**MEDIA RELEASE**

*English version:* **Gaulitanus Choir returns from Rome concert tour**

Gozo’s Gaulitanus Choir has just returned from its 23rd artistic choral venture abroad, a concert tour in Rome, Italy, between the 7th and the 10th June.

The concert tour ensued from an ongoing Gaulitana: A Festival of Music artistic collaboration, and followed an invitation by the ‘Associazione Fondazione Euro Mediterraneo’ and its artistic director, Enrico Castiglione, who for several years has been responsible for the production, scenery and costumes for the Gaulitana's annual operatic production.

Indeed, the main artistic event was participation in the 24th edition of the Festival Euro Mediterraneo through a secular openair concert at the wonderful Parco di Appia Antica on Saturday 8th June in the evening. Entitled "Sole e Amore ... da Malta all'Italia!", the concert pertinently opened with Joseph Vella’s ‘Innu lil Ghawdex’ – which was being performed for the first time in a 4-voice arrangement which Colin Attard worked on Vella’s (latest) revision of the hymn –, and Giacomo Puccini’s bouncy ‘Inno a Roma’.

The first part of the concert was a Puccini celebration. The choir’s soloists, sopranos Stephanie Portelli, Georgina Gauci, Antonella Portelli, Patricia Borg and mezzo-soprano Claire Massa gave a rendition of a number of chamber arias. Violinist Pierre Louis Attard then interpreted ‘Madama Butterfly - Fantasia for Violin’ as arranged by Alberto Bachmann, and the Gaulitanus Choir concluding the slot with ‘La Bohème – Choral Snippets’ as compiled by Colin Attard.

The second part of the concert was then completely devoted to Maltese music – very much underlining Maltese traditions, lifestyles, ambience and identity. Violinist Pierre Louis interpreted Stephen Attard’s suite ‘Xejriet’ and the choir performed Carmelo Pace’s ‘Is-Sajf’ (for female voices only), ‘Lapsi’ and ‘L-Imnarja’, Charles Camilleri’s ‘L-Għanja tas-Sajf’, as well as Colin Attard’s arrangements for ‘a cappella’ mixed choir of Giuseppe Caruana’s ‘Innu ta’ Filgħodu’ and ‘Innu ta’ Filgħaxija’.

The final part of the concert was then a very typical Italian one. Indeed, ‘Napolitana!’ – an extended medley of some of the best-loved Neapolitan songs as arranged by Colin and Stephen Attard – brought together all the vocal soloists, violinist Pierre Louis Attard and the Gaulitanus Choir for a rather climactic ending. The concert was attended by Maltese Embassy official, Ms Maria Buttigieg, as well at the FEM’s artistic director, Enrico Castiglione.

This major artistic commitment was then complemented by various other artistic events. Indeed, on Saturday morning the choir was invited to attend the exclusive Papal Audience which HH Pope Franics was holding for the many choirs participating in the ‘IV International Meeting of Choirs in the Vatican’. In the joyous and uplifting atmosphere prevailing at the Sala Nervi, the choir joined the thousands of choristers hailing from all across the world in the singing of popular religious hymns before the arrival of His Holiness. After the Pope’s address, several Gaulitanus members had the opportunity to line up very close to the aisle from where the Pope was passing, and 9-month-old Oliver Borg (the son of a chorister) was handed over to HH for a special blessing (with the photo also featuring on the ‘L’Osservatore Romano’). The cherry on the cake then arrived when the organizers of the IMCV2024 asked the choir’s director, Colin Attard, to give a comment – which he duly did, also referring to Pope’s address – and the choir to perform a Maltese number – with Attard’s arrangement of Giuseppe Caruana’s Marian hymn ‘Fil-Ħlewwa ta’ Mejju’ being very much acclaimed.

More prestige was then in stock on Sunday. As a matter of fact, at 12.30hrs, right after the Pope’s Angelus, the choir animated the extremely well-attended holy mass at St Peter's Basilica along with the resident Cappella Giulia directed by Mro. Avolio. Later in the afternoon, at 17.30hrs, the choir animated another holy mass, this time at the Archbasilica of St John Lateran, the Pope’s seat. The mass was attended by the Maltese Ambassador to Italy Frank Vassallo and Mrs Vassallo. Amongst the various numbers performed during both masses, pride of place was taken by Maltese excerpts, namely Giuseppe Caruana’s hymns and Pierre Louis Attard’s ‘O Salutaris Hostia’.

Truly, and as always, in line with its ambassadorial role as a prime promoter of Maltese music abroad, even in its Rome concert tour the Gaulitanus Choir made sure to present quite a lot of Maltese music, also in the Maltese language.

