Indigenous festivals — like all arenas of Indigenous lives — they operate within a web of government and non-government agencies and corporate agendas, values and power relations. Indeed, funding and supporting such events could be regarded, in some instances, as cunning forms of governmentality. Henry (2008: 53) points out that ‘the state deceptively asserts its presence within the festivals. Indeed, agents and agencies of the state colonize the festivals, so that the festivals become prime sites for recognition of the “effects” of the state’. (Slater 2020: 140)

The contrast helps us understand why *ghannejja* feel they are not understood, and why they feel alienated from a festival whose origins lie in giving their artform a national prominence. But it also helps us understand how even the most assiduous and sophisticated of artistic directors could feel the logic of a festival left them with little to no choice, and claim that the *ghannejja* needed to be more flexible and open.

What has been observed in this study was that certain development tends to come from within the members of the community. Oftentimes, as we have seen, through a process which involves the active participation of both performers and aficionados. Each having an active role in the development process, through a collective endeavour which regulates performance according to the *Ghana* institution — an outcome of the convergences which emerge through discussion. One such example was the incorporation of the *gadanza*<sup>10</sup> at the end of a *Spiritu Pront* session. Another concerned the inclusion of the synthesiser in *Ghana tal-Fatt*<sup>11</sup>, one was accepted and adopted by many until it became conventional, leading to another type of innovation on the *gadanza* by Mikiel *is-Superstar*. The other was explored by a couple of performers and emerged not as successful, thus eventually discarded.

What this shows us is that a set of aesthetics and interests are explored through performance and discussions. Convergences are then adopted and become part of the *Ghana*

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<sup>10</sup> In my fieldwork some attributed the innovation of the *gadanza* to *Ta' Vestru*.

<sup>11</sup> A remark also observed in Zahra Sacco's documentation of Frans Baldacchino *il-Budaj* when exploring this sound in his work (2011: 85).

enterprise, where ideas and experiments are explored by performers. The outcome of which is then subject to a criterion which is shared and adopted by the majority.

With this in mind in the final concluding chapter I will turn to suggest what can be explored to improve the creative process of the festival.

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Fig.37 georgemario, 2022. A *Ghana* session being performed during the agricultural show at Villa Rundle, Gozo. [Photography] (14 August, IMG\_8715.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonën Studios).



Fig.38 georgemario, 2022. A juxtaposition of photographs of *ghannejja* seen in a profound concentration. [Graphic Image] (12 August, Concentration Juxtaposition.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ažeeğonën Studios)

## 7. Conclusion

This dissertation has made a series of simple arguments, even if the presentation of the evidence was sometimes intricate.

Chapter 1 established the gap that has emerged between a National Festival designed to showcase *Ghana* and the *ghannejja*, *kitarristi* and aficionados whose daily practices keep *Ghana* (understood largely as *Sirtu Pront*, *Ghana fil-Gholi* and *Fattijiet*) vital and capable of attracting audiences as large as 1000. Chapter 2 showed how my own comprehension of the *ghannejja*'s point of view and aesthetic required long immersion and reflexivity; without fieldwork and exchanging ideas with the community, I would have remained on the uncomprehending side of the gap. Chapter 3, provided a synopsis of the current genres of *Ghana* that the *Ghana* community practices in the current music scene.

Various aspects of the succeeding chapters show the gap has been threefold. On the question of identity, Chapter 4 showed practitioners think of *Ghana* as the proper name of a practice that is part of their contemporary lives constituting (though they would not put it this way) an autonomous social field; Chapter 5 showed the festival has been premised on seeing its identity as 'folklore', variously understood, but often enough as expressing the uniqueness of an ethnicity, not an individual performer. On the question of representation, Chapter 6 showed the *Ghana* community think of their performances and recordings as representing themselves in their time, perhaps in an idealised self; Chapter 5 also showed the Festival organisers have tended, in their different ways, to represent *Ghana* through the rhetoric of a vanished world and hence *ghannejja* are called to perform in costume, their specific profile in the *Ghana* community often effectively erased. On the question of performance, Chapter 6 showed why the community thinks *Ghana* is a complex performance, not just singing, where the musicians and audience are instrumental in shaping it; Chapter 6 also showed how this dense performance is thinned out by the exigencies of the festival.

Chapter 5 showed that the potential of the festival has been hampered by a rhetoric of existential crisis: that *Ghana* (usually implying the *ghannejja* and *kitarristi*) must change, or the

practice will die out. Chapter 4 showed that there is little basis for believing this: *Ghana* is a flourishing, if niche practice, with *ghannejja* spanning all ages from childhood to old age. Indeed, *ghannejja* and *kitarristi* had adapted to a new environment of a culture of festivalisation, organising themselves as *gajjijiet* to respond to a market need for ‘brokers’ and impresarios, with some impresarios being more successful than others in utilising their connections.

The question therefore is whether the festival can operate in a better working environment with the *ghannejja* or whether there is an irreducible cultural clash, as some informants close to festival organisation have confided to me.

Although this dissertation has been an examination of the intricate embedded social practice of *Ghana*, as understood by its major practitioners and aficionados, and a detailed explanation of why *Ghana* has often not been well served by the National Festival, it has not argued for the status quo. It is not an elaborate argument against innovation or the exploration of the creative impulse in the arts and cultural programmes. But what has emerged through this study is that the heritage of a particular cultural activity changes the dynamics of curation, especially when a festival has a particular meaning for a specific community and its representation in other domains. One needs to be sensitive and aware of this, particularly during the planning phase of the cultural activity. It is a case for a better understanding, appreciation and working relationship between organiser and community cultural projects.

The festival’s cultural activity itself generates a series of meanings with every edition. That cultural activity also becomes representative of that community — sometimes, a misrepresentation that is reinforced through decisions and communication. Audiences generate a series of interpretations from the communication issued, together with the experience itself of the festival programme. This relationship between the festival, space and the community — performers and audience — is constantly being contested and affirmed through official national cultural production.

What has emerged is that an open dialogue between the community and the organisers should be established in such cultural productions which are meant to represent an activity produced by the community members. Without dialogue — consultation and workshops throughout the year, aimed at understanding the way the *ghannejja* practise and experiment throughout the year in informal settings — the gap cannot be bridged.

We have observed how *Ghana* requires the participation of more than one performer to collaborate together in the production of an *Ghana* performance. It is a performance involving the collective endeavour where the *Ghana* community, as audience, participates actively in the discussions that ensue after every performance. The whole community engages in a continuous discussion that goes beyond the performance space generating a series of intertexts and hypertexts which form the *Ghana* institution governing the current music scene. Members of the community who embody *Ghana* evaluate the experiences of the *Serati* and the Saturday–Sunday morning *Ghana* sessions continuously. They are not just reviewing the past. They are probing the future as they seek to identify potential apprentices–performers and evaluate the careers of established and veteran performers.

A festival that wants to succeed needs to generate that kind of discussion about its own experiments. It needs to excite a search for new personalities who might be seen as possible stars of new formats or ‘fusion’ performances, of whatever kind. But for that to take place, the dialogue must be two-way so that the aesthetics and values of the community — not least, quick wit, poetic and linguistic qualities, melodic contours and musical vocal idioms — can also be accommodated.

Despite constantly being concerned with individual and collective (Maltese) identity, the *Ghana* community, including the performers do not seem to fit the idea of the twenty-first century Maltese identity that certain decision makers and entities seek. Highlighting concerns ‘[...] focusing on difference and the ‘essence’ of Maltese-ness.’ (Fsadni 1993: 336) *Ghana* then gets divorced from the community and the performers once it reaches the national domain. It becomes an object, a theme more associated with the past; hence the folkloric meaning dominates, instead of the present and the contemporary community which are at present

constantly embodying and defining it within the festival space. *Ghana* gets detached from the experience and becomes an artefact, not an art.

Dialogue therefore must be a discussion of a plurality of unique performers and personalities, not a way of finding people ready to be exhibits of a unique ethnicity. *Ghana* is about the empowerment of the individual who is allowed to perform in a framework producing a work as a collective where everyone contributes to the experience — ultimately *Ghana* gives a voice to the individual, whoever they may be, whatever background they have in terms of age, gender and social biography.

What does the contemporary *Ghana* scene require? The scene is at its peak when *gaj* leaders provide the community with a series of events and take the initiative to organise the *Serati Ghana* producing a *Ghana* calendar. This generates most interest among aficionados when the *Ghana* performers are well matched according to a series of criteria outlined in this research. The scene benefits from key individuals who document and disseminate *Ghana* session recordings online or on CDs/DVDs within the community, increasingly producing *Ghana* material culture (See Figure 39). Meanwhile, we find that national efforts to transmit *Ghana* have faded over time. This research showed how a number of radio and TV programmes hosted performers and/or recordings in respective programmes and this played a crucial role in maintaining a spotlight on the current development of *Ghana* and its dissemination across the islands. This research has shown that it had a particular audience which has been cut off. The National Festival was one of such programmes, where the festival used to be documented and eventually broadcasted on national television, ensuring further audience outreach. During my fieldwork, several research participants had expressed their concern that such programmes had all eventually discontinued — a sentiment particularly noted by female research participants. This can be an endeavour taken up by the organisers of the National Festival to restore such an outreach.

In the latest edition of *Ritmu* a series of explorations by musicians inspired by *Ghana* were explored and presented in the *GhanaLab* sessions at *Argotti Gardens*. *Ritmu* can remain a festival which explores experimentation with different artists who are inspired by any particular aspect of *Ghana*. However, I think this study has revealed that often this interest

bypasses the contemporary *ghannejja* and *kitarristi*, and the *Ghana* of the present, which as we have seen is the result of a collective endeavour through active participation of the *Ghana* community.

