

FOLK SONGS AND MUSIC FROM MALTA

Edited and with notes by George Bonavia / Folkways Records FM4047



FOLKWAYS RECORDS FM 4047

MALTESE COUNTRY DANCE
LULLABY
NURSERY RHYME
CHILDREN'S SONG - "BAQBAQUM"
CHILDREN'S GAME, "PIZZI,
PIZZI KANNA"
FOLK TUNES ON GUITAR
MALTESE BAGPIPE AND
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THE FLAGELETTE AND DRUM
CHRISTMAS SONG, "NINNI LA
TIBKIX IZJED"
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BAHAR
MALTESE DRINKING SONG
SONG ON THE GUITAR-GHANA
MALTESE BALLAD
VILLAGE HOLIDAY - FESTA
MODERN SONG
A LOVE SONG

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

MALTA
Folkways Records FM 4047

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number : R 64-1111
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FOLKWAYS RECORDS FM 4047

FOLKWAYS RECORDS ALBUM #FM 4047
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632 Broadway, NYC 10012 N.Y.

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Edited and with notes by **George Bonava**

GEORGE BONAVIA

GEORGE BONAVIA, your host and commentator on International Rendezvous came to Canada from Malta in 1948 and since coming here he has worked to establish bridges of understanding among different racial and nationality groups in Canada. Being a journalist and broadcaster in Malta he has made use of these talents to further worthwhile activities in his new country.

GEORGE had only been here a short time when he began to work on a book — "Canada . . . Land of Hope and Prosperity" which was published in 1951, followed by "Workers in Canada" published by the Malta Government in 1961. He has written two more books: "In Canada Now . . . Thoughts and Events" and "Canada — From an Unknown Country to a Great Nation." George has also contributed to the Encyclopedia Canadiana. He writes regularly to newspapers in Malta and has his own radio programme in Malta "With George Bonavia in Canada" produced here in co-operation with the International Service of the CBC.

GEORGE is the editor and publisher of the "Malta News," and in 1961 published "The Citizen's News," a monthly newspaper for all ethnic groups.

MALTA and the Maltese

An introduction

The Maltese Islands which consists of Malta, Gozo, Commino and two other small islets are situated in the middle of the Mediterranean, about 60 miles from Sicily and 180 miles from the North African mainland.

Malta's strategic position has from the earliest times attracted many powerful nations to her shores. The Phoenicians are the earliest known foreigners to occupy the island from whom the Maltese trace their origin and their language. These were followed by the Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs, Normans, Angevins, Aragonese and Castillians. Much of Malta's grandeur is owed to the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem who came to Malta in 1530 and stayed there for about 300 years, hence the name of "Knights of Malta". Malta was then taken by the French under Napoleon Bonaparte and then passed under British rule, since 1800. Constitutional changes leading to Independence are now being negotiated.

Malta has a population of 330,000 over an area of 122 square miles, which is one of the reasons why so many Maltese have migrated to Australia, Canada, United States and Great Britain. A noticeable characteristic of the Maltese is their joviality. This springs mainly from the agreeably warm climate with sunshine throughout the year, tempered by breezes which blow from over the blue waters.

As it has been said that folksongs and music reflect the temperament of the nation, I have tried in these selections to offer a cross-section of Malta's musical folklore from children's rhymes to country music, from national dances to modern songs, with a glimpse or two into the life of the island, such as the village festa and the outing to St. Paul Bay.

-- January, 1964.

Mgarr Harbour



FOLK SONGS AND MUSIC FROM MALTA

Notes by George Bonavia

Side I, Band 1:

MALTESE COUNTRY DANCE - "Il-Maltija"

This is the music of Malta's national country dance, which used to be performed in the costumes of the farmers known as "Zeppu" and "Grezz". It is said that this dance originated as a court dance in the 18th century. It is to this day the custom to dance "Il-Maltija" at the Governor's Palace, mostly by the Nobles and the professional class of Malta, all wearing 18th century costumes in diverse colours.

Side I, Band 2:

LULLABY

This is a traditional lullaby with which the Maltese mothers rock their babies to sleep. It is rich in imagination and poetic feeling. "Sleep, Sleep, my little child, amongst roses and gesamines, The Holy Virgin is your mother, and the Child Jesus is your father."