Throughout this Rome concert tour the choir was led and conducted by its founder and musical director as well as Gaulitana: A Festival of Music Artistic Director, Colin Attard, who also accompanied the choir and the soloists during the FEM concert.

Artistic commitments apart, the concert tour was another very enriching cultural experience, with the group also having the possibility to visit Viterbo, Bolsena and the lake, Orvieto, and of course to explore several of the infinite charms found at the Città Eterna and its peripheries.

This foreign foray, part of the organisation's calendar of international events generally ensuing from Gaulitana: A Festival of Music's international collaborations. followed the choir’s highly successful concert tour of Poland last December, Colin Attard’s chairing of the adjudicating board at the 13th edition of the 'Concorso Internazionale Città di Massa', Italy, and Attard’s conducting the Ion Dimitrescu Philharmonic in a symphonic concert in Ramnicu Valcea, Romania, also with the participation of the Gaulitana Festival's coordinator Pierre Louis Attard as solo violinist.

*Maltese version:*

**Il-Kor Gaulitanus jirritorna minn ‘concert tour’ f’Ruma**

Il-Kor Gaulitanus t’Għawdex għadu kif irritorna mill-23 avventura korali artistika barra mill-pajjiż, li saret f’Ruma, l-Italja, bejn is-7 u l-10 ta’ Ġunju.

Din kienet frott ta’ kollaborazzjoni artistika nternazzjoanli ta’ Gaulitana: A Festival of Music, u segwiet stedina mill-‘Associazione Fondazione Euro Mediterraneo’ u d-direttur artistiku tagħha, Enrico Castiglione, li għal diversi snin kien responsabbli għall-produzzjoni, ix-xenarju u l-kostumi għall-produzzjoni operistika annwali ta’ Gaulitana.

Fil-fatt, l-avveniment artistiku prinċipali kien il-parteċipazzjoni fit-24 edizzjoni tal-Festival Euro Mediterraneo permezz ta’ kunċert sekulari fil-beraħ fil-Parco di Appia Antica nhar is-Sibt 8 ta’ Ġunju filgħaxija. Intitolat "Sole e Amore ... da Malta all'Italia!", il-kunċert bix-xieraq fetaħ b’‘Innu lil Għawdex’ ta’ Joseph Vella – li kien qed jigi eżegwit għall-ewwel darba f’arranġament għal erba’ vuċijiet li Colin Attard ħadem fuq ir-reviżjoni (l-aktar reċenti) tal-innu ta’ Vella stess –, u ‘Inno a Roma’ majestuz ta’ Giacomo Puccini.

L-ewwel parti tal-kunċert kienet ċelebrazzjoni ta’ Puccini. Is-solisti tal-kor, is-soprani Stephanie Portelli, Georgina Gauci, Antonella Portelli, Patricia Borg u l-mezzo-sopran Claire Massa taw rendizzjoni ta’ numru ta’ ‘arie di camera’. Il-vjolinista Pierre Louis Attard imbagħad interpreta ‘Madama Butterfly - Fantasia for Violin’ kif arranġata minn Alberto Bachmann, u l-Kor Gaulitanus temm is-slot b’‘La Bohème – Choral Snippets’ kif ikkumpilata minn Colin Attard.

It-tieni parti tal-kunċert kienet imbagħad iddedikata kompletament għall-mużika Maltija – li tirrifletti t-tradizzjonijiet Maltin, l-istili ta’ ħajja, l-atmosfera u l-identità tagħna. Il-vjolinista Pierre Louis interpreta s-suite ta’ Stephen Attard ‘Xejriet’ u l-kor kanta ‘Is-Sajf’ (għal vuċijiet nisa biss), ‘Lapsi’ u ‘L-Imnarja’, kollha ta’ Carmelo Pace, ‘L-Għanja tas-Sajf’ ta’ Charles Camilleri, kif ukoll l-arranġamenti ta’ Colin Attard għal kor imħallat ‘a cappella’ ta’ ‘Innu ta’ Filgħodu’ u ‘Innu ta’ Filgħaxija’ ta’ Giuseppe Caruana.

Il-parti finali tal-kunċert kienet imbagħad waħda tipikament Taljana. Fil-fatt, ‘Napolitana!’ – medley estiż ta’ wħud mill-aqwa kanzunetti Naplitani arranġati minn Colin u Stephen Attard – ġabret flimkien lis-solisti vokali kollha, il-vjolinista Pierre Louis Attard u l-Kor Gaulitanus għal tmiem klimattiku. Għall-kunċert attendew l-uffiċjal tal-Ambaxxata Maltija, is-Sinjura Maria Buttigieg, kif ukoll id-direttur artistiku tal-FEM, Enrico Castiglione.

