

Press release (please do not publish before November 5th)

## The 1st EU Songbook is published after nine years – the six Maltese songs have now been unveiled

After 70 years of exchanging coal, steel, and fish within the European Union, the time has come for a more soulful exchange: *song treasures*. A cultural milestone, the 1st EU Songbook, assembled by the civil society *independent* of the EU institutions, has finally been published in print format with an app. The six Maltese songs, chosen by public vote, have now been unveiled.

Song celebrations are heard across the EU today where the motto of the European Union, “Unity in Diversity”, has been concretised in a pioneer songbook. The EU Songbook was created with the participation of more than 100 music organisations and conservatories, and through public votes covered by over 400 media outlets, engaging more than 87,000 citizens across the union. The result are 164 songs, six from each of the 27 EU populations, presented in both the original 25 languages and in singable “European English”, side by side.

### The Maltese contribution

In 2018, with participation of *School of Performing Arts, University of Malta* and *Malta School of Music*, six cherished songs from Malta were chosen by **1.112 people** in a public vote covered by *Malta Today, The Times of Malta* and *Malta Independent*:

1. Love song: **Xemx** (1975) – (Dominic Grech / The Tramps)
2. Nature & Seasons: **L-Aħħar Bidwi f’Wied il-Għasel** (1974) - (P. Abela / Alfred C. Sant)
3. Freedom & Peace: **Tema ‘79** (1982) – (Paul Abela / Ray Mahoney)
4. Folksongs & Traditionals: **Viva Malta** (1966) – (Freddie Portelli)
5. Faith & Spirituals: **Iddeċidejt** – (Tiziana Grech)
6. Children’s song: **Ninni la tibkix iżjed** (1846) – (Ġizwita Indri Schembri)

41 songs nominated Maltese songs went on vote. When the six finalists were identified, the two EU Songbook editors for Malta, Dr. Albert Pace and Dr. John Galea, School of Performing Arts, University of Malta, provided introductions, lead sheets and song lyrics. Dr. Pace comments on the Maltese contribution:

*“Some songs, particularly in a small country like Malta, have an almost iconic status for the local population. It is a fascinating idea to have these songs shared with other fellow citizens of the European Union.”*

### Lost ‘n found - in translation

In Malta, composer Paul Arbela, himself composer of two of the chosen songs, rallied all the implied lyricists ensuring that the translations of the Maltese songs into singable

“European English” were in the best of hands, such as *Ray Mahoney, Alfred C. Sant, Freddie Portelli*. Lyrics translator of the cherished “Ninni La Tibkix Izjed”, chosen in the category of freedom and peace, Joe Julian Farrugia, comments on the challenge of lyrics translation:

*“Translating popular Maltese songs into English presents a unique artistic challenge, as the cultural richness and lyrical rhythm of the Maltese language often convey emotions that are difficult to capture in direct translation. In my translation of a popular Christmas carol, more than a century old, I had to preserve the essence of the original lyrics while making them accessible to a wider audience. The new lyrics retain their core sentiment, allowing non-Maltese speakers to experience the heartfelt expression and stories that define Malta’s vibrant musical tradition”.*

### **From the Byzantine Empire to rock-classics**

Each of the 164 classics are presented for solo voice, with chords, and with lyrics in both the 25 original languages (spanning three alphabets) and in singable *European English*, side by side. A mosaic of introductions, crafted by 61 national editors, provides unique insight into European music history spanning six centuries, from a Byzantine hymn to modern European rock-classics.

For those who wish to listen to the songs, QR codes printed on all 164 scores lead to original recordings. Additionally, a free app is available for download for all who wish to participate in the European song exchange.

Jeppe Marsling (50), the Danish founder of the European non-profit NGO behind the project, comments on the intention of the EU Songbook:

*“With the EU Songbook, we hope to enable the 27 populations to live less parallel lives through song exchange. We chose the term ‘European English’ on the cover because it reflects the way we Europeans speak our most common second-language—coloured by our native tongues. It is not meant for perfection, but for heart-to-heart dialogue. The EU Songbook is intended for all kinds of meetings between all kinds of people, whether in good times or times of crisis: for education, concerts, diplomatic engagements, or even for first-time conversations on a train or in a café. Moreover, we hope to inspire singing events on the largely silent annual Europe Day, May 9th—our European ‘Dependence Day’.*

Even though the project, carrying EU’s name, originated not from the system, but from the civil society, it was both granted the *European Citizen’s Prize 2023* by the European Parliament and supported profoundly by 18 ministers of culture, including Dr. Owen Bonnici, Minister for the National Heritage, the Arts, and the Local Government who funded the translations of the Maltese songs into English. Dr. Bonnici issued a statement:

“I welcome the EU Songbook as an initiative that reflects the cultural diversity and richness of the EU in the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the Union. The preservation and promotion of songs from different Member States, to be more widely enjoyed through translation, is an opportunity for sharing of national identities, which I look forward to in earnest.”

The EU Songbook is now available throughout the EU, UK and USA. The WebApp, which includes all 164 titles, introductions, and links to YouTube, is free for download via the App Store and Google Play or via the following QR code:



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