



12 March 2020

National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage

In March, 2017, following a Government decision, the Parliament of Malta ratified the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The Ministry for the National Heritage, the Arts and Local Government assigned the implementation of the Convention in Malta to the Culture Directorate.

To assist in approving proposals of elements for inclusion on the inventory, a National Board on Intangible Cultural Heritage was appointed with representatives from Heritage Malta, the Cultural Superintendence, the Culture Directorate and two representatives from the community.

Please find the list of elements of our intangible cultural heritage included on Malta's National Inventory that is regularly updated.

Mario Azzopardi
Director Culture

ELEMENTS INCLUDED ON THE NATIONAL INVENTORY

Element	Date of Inscription	Reference	Short Description
<i>Il-Ftira: the culinary art and culture of flattened sourdough bread in Malta</i>	20 June 2018	01/2018	Ftira is a small sourdough bread commonly consumed in the Maltese archipelago. Maltese people eat filled ftira regularly as a daily snack or light meal, or as an appetiser in band clubs, restaurants or bars. Bread plays a fundamental role in Maltese historical consciousness and forms an integral part of the Maltese cultural tradition. Despite the modern changing eating habits and a drop in the local per capita consumption of bread; the Maltese still consider themselves to be mainly 'bread eaters'.
<i>Gold Embroidery: The art of embroidery using metal threads and the conservation of existing artefacts</i>	28 June 2018	02/2018	Gold embroidery originated in Asia and has been used for many centuries and it is widespread in many countries. In Malta, there is a tradition that gold embroidery is used on religious artefacts and emblems of various societies prominent in different communities across the two islands. Today, there are a few highly skilled individuals spread throughout the Maltese Islands who still know, practice and (on a very small scale) teach this craft.
<i>Ghana – Malta's Folksong</i>	28 June 2018	03/2018	Ghana is a performative art, transmitted through generations in Maltese archipelago, including sung poetry and music. The origin of għana is still unknown and, hence, subject to ongoing debate. The folklore researcher Ġużè Cassar Pullicino found an early form of għana dating back to 1792, that is, towards the end of occupation of the Maltese islands by the Knights of Malta. Some local music scholars have attributed the origin of this singing to the presence of Arabs in Malta.
<i>Maltese Lace Making - Bizzilla</i>	28 June 2018	04/2018	The art of lace making is popular in both Malta and Gozo, although Gozo. Its roots can be traced from the cotton trade of the Maltese Islands along the maritime trade route with Genoa, since 1530. It was first promoted in the old nuns convents at Mdina, the old capital of Malta, and in the Borgo cities developed around the Grand Harbour after the coming of the Knights of Malta in 1530. This craft has passed down through different generations and many lace makers, mainly women practice this craft in their own homes or private space. Few women can be seen making lace outdoors nowadays.

Brilli	18 October 2018	05/2018	Bocci and brilli are two traditional games played in Gozo, which continue to draw interest from locals. Research conducted through participant observation and informal interviews informs the ethnographic accounts of how these games are conceived of and integrated into the space of leisure, work and social memory
Għażżiela	18 October 2018	06/2018	The making and faith in the 'Għażżiela' (oven baked dough with the initials of the name of Our Lady) is traditionally used as a protection against thunderstorms. Its origins are unknown, but records show that Zebbug's first parish priest bequeathed in his will back in 1737 a trust fund to permit the residents to buy flour to make għażżiela and protects the place from thunderstorms.
Falconry: A Living Cultural Heritage	11 March 2019	01/2019	The practice of falconry was already well established in 1239 and this ties in with the issue of bird names and language. Semitic origin for birds of prey, as well as expressions in Maltese involving birds of prey, continues to prove that a strong bond with these birds existed for a very long time. Falconers in the Middle Ages in Malta were well paid and enjoyed several privileges. This tradition was revived by falconers communities in the recent years.
The practical Implementation of STEREOTOMY principles to load bearing structural members in various buildings using local construction materials and expert craftsmanship.	20 May 2019	02/2019	From the earliest times in history, people have always built, sometimes small constructions but sometimes great buildings, using huge blocks of stone. Each great period in history has required different types of buildings. Like the architects of today, while designing their buildings, the architects and the master masons of the past needed to consider all the aspects of their architectural design. The most important aspects of an architectural design are: -The practical aspects, that is the utility of the building, what to provide and how this may be arranged and the method of its construction. - The aesthetic aspect, that is the consideration taken to design the building with a view to aesthetic appeal.
The Traditional Maltese Village Feast	25 September 2019	03/2019	The Traditional Maltese Festa in its present form emerged from the 19th century through the fusion of a number of existing traditions that harked back to many years. 400 years ago, the Festa had been a small affair with a rustic character organized mainly through benefactors who distributed wine and food among the people attending the religious ceremonies or to the poor people of the village. By the 18th century, small mortars (known as maskli) were being fired and flags were hired to decorate the festive areas. Music was provided by small groups of

