

My Lovely, Lovely Ladies!

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As we approach the busiest time of year for the Imperial Ladies Choir, I reflect on a very mixed year of events.

Our Festa contributions in September last year were very successful and it encouraged a past member to re-join our ranks. We then lost two of our sopranos for various reasons and another mezzo-soprano left to study abroad. However, our singing commitments didn't stop. In November, we sang a new mass at St. Catherine's Monastery in Valletta. In December, we entertained the Christmas tourists at The Paradise Bay Hotel and The Maritim Hotel, and joined with the band to sing carols to the staff and residents at Dar il-Madonna tal-Melliġna.

After Christmas, it was time to prepare for the Palm Sunday concert. Sadly, Odette Zammit, who had returned to the choir after battling with a serious life-threatening illness and had joined us for the Christmas concerts, had a relapse a few weeks before the concert. She had attended nearly all the rehearsals, but she could not continue due to her failing health. This was a real blow to the choir as it had been wonderful to have her back. It was such a pity, as the concert this year was held, not in the primary school, but at the Parish Church. It was a moving and awe-inspiring occasion and a privilege to sing in such wonderful surroundings. The acoustics made it a real pleasure to perform.

Our next two performances were very different. Sunday the 22nd of April saw us at Il-Majjistral Nature Park, singing with the band on the headland as the sun went down as part of Altifest Malta 2018. Two months later, on the 20th of June, we had a more traditional concert with the band in the Parish Square singing for the San Ġwann tal-Ħgejjeġ. We had a large and appreciative audience. We also had a new recruit singing with us at this concert as the ladies welcomed Diane Cucciardi into the ranks.

On the 8th of July, we heard the sad news that Odette had lost her battle and had passed away at the young age of only 49. Standing with the band while

they played a fanfare for her coffin outside the Band Club was heart-wrenching. We joined in with the church choir to sing at her funeral mass. What a loss of such a musical, beautiful, and happy person. I know the choir misses her deeply. A few days later we were singing for another funeral. Our ex-president Joseph Bartolo had also passed away and the choir came together to celebrate the life of someone who had dedicated so much of his life to the club.

In July, we were very pleased to have our own concert at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Mellieħa as part of the Iljieli Melleħin 2018. We performed a varied programme of some of our favourite songs which was very well received and attended. I thought this concert included some of the best singing I have heard from the choir. Sadly, this was to be the last concert of another of our members, Jennie Mitchell who has moved to Cyprus to continue her teaching career. It's a big loss to the mezzo section but she went off on a high note – literally, as she sang the solo soprano part in a beautiful setting of the Ave Maria by Cesar Franck. She was joined by Marisa, a seasoned soloist, and they produced a gorgeous sound which was complemented by the choir who joined in with the Sancta Maria. We wish her all the best in her and her partner's new life and await the invitation for a choir tour to Cyprus! Just keep looking at the choir's picture, Jennie, as a cheeky reminder.

On a jollier note, we had a surprise visit from the previous conductor of the choir, Shirley Helleur. We went for a lovely meal at the Maritim and caught up with old times. Perhaps another tour possibility to Gibraltar!

So, if your maths is keeping up, you will notice that we have now lost five choir members in the last twelve months and gained only one. This is a matter

of concern for me and the ladies. We do enjoy our time at rehearsals and the choir are very supportive of each other, so how do we go about attracting new members? Who are we trying to recruit and why should they want to join our choir?

We need to think about the different desires and needs of a new member:

- Rehearsals: location and time
- Type of music performed
- Type of choir: image and style
- Time commitment

As answers to these points, we:

- have a central location on the Parish Square for our rehearsals and during the summer the rooms are air conditioned for comfort;
- rehearse every Thursday at 7:30 and finish at 9pm;
- sing a wide variety of music from pop to classical pieces and from traditional Maltese songs to songs from other cultures;
- can sing a cappella, with keyboard or band accompaniment;
- perform in a wide variety of venues.

We are part of The Imperial Band Club and promote its image which also means that we share the benefits of the club members. This includes organised trips, themed evenings at the club as well as ‘thank-you’ occasions – receptions and pasta evenings hosted by the committee. Everyone who attends a rehearsal is given a free drink token, redeemable at the bar.

Time commitment is probably a major factor. We do expect members to turn up regularly and on time. Singers are also required to do some homework, even if it is just looking at the song lyrics. We do have a fairly relaxed rehearsal ethos – everyone gives up their time towards a common goal and it is understood that family and other commitments can crop up. We try to be as accommodating as we can.

A phrase I have often come across when asking someone if they would be interested in joining the choir is “I can’t sing!” This could not be further from the truth. Only a tiny percentage of people can’t sing. With practice and support, most people can join a choir. We’re not trying to recruit operatic soloists, but rather train a group of ladies to make a pleasant sound. That’s what group singing is all about.

Another favourite phrase is “choirs are not my sort of thing!” This is probably a diplomatic statement so as not to offend me. I promote my choir as a fun group of people who enjoy getting together, escaping the ironing (or the kids), washing up etc. and enjoy a good sing-song. We catch up on each other’s stories and offer support or help if needed. We share interest in each other’s events and we love it when we do a good concert. We also enjoy cake and other home baked goodies – but that’s another story!

‘I can’t read music’ is another well-worn phrase. It really doesn’t matter. I try to help as much as possible to help at least knowing your way around a piece of music. I provide mp3s to go with the songs with the various voices standing out so that they can listen to them as they follow the words.

I strongly believe that there needs to be an ongoing drive to promote, and recruit for, the choir. We need to keep our current standard of performance, our sense of fun, and our numbers. So, if you know anyone who is interested and would like to come to our rehearsals on a ‘taste and see’ with no obligations, please send them along. Let me know in advance so that there will be goodies!

Finally, I wish to thank my Lovely Ladies for all the hard work and commitment they have shown this year. I get so many wonderful comments after our concerts.

May you all have a very happy Festa.

Interested in joining the Imperial Choir?

New Members Welcome!

Contact us on info@imperialbandclub.com