



October 2006

Ggantija Solar Festival
Saturday, 5 August 2006
8.30 pm, Ggantija Temple,
Xaghra, Gozo
Free to the public

Ggantija Gathers Force...for the Future!

Report on First Annual Ggantija Event
for Sponsors, Donors, Contributors and Friends

Barbara Bode
October 2006

Colored lights tracing the swirls of old temple patterns transformed the rear wall of Ggantija into a Neolithic invitation. Built of massive boulders, this pair of goddess worship temples here in Xaghra, on Gozo, in the middle of the Mediterranean creates a powerful presence. The temples were built more than a thousand years before the Pyramids and Stonehenge. Today, as the oldest free-standing structures in the world, their robust spirituality continues to welcome visitors from around the world.

The projected light patterns on the back wall evoked an appropriately prehistoric atmosphere and put the temples into context with the other megalithic temples found in Malta.

The scene was set. Lights. Sound. Action.

Thanks to the efforts of Mayor Joseph Spiteri, the support of the Xaghra Local Council, the scripting and organizing ability of the Victoria-based *Venew Group* and the production skills of Jamie Camilleri's *Unique Sound* company based in Marsalforn, this summer, in August, these temples came alive with a first-ever light and sound show.

Never before on the Maltese islands had any of the prehistoric temples been celebrated in such a way. The Spirit of Ggantija and the legend of Sansuna

enveloped the audience of more than a thousand people and caught them up in the magic of the legend and their own imaginations.

“Prosit,” wrote Bishop Mario Grech of Gozo. “I only heard words of praise from people who were present [my parents included] and even from others. ... Thank you for contributing to our history and culture.”

“Brilliant and innovative,” observed Maltese environmental activist Astrid Vella from Sliema. “By Gozitans, for Gozitans and for the country of Malta...we need such initiatives to give us pride and appreciation of our country, our heritage and ourselves.”

“This sort of initiative should be taken on a regular basis,” proclaimed Caroline Borg, Corporate Sales Manager for the Hilton in St. Julian’s. “Absolutely,” agreed Maurice Saliba, renowned Maltese hair stylist now at The Dragonera. “Congratulations to all involved for making the effort to highlight one of the wonders of our heritage.”

“...fine work, excellent planning and realistic scheduling resulted in a smoothly run event. I have heard nothing but praise from all who attended the show. ... a superb job ... set a new standard for promoting a new market for Gozo,” wrote Victor Galea, head of The Ager Foundation, promoting agro- and eco-tourism on Gozo and spokesperson for the AD Gozo Regional Committee.

As the lighting came up on stage, the audience was introduced to Sansuna and a story of how the temples came to be. Struggling up the sheer cliffs to the wind swept plateau, later to be known as Xaghra, the legendary giantess Sansuna carried heavy baskets of vegetables and fruit to create a thanksgiving harvest ceremony, a Solar Festival. One day when she again had carried the bountiful produce of her fields up the steep slopes to the plateau as an offering, she reached the top, hungry and exhausted and lay down to rest. The Spirits came to her, “Build a magnificent temple,” they encouraged her as she slept.

When she awoke, for sustenance, she found a bag of broad beans beside her. Eating them for strength, she felt the gentle stirrings of the spirit of Ggantija as she considered the mission.

Faithfully, she began to quarry and haul huge boulders, megaliths, up onto the plateau. Each time she successfully delivered another enormous rock, the Spirits guided her placement of it. Eventually, she saw the outlines of her inspired efforts, the temples of Ggantija were taking shape. She was constructing a sacred place to celebrate the Goddess, the sun and the fruits of the field.

And that's how the story of Sansuna and Ggantija began, as it was told on the first Saturday of August 2006, in light and sound and dancing and acting on the grounds behind the Ggantija temples in Xaghra. Against the light patterns cast on the enormous flat rocks that make up the back wall, the actors and dancers played out their interpretation of the legendary origins of Ggantija.

More than a thousand visitors watched mesmerized by the swirling silk scarves of the Spirit of Ggantija, the music, the dancing, and the play of the lights on the age old stones.

Just as Sansuna was inspired by a dream, so was Xaghra Mayor Joseph Spiteri. He envisioned Ggantija bathed in lights with gentle music playing. Thanks to his vision and thanks to financial support from the local council, the Malta Tourism Authority, Vodafone and private American donors, as well as the fine catering contributed by Il Kartell of Marsalforn, the endorsement of Heritage Malta, and the creative energy of a team of enthusiastic Gozitans, his dream came true.