Side I, Band 3:

NURSERY RHYME

Maltese Nursery Rhymes as in other countries generally serve to measure the children's ability to talk and repeat what they hear. It is by repetition and imitation that the child is ushered in the adventures of nursery rhymes. This one is a fine example.

Side I, Band 4:

CHILDREN'S SONG - "BAQBAQUM"

"Baqbaqum" is a nickname. This song is part of a children's game. This is partly what is said in the song: "Baqbaqum, what did you eat today?" and the answer, "A measure of beans". "What did you have after it?" is an other question, and the answer: "A fresh egg". After the questions are answered the children form a circle and sing.

Side I, Band 5:

CHILDREN'S GAME, "PIZZI, PIZZI KANNA"

In playing games, Maltese children repeat cer-

tain rhymes that are traditional, as this ditty shows. The game is played by two or more children, they start by putting a finger each, counting by the syllables of the song, and on whom the words ends puts out another finger. The winner is the one who puts out all his fingers first.

Side I, Band 6:

FOLK TUNES ON GUITAR

The Spanish guitar is by far the most popular musical instrument for the accompaniment of Maltese songs. Several folk tunes have developed through the years, and each became associated with the type of the song the guitarist wants to play, a ballad, a love song, a humorous song and so forth. Maltese folk singers in the country play these tunes from memory, known as "prejjem tal-ghana".

Side I, Band 7:

MALTESE BAGPIPE AND TAMBOURINE

The Maltese Bagpipe, known in Malta as "Iz-Zaqq", is formed of an inflated dog skin, which is held under the left arm with the legs directed upwards and having a mouthpiece by which the skin is filled and a flute or pipe played with both hands is affixed to it. This bagpipe is generally accompanied by a tambourine player.

Side I, Band 8:

THE FLAGELETTE - Christmas tune.

The flagelette or as it is called in Malta, "Flejguta" is a primitive instrument, something like a flute. This instrument is fast dying out. This traditional Christmas tune heard in Malta in many churches during the festive season is played by an old timer from the village of Siggiewi.

Side I, Band 9:

THE FLAGELETTE AND DRUM - Good Friday Tune.

The Good Friday processions in Malta are great religious spectacles portraying the Passion of our Lord, recalling in some way the mystery plays of medieval times. At the head of the procession comes the flute player, playing this old lament, accompanied by the dull beating of a drum.



Side I, Band 10:

CHRISTMAS SONG, "NINNI LA TIBKIX IZJED"

This is one of Malta's most popular, and most known Christmas songs. It is a song about the infant Jesus: "Sleep and cry no more/ Sleep Baby Jesus/ Leave the crying to us/ Because we are sinners. "It was written by Fr. Andrea Schembri, a Jesuit father who went with Maltese migrants in North Africa, and needed some religious songs for his congregation. These religious songs were later published in 1864. This song although known by the first line of the first stanza "Ninni, la tibkix izjed" was titled "Benniena ta' Gesu Bambin".

Side I, Band 11:

MODERN SONG "MAHBUBA KEKINA"

Band 12:

POPULAR SONG "TAL-KARAWETT"

These two songs originated among the Maltese emigrants in Toronto. Carmen Sapiano came to Canada in 1948 and settled in Toronto where he met Joe Xuereb, and formed a group to entertain at Maltese gatherings. Carmen Sapiano was at that time recording programmes for the Malta Redifussion, and it was on these programmes that these songs were first heard, about 10 years ago.

The first song (Band 11) was written by Carmen Sapiano and put to music by Joe Xuereb. It is a love song - MY DEAR CATHERINE... "Mahbuba Kekina". The other one (Band 12), is about a peanut vendor, a popular figure on the Maltese scene.

Side I, Band 13:

IL-PARATA - Kuntradanza Maltija.

Carnival or Madri Gras is ushered in Malta by the "Parata" - an ancient Maltese sword-dance commemorating the victory of the Maltese over the Turks in 1565. It consists of groups of young men dressed in gay ribbons and armed with wooden swords forming two circles representing the Turks and the Christians. At the end of the dance a young girl symbolising Malta is carried high on the shoulders -- as a sign of victory. The dance is directed by the leader who, blowing a whistle, gives the orders.