			musicians who enlivened the festive atmosphere. Church services had by now developed into a grander affair with musicians and singers being part of the celebrations. By the 19th and early 20th centuries, most individual parishes had their own Church music written especially for the annual feast celebrations.
<i>Nicknames in Maltese Villages - Zejtun</i>	25 September 2019	04/2019	Nicknames are an oral practise, sometimes are given by friends or relatives, however, some of them are passed on by generations. Families in Żejtun have acquire their respective nickname by the trade they practice, to be precisely with their breadwinner. Practice is involved directly in everyday life. Nicknames can be a descriptor of a physical characteristic as well or the opposite of a physical characteristic. Such nicknames are often considered offensive or derogatory, unless the nickname is based on a trait that is viewed positively.
<i>Ephemeral Art with Natural Materials</i>	25 September 2019	05/2019	Ephemeral art is often connected to traditional rituals aimed at marking the passage of time, celebrating the succession of seasons and religious holidays. Flower petals, salt and sawdust are used to create horizontal and vertical arts; designed carpets and designed salt plates. This tradition dates back to hundreds of years mainly used to be a carpet for the Corpus Christi and salt plates for Easter period.
ELEMENTS INCLUDED ON THE EXPRESSION OF INTEREST LIST			
<i>Maltese Proverbs</i>	20 May 2019		There are hundreds of proverbs in the Maltese language reflecting the beliefs, customs and traditions of past generations of Maltese speakers from all walks of life that are in danger of being lost because of lack of use. They include gems of practical wisdom expressed in a language that can be strongly satirical or strikingly poetic. Because of their rich vocabulary and clever turn of phrase, these proverbs have lost none of their freshness despite their age. Their inclusion in the National Inventory of Culture might stimulate fresh interest in them among educators and lead to concrete measures being taken for their dissemination and preservation, especially among the young.
<i>The drafting and making of a Maltese traditional wooden boat</i>	22 August 2019		Until few deacade ago, this traditional boat was used for transportation of goods and to embark and disembark pilots from larger vessels in the harbour. Nowadays, they are used for transportation within the harbour and Sliema area (Balklori). Also used for fishing and for sports activities such as the 'Regatta'. The Maltese Traditional Boat is made from different types of wood and the

			normal size of the boat is 21 feet (6.4 metres). Making of a traditional boat includes the drafting of a sketch according to the requirements and wooden parts cut according to sketch. An old-style method of wood bending is used, using traditional tools as 'Majjieri' and 'Stamnari' with the help of steam. Traditional methods are used to assemble the boat completely.
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National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Malta

Entry number:

03/2018

Recommendation of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage Board:

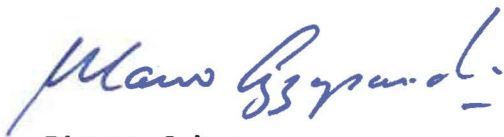
NICH Board recommended that 'Għana: Lehen il-Poplu Malti' is inscribed on the National Inventory during the meeting of 28th June 2018

**Authorisation by the Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government
(Culture Directorate):**

Approved by the Culture Directorate on 30th June 2018

Date of entry into the Inventory:

2nd July 2018



Director Culture

Culture Directorate

National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Malta

1. Name of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Tradition, Activity or Practice.

L- Għana, Leġen il-poplu Malti [In English: Għana, A Maltese folksong tradition]