This event was the first ever to bring a combination of light and sound and drama to a Maltese temple. In a sense, it was a pilot project, a test to gauge public response. Happily, most in the audience were positive. What criticism there was had to do with the show being short or the plot a bit thin or the presentation being somewhat unsophisticated.

On balance, however, the response was highly encouraging. Consequently, plans are underway for next summer's presentation of *Ggantija Alive* and to continue to improve it and move toward making it an annual event with the goal of promoting awareness of Ggantija, locally, nationally and internationally.

While most Gozitans visit the temples as school children, that school visit is often for them, unfortunately, a one-time event. Thanks to this summer's family-oriented production, however, many former school children returned for the first time since they were in school. They brought their own children with them.

They were joined by a substantial number of Maltese and international visitors, many of whom came across the channel and chose to spend the night in one of the majority of Gozitan hotels offering special packages for those who came to see *Ggantija Alive*. Ex-pat residents helped to swell the crowd. To the surprise of many, including some of the organizers, almost all the thousand seats were taken and a couple of hundred more people lined the wall watching.

What were some online reactions on the blogs?

Sabine Cassar Alpert, Editor of *Gozo Plus*, author and freelance writer, noted on her blog:

“The show was a nicely presented affair; there was a festive and enjoyable atmosphere all around. ... The piece was put up using legitimate artistic license... and it definitely was enjoyable! Overall, 3 thumbs up to the organizers for putting this together and offering it free of charge to everyone!”

Adding his comment to her blog, John said:

“I was present at the ‘festival’ and I must admit that it was a rather bold interpretation of one of the local legends. I enjoyed the fact that the spirit of Ggantija spoke to the audience.”

Writing on Rob Micallef’s MaltaMedia.com blog:

One anonymous poster wrote...

“Excellent night! Great special effects! Not sure if Unique Sound or God was responsible for them. But all in all a great night for the whole family -- made our trip to Gozo worth it. Looking forward to 2007!!!”

Another anonymous writer said...

“it was great, thoroughly enjoyed it. When the wind picked up I actually looked towards the heavens to see if the gods had accepted the offering. (Very good effects)”

Cast and Crew and Benefactors

The all Gozitan - except for one American -- cast and crew were assembled by Jamie Camilleri’s company, *Unique Sound*.

Amanda Neal, the American who flew in from Washington DC for two months to help with marketing and promotion, also landed in the role of the Spirit of Ggantija. Another American, Stephen Bouchard, prominent New York attorney, came for a couple of weeks to help and found he had undiscovered talents, including sticking flyers on the windscreens of cars and putting gold paint on the Spirit of Ggantija.

Cast

Amanda Neal	Spirit of Ggantija
Margaret Cassar	Voice of Ggantija
Franco Vella	Narrator

Pauline Vella	High Priestess
---------------	----------------

Maureen Camilleri Sansuna

Simone Grech Choreographer &
Spirit / Neophyte

Laura Grima Spirit / Neophyte
Christine Formosa Spirit / Neophyte
Marceline Formosa Spirit / Neophyte
Edel Cauchi Spirit / Neophyte

Crew

Unique Sound Audio / Visual
Jamie Camilleri
Sean Said
Antoine Debrincat ProStage
Etienne Micallef Video & Photos
Barbara Bode Photography
Erika Brincat Poems "Xaghra Circle" & "Ggantija"
Jerry Vella Script & Poem "Faithful Servant - Loyal Friend"
Francis Aloisio Drawing of serpent from stone slab at Ggantija for 2006
logos
Venew Group Ltd. Props, Souvenirs, Minibus Shuttle service

Helpful friends

Thanks to various people who pitched in to help along the way and the night of the event:

Carmen Bajada (MLP) and Joe Cordina (MLP) members of Xaghra local council
Carmelino Refalo (PN) Vice Mayor, Xaghra local council
Josephine Sultana & Executive Secretary Joseph Azzopardi, staff of Xaghra Council
Stephen Bouchard, New York City
Fr. Charles Cini SBJ, Marsalforn and Sliema
Brian Camilleri from Vodafone Victoria, Arkadia
Rob Micallef, Valletta, MaltaMedia.com
Philip Spiteri, restaurant *Il Kartell*, Marsalforn
Michael Troje, Consular and Commercial Attaché, US Embassy Malta
Tania & Joe Vella, Xaghra and Comino
Joseph Vella, Xaghra
Salvina & Paul Vella, Kercem
Jo Warren, archeological historian, Sannat

Marketing and Promotion

Key to popularizing the event was the *Ggantija Alive* website designed and hosted by The Venew Group. Fortuitously discovering that the domain name *Ggantija.com* was available, The Venew Group bought it knowing it would be easily remembered.