Dan l-impenn artistiku prinċipali kien imbagħad ikkumplimentat minn diversi avvenimenti artistiċi oħra. Fil-fatt, is-Sibt filgħodu l-kor kien mistieden jattendi l-Udjenza Papali esklussiva li l-Papa Franġisku kien qed iżomm għal bosta korijiet li ħadu sehem fil-‘IV Incontro Internazionale delle Corali in Vatican’. Fl-atmosfera ferriħija u ta’ qawmien tal-ispirtu fis-Sala Nervi, il-kor ingħaqad ma’ eluf ta’ koristi ġejjin minn madwar id-dinja kollha fil-kant ta’ innijiet reliġjużi popolari qabel il-wasla tal-Qdusija Tiegħu. Wara d-diskors tal-Papa, diversi membri tal-Gaulitanus kellhom l-opportunità jersqu viċin ħafna tal-passaġġ minn fejn kien għaddej il-Papa, u Oliver Borg ta’ 9 xhur (it-tifel ta’ korista) ġie mogħti lill-Papa għal barka speċjali (bir-ritratt ippublikat ukoll fuq ‘L’Osservatore Romano’). Iċ-ċirasa fuq il-kejk imbagħad waslet meta l-organizzaturi tal-IMCV2024 talbu lid-direttur tal-kor, Colin Attard, jagħti kumment – li huwa għamel, anke billi rrefera għad-diskors tal-Papa – u lill-kor biex jesegwixxi biċċa Maltija – bl-arranġament ta’ Attard tal-innu Marjan ta’ Giuseppe Caruana ‘Fil-Ħlewwa ta’ Mejju’ ikun ferm apprezzat.

Aktar prestiġju kien merfugħ għall-Ħadd. Fil-fatt, fil-12.30, immedjatament wara l-Anġelus tal-Papa, il-Kor Gaulitanus (flimkien mal-Cappella Giulia, residenti fil-Vatikan u mmexxija minn Mro. Avolio) anima quddiesa fil-Bażilika ta’ San Pietru li għalija attendew bosta nies. Aktar tard filgħaxija, fis-17.30, il-kor anima quddiesa oħra, din id-darba fl-Arċibażilika ta’ San Ġwann Lateran, is-sede tal-Papa. Għal din il-quddiesa attenda l-Ambaxxatur Malti għall-Italja, Frank Vassallo, u s-Sinjura Vassallo. Fost in-numri varji esegwiti matul iż-żewġ quddisiet, biex xieraq ingħhatat importanza kbira lil siltiet Maltin, jiġifieri l-innijiet ta’ Giuseppe Caruana u ‘O Salutaris Hostia’ ta’ Pierre Louis Attard.

Tassew, bħas-soltu u f’konformità mar-rwol ambaxxadorjali tiegħhu bħala promotur ewlieni tal-mużika Maltija barra minn Malta, anke f’Ruma il-Kor Gaulitanus għamel ħiltu biex jippreżenta ħafna mużika Maltija, ukoll bl-ilsien Malti.

Matul din il-mawra ta’ kunċerti f’Ruma l-kor kien immexxi mill-fundatur u d-direttur mużikali tiegħu kif ukoll Direttur Artistiku tal-Festival Gaulitana: A Festival of Music, Colin Attard, li anke akkumpanja lill-kor u lis-solisti matul il-kunċert tal-FEM.

Minbarra l-impenji artistiċi, din il-mawra kienet esperjenza kulturali oħra arrikkenti ħafna, bil-grupp ikollu wkoll il-possibilità li jżur Viterbo, Bolsena u l-għadira sabiħa tagħha, Orvieto, u naturalment jesplora diversi mill-attrazzjonijiet infiniti misjuba fil-Belt Eterna u l-inħawi tagħha.

Din l-avventura barranija, parti mill-kalendarju tal-avvenimenti internazzjonali tal-organizzazzjoni ġeneralment irriżultat minn kollaborazzjonijiet internazzjonali tal-Festival Gaulitana: A Festival of Music, segwiet il-mawra ta’ kunċerti ta’ suċċess kbir tal-kor fil-Polonja f’Diċembru li għadda, it-tmexxija ta’ Colin Attard tal-bord ta’ ġudikaturi fit-13-il edizzjoni tal-‘Concorso Internazionale Città di Massa’, l-Italja, u l-kondizzjoni ta’ Attard tal-Filarmonika Ion Dimitrescu f’kunċert simfoniku f’Ramnicu Valcea, ir-Rumanija, ukoll bil-parteċipazzjoni tal-koordinatur tal-Festival Gaulitana Pierre Louis Attard bħala solista bil-vjolin.