2. Category or Domain of Intangible Cultural Heritage

- ☒ Festivities and Community Events
- ☒ Music and Dance
- ☐ Performing Arts
- ☒ Oral Traditions
- ☒ Crafts
- ☐ Food Traditions
- ☐ Games and Playing
- ☐ Nature and the Universe

Category

- ☐ Good safeguarding practice
- ☒ Viable safeguarding status
- ☐ In need of urgent safeguarding

3. Practitioners and communities related to the Tradition, Activity or Practice

All Għana employs vocal artists who are informally trained to rhyme in synch with accompanying guitars. These are predominantly men even though there are a number of female performers who mainly sing away from the public eye. Għana features prominently in a number of local town feasts as well as national festivals.

Għana guitarists are also important for a successful Għana session as they are expected to establish through their playing the overall mood for the performance, the right tonality for the singers, and the sounding of melodic motifs useful for the performing singers. Għana guitarists are sometimes proficient enough to improvise on their instrument, mainly, at the beginning of an Għana session, in what is considered as the prelude, and during instrumental interludes between the rhymed stanzas of the singers.

Other members of the community include bar owners and organisers who host Għana sessions, patrons and enthusiasts / aficionados, as well as audience members in general.

4. Location of practice and transmission

Most Għana takes place in bars and village clubs. A Maltese locality popular for Sunday mornings Għana sessions is Żejtun where bars known for such sessions are full of people chatting and drinking whilst listening to extemporised Għana. Għana sessions are also held as part of public events such as national Maltese traditional celebrations, like that of St. Gregory in Marsaxlokk, a feast held annually on the first Wednesday following Easter, and I-Imnarja, a national feast in honour of St. Peter and St. Paul celebrated on June 29th at the gardens of Buskett. On Gozo during the feast of Our Lady of Divine Grace and during the Santa Marija Agricultural and Industrial Fair held on August 14 and 15, Għana has been a

staple feature. Għannejja and kitarristi (Għana singers and guitarists) are also invited to perform on local television and radio, during social events, and are even sent abroad to represent Malta at international folk festivals. The Għana Festival held annually at the gardens of Argotti in Floriana is principally aimed at preserving this musical tradition and promoting new talent in this genre of singing. Għana is also popular and performed amongst Maltese migrant communities in Australia, Canada and the US. Some of this Għana is held in social clubs set up by these Maltese communities as well as in clubs dedicated to Għana singing such as the Klabb Għannejja Maltin ("the Maltese Għannejja Club") of St Albans (Melbourne) which was set up in 1985.

5. General Description of the Tradition, Activity or Practice and its meaning and value to the communities, groups and individuals concerned

As noted above, Għana sessions are held in a range of contexts and venues. To these, one may add the activity that goes on in the private houses of Għana performers who spend hours in each other's company improvising on popular Għana tunes. These improvisations are known as prejjem. It is also a normal practice that before an Għana session these guitarists warm up by playing these prejjem to the enjoyment of all those present. In relation to this, one may also say that specially made Għana guitars are produced locally. This local craft is transmitted through apprenticeship in private workshops. Models for the making of these guitars that contain specific details (measurements, design etc.) pass from master to apprentice, normally, when the former decides to give up his business.

The most anticipated annual Għana event is the two-day Għanafest organised by Arts Council Malta. The festival aims to present and preserve, through performance and recording, the different sub-genres of Għana which are the spirtu pront, tal-fatt, and la Bormliża (this is also known as Għana bil-ksur and Għana fl-gholi). The Għana spirtu pront or spirtu pront ('quick spirit/wit') can briefly be described as an extemporised song duel between two or three pairs of għannejja that unfolds in the same session. This is by far the most popular Għana nowadays. The Għana tal-fatt or, as it is more conveniently called, tal-fatt, refers to Malta's narrative Għana singing by a solo singer accompanied on guitar. The Għana la Bormliża, in short known as la Bormliża, is much less popular as few għannejja possess the high range voice required by this type of Għana. Apart from generating more interest in Għana the festival also aims to encourage the very few female għannejja to sing in public. Due to various social and gender issues, female għannejja hardly ever sing in public. The festival aims to encourage such public exposure.