Website statistics for the two week period from 25 July - 7 August 2006:

Total Hits:	23,564
Total Visitors:	760
Average Hits per Day:	1,726
Average Visitors per Day:	55

Note: the site achieved First Page Google ranking for search terms "Ggantija", "Ggantija Alive" and "Ggantija Solar Festival."

Almost all the major hotels on Gozo offered special packages for attendees who wanted to stay the night. Thanks to: The Grand Hotel, The DownTown, The Serena Hotel, Hotel San Andrea, Hotel Ta Cenc, Cornucopia Hotel, and St Patrick's Hotel.

With no budget for paid advertising, the producers and organizers relied on the Internet and hands-on distribution of flyers. Thanks to various businesses for providing distribution points and advertising space and to the MTA for setting out flyers in their tourist office inside the City Gate in Valletta.

Some 450 email press releases sent a couple of weeks before the show, resulted in articles in the major English language newspapers and an interview in Maltese for an Australian radio show and, in both English and Maltese, notices and comments appeared on some web blogs as well. Fax blasts went out to approximately 350 small businesses in both Malta and Gozo.

And to make sure the neighbors knew about the event, the Mayor and Local Council sent individual invitations to all the residents of Xaghra and the Mayors of Gozo and Malta. The Xaghra Council sent out about 2,500 invitations with flyers.

For hard copy distribution, the number of flyers and posters produced by The Venew Group and printed were:

- 10,000 flyers (small full color Posters)
- 200 large full color Posters
- 200 black & white Programs
- 50 color programs

All but a handful of flyers were distributed.

What did we learn?

First of all, Gozitans and Maltese are interested enough in their heritage to make the effort to come to such an event. Second, they and their families welcome an event that engenders a sense of civic pride. Third, a fairly simple approach with a straightforward message can attract and hold an audience.

What's next? Your version.

It's your turn. Thousands of years ago when Ggantija was being built, no one was around taking notes so how it came about is anyone's guess. Use your imagination. If you have a notion about the creation of Ggantija that you would like to see presented on stage to bring Ggantija Alive next summer, or if you have a friend who does, let us know. Submit a summary, a synopsis.

We don't want you to write a script, just write a summary of no more than 1,000 -1,200 words. Check out the rules on our website: <http://www.ggantija.com> .

No matter what your age, your hobbies or your occupation, if you have a script idea, submit a *synopsis*, a summary of your ideas for the story of Ggantija.

The story for *Ggantija Alive 2007* will be selected through an open competition. First cut will be made by a committee of professionals. Final choices will be by popular vote at the website online.

Some things to keep in mind...

What *Ggantija Alive 2007* is NOT:

NOT necessarily historical or fact-based
NOT an adult-centric production
NOT an expensive extravaganza

GGANTIJA ALIVE 2007 is meant to be engaging, amusing and interesting for the whole family. Keep the size and complexity manageable. Remember, a simple story line enables the audience to see and understand your presentation.

The goal is to bring *GGANTIJA* to life in the imaginations of the next generation -- the ones who will be her "guardians" in years to come

Script Synopses will be solicited from:

- Drama and Theater groups

- Gozo Education Ministry
- Arts and Cultural groups

- And from individuals...
Everyone and Anyone who is interested in participating

Awards: Cash Prizes

There will be cash awards of

- Lm 400 for first prize;
- Lm 200 for second prize; and
- Lm 100 for third prize

Our 5-year goal for this event is to have it become an internationally recognized and well-attended Light, Sight and Sound show that teaches the world about Ggantija, Gozo and the wonders of Malta's Neolithic heritage.

Ggantija: The Magic of Light, Sight and Sound
Barbara Bode
Xaghra, Gozo
October 2006