This "Kuntradanza Maltija" is interpreted by the orchestra under the direction of Domenico Lombardo.

Side I, Band 14:

XALATA GHAL SAN PAWL IL-BAHAR

It used to be quite a sight before the automobiles, to see groups riding on a horse cart going for a picnic to the many beaches in Malta, especially on such holidays as "L-Imnarja" or "Lapsi". As the group rides to their destination, they sing happily accompanied by guitars and accordions or concertinas. Here in this number the group is going to St. Paul Bay. It is interpreted by Emmanuele Cilia and Carlo Cardona.

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The 'Dghajsa'—Malta's water taxi

Side II, Band 1:

MALTESE DRINKING SONG

In many villages, the corner wine shop was the place where many of the village singers gather and to the strains of the guitar they pour out one song after another. At intervals, the audience present stands them a drink as an encouragement, and the wine heightens the vigour of their song. In this song a toast is offered to Baccus, the ancient god of wine: "Let's drink and be happy". One after each other they accept the invitation and each gives praise to the drink. At the end the group joins in the refrain: "Long live the wine, for it is the drink that makes us happy, and makes us forget all the heavy burdens of life".

Side II, Band 2:

SONG ON THE GUITAR - GHANA "Iz-zaqqieq"

The subjects of Maltese folk-songs vary according to circumstances, and this one it is in the nature of a satire upon the faults of the character of the one "That eats too much", hence the Maltese name "Iz-zaqqieq".

Side II, Band 3:

MALTESE BALLAD "Xbejba Ta' Rdum"

The Maltese Ballad, which is referred to by guitarists as "l-Ghana tal-Fatt" tells of the brave deeds or great events of the past. This Ballad is written by C. Satariano and sung by Emmanuele Cilia to the accompaniment of the guitar. Like the troubador of olden days, the strolling guitarist recounts the story of "The young lady of the ravine" (Ix-Xbejba ta' Rdum). Katerina, daughter of a noble family in Malta was in love with Pawlu, an able officer in the Army. This was the time when Turkish corsairs used to raid the Island and carry with them in slavery those who fell under their hands. Murat, was a slave with Katerina's family and he was secretly in love with his master's daughter. One day Murat runaway and made his way to his country by a boat and found out that his father was a great Musulman General. Murat helped by his father's men came back to Malta and took away with him the lovely Katerina. Murat was able to take Katerina to a hiding place near the coast waiting for the opportunity to load his lover on a corsiar boat. A servant in the Katerina's household breaks the news to Pawlu the Maltese officer, who in turn takes a group of men to search for Katerina. Finally the two rivals meet. Pawlu kills Murat, but

one of Murat's men comes from the bat and stabs Pawlu. Seeing all this Katerina, dies broken hearted.

Side II, Band 4:

VILLAGE HOLIDAY - FESTA

The Village Festa is full of excitement, colourful processions honouring the patron saint, bands parade the streets and fireworks light up the clear skies, while church bells ring. This gave the idea to this recording by Satariano. The music of V. Ciappara and D. Busuttil and his company brings us a sound picture of a Maltese Festa.

Side II, Band 5:

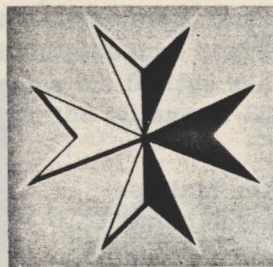
MODERN SONG "Xemx jew Qamar"

"Xemx jew Qamar" means in English "Sun or Moon". It was composed by Joseph Ciappara to the lyrics of George Zammit and presented for the first time in the 1962 Festival of Maltese Songs. It is sung by the "Coro Armonico", accompanied by the Audiovision Orchestra.

Side II, Band 6:

A Love Song -- Ghanja lin-Namrata

Of the Maltese folk songs, love songs are by far the most popular and numerous. Here is a lovely serenade, country style, by the lover to his sweetheart, interpreted on the guitar by Emmanuele Cilia.



References:

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