Għana has been highly influential in stimulating other cultural productions in the Maltese Islands. Noted Maltese composer Charles Camilleri lists Għana as one of the direct influences in one of his major compositions. Għana has also been taken up by younger groups of musicians who have incorporated elements of Għana in their own new compositions fusing Għana with other style of music. This includes groups such as Etnika. It has also inspired theatrical productions such as the successful Lost Voices production based on the work by Andrew Alamango which has also led to the exposure of young female actors to the genre who started to integrate the singing in their performances. Some of them went on to become Għana performers in their own right, such as Mariele Zammit.

6. Viability of the element, and threats and risks to its practice and transmission

In the past folk singing was not appreciated by all levels of society and it was often shunned by Anglophile elites. Since the latter half of the twentieth century however thanks to the

efforts of enterprising community enthusiasts and folklorists such as Mr Charles Coleiro and the late Dr. George Mifsud Chircop there was a greater interest in the genre and its recognition as National Cultural Heritage. There is however concern among members of the community that the element might not be getting enough new younger singers taking on the practice. Community members and other stakeholders are finding ways (such as programmes in schools and for youth) to encourage female performers. Ghana sessions however always have an active and engaged audience especially when it comes to Spirtu Pront sessions which also includes a number of female enthusiasts.

Members of the community would like more radio and TV programming exclusively dedicated to the Ghana and they noted that a greater exposure on the media will help in the dissemination and transmission of the practice as it becomes more appreciated and interwoven with daily life. Some enthusiasts might not be in a position to attend Ghana events for social or health reasons and they look forward to the opportunity to listen to Ghana on the Radio and Television.

Members of the community feel that at the National Folksong Festival performers are having to compete with other genres - they want it to function a festival *for* Ghana.

Community members want performers of a high calibre and constantly seek to find ways to maintain the overall quality of the performances through training and selection processes.

During consultation sessions it also emerged that members feel they should be getting more funding support for their performances.

7. Transmission of the Tradition, Activity or Practice from one generation to the next

Ghana is transmitted orally in bars and private homes. Once a young person learns how to rhyme and shows abilities in staying within the musical framework set by the guitarists he is ready to give it a try during a spirtu pront session. So, the transmission of Ghana is also performance based, that is, most of the training takes place through performance and follows feedback provided by audience members and fellow Ghana singers alike. Learning Ghana also means acquiring the right vocal timbre required for this singing. Proficient Ghana singers make a distinction between 'tghanni' (that is, to sing in the style of Ghana) and 'tkanta' ('to sing'). In any case, what these ghannejja imply is a strong voice that projects outward, a nasal timbre with 'voix granuleuse' (lit. 'granular voice'), and a narrow upper range able to produce melismas (or vocal inflexions).

The training of Ghana guitarists more or less follows that of the singers in the sense that basic fingerings on the guitar are shown either before a session or at home during informal tuition. Once the novice learns the fingerings of some basic chords he joins in the accompaniment of a spirtu pront session. The upgrade from an accompanist to a soloist (*prim*) depends on the player's interest and motivation, as well as his musical talent and disposition to progress further in his Ghana guitar playing.

In both cases, the transmission of Ghana singing and guitar playing relies on an artist's ability to imitate other singers and players. Singers imitate vocal qualities, postures, and the technique of rhyming whilst guitarists imitate fingerings and recorded improvisations of past leading Ghana guitarists as well as motifs from recorded local band marches amongst others.

Ghana enthusiasts attend Ghana evenings and events often accompanied by Maltese food and drink in Maltese themed evenings (Lejla Maltija). The passion for the genre is often transmitted along family lines from parents or grandparents to their grandchildren and children. Enthusiasts use various media to transmit and pass on to other generations their

passion for the genre. These include existing Għana recordings (known as *zigarelli* (lit. ribbons referring to the magnetic tape recordings of old) available on audio and video cassettes, locally produced CDs, and increasingly Għana available online. These are generally circulated freely among enthusiasts and with the permission of the event organisers and performers.