The organisers of national entities therefore have a certain degree of responsibility to ensure that the *Ghana* of the present is featured and represented well at the National Festival. And this is best achieved by restoring and establishing a healthy relationship with the community and maintaining an open dialogue with the *Ghana* community. *Ghana* performers tend to get separated from the audience that understands them the most — this changes the performance dynamics and creates its own representations. There is of course the possibility that *Ritmu Roots Festival* could affirm its position as a type of nostalgia festival, producing ‘a temporal, yet highly visible and in some cases inherently spectacular, display of commonly shared lifestyle preferences’ (Bennett and Woodward 2020: 14). Such a festival would explore the various genres of *Ghana* that truly have died out (like *Ghana tal-Banju* and *Ghana tad-Dballit*). It can generate and attract a set of audiences including tourists who view *Ghana* as spectacle, attracting tourists and generic Maltese audiences, where the logic of spectacle would very likely work, as it has worked with *Makkjetti*. One would still need to keep in mind that such a festival could have an impact on how *Spiritu Pront* is perceived:

There are cultural differences, but they emerge in a relational field: the reproduction of cultural differences is in a field of interdependencies, imbrications and relatedness (Preaud 2009: 119). (Slater 2020: 134)

Keeping in mind the dynamic nature of *Ghana*’s current social organisation, thought should be given to the formation of an *Ghaqda*, a formal association, for the performers within the *Ghana* community, particularly the *ghannejja* and *kitarristi*. The main purpose of such a ‘body’ would be to unite the whole scene and employ an inclusive approach towards all areas of *Ghana*. It would seek to learn from the circumstances that, years ago, led to a similar *Ghaqda* founded by Ġorġ Mifsud-Chircop to be dissolved. It would attempt to move beyond the *gajjijiet* and ensure that it represents all individual members of the *Ghana* community as well as the *gajjijiet*. Such an association could also serve as a mediator between the local and the national entities, stakeholders, interested in *Ghana*. It would function as a facilitator to establish better communication between the local level and the national level. The aim would not be to

supplant impresarios but to complement them and ensure that their market interests do not come at the expense of the range of cultural interests. It could also work towards a more inclusive approach to address any individual performers who are left out of the *gaj* system.

An association can ensure that adequate knowledge is made accessible to generate further appreciation and awareness of how *Ghana* can adapt and contribute to any particular cultural activity and/or project. An association can also take on the responsibility to organise regular meetings for the *Ghana* community. Meetings could serve as discussions which build on what takes place during and beyond the performance space. An association would provide the possibility to take action on such discussions, representing the whole community, and bypassing the need for patron-client relations, usually implied by the frequent boast of some individuals that they “spoke to the Minister”, even though such talks were often in practice fruitless.

An *Ghaqda* could also act as a contact point between organisers, such as the entity currently producing the National Festival, and the community, so that it would ensure that adequate representation of the whole community is reached — if such an objective is held by the organiser. Alternatively it can seek funding to set up a festival which would be solely dedicated to contemporary *Ghana*. An association could also lobby on behalf of the community to resume radio and television programmes featuring *Ghana*; a podcast could also be considered, building on the current dissemination in the current scene of the numerous *Ghana* recordings that are generated on a weekly basis, reaching members in the diaspora. Such an association might generate the public trust necessary to mount a national campaign to gather copies of private collections of *Ghana* recordings, photographs, and publications, to be stored in a public repository.

It could also liaise with cultural entities and respective organisers when interested in producing an activity with *Ghana* performances. An aspect which became clear through this study is perhaps a distinct approach between the organisers and the *Ghana* community regarding the process of music making. Contemporary *Ghana* is a collective enterprise, whilst an artist in the position of a decision maker on behalf of the *Ghana* community is required to shift from an individual intuitive working process into a gradual communication and an open

discussion approach to festival organisation. Therefore an alternative approach to the curation of a cultural programme could be taken in the spirit of:

[...] the work of the contemporary curator remains surprisingly close to the sense in *curare* of cultivating, growing, pruning and trying to help people and their shared contexts to thrive. (Orbrist 2015: 25)

Such an endeavour would lead to the production of a different kind of festival. One which presents a contemporary showcase of *Ghana* and its community. It would build on hypertext, enhance the interrelations that are at work on the local level, present a type of experience that builds on what the *gajijiet* do. Hence building on the regional *Serati*, produced on a national level (as scale), as well as reaching regions which are not typically exposed to *Ghana*, and exploring possible performances based on artistic content and experiments which could not perhaps be produced by the current individual impresarios — by entering into discussions with *gaj* leaders and performers and establish possible collaborations. It could thereby facilitate performances which otherwise could not be explored. In this sense the approach would be in line with Patrick Sullivan's call for:

the development of relational anthropology, which accounts for the fluidity and contestation privileged by many Indigenous peoples, and which reveals complex fields of interrelations and co-location. In this sense, he proposes that cultures should primarily be understood as affects of strategic and political relationships (Sullivan 2005: 184).

Another aspect which could be addressed through such an association would be to forge potential links between interested enthusiasts, prospective apprentices and mentors, in the spirit of a school (not necessarily centred in one place but possibly one in which staff visit localities). An association could list current performers and identify community members interested in taking on a mentorship role to individuals who are 'not born in *Ghana*'. (It could also liaise with the Government for a permanent club-hub of *Ghana*, which would include a permanent performance space).

This proposal was also made public on 23rd September 2022, during a *Serata Ghana* sponsored by the Ministry for Culture, where the *ghannej*, Mikiel Cutajar *is-Superstar*, addressed the minister directly and, in one of his renowned elongated *gadenzas*, publicly expressed the wish on behalf of the community for such a project (See Figure 40). The seven minutes, fifteen-quatrains of solo acapella improvisation included the following:



[...]  
*Għaliex ċertu-u, nies ġewwa Malta,*  
*jassoċċjawna ma l-injoranza,*  
*b'għajnejk qed tara, u qed tisma,*  
*l'Ghana kemm hu ta' mportanza-a, [...]* (Kelinu is-Superstar 2022)

[...]  
Because some people in Malta  
Associate us with ignorance  
But you can see with your own eyes and hear  
How *Ghana* is of such importance.

The sequence included sly allusions to the minister's own electoral interests and fame, but I believe the request for a 'school', however organised, does reflect a common request for collective recognition which is worth exploring. The club-school idea was also being harboured during the discussions held by *għannejja* when participating in Italy a couple of weeks earlier. The community is aware of the success, among the Maltese diaspora in Australia, of the *Ghana* clubs that have been formed. There are several Maltese clubs in Melbourne alone; one particular club in St Albans includes also a physical space which was specifically built to 'house' *Ghana* (Leber and Chesworth 2015). An informant also mentioned another club dedicated to *Ghana* in Sydney.<sup>1</sup> A physical club operating not strictly as a bar could provide a more inclusive space to participants of different gender.

All this shows, hopefully, how research can inform festival design, artistic content and experience.

A new architecture for producing and sharing knowledge about globalization could provide the foundations of a pedagogy that closes this gap and helps democratize the flow of knowledge about globalization itself. Such a pedagogy would create new forms of dialogue between academics, public intellectuals, activists, and policymakers in different societies (Appadurai 2001: 20).

I hope that in some way this present project could also contribute to such an endeavour. What this study has shown is that there is a relationship between the decisions taken at an organisation level and what the performers and audiences experience at cultural programmes produced at the national level. It has also identified a series of relationships that occur between the organisers, communication, performers, space, and audiences, that concern festival performances. It has also shown how festivals that possess a degree of

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<sup>1</sup> He is the second or third generation hailing from a family of *għannejja* who eventually has relocated to Malta from Australia. His family is also encouraging a possible fourth or fifth generation of *għannejja* to continue the practice of the tradition within family members.

heritage carry with them meaning to particular communities which identify with them, and therefore the organisers must be conscious of this when developing and planning the festival programme. The study urges organisers to be aware of the type of discourse and degree of experimentation that can be explored when festivals involve the participation of local communities, since as we have analysed through this research project, certain ideas may cause an undesired effect on the engagement and involvement of local communities.

The research project has also demonstrated a distinct approach between the local and national levels, where by design cultural activities supported by the government entities occur at the local level with the participation of politicians in some activities whilst at a national level the cultural activities are not designed to attract the local community so that it may be replaced with a more generic, artistic and touristic audiences. We have seen how this shift simultaneously transforms *Ghana* as art experienced at the local level into *Ghana* as artefact and interpretation at the national level. I hope that this project will provide further insight into the wealth of knowledge that is present within the *Ghana* community which is immersed in the contemporary *Ghana* experience and its life ways. It also aims to bridge the gap between the organisers and the *Ghana* community so that *Ghana* can be better represented at the national level and adequately supported honouring the safeguarding measures intended with an inscription of the element in the Intangible Cultural Heritage recognised by UNESCO.

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Fig.39 georgemario, 2018. Anthony il-Luzzu documenting a Sunday morning Ghana session at Żabbar Boċċi Club. [Photography] (November, 20181125\_130141.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ażeeġonèn Studios)



Fig.40 georgemario, 2022. Kelinu Cutajar is-Superstar performing an elongated Gadanza. [Photography] (23 September, IMG\_9857.JPG, Zebbug, Gozo: Ażeeġonèn Studios).

## Appendices

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## Appendix A: Formal questionnaire

### Sample Questions:

- What are your earliest memories of *Ghana*?
- What got you involved in the music scene of *Ghana*?
- Comparing then and now what positive outcomes do you see in participating at the festivals? Any negative outcomes?
- Could you describe the radio shows that you hosted over the years?
- How did you organise *ghannejja* and the *daqqaaqa*?
- Did you organise any serati or were you part of an organising committee in the past?
- If so, what was your involvement?
- How would you describe this experience, being involved in the organisation aspect of *Ghana* performances?
- This also led to *ghannejja* participating in festivals abroad, how did this come about?
- In experiencing this with *ghannejja* did you witness networking taking place between *ghannejja* and other performers at these festivals?
- Did these experiences spark any collaborations?
- Do you have any recordings of these experiences?
- Are you aware of any *ghannejja* who participated out of their own will in festivals abroad?
- What benefits did you envision in such participation?
- Do you think that these outcomes were reached?
- Why do you think this was discontinued?
- The export of *Ghana* also involved recordings of *Ghana* in professional studios abroad and here you were also involved, as a facilitator I would say. Is this correct?
- Could you describe this experience?
- In your opinion how did *ghannejja* feel during the performances taking place at professional studios?
- Now that *Ghana* is recognised by UNESCO as an intangible heritage, how do you think that this would benefit *Ghana* and *ghannejja*?
- In your opinion what needs to be done in *Ghana*, if anything by whom and how?
- Why?

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## Appendix B: Structured interview English

Sample Structured Interview

georgemario

### ***Ghanafest* and contemporary *Ghannejja*: The dialectics of influence**

Questions:

- In your opinion what is tradition?
- What does folklore mean to you?
- How would you identify with Ghana?
- Describe your activity in the Ghana music scene?
- For how long have you been involved in the Ghana music scene?
- Do you follow the activities of the scene?
- If so, do you attend regularly, occasionally, rarely.
- What type of Ghana sessions do you attend to?
- Do you encourage others to join in the scene?
- Did you attend Ghanafest before?
- Do you attend every edition of the festival?
- Could you elaborate on your answer?
- Have you ever performed at the festival?
- Could you describe your experience at the festival?
- Discuss your experience
- What does the festival mean to you?
- Are there any key features at the festival that have a particular significance to you?
- What is your overview of Ghana in today's society?
- How do you think that Maltese society perceives Ghana today?
- Did the pandemic affect the Ghana music scene in any way?

Do you have any questions about our discussion?

Thank you very much for your time,

Please note that an identical version of the contents stated above will also be provided in Maltese to all Maltese speaking participants.

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## Appendix C: Information and recruitment letter Maltese

Ittra ta' informazzjoni u reklutaġġ

georgemario

### L-Ghanafest u l-Ghannejja kontemporanji: Id-djalettika tal-influwenza

Data:.....

Għażiż/a Sinjur/Sinjura,

Jiena George Mario Attard, student mal-Università ta' Malta, u fil-preżent qed nagħmel Master of Arts fl-Istudji tal-Mediterran, fi hdan l-Istitut tal-Mediterran. Bhalissa qed inwettaq riċerka ta' studju għat-teżi tiegħi bit-titlu ta' *L-Ghanafest u l-Ghannejja kontemporanji: Id-djalettika tal-influwenza*; din qed tiġi mharsa minn żewġ superviżuri, Mr Ranier Fsadni u Dr Philip Ciantar. Din l-ittra hija stedina biex tipparteċipa f'dan l-istudju. Hawn isfel għandek issib informazzjoni dwar l-istudju u dwar fiex ser ikun jikkonsisti l-involvement tiegħek, jekk inti tilqa l-istedina biex tiehu sehem.

L-għan ta' dan l-istudju huwa li ssir riċerka dwar it-tradizzjoni tal-mużika lokali, l-Ghana, u l-festival nazzjonali, l-Ghanafest. Il-parteċipazzjoni tiegħek f'dan l-istudju ser tgħin biex tikkontribwixxi għal għarfien aħjar dwar l-Ghana fis-soċjetà kontemporanja u it-tradizzjoni orali tal-passat, mistura fil-memorja kollettiva tal-komunità tagħna. Kwalunkwe *data* miġbura minn din ir-riċerka ser tintuża biss għall-iskopijiet ta' dan l-istudju.

Jekk tagħzel li tipparteċipa, ser niddiskutu flimkien l-esperjenza tiegħek tal-festival nazzjonali, is-Serati u s-sessjonijiet tal-Ghana fl-irhula, u s-sugġett tal-Ghana innifsu (l-aspetti lingwistiċi, soċjali, storiċi u mużikali fost oħrajn). Id-diskussjoni tista' ssir f'forma każwali kif ukoll f'intervista strutturata jew parzjalment strutturata. Mistoqsijiet ewlenin ser jiġu maqsuma u diskussi kif xieraq.

Id-*data* miġbura ser tiġi pprocessata kif indikat fil-formola ta' kunsens. Il-parteċipazzjoni f'dan l-istudju hija fuq bażi totalment volontarja; fi kliem ieħor, inti liberu li taċċetta jew li tirrifjuta li tipparteċipa, mingħajr ma jkollok bżonn tagħti raġuni. Inti wkoll liberu li tirtira l-parteċipazzjoni tiegħek mill-istudju fi kwalunkwe mument, mingħajr ma jkollok bżonn tipprovdi xi spjegazzjoni u mingħajr riperkussjonijiet negattivi għalik. Jekk tagħzel li tieqaf, kwalunkwe *data* miġbura mill-intervista tiegħek ser tiġi

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Ittra ta' informazzjoni u reklutaġġ

georgemario

maħżuna kif indikat fil-formola ta' kunsens. Jekk tagħżel li tipparteċipa, jekk jogħġbok kun af li m'hemm l-ebda benefiċċju dirett għalik. Il-parteċipazzjoni tiegħek ma tinvolvi l-ebda riskju magħruf jew antiċipat.

Jekk jogħġbok kun af li, bhala parteċipant, għandek id-dritt taht ir-Regolament Ġenerali dwar il-Protezzjoni tad-Data (GDPR) u l-leġiżlazzjoni nazzjonali, li taċċessa, tirrettifika, u fejn applikabbli, titlob li d-data li tikkonċerna lilek tiġi mhassra. Id-data kollha miġbura ser tiġi maħżuna f'forma anonimizzata wara l-pubblikazzjoni tar-riżultati fi żmien sentejn mit-tlestija ta' dan l-istudju. Qed tiġi pprovduta kopja ta' din il-karta ta' informazzjoni lilek biex iżżommha u għal kwalunkwe referenza li jkollok bżonn tagħmel fil-futur.

Grazzi tal-ħin u l-konsiderazzjoni tiegħek. Jekk ikollok xi mistoqsijiet jew thassib, jekk jogħġbok tiddejjaqx tikkuntattjani permezz ta' email fuq george-mario.attard.19@um.edu.mt; tista' wkoll tikkuntattja lis-superviżur tiegħi fuq il-mobile: +356 7963 7112 jew permezz ta' email: ranier.fsadni@um.edu.mt

Grazzi u tisljiet,

*Student:* George Mario Attard  
george-mario.attard.19@um.edu.mt  
+356 7906 8172

*Superviżur Principali:* Mr Ranier Fsadni  
ranier.fsadni@um.edu.mt  
+356 7963 7112

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## Appendix D: Information and recruitment letter English

Information and recruitment letter

georgemario

### ***Ghanafest and contemporary Ghannejja: The dialectics of influence***

Date:.....

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is George Mario Attard and I am a student at the University of Malta, presently reading for a Master of Arts in Mediterranean Studies. I am presently conducting a research study for my thesis titled *Ghanafest and contemporary Ghannejja: The dialectics of influence*; this is being supervised by Mr Ranier Fsadni and Dr Philip Cianter. This letter is an invitation to participate in this study. Below you will find information about the study and about what your involvement would entail, should you decide to take part.

The aim of this study is to research about the local music tradition Ghana and the national festival, Ghanafest. Your participation in this study would help contribute to a better understanding of Ghana in contemporary society. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for the purposes of this study.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to discuss your experience at the festival and other Ghana sessions. The discussion can take place in a casual format as well as in a semi-structured or structured interview. Key questions will be shared and discussed accordingly.

Data collected will be processed as indicated in the consent form. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without the need to give any reason. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from your interview will be stored as indicated in the consent form. If you choose to participate, please note that there are no direct benefits to you whatsoever. Your participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.

Please note also that, as a participant, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation to access, rectify and where applicable

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Information and recruitment letter

georgemario

ask for the data concerning you to be erased. All data collected will be stored in an anonymised form following publication of results within two years of completion of the study. A copy of this information sheet is being provided for you to keep and for any future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail [george-mario.attard.19@um.edu.mt](mailto:george-mario.attard.19@um.edu.mt); you can also contact my supervisor over the phone: +356 7963 7112 or via email: [ranier.fsadni@um.edu.mt](mailto:ranier.fsadni@um.edu.mt)

Sincerely,

*Student:* George Mario Attard  
[george-mario.attard.19@um.edu.mt](mailto:george-mario.attard.19@um.edu.mt)  
+356 7906 8172

*Principal Supervisor:* Mr Ranier Fsadni  
[ranier.fsadni@um.edu.mt](mailto:ranier.fsadni@um.edu.mt)  
+356 7963 7112

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## Appendix E: Sample email



George Mario Attard &lt;george-mario.attard.19@um.edu.mt&gt;

## Ittra ta' informazzjoni u reklutaġġ: L-Ghanafest u I-Għannejja kontemporanji: Id-djalettika tal-influwenza. GMAttard

3 messages

George Mario Attard <george-mario.attard.19@um.edu.mt>  
To: info@rubenzahra.com

9 May 2022 at 17:14

Għażiż Mr Zahra,

Jiena George Mario Attard, student mal-Università ta' Malta, u fil-prezent qed nagħmel Master of Arts fl-Istudji tal-Mediterran, fi hdan l-Istitut tal-Mediterran. Bħalissa qed inwettagħ riċerka ta' studju għat-teżi tiegħi bit-titlu ta' *L-Ghanafest u I-Għannejja kontemporanji: Id-djalettika tal-influwenza*; din qed tiġi mharsa minn Żewġ superviżuri, Mr Ranier Fsadni u Dr Philip Ciantar. Din l-ittra hija stedina biex tipparteċipa f'dan l-istudju. Hawn isfel għandek isib informazzjoni dwar l-istudju u dwar feix ser ikun jikkonsisti l-involvement tiegħek, jekk inti tilqa l-istedina biex tiegħu sehem.

L-għan ta' dan l-istudju huwa li ssir riċerka dwar it-tradizzjoni tal-mużika lokali, I-Għana, u l-festival nazzjonali, I-Ghanafest. Il-partecipazzjoni tiegħek f'dan l-istudju ser tgħin biex tikkontribwixxi għal għarfien aħjar dwar I-Għana fis-socjetà kontemporanja u it-tradizzjoni orali tal-passat, mistura fil-memorja kollettiva tal-komunità tagħna. Kwalunkwe *data* miġbura minn din ir-riċerka ser tintuża biss għall-iskopijiet ta' dan l-istudju.

Jekk tagħzel li tipparteċipa, ser niddiskutu flimkien l-esperjenza tiegħek tal-festival nazzjonali, is-Serati u s-sessjonijiet tal-Għana fir-riħula, u s-suġġett tal-Għana innifsu (l-aspetti lingwistiċi, soċjali, storiċi u mużikali fost oħrajn). Id-diskussjoni tista' ssir f'forma każwali kif ukoll f'intervista strutturata jew parzjalment strutturata. Mistoqsijiet ewlenin ser jiġu maqsuma u diskussi kif xieraq.

Id-*data* miġbura ser tiġi pprocessata kif indikat fil-formola ta' kunsens. Il-partecipazzjoni f'dan l-istudju hija fuq bażi totalment volontarja; fi kliem ieħor, inti liberu li taċċetta jew li tirrifjuta li tipparteċipa, mingħajr ma jkollok bżonn tagħti raġuni. Inti wkoll liberu li tirtira l-partecipazzjoni tiegħek mill-istudju fi kwalunkwe mument, mingħajr ma jkollok bżonn tipprovi xi spjegazzjoni u mingħajr riperkussjonijiet negattivi għalik. Jekk tagħzel li tieqaf, kwalunkwe *data* miġbura mill-intervista tiegħek ser tiġi maħżuna kif indikat fil-formola ta' kunsens. Jekk tagħzel li tipparteċipa, jekk jogħġbok kun af li m'hemm l-ebda benefiċċju dirett għalik. Il-partecipazzjoni tiegħek ma tinvolvi l-ebda riskju magħruf jew antiċipat.

Jekk jogħġbok kun af li, bħala partecipant, għandek id-dritt taħt ir-Regolament Ġenerali dwar il-Protezzjoni tad-*Data* (GDPR) u l-leġiżlazzjoni nazzjonali, li taċċessa, tirrettifika, u fejn applikabbli, titlob li d-*data* li tikkonċerna lilek tiġi mhassra. Id-*data* kollha miġbura ser tiġi maħżuna f'forma anonimizzata wara l-pubblikazzjoni tar-riżultati fi żmien sentejn mit-tlestija ta' dan l-istudju. Qed tiġi pprovduta kopja ta' din il-karta ta' informazzjoni lilek biex iżżommha u għal kwalunkwe referenza li jkollok bżonn tagħmel fil-futur.

Grazzi tal-ħin u l-konsiderazzjoni tiegħek. Jekk ikollok xi mistoqsijiet jew tħassib, jekk jogħġbok tiddejjaqx tikkuntattjani permezz ta' email fuq [george-mario.attard.19@um.edu.mt](mailto:george-mario.attard.19@um.edu.mt); tista' wkoll tikkuntattja lis-superviżur tiegħi fuq il-mobile: +356 7963 7112 jew permezz ta' email: [ranier.fsadni@um.edu.mt](mailto:ranier.fsadni@um.edu.mt)

Grazzi u tisljiet,



George Mario Attard  
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Superviżur Prinċipali: Mr Ranier Fsadni  
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## Appendix F: Consent Form Adults Maltese

Formoli ta' Kunsens (parteċipazzjonijiet mill-adulti)

georgemario

### L-Ghanafest u l-Ghannejja kontemporanji: Id-djalettika tal-influwenza

Jien, is-sottoskritt, nagħti l-kunsens tiegħi biex niehu sehem fl-istudju mwettaq minn George Mario Attard. Din il-formola ta' kunsens tispjega t-termini tal-parteċipazzjoni tiegħi f'dan l-istudju ta' riċerka.

1. Jien ngħatajt informazzjoni bil-miktub u/jew bil-fomm dwar l-iskop ta' dan l-istudju. Kelli l-opportunità li nista' xi mistoqsijiet u kwalunkwe mistoqsijiet li kelli ngħatajt risposta għalihom b'mod sħiħ u sodisfaċenti għalija.
2. Nifhem ukoll li jien liberu li naċċetta li nipparteċipa, jew li nirrifjuta jew inwaqqaf il-parteċipazzjoni tiegħi fi kwalunkwe mument mingħajr ma nagħti r-raġuni u mingħajr ebda konsegwenza. Jekk nagħzel li nipparteċipa, nista' nagħzel li nirrifjuta li nwieġeb xi mistoqsijiet li jsiruli. Fil-każ li nagħzel li nirtira l-parteċipazzjoni tiegħi mill-istudju, kwalunke *data* miġbura mingħandi ser tinhażen b'mod anonimu.
3. Nifhem li ġejt mistieden li nipparteċipa f'intervista li matulha r-riċerkatur ser jagħmel mistoqsijiet sabiex jesplora n-natura tal-festival lokali Ghanafest. Jien konxju li l-intervista ser tiehu madwar sittin minuta. Nifhem li l-intervista ser issir f'post u f'hin li huma konvenjenti għalija.
4. Nifhem li l-parteċipazzjoni tiegħi ma tinvolvi l-ebda riskju magħruf jew antiċipat.
5. Nifhem li m'hemm l-ebda benefiċċju dirett għalija jekk nipparteċipa f'dan l-istudju. Nifhem ukoll li din ir-riċerka tista' tibbenefika persuni oħra fil-futur li jipparteċipaw fil-festival u/jew jesperjenzawh.
6. Nifhem li taht ir-Regolament Ġenerali dwar il-Protezzjoni tad-*Data* (GDPR) u l-leġiżlazzjoni nazzjonali, jien għandi d-dritt li naċċessa, nirrettifika, u fejn applikabbli, nitlob li d-*data* li tikkonċerna lili tiġi mħassra.
7. Nifhem li d-*data* kollha miġbura ser tiġi maħzuna f'forma anonimizzata mat-tlestija tal-istudju u wara l-pubblikazzjoni tar-riżultati fi żmien sentejn mill-pubblikazzjoni ta' dan l-istudju.
8. Jien ġejt ipprovdut b'kopja tal-ittra tal-informazzjoni u nifhem li ser ningħata wkoll kopja ta' din il-formola ta' kunsens.
9. Jien konxju li, jekk nagħti l-kunsens tiegħi, din l-intervista ser tiġi rrekordjata permezz tal-awdjo u ser tinqaleb f'forma miktuba hekk kif ġiet irrekordjata (traskritta).
10. Jien konxju li, jekk nagħti l-kunsens tiegħi, siltiet mill-intervista tiegħi jistgħu jiġu riprodotti f'dawn il-forom, jew f'forma anonimizzata, jew bl-użu ta' pseudonimu.

Formoli ta' Kunsens (partecipazzjonijiet mill-adulti)

georgemario

11. Jien konxju li d-*data* tiegħi ser tiġi psewdomizzata, jiġifieri l-identità tiegħi mhux ser tiġi mnizzla fuq it-traskrizzjonijiet jew in-noti mill-intervista tiegħi, iżda minflok, ser jiġi assenjat kodiċi. Il-kodiċi li jorbtu d-*data* tiegħi mal-identità tiegħi ser jiġu maħżuna b'mod sikur u separat mid-*data*, u r-riċerkatur biss ser ikollu aċċess għal din l-informazzjoni. Kwalunkwe materjal li jidentifikani bhala partecipant f'dan l-istudju ser jiġi maħżun b'mod sikur għad-durata tal-istudju.
12. Jien konxju li l-identità u l-informazzjoni personali tiegħi mhux ser jiġi żvelati f'xi pubblikazzjonijiet, rapporti jew preżentazzjonijiet li joħroġu minn din ir-riċerka, hlief jekk jien nitlob mod iehor.
13. Jien konxju li nista' nitlob li ningħata l-opportunità li nirvedi siltiet tat-traskrizzjoni tal-intervista tiegħi qabel ma r-riżultati tal-istudju jiġu ppubblikati. Jien konxju wkoll li nista' nitlob li jsiru xi bidliet, jekk inħoss li dan ikun neċessarju.

Jien qrajt u fhimt id-dikjarazzjonijiet t'hawn fuq u naqbel li nipparteċipa f'dan l-istudju.

*Isem tal-partecipant:* .....

*Firma:* .....

*Data:* .....

*Student:* George Mario Attard  
 george-mario.attard.19@um.edu.mt  
 +356 7906 8172

*Superviżur Principali* Mr Ranier Fsadni  
 ranier.fsadni@um.edu.mt  
 +356 7963 7112

## Appendix G: Consent Form Adults English

Consent Forms (adult participations)

georgemario

### ***Ghanafest and contemporary Ghannejja: The dialectics of influence***

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the study conducted by George Mario Attard. This consent form specifies the terms of my participation in this research study.

1. I have been given written and/or verbal information about the purpose of the study; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions that I had were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
2. I also understand that I am free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty. Should I choose to participate, I may choose to decline to answer any questions asked. In the event that I choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from me will be stored anonymously.
3. I understand that I have been invited to participate in an interview in which the researcher will ask questions to explore the nature of the local festival: Ghanafest. I am aware that the interview will take approximately sixty minutes. I understand that the interview is to be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me.
4. I understand that my participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.
5. I understand that there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study. I also understand that this research may benefit others in the future, participating and/or experiencing the festival.
6. I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.
7. I understand that all data collected will be stored in an anonymised form on completion of the study and following publication of results within two years of publishing this study.
8. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.
9. I am aware that, if I give my consent, this interview will be audio recorded and converted to text as it has been recorded (transcribed).
10. I am aware that, if I give my consent, extracts from my interview may be reproduced in these outputs, either in anonymous form, or using a pseudonym.
11. I am aware that my data will be pseudonymised; i.e., my identity will not be noted on transcripts or notes from my interview, but instead, a code will be assigned. The codes that link my data to my identity will be stored securely and separately from the data,

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and only the researcher will have access to this information. Any material that identifies me as a participant in this study will be stored securely for the duration of the study.

- 12. I am aware that my identity and personal information will not be revealed in any publications, reports or presentations arising from this research unless I myself request otherwise.
- 13. I am aware that I may ask to be given the opportunity to review relevant extracts of the transcript of my interview, before the results of the study are published. I am also aware that I may ask for changes to be made, if I consider this to be necessary.

I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

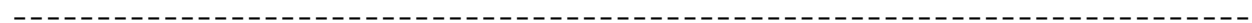
Name of participant: .....

Signature: .....

Date: .....

Student: George Mario Attard  
 george-mario.attard.19@um.edu.mt  
 +356 7906 8172

Principal Supervisor: Mr Ranier Fsadni  
 ranier.fsadni@um.edu.mt  
 +356 7963 7112





## Appendix H: Assent Form minors Maltese

Assent Forms (minors)

georgemario

### **Ghanafest and contemporary Ghannejja: The dialectics of influence**

Jiena George Mario Attard, qiegħed nagħmel *ricerca* dwar l-Ghana fi *ħdan l-Istitut tal-Mediterran ġewwa l-Università ta' Malta*. Peress li *ġieli smajtek tghanni fil-passat, nixtieq nistaqsik xi mistoqsijiet dwar l-esperjenza tiegħek fl-Ghana*.

Għalhekk qiegħed nistaqsik jekk tixtieqx li tipparteċipa f'dan l-istudju li qiegħed nagħmel. Bħala parti minn dan l-istudju jiena ser nkun qiegħed nitkellem ma' ghannejja u kitarristi oħrajn wkoll sabiex nitgħallem aktar dwar l-Ghana tal-preżent.

Inti liberu u tista tirrifjuta li tipparteċipa f'dan l-istudju. Jekk taċċetta u tagħtini *permess*, ser nkun qed insaqsik u nitkellem miegħek dwar l-Ghana. Jekk jkun hemm xi mistoqsija li ma tkunx komdu twieġeb, tista tghidli u naqbżuha. Tista wkoll tieqaf x'hin trid minn dan l-istudju.

Mhux ser jkun hemm l-ebda *konsegwenza għat-tweġibiet jew deċiżżjonijiet tiegħek*. Ma hemm l-ebda *benefiċċju dirett lejki talli tkun ipparteċipajt f'dan l-istudju*. Dan l-istudju jista' jibbenefika lil kull min hu *nteressat jew attiv fl-Ghana iktar il-quddiem*. Jiġifieri, wara li dan l-istudju jiġi ppublikat madwar *sena oħra*.

L-*informazzjoni* li jgħogħbok taqşam miegħi ser tkun *dokumentata b'mod privat*. Dan jiġifieri li fl-istudju mhux ser jkun hemm *referenza għalik, għaliex id-dokumenti bl-informazzjoni ser jkunu protetti u ismek mibdul għal wieħed fittizju*. Jekk tghid xi *haġa fejn tkun trid li tibqa mniżżel li tkun inti li għidtieli, trid tindikali speċifikament int u jien nosserva ix-xewqa tiegħek*.

Jekk tagħtini *kunsens nista' nirrekordja l-awdjo għal fini ta' analiżi mas-superjuri tiegħi fi' ħdan l-Istitut tal-Mediterran*. Dan jiġifieri li ma tistax tiġi ppublikata jew *mxandra fil-futur jekk mhux bil-kunsens tiegħek aktar il-quddiem*.

Dan l-istudju qed isir taħt id-*direzzjoni ta' Mr Ranier Esadni*. Jekk jkollok xi *mistoqsijiet jew tkun tixtieq xi klarifikazzjoni, hawn il-kuntatt tiegħu hawn taħt*. Din il-*kopja hija tiegħek u jekk tkun trid tikkuntajani tista tiktibli fuq l-indirizz eletroniku ta' hawn taħt*.

Dan kollu għadu kif nqara u *gie spjegat quddiem* .....  
*fil-preżenza tal-kustodja ta'* .....

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Assent Forms (minors)

georgemario

*Isem tal-minuri:* .....  
*Isem tal-kustodju:* .....  
*Firem:* .....  
*Data:* .....

*Student:* George Mario Attard  
george-mario.attard.19@um.edu.mt  
+356 7906 8172

*Superviżjoni Principali:* Mr Ranier Fsadni  
ranier.fsadni@um.edu.mt  
+356 7963 7112

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## Appendix I: Assent Form minors English

Consent Forms (legal guardians)

georgemario

### ***Ghanafest* and contemporary *Ghannejja*: The dialectics of influence**

I, the undersigned, give consent for the legal minor to take part in the study conducted by George Mario Attard. This consent form specifies the terms of participation in this research study.

1. As the legal guardian I have been given written and/or verbal information about the purpose of the study; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions that I had were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
2. I also understand that we are free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty. Should participation take place, I may choose to decline for the minor to answer any questions asked. In the event that I choose to terminate the participation from the study, any data collected will be stored anonymously.
3. I understand that we have been invited to participate in an interview in which the researcher will ask questions to explore the nature of the local festival: *Ghanafest* directly to the minor. I am aware that the interview will take approximately sixty minutes. I understand that the interview is to be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for us.
4. I understand that the minor's participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.
5. I understand that there are no direct benefits to us from participating in this study. I also understand that this research may benefit others in the future, participating and/or experiencing the festival.
6. I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning the minor to be erased.
7. I understand that all data collected will be stored in an anonymised form on completion of the study and following publication of results within two years of publishing this study.
8. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.
9. I am aware that, if consent is given, this interview will be audio recorded and converted to text as it has been recorded (transcribed).

- 10. I am aware that, if I give my consent, extracts from this interview may be reproduced in these outputs, either in anonymous form, or using a pseudonym.
- 11. I am aware that the data will be pseudonymised; i.e., the identity of the minor will not be noted on transcripts or notes from my interview, but instead, a code will be assigned. The codes that link my data to my identity will be stored securely and separately from the data, and only the researcher will have access to this information. Any material that identifies me as a participant in this study will be stored securely for the duration of the study.
- 12. I am aware that the identity of the minor and any personal information will not be revealed in any publications, reports or presentations arising from this research unless I myself request otherwise.
- 13. I am aware that I may ask to be given the opportunity to review relevant extracts of the transcript of my interview, before the results of the study are published. I am also aware that I may ask for changes to be made, if I consider this to be necessary.

I have read and understood the above statements and agree that the legal minor can participate in this study.

*Name of legal guardian:* .....

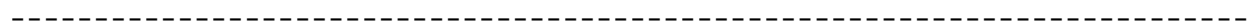
*Name of legal minor:* .....

*Signature of legal guardian:* .....

*Date:* .....

*Student:* George Mario Attard  
 george-mario.attard.19@um.edu.mt  
 +356 7906 8172

*Principal Supervisor:* Mr Ranier Fsadni  
 ranier.fsadni@um.edu.mt  
 +356 7963 7112



## **Appendix J: List of Research Participants**

The list shows the identity of the research participants that were engaged during the fieldwork of this research project. The document also shows the specialisation of each individual and the type of engagement. Even though all of the research participants expressed their intent that they were quite comfortable in being quoted directly by their proper names, in order to safeguard their identity from any unforeseen circumstance I have made use of anonymity throughout the dissertation.

<b>Name of Research Participant</b>	<b>Expertise</b>	<b>Aficionado / Expert / Performer</b>	<b>Type of Participation</b>
Adrian Camilleri	Ethnographer-Artist	Expert	Semi-Formal
Aiken Gatt	<i>Għannej</i>	Performer	Formal
Andrew Alamango	Artistic Director	Expert	Semi-Formal
Anglu Theuma <i>il-Kina</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	Performer	Semi-Formal
Anthony Cutajar <i>il-Pikolin</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	Performer	Formal
Anthony Sammu <i>il-Luzzu</i>	Aficionado	Aficionado	Formal
Brett Pyper	Ethnomusicologist	Expert	Formal
Carl Gatt <i>il-Poj</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	Performer	Formal
Carmel Cassar <i>ta' Bakkar</i>	Aficionado	Aficionado	Formal
Caterina Mercieca	Ghana enthusiast	Aficionado	Formal
Charles Busuttil	String instrument tuner	Expert	Formal
Charles Coleiro	Folklorist	Expert	Formal
Charlie Mangion <i>iz-Żubina</i>	Aficionado-Impresario	Aficionado	Formal
Christian <i>Tal-Merill</i>	Organiser	Expert	Semi-Formal
Colin Attard	Conductor - Composer	Expert	Semi-Formal
Dena Davida	Curator-Researcher	Expert	Formal
Emanuel Ellul <i>il-Begġig</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & Impresario	Performer	Formal
Frans Azzopardi <i>iz-Żott</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	Performer	Semi-Formal
Frans Cassar <i>il-Bloq</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	Performer	Semi-Formal
Fredu Abela <i>iz-Żejtuni</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	Performer	Formal
Ġanni	Aficionado & Organiser	Aficionado	Semi-Formal
Ganni Spiteri <i>I-Pisklu</i>	Aficionado	Aficionado	Formal
Ġuzeppi Refalo	Compère	Expert	Semi-Formal
Guzeppi Spagnol <i>il-Kelba</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	Performer	Formal
<i>Il-Klallu</i>	Organiser	Expert	Semi-Formal
<i>Il-Lagoga</i>	Aficionado	Aficionado	Semi-Formal
Il-Mara ta' Bakkar	Ghana enthusiast	Aficionado	Formal
Il-Mara tal-Pisklu	Aficionado	Aficionado	Formal
Ion Mifsud <i>ta' Vestru</i>	Prim Kitarrist	Performer	Semi-Formal
Jason Seguna <i>In-Nekus</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	Performer	Semi-Formal
Jesmond <i>il-Kalora</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	Performer	Semi-Formal
Joe Attard Tabone	Folklorist - Researcher	Expert	Formal
Joe Gauci <i>il-Mulett</i>	Aficionado	Aficionado	Semi-Formal
John Mercieca <i>Sufa</i>	Barber	Expert	Semi-Formal
Johnny Saliba <i>ta' Birzebbugia</i>	<i>Prim Kitarrist</i>	Performer	Semi-Formal
JohnPaul Azzopardi	Artist	Expert	Semi-Formal
Joseph Attard	Ghana Enthusiast	Aficionado	Semi-Formal

Name of Research Participant	Expertise	Aficionado / Expert / Performer	Type of Participation
Joseph Bajada <i>ir-Regett</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & organiser	Aficionado	Formal
Joseph Calleja	Artistic Director	Expert	Semi-Formal
Joseph Camilleri	Musician	Expert	Semi-Formal
Joseph Debrincat	Conductor - Composer	Expert	Semi-Formal
Justin Galea	Musician	Expert	Semi-Formal
Kalċidon Vella <i>id-Danny</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	Performer	Semi-Formal
Kalċidon Vella <i>ta' Mustacċa</i>	Prim Kitarrist	Performer	Semi-Formal
Karen Caruana	Aficionado	Aficionado	Semi-Formal
Kurt Carabott	Ghana enthusiast	Aficionado	Semi-Formal
Liam Gatt <i>tas-Samba</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	Performer	Formal
Luis Coradazzi	Artistic Director	Expert	Formal
Luke Camilleri	Musician	Expert	Formal
Mamante Mercieca	Aficionado	Aficionado	Semi-Formal
Maria Sammut	Architect-Artist	Expert	Semi-Formal
Mario Gravina	<i>Għannej</i>	Performer	Formal
Mario <i>L-Bubajs</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & Organiser	Performer	Formal
Marku <i>il-Lager</i>	Aficionado	Aficionado	Semi-Formal
Mary Dolores Attard	Ghana Enthusiast	Aficionado	Semi-Formal
Michael Refalo	Musician	Expert	Semi-Formal
Mikiel Cumbo <i>Lizgej</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	Performer	Semi-Formal
Noel Damato	Organiser	Expert	Formal
Norma Camilleri	Speech Language Pathologist	Expert	Formal
Pietru Pawl Farrugia	Local Instrument Builder	Expert	Formal
Robyn Archer	Artistic Director-Artist	Expert	Formal
Roselle Pineda	Curator-Researcher	Expert	Formal
Ruben Zahra	Artistic Director & Composer	Expert	Formal
Spiru Cauchi	Musician	Expert	Formal
Steve Borg	Folklorist	Expert	Formal
<i>Tal-Bigilla</i>	Aficionado & <i>Dilettant</i>	Aficionado	Semi-Formal
Tan-Nexos	Aficionado-Supplier	Aficionado-Expert	Semi-Formal
<i>Taż-Żwiemel</i>	Aficionado	Aficionado	Semi-Formal
Victor Galea	Folklorist - Researcher	Expert	Formal
Vince Carabott <i>il-Bukku</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & <i>Kitarrist</i>	Performer	Formal
Vince Cumbo <i>Lizgej</i>	Impresario	Aficionado	Semi-Formal
Vince Cumbo <i>Lizgej</i>	Impresario	Aficionado	Semi-Formal
William Camilleri	<i>Kitarrist</i>	Performer	Formal
Willie Saliba <i>tal-Black Sorrows</i>	Kitarrist	Performer	Semi-Formal

[Appendices Page](#)

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**Appendix K: List of Discussions held with Research Participants**

The list outlines the type of participation, whether a formal and extensive discussion was conducted which includes signed consent forms or whether a discussion was held in a semi-formal environment. Every participant was fully aware that I was conducting research and that their privacy would be protected. In some cases the informal conversations led to more comprehensive discussions. In every instance and mode of engagement whilst conducting fieldwork I have maintained full ethical and transparency regarding the nature of my research at the University of Malta.



Maltese *Ghana*: Folksinging, Representation and Performance

Date	Research Participant	Role Description	Venue	Location	Type of Meeting
2021.01.17	Emanuel Ellul <i>il-Begig</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & Impresario	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2021.01.18	Mikiel Cumbo <i>Liżgej</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2021.01.27	Jesmond <i>il-Kalora</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2021.01.27	Mario <i>il-Bubajs</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & Organiser	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2021.01.27	Johnny Saliba ta' Birzebbugia	<i>Prim Kitarrist</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2021.09.24	Andrew Alamango	Musician	Coffee Shop	Valletta	Informal discussion after the screening of the documentary <i>Bidla</i>
2021.11.04	Charles Coleiro	Folklorist	Coffee Shop	Gwardamangia, Pieta	Discussion with signed documents
2021.11.05	Luke Camilleri	Musician	PBS Archives	Gwardamangia, Pieta	Discussion with signed documents
2022.01.18	Ganni I-Pisklu	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.01.27	Mario <i>L-Bubajs</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & Organiser	NA	NA	Phone discussion with signed documents
2022.01.27	Jesmond <i>il-Kalora</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Phone discussion without signed documents
2022.01.27	Johnny Saliba ta' Birzebbugia	<i>Prim Kitarrist</i>	NA	NA	Phone discussion without signed documents
2022.01.31	Emanuel Ellul <i>il-Begig</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & Impresario	Workplace	Mrieħel	Discussion with signed documents
2022.02.03	Anthony Cutajar <i>il-Pikolin</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.03.14	Mario <i>il-Bubajs</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & Organiser	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.03.14	<i>il-Klallu</i>	Organiser	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.03.28	Mamante	Aficionado	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.03.28	Mario <i>il-Bubajs</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & Organiser	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.03.29	Mario <i>L-Bubajs</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & Organiser	Workplace	Kerċem	Discussion with signed documents
2022.03.29	Mamante	Aficionado	Mandraġġ	Rabat, Ghawdex	Informal discussion without signed documents
2022.04.04	Anthony Sammu <i>il-Luzzu</i>	Aficionado	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.04.04	Fredu Abela <i>iż-Żejtuni</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.04.04	Mario Gravina	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.04.04	Johnny Saliba ta' Birzebbugia	<i>Prim Kitarrist</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.04.04	Fredu Abela <i>iż-Żejtuni</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	Każin tal-Banda Żejtun	Żejtun	Discussion with signed documents
2022.04.06	Mary Dolores Attard	Aficionado	NA	NA	
2022.04.11	<i>il-Klallu</i>	Organiser	Pjazza San Gorg	Rabat, Ghawdex	Informal discussion without signed documents
2022.04.12	Omm <i>il-Mirru</i>	Aficionado	Għajn tal-Fasselin	Fontana, it-Triq tal-Għajn	Discussion with signed documents
2022.04.12	Spiru Cauchi	Musician	NA	NA	Phone discussion with signed documents
2022.04.12	Jesmond <i>il-Kalora</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.04.12	Joseph Bajada <i>ir-Regett</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & organiser	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.04.12	Pietru Pawl Farrugia	Local Instrument Builder	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.04.13	Pietru Pawl Farrugia	Local Instrument Builder	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.04.14	Spiru Cauchi	Musician	Private Home	Għajnsielem	Discussion with signed documents

Date	Research Participant	Role Description	Venue	Location	Type of Meeting
2022.04.14	Anthony Sammu <i>il-Luzzu</i>	Aficionado	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.04.14	Mikiel Cumbo <i>Lizgej</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.04.14	Noel Damato	Organiser	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.04.15	Pietru Pawl Farrugia	Local Instrument Builder	Private Home	Nadur	Discussion with signed documents
2022.04.17	Anthony Sammu <i>il-Luzzu</i>	Aficionado	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.04.17	Anthony Cutajar <i>il-Pikolin</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.04.19	Noel Damato	Organiser	Workplace	Floriana	Discussion with signed documents
2022.04.26	Mikiel Cumbo <i>Lizgej</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Phone discussion without signed documents
2022.04.26	Johnny Saliba <i>ta' Birzebbugja</i>	<i>Prim Kitarrist</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.04.27	Mario Gravina	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.04.27	Noel Damato	Organiser	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.04.29	Anthony Sammu <i>il-Luzzu</i>	Aficionado	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.05.01	Johnny Saliba <i>ta' Birzebbugja</i>	<i>Prim Kitarrist</i>	Każin	Gudja	Informal discussion before a <i>Għana</i> session
2022.05.02	Anthony Sammu <i>il-Luzzu</i>	Aficionado	DIY Studio	Qawra - Buġibba	Discussion with signed documents
2022.05.03	Frans <i>il-Bloq</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.05.03	Mikiel Cumbo <i>Lizgej</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.05.04	Ganni <i>l-Pisklu</i>	Aficionado	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.05.05	Ganni <i>l-Pisklu</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	Private Home	Xewkija	Discussion with signed documents
2022.05.11	Joseph Bajada <i>ir-Regett</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & organiser	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.05.11	Noel Damato	Organiser	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.05.13	Joseph Bajada <i>ir-Regett</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & organiser	Private Home	Rabat, Ghawdex	Discussion with signed documents
2022.05.13	Guzeppi Spagnol <i>il-Kelba</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.05.13	Mikiel Cumbo <i>Lizgej</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.05.14	Mario Gravina	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.05.14	Charles Busuttil	String instrument tuner	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.05.16	Mario Gravina	<i>Għannej</i>	<i>Pjazza, Village Square</i>	Żejtun	Discussion with signed documents
2022.05.18	Steve Borg	Folklorist	NA	NA	Online meeting with signed documents
2022.05.19	Joe Attard Tabone	Folklorist	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.05.19	Guzeppi Spagnol <i>il-Kelba</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.05.19	Vince Cumbo <i>Lizgej</i>	Impresario	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.05.19	Charles Busuttil	String instrument tuner	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.05.20	Charles Busuttil	String instrument tuner	Workplace	Żabbar	Discussion with signed documents
2022.05.24	Guzeppi Spagnol <i>il-Kelba</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Phone discussion with signed documents
2022.05.26	Ruben Zahra	Artistic Director	NA	NA	Online meeting
2022.05.30	Fredu Abela <i>iz-Żejtuni</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	<i>Pjazza, Village Square</i>	Żejtun	Discussion with signed documents
2022.05.30	Vince Carabott <i>il-Bukku</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & <i>Kitarrist</i>	Private Home	Żurrieq	Discussion with signed documents
2022.05.30	Anglu Theuma <i>il-Kina</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.05.30	Fredu Abela <i>iz-Żejtuni</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.05.30	<i>In-Nekus</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.05.30	Jesmond <i>il-Kalora</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication

Maltese *Ghana*: Folksinging, Representation and Performance

Date	Research Participant	Role Description	Venue	Location	Type of Meeting
2022.05.30	Emanuel Ellul <i>il-Begig</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & Impresario	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.05.30	Vince Carabott <i>il-Bukku</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & <i>Kitarrist</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.06.01	Guzeppi Spagnol <i>il-Kelba</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Phone discussion with signed documents
2022.06.03	Emanuel Ellul <i>il-Begig</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & Impresario	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.06.03	Vince Carabott <i>il-Bukku</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & <i>Kitarrist</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.06.09	Emanuel Ellul <i>il-Begig</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & Impresario	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.06.09	Noel Damato	Organiser	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.06.10	Emanuel Ellul <i>il-Begig</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & Impresario	Tal-Begig Restaurant	Msida	Discussion with signed documents
2022.07.29	Ruben Zahra	Artistic Director & Composer	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.08.03	Ruben Zahra	Artistic Director & Composer	NA	NA	Online meeting with signed documents
2022.08.23	Joe Attard Tabone	Folklorist	NA	NA	Phone discussion with signed documents
2022.08.23	Guzeppi Spagnol <i>il-Kelba</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.08.24	Guzeppi Spagnol <i>il-Kelba</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Phone discussion with signed documents
2022.08.29	Victor Galea	Folklorist	NA	NA	Phone discussion with signed documents
2022.08.30	Joe Attard Tabone	Folklorist	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.09.01	Victor Galea	Folklorist - Researcher	Private Home	Rabat, Ghawdex	Discussion with signed documents
2022.09.02	Guzeppi Spagnol <i>il-Kelba</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.09.07	Vince Carabott <i>il-Bukku</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & <i>Kitarrist</i>	NA	NA	Phone discussion with signed documents
2022.09.07	Guzeppi Spagnol <i>il-Kelba</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.09.07	Emanuel Ellul <i>il-Begig</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & Impresario	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.09.08	Guzeppi Spagnol <i>il-Kelba</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Phone discussion with signed documents
2022.09.08	Mikiel Cumbo <i>Lizgej</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.09.12	Noel Damato	Organiser	Workplace	Floriana	Discussion with signed documents
2022.09.13	Aiken Gatt	<i>Għannej</i>	Romeo Romano Gardens	Santa Venera	Discussion with signed documents
2022.09.13	Charlie Mangion <i>iz-Zubina</i>	Impresario	Taste Good Bar	San Gwann	Discussion with signed documents
2022.09.14	Anthony Cutajar <i>il-Pikolin</i>	<i>Għannej</i>	Gnien San Girgor	Żejtun	Discussion with signed documents
2022.09.24	Joe Attard Tabone	Folklorist	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.09.24	Liam Gatt	<i>Għannej</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.09.28	Liam Gatt	<i>Għannej</i>	Gnien Sur Pawlu Boffa	Raħal Ġdid	Discussion with signed documents
2022.10.18	William Camilleri	<i>Kitarrist</i>	NA	NA	Online meeting with signed documents
2022.11.04	Ganni I-Pisklu - <i>il-Mara</i>	Aficionado	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.11.04	Joseph Bajada <i>ir-Regett</i>	<i>Għannej</i> & organiser	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.11.04	Vince Cumbo <i>Lizgej</i>	Impresario	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.11.15	Karmnu ta' Bakkar	Aficionado	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.11.18	Norma Camilleri	Speech Language Pathologist	Private Home	San Gwann	Discussion with signed documents
2022.11.23	Joe Attard Tabone	Folklorist	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.11.30	Norma Camilleri	Speech Language Pathologist	Private Home	San Gwann	Discussion with signed documents

Date	Research Participant	Role Description	Venue	Location	Type of Meeting
2022.12.06	Vince Carabott <i>il-Bukku</i>	<i>Għannej &amp; Kitarrist</i>	NA	NA	Phone discussion with signed documents
2022.12.06	Karmnu ta' Bakkar	Aficionado	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2022.12.09	Karmnu ta' Bakkar	Aficionado	Workplace	Rabat, Ghawdex	Discussion with signed documents
2023.02.23	Michael Refalo	Musician	NA	NA	Phone discussion without signed documents
2023.04.15	Mamante	Aficionado	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2023.04.25	Joe Attard Tabone	Folklorist	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2023.04.27	Joe Attard Tabone	Folklorist - Researcher	Private Home	Xagħra	Discussion with signed documents
2023.06.06	Emanuel Ellul <i>il-Begġ</i>	<i>Għannej &amp; Impresario</i>	NA	NA	Telecommunication
2023.07.13	Andrew Alamango	Artistic Director	NA	NA	Informal discussion while travelling on Fast Ferry service

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Appendix L: List of *Serati*, *Ghana* activities and festivals attended

Date	Occasion	Organiser	Venue	Location	Ghana sessions	Style
n.d. [c.2019]	<i>Serata Ghana</i>	Vince Cumbo <i>Lizgej</i>	Crazy Bar <i>Ta' Zgej</i>	Żejtun	2	Spirtu Pront
n.d. [c.2019]	Sunday morning	NA	<i>Ta' Ganna</i> Bar	Żejtun	2	Spirtu Pront
n.d. [c.2019]	Sunday morning	NA	Żabbar Boċċi Club	Żabbar	2	Spirtu Pront
2018.06.22	<i>Ghanafest</i>	FestivalsMalta	Argotti Gardens	Floriana		
2018.06.28	Imnarja	FestivalsMalta	Buskett Gardens	Rabat		
2018.06.29	Imnarja	FestivalsMalta	Promenade	Birżebbuġa	2	Spirtu Pront, Makkjetti
2018.07.01	Art Performance	Arts Council Malta	Manoel Island	Gżira	2	
2018.11.25	Sunday morning	NA	Żabbar Boċċi Club	Żabbar	2	Spirtu Pront
2019.06.21	<i>Ghanafest</i>	FestivalsMalta	Argotti Gardens	Floriana		
2019.06.21	<i>Serata Ghana</i>	Kelinu Cutajar <i>is-Superstar &amp; Social Partners</i>	<i>Ġnien Kottoner</i>	Birgu-Bormla	3	Spirtu Pront, Ghana tal-Fatt
2019.06.22	<i>Ghanafest</i>	FestivalsMalta	Argotti Gardens	Floriana		Spirtu Pront, Prejjem, Makkjetti
2019.11.10	Sunday morning	NA	<i>Ta' Ganna</i> Bar	Żejtun	3	Spirtu Pront, Makkjetti, Lament
2020.06.08-13	<i>Ghanafest</i>	FestivalsMalta	NA	NA		Makkjetti, Ghana fuq il-Kelma
2021.08.26	<i>Serata Ghana</i>	Local Council & Ministry for Gozo	<i>Ġnien Blankas</i>	Xewkija	3	Spirtu Pront, Makkjetti
2021.11.05	Il-Festival Nazzjonali tal-Ktieb	Għaqda tal-Malti	Malta Fairs & Conventions Centre	Ta' Qali	2	Ghana fil-Għoli, Ghana tal-Fatt
2021.11.07	Sunday morning	NA	Oseris Bar	Żabbar	2	Spirtu Pront
2022.02.27	Sunday morning	NA	Oseris Bar	Żabbar	2	Spirtu Pront
2022.03.13	Sunday morning	NA	Oseris Bar	Żabbar	2	Spirtu Pront
2022.05.01	Sunday morning	NA	Kažin	Gudja	2	Spirtu Pront
2022.05.22	Sunday morning	NA	PL Club	Qrendi	3-4	Spirtu Pront
2022.06.03	<i>Serata Ghana</i>	Emanuel Ellul <i>il-Begig</i>	Kažin Banda Sacro Cuor	Sliema	3-4	Spirtu Pront
2022.06.10	Ritmu	FestivalsMalta	Upper Barrakka Gardens	Valetta	5	Spirtu Pront, Ghana fil-Għoli, Makkjetti

Date	Occasion	Organiser	Venue	Location	Ghana sessions	Style
2022.06.11	Ritmu	FestivalsMalta	Upper Barrakka Gardens	Valletta	6	Spiritu Pront, Ghana tal-Fatt, Prejjem
2022.06.28	Imnarja	Ministry for Agriculture	Buskett Gardens	Rabat	4-5	Spiritu Pront, Ghana tal-Fatt, Ghana fil-Għoli, Ghana fuq il-Kelma, Prejjem
2022.06.29	Imnarja	Ministry for Agriculture	Buskett Gardens	Rabat	3-4	Spiritu Pront, Prejjem
2022.07.29	<i>Serata Għana</i>	Vince Cumbo <i>Liżgej</i>	Kažin	Gudja	4	Spiritu Pront
2022.08.05	<i>Serata Għana</i>	Mikiel Cutajar <i>is-Superstar</i> & Social Partners	<i>Pjazza</i> , Village Square	Hal-Għaxaq	4	Spiritu Pront, Ghana tal-Fatt, Makkjetta
2022.08.14	Santa Marija	Joseph Bajada <i>ir-Regett</i> & Ministry for Gozo	Villa Rundle	Rabat, Ghawdex	3	Spiritu Pront, Makkjetti
2022.08.31	Funeral	Family & Ghana community	Bażilika Sant Elena	Birkirkara	3	Ghana Mass, Spiritu Pront
2022.09.04	Improvvisazione Poetica	Mauro Chechi		Pomonte, Grosseto, Italy	4+	Spiritu Pront, Prejjem, Makkjetta
2022.09.16	Festa Kapučċini	Joseph Bajada <i>ir-Regett</i> & Feast committee	Zuntier tal-Knisja tal-Kapuċċini	Rabat, Ghawdex	2	Spiritu Pront, Makkjetti
2022.09.23	<i>Serata Għana</i>	Charlie Mangion <i>iż-Żubina</i> & Social Partners	Club Boċċi	Hal-Għaxaq	3	Spiritu Pront
2022.11.04	<i>Serata Għana</i>	Vince Cumbo <i>Liżgej</i>	Crazy Bar <i>Ta' Żgej</i>	Żejtun	3	Spiritu Pront
2022.11.11	<i>Serata Għana</i>	Nordai Desira	Boċċi Club	Żejtun	3	Spiritu Pront
2023.04.02	Sunday morning	Mario il-Bubajs, Cultural Heritage Directorate, Gozo	Pjazzetta tax-Xelina	Sannat	2	Spiritu Pront
2023.04.28	<i>Serata Għana</i>	Emanuel Ellul <i>il-Begig</i>	Truck Stop	Gudja	3	Spiritu Pront
2023.04.30	Sunday morning	Mario il-Bubajs, Cultural Heritage Directorate, Gozo	Pjazzza Madonna Ta' Loreto	Għajnsielem	2	Spiritu Pront

Date	Occasion	Organiser	Venue	Location	Ghana sessions	Style
2023.05.07	Sunday morning	Mario il-Bubajs, Cultural Heritage Directorate, Gozo	Pjazza, Village Square	Żebbuġ, Għawdex	2	Spirtu Pront
2023.05.21	Sunday morning	Mario il-Bubajs, Cultural Heritage Directorate, Gozo	Sacred Heart Parish Church	It-Triq tal-Għajn, Fontana	1	Ghana Mass
2023.06.02	Ritmu	Vince Cumbo <i>Lizgej &amp; Festivals</i> Malta	Crazy Bar <i>Ta' Żgej</i>	Żejtun	3	Spirtu Pront, Ghana fil-Gholi
2023.06.04	Ritmu	FestivalsMalta	Splendid, Strada Stretta	Valletta	2	Ghana tal-Fatt
2023.06.06	Ritmu	FestivalsMalta	Splendid, Strada Stretta	Valletta	0	NA
2023.06.07	Ritmu	FestivalsMalta	Splendid, Strada Stretta	Valletta	2	Prejjem, Makkjetta
2023.06.07	Ritmu	FestivalsMalta	Splendid, Strada Stretta	Valletta	0	NA
2023.06.09	Ritmu	FestivalsMalta	Argotti Gardens	Floriana	0	0
2023.06.09	<i>Serata Ghana</i>	NA	Msida Boċċi Club	Msida	4	Spirtu Pront
2023.06.10	Ritmu	FestivalsMalta	Splendid, Strada Stretta	Valletta	0	NA
2023.06.10	Ritmu	FestivalsMalta	Argotti Gardens	Floriana	0	0
2023.06.28	Imnarja	Ministry for Agriculture	Buskett Gardens	Rabat	4	Spirtu Pront, Prejjem, Ghana fuq il-Kelma

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<b>Title - Content Info</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Keywords</b>
Festival Nazzjonali ta' I-Ghana	2005	TV Programme	Festival
Festival Nazzjonali ta' I-Ghana	2005	TV Programme	Festival
Festival Nazzjonali ta' I-Ghana	2006	TV Programme	Festival
Festival Nazzjonali ta' I-Ghana	2006	TV Programme	Festival
Festival Nazzjonali ta' I-Ghana	2006	TV Programme	Festival
Festival Nazzjonali ta' I-Ghana	2006	TV Programme	Festival
Festival Nazzjonali ta' I-Ghana	NA	TV Programme	Festival
Festival tal-Hobż	2007	Rush Film File	Ghana
Ghanafest	2015	TV Programme	Festival
Ghanafest	2015	TV Programme	Festival
Ghanafest	2015	TV Programme	Festival
Ghanafest	2015	TV Programme	Festival
Ghanafest	2015	TV Programme	Festival
Ghanafest	2015	TV Programme	Festival
Ghanafest	2018	TV Programme	Festival
Ghawdex Illum	2006	TV Programme	Folk
Ghawdex Illum	2013	TV Programme	Folk
Ghawdex Illum	2017	TV Programme	Folk
Harifa Maltija	2020	TV Programme	
Il-Ġnien tal-Buskett	2001	TV Programme	Imnarja
Il-Harifa Maltija	2019	TV Programme	Ghana, Żejt iż-Żejtun
Ilsienna	2018	TV Programme	
Ilsienna	NA	TV Programme	Ghana
Ilsienna	NA	TV Programme	Ghana
Ilsienna	NA	TV Programme	Ghana
Imnarja	1967	Rush Film File	Imnarja
Imnarja	1968	Rush Film File	Imnarja
Imnarja	1968	Rush Film File	Imnarja
Imnarja	1987	Rush Film File	Imnarja
Imnarja	1996	Rush Film File	Imnarja
Imnarja	2003	Rush Film File	Imnarja
Imnarja	2004	Rush Film File	Imnarja
Imnarja	2012	Rush Film File	Imnarja
Imnarja	NA	Rush Film File	Imnarja
Imnarja	NA	Rush Film File	Imnarja
Kunċert mill-Kor Santa Monika tal-Mosta	NA	TV Programme	Music Analysis
L-Imnarja fil-Buskett	1998	TV Programme	Imnarja
Linji Lokali	2019	TV Programme	Żejt iż-Żejtun, San Girgor
Malta fl-Ilsien u l-Qalb	1999	TV Programme	Festival
Malta Military Tattoo	NA	TV Programme	Music Analysis
Mary Meylak	NA	Rush Film File	Ghana, Maltese
Meander	2001	TV Programme	Festival
Mediterranea Lejla f'Malta	1996	TV Programme	
Merħba	1991	TV Programme	Internationalisation

<b>Title - Content Info</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Keywords</b>
Midnight Circus	2002	TV Programme	Music Analysis
Mill-Arkivji	NA	TV Programme	Imnarja
Personaġġi	2015	TV Programme	Festival
Premju Letterarju għall-Kotba	c2001	TV Programme	Maltese, High-Low
Riflessi Sajfin	1999	TV Programme	Folk
San Girgor	1995	Rush Film File	San Girgor
San Girgor	1999	Rush Film File	San Girgor
San Girgor	2000	Rush Film File	San Girgor
San Girgor	2001	Rush Film File	San Girgor
San Girgor	NA	Rush Film File	Ghana, San Girgor
Sensiela Mużika?	c1995	TV Programme	Folk
Soċjeta Agrarja - Buskett Gardens	NA	TV Programme	Imnarja
Storja Tinkiteb	NA	TV Programme	San Girgor
TV Awards	NA	Rush Film File	Music Analysis
TV programme ft. Charles Clews, Johnny Navarro & Johnny Catania	NA	Rush Film File	Ghana
TVM News Bulletin - Imnarja	2013	Rush Film File	Imnarja
TVM News Bulletin - Imnarja	2019	Raw Footage	Imnarja
TVM News Bulletin - Imnarja	2020	Raw Footage	Imnarja
TVM News Bulletin - Imnarja	2021	TV Programme	Imnarja
TVM News Bulletin - Imnarja	NA	TV Programme	Imnarja
TVM News Bulletin	2002	TV Programme	Folk
TVM News Bulletin	2015	TV Programme	Ghana
TVM News Bulletin	NA	TV Programme	Ghana
TVM News Bulletin	2017	TV Programme	Festival, San Girgor
TVM News Roundup	2003	Rush Film File	Ghana, Festival
Waltzing Matilda - Imnarja celebrations in Australia and Canada	2000	TV Programme	Diaspora
Xarabank? / Millenium Special Programme	2000	Rush Film File	Ghana
Żafir	1987	TV Programme	Ghana

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## Appendix N: List of Performers in the current scene

Name, Surname, Artist Name	Type of Performer	Ghana Style
Aiken Gatt	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Amber Carabott	Makkjettista	Makkjetti
Anġlu n-Najs	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Anglu Theuma il-Kina	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront, Għana tal-Fatt, Għana fil-Għoli
Boost	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Brian ta' Żaru	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Callum	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Carl Gatt il-Paj	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Carl tal-Pikkolin	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Carol Aquilina	Prim Kitarrist	Prejjem
Charles Seychell iż-Żorro	Għannej	Makkjetti
Chris il-Ganga	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Daniel	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Denise Vella Ta' Kalcidon	Kitarrista	Prejjem, Għana Spirtu Pront
Dylan Mula	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Emanuel Ellul il-Begġ	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Etienne Pawney tan-Naxxar	Għannej, Makkjettist	Għana Spirtu Pront, Makkjetti
Francesco Cutajar	Kitarrist	Għana Spirtu Pront
Frankie ta' Hjal Qormi/il-Krekk	Prim Kitarrist	Għana Spirtu Pront
Frans Azzopardi iż-Żott	Għannej	Għana fil-Għoli
Frans Casha Tas-Saqajn	Kitarrist	Għana Spirtu Pront
Frans Cassar il-Bloq	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront, Għana bin-Nofs Għanja
Frans Chircop Tar-Rabat	Kitarrist	Għana Spirtu Pront
Frans il-Budaj tas-Siġġiewi	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Frederick Mallia ir-Re	Prim Kitarrist	Għana Spirtu Pront, Għana tal-Fatt
Fredu Abela ż-Żejtuni	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Fredu Desira L-Indjan	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Gabriel ta' Żezien/il-Qormi	Għannej, kitarrist	Għana Spirtu Pront
Giustinu Zammit	Kitarrist	Għana Spirtu Pront
Grezzju Dalli l-Garawwa	Għannej, Makkjettist	Għana Spirtu Pront, Makkjetti
Guzeppi Bajada ir-Regett	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Guzeppi Spagnol tal-Kelba	Għannej, kitarrist	Għana tal-Fatt
Iċ-Ċiranu	Kitarrist	Għana Spirtu Pront
Il-Qaddis	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Ion Mifsud ta' Vestru	Prim Kitarrist	Għana Spirtu Pront
Is-Setti	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Is-Sufinu	Prim Kitarrist	Għana Spirtu Pront
James Pawney tan-Naxxar	Għannej, Makkjettist	Għana Spirtu Pront, Makkjetti
Jason Seguna In-Nekus	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Jean Claude Zahra tal-Fox	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Jesmond Galea il-Kalora	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront
Jimmy Pawney tan-Naxxar	Għannej, Makkjettist	Għana Spirtu Pront, Makkjetti
Joe Busuttil l-Bužu	Għannej	Għana Spirtu Pront

<b>Name, Surname, Artist Name</b>	<b>Type of Performer</b>	<b>Ghana Style</b>
Joe Grech ta' Raħal Ġdid	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront, Ghana fuq il-Kelma
Joe il-Muni	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Joe I-Boxer	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
JoeMike Agius tas-Seba Rġiel	Għannej, Makkjettist	Ghana Spirtu Pront, Makkjetti
Johann	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Johnny Grima tal-Belt	Kitarrist	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Johnny I-Gaġġa	Prim Kitarrist	Prejjem, Ghana Spirtu Pront
Johnny Saliba ta' Birzebbuġa	Prim Kitarrist	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Josef tal-Belt	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Joseph Muscat Zeppi In-Nizza	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Joseph Sarfid	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Kalċidon Vella id-Danny	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Kalċidon Vella Ta' Mustaċċa	Prim Kitarrist	Prejjem, Ghana Spirtu Pront
Kurt Carabott	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Kurt Carabott	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Lawrence Kalora	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Liam Gatt tas-Samba	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Lydon Agius	Għannej, Makkjettist	Makkjetti
Mariah Agius	Makkjettista	Makkjetti
Mariele Zammit	Għannejja	Ghana fil-Għoli
Mario Azzopardi I-Bubajs	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Mario Gravina is-Sipa / il-Gravina	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Mario is-Sufu	Prim Kitarrist	Prejjem, Ghana Spirtu Pront
Mario iż-Żebbuġi	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Mario ta' Gilard	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Mark Vella Ta' Mustaċċa	Prim Kitarrist	Prejjem
Michael Brignoli il-Ġurdien / Wesu / Lis-Star	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Michelina Camilleri	Għannejja	Ghana tal-Banju
Mikiel Cumbo Liżgej	Għannej	Ghana fil-Għoli
Mikiel Cutajar is-Superstar	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront, Ghana fil-Għoli, Ghana tal-Fatt
Nenu Borg	Il-Brazz	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Ninu Galea ir-Rajsu	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Nordai Desira	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Patrick il-Ġermaniż	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Ramon Caruana	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Ras il-Baġħal	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Raymond Attard ta' Sydney	Prim Kitarrist	Prejjem, Ghana Spirtu Pront
Raymond Buttigieg Il-Basli	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Rene ta' Sabiħa	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Ronaldo Cutajar ta' Kellin	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Ronnie tal-Mosta	Prim Kitarrist	Prejjem, Ghana Spirtu Pront
Rose ta' Zeppi ta' Gusta	Għannejja	Makkjetti

<b>Name, Surname, Artist Name</b>	<b>Type of Performer</b>	<b>Ghana Style</b>
Ruben il-Fusinu	Prim Kitarrist	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Ruman tan-Nan	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Silvan ta' Fredu	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Stefan Cutajar	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Stefan tal-Minoċċ	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Steve Ciantar il-Furkett	Prim Kitarrist	Prejjem, Ghana Spirtu Pront
Ta Bormla	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Tal-Bigilla	Għannej, Makkjettist	Ghana Spirtu Pront, Makkjetti
Toni Cutajar il-Pikkolin	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Twanny Coleiro Kulajru	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Vince Carabott il-Bukku	Għannej, Kitarrist, Makkjettist	Ghana Spirtu Pront, Ghana fil-Gholi, Ghana bin-Nofs Għanja, Makkjetti
William Camilleri	Kitarrist	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Willie Saliba tal-Black Sorrows	Kitarrist	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Wollie Ghiller il-Giller / ta' l-Isla	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront
Yvette Grech Buhagiar	Għannejja	Ghana tal-Banju, Ghana fuq il-Kelma
Žeppi iż-Žebbuġi	Għannej	Ghana Spirtu Pront

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