8. Related tools, cultural spaces, natural resources, etc

Malta's oral poetry; Għana guitars; a unique voice with a special vocal timbre; proper rhyming; idiomatic knowledge of Maltese language.

9. Safeguarding measures: past, present and future

The best safeguarding for the transmission and continuation of this musical tradition comes from the practitioners themselves, mainly, through their performances. Performances in bars and other public venues keep the tradition alive and accessible to all interested audiences. The topics treated in Għana may also be attractive in themselves, and, consequently, assist in maintaining Għana's popularity as they provide commentary on current issues which audience members like and may engage in. Debated topics in *spirtu pront* may range from those focusing on which of the two duelling *għannejja* possesses the most adaptable vocal qualities for Għana to the impact of recent hunting and bird trapping regulations on the Għana singers and guitarists. In this sense, an old form like the *spirtu pront* provides the right context for the debate of current issues. Also, initiatives such as Għanafest aim to generate more interest in this singing as well as supporting promising new Għana singers and guitarists. The promotion of these new talents is further supported by their appearance on TV in that the sessions recorded during the days of the festival are then aired on local TV.

The performers generally perform for free and in some sessions, especially those organised by the state or formal organisations, they receive a token sum.

Past safeguarding measures have generally involved giving greater exposure and recognition to Għana. Mr Charles Coleiro together with Dr. Mifsud-Chircop had worked to organise several international tours of Maltese folksingers in France, England, Italy Tunisia and Australia among others in the 1970s. The state has also assisted in creating a greater valorisation of the practice. It funds in its entirety the National Folksong Festival as well as other important celebrations which feature an important presence of folk singing such as the *Imnarja* celebration in the Buskett Gardens. It has also sought to formally recognise the contribution to national culture by the performers. In 1998, for instance, the famous female Maltese Għana singer Ġolina Mifsud was awarded the National Order of Merit by the President of Malta in recognition of her contribution to culture

Interest in the tradition is also maintained and supported through academic writings produced by local and international scholars from a range of disciplines. Such studies are initially presented during conferences and, eventually, published in international peer-reviewed journals. All this helps to generate more interest in Għana as a research topic. Indeed, Għana is the subject matter of several undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations produced at the University of Malta and other international universities.

Scholars have also noted that a formal framework for the preservation of Għana is not yet in place. Consequently, most recordings and documentation are still scattered in several libraries and archives. In light of this, a national centre for the research, documentation, and preservation of Malta's popular music, including Għana, is greatly needed.

10. NGOs or other organizations assisting communities, groups and individuals concerned to safeguard the Tradition, Activity or Practice

There are currently no NGOs of Għana singers, musicians or enthusiasts in Malta.

11. Additional information.

Publications and Research

Alamango, Andrew. 2011. 'Malta's Lost Voices: The Early Recording of Maltese Folk and Popular Music, 1931-32', *Journal of Maltese History*, 2: 54-8.

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Ciantar, Philip, 2000. 'From the Bar to the Stage: Socio-musical Processes in the Maltese Spirtu Pront', *Music and Anthropology: Journal of Musical Anthropology of the Mediterranean*, 5. [online] Available at: http://umbc.edu/MA/index/number5/ciantar/cia_0.htm [accessed on 12 June 2018].

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Fsadni, Ranier. 1989. 'The Wounding Song: Honour, Politics and Rhetoric in Maltese Għana.' *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, 3: 335-53.

Galley, Micheline. 1980. 'Chants Traditionnels de Malte', *Littérature Orale Arabo-Berbère*, 11: 115-26.

Herdon, Marcia and Norma McLeod. 1975. 'The Bormliża: Maltese Folksong Style and Women', *The Journal of American Folklore*, 88: 81-100.

Ilg, Bertha and Hans Stumme. 1909. *Maltesische Volkslieder im Urtext mit Deutscher Übersetzung* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung).

Pace, Andrew. 2015. 'Participating in the Musical Tradition of Prejjem: Transmitting the Guitar Culture of Għana within and between Insular Musical Communities of Islanders in Malta and the Maltese-Australian Diaspora' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Manchester).

Sant Cassia, Paul. 2000. 'Exoticizing Discoveries and Extraordinary Experiences: "Traditional" Music, Modernity, and Nostalgia in Malta and Other Mediterranean Societies', *Ethnomusicology*, 44: 281-301.

Zahra Sacco, Marced. 2011. 'Frans Baldacchino Il-Budaj: The Public Perception of Għana in Contemporary Maltese Society' (unpublished M.A thesis, University of Malta).

12. Persons responsible for compiling the inventory form with the assistance of the communities, groups and individuals concerned.

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13. Communities, groups and individuals involved in preparing the inventory form

Inventory form was prepared with the assistance of the following community members serving on the consultative committee for the development of the form:

Mr Charles Coleiro (Community enthusiast and folklorist)

Mr George Mario Attard (Community enthusiast and event organiser)

The Inventory form was presented to and discussed with community members in general, simultaneously with the nomination form, in a series of consultation sessions as follows.

05/05/2019: on the occasion of the unveiling of a monument in honour of a well known local l-Għannej, in Għaxaq (Southern Region), 80 attendees.

24/04/2019: during San Girgor local Feast in Marsaxlokk (Southern Region), 67 attendees.

10/5/2019: during a Għana session at Tal-Bagri, Sant Helen Band Club in Birkirkara (Central Region), 119 attendees.

21/06/2019: during an open air Għana evening session at Kottoner Gardens in Bormla (Inner Harbour Region), 164 attendees.

22/06/ 2019: during the national Għanafest festival at Argotti Gardens in Floriana (Inner Harbour region), 170 attendees (two sessions). Aside from these discussion sessions, Culture Directorate also set up a booth at Għanafest for more individual consultation and information sharing with community members regarding the Għana nomination.

28/06/2019: during the Annual St Peter and St Paul celebrations (Imnarja) at the Buskett gardens (North), 113 attendees.

13/09/ 2019: on the occasion of the local feast of Our Lady of Graces in Rabat, Gozo, 137 attendees.

14/09/2019: on the occasion of the feast of Our Lady of Victories at Mtahleb (North), 149 attendees.

After the consultations, an open National Consultation Session was held on 8/12/19 in Żejtun, a hub for Għana practitioners. As a result of the consultation sessions the National Inventory form was updated as well to reflect community feedback.

14. Role of other stakeholders in identifying the element and preparing the inventory form

The Intangible Cultural Heritage Board within the Ministry of National Heritage and staff within the Cultural Directorate provided logistical and technical assistance in the preparation of the inventory form.

A first expression of interest for drawing up an inventory file for Għana singing was written by Dr Philip Ciantar, Head of Music Studies at the University of Malta, based on his research on the tradition with the participation of the communities concerned. After the application was approved for inclusion on the National ICH Inventory in July 2018, a consultative committee was established to develop the full inventory file with further community participation. This committee included researchers from the University of Malta and two community members, viz. Dr. JP Baldacchino (Anthropologist), Dr. P. Ciantar (Ethnomusicologist), Ms. R. Radmilli (Anthropologist), Mr. A Camilleri (Visual anthropologist), Mr. C. Coleiro (Folklorist and community scholar, Għana enthusiast) and Mr. GM Attard (Għana community event organiser).

15. Dates of updating and details updated

After consultations the inventory was updated in October 2019. The form was updated to include feedback given by community members with regards to threats to viability and safeguarding initiatives (Sections 6 and 9). These amendments were put to public review as part of the process of obtaining community consent for the nomination of the element to the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Members underscored the importance of Għana for their sense of identity and for social cohesion and community development underlining the importance that working class culture needs to be given its due recognition and support.

A second update to the form was implemented in February 2020. This update related to the appropriate title for the element. After the National Consultation Session held on 8/12/2019 in response to feedback from the community the final title for the inventory file was decided upon. It is important to note that 'folksong' and 'singing' are only approximate translations. No exact translation exists in English for Għana and the Maltese language clearly distinguishes between Għana and song [kant].

Signature of Applicant: