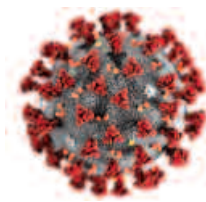


Lifestyle & Culture



Watching the Wheels through the Coronavirus Pandemic



UK-based writer and broadcaster **DR TONI SANT** recently retired from his role as Artistic Director at *Spazju Kreattiv*, after six years leading the creative vision at Malta's national centre for creativity. He is now the director of the University of Salford's Digital Curation Lab at MediaCityUK. His writings on media archaeology and digital curation have appeared in a variety of publications across Europe and the United States. Many still remember him from his broadcasting years with Maltese public radio and television in the early 1980s and into the 1990s, a career that has seen him pioneer Maltese-language podcasting, most recently through his long-standing *Muzika Mod Ieħor* series, which features new music by performers in or from Malta at www.ToniSant.com. Finally persuaded to send in his Diary, here is what he had to say.

I don't know about you but I've had more than enough of the coronavirus pandemic. The last thing I feel like doing is writing about how the pandemic has impacted on my life over the past eight months.

I've been locked inside at home in England most of this time. My hectic travel schedule has come to a complete stop and other than occasional trips to my favourite British seaside town, Scarborough, where I still manage to avoid almost everyone, I only leave home to run quick grocery shopping errands or to take a walk in my neighborhood park just to ensure my aging body doesn't become too stiff.

From the start of 2020 until the first week of March, I had already travelled more than the average person does in any given year. These travels were mostly work-related, even if some of them involved voluntary work for Wikimedia Community Malta, the internationally-affiliated NGO that supports Wikipedia and other open knowledge projects in Malta.

My last visit to Malta was precisely to run workshops for the Art+Feminism initiative, which included an edit-a-thon at MUŻA and an exhibition featuring new works by eight women artists at *Spazju Kreattiv*. That whole shebang included an early celebration of Jean Zaleski's 100th birthday, featuring a public gathering which also marked 10 years since her death in 2010. This was the first of many creative projects that had to be interrupted, postponed, redesigned, or totally cancelled during my last few months as *Spazju Kreattiv* artistic director.

As exciting as all this was, I must admit that the highlight of my last visit to Malta was the Career Recognition honour bestowed on me during the 25th edition of the Malta Music Awards. In my acceptance speech I saluted 25 people, all dead, who had a direct positive impact on my professional career. Little did I know that I was not to return to Malta again as I boarded a plane to Frankfurt the next morning, on my way to the European Forestry Institute in Bonn.



Our much travelled Diarist whizzing through some airport or another recently



TS In Malta receiving a Career Recognition honour during the 25th edition of the Malta Music Awards

I'm now working on three books. The first of these is out during this year's Malta Book Festival. It's a book that wasn't written, as the book's co-author puts it in the preface to our book. It's a series of Facebook posts that he and I wrote between May and June 2020, charting our musical journeys in time and space, along with a number of other metaphysical dimensions.

Immanuel Mifsud, whose words appeared in this Diary last September, started writing Facebook posts about music in his life to balance out all the right-wing "fascist" fist-waving permeating his online newsfeed last April. Inspired by these writings, and the fact that he and I have known each other



The cover of the new book co-authored with Immanuel Mifsud to be launched at the Book Festival

since our secondary school days back in the late 1970s, I decided to write similar posts about my own life story through music.

Either because I have different settings on my Facebook account, or simply because I'm not Facebook "friends" with as many racist bigots as he is, I had no reason to get away from the misguided nationalist drivel he complains about. Come to think of it, I first tried to get away from all that (to some degree) and the polarized partisan political scene in Malta way back in the early 1990s when I left the country to explore life elsewhere. There's lots more about that in the book.

He wrote 34 Facebook posts and I wrote 34 of my own. Our stories intersect a couple of times, most notably around Easter in 1988, when we both holidayed together in London, beyond our initial shared experiences as students in the same school in Rabat. My musical voyages offered me an op-

portunity to revisit most of my life from the perspective of sounds and smells that have stayed with me over the decades. My musical tastes are eclectic and surprisingly more jazz-infused than I had realized before I set out writing these largely autobiographical nonfiction short stories.

These writings have sparked a lot of nostalgia for friends and readers. I prefer not to think of things that way. I'm not great friends with the past. I always prefer the future. Or, to put it another way, I think the present is often better than the past and the future is likely to be better, even if we're all dead anyway in the end.

Jien-Noti-Jien: Hsejjes u Stejjer is published by Klabb Kotba Maltin and available through their website and all leading bookshops in Malta and Gozo. Immanuel and I will be speaking about it, supposedly while commenting on writing literature during the time of the pandemic, during one of the official events on the National Book Festival programme on 13 November at 8:30pm.

The second book is very different and should be appearing just before Christmas. It's a project I've been working on with a number of collaborators over the past five years or so. This book is the first attempt to present a catalogue of what is now known as the *Spazju Kreattiv Art Collection*.

The third book is the one I'm hoping to finish next year. It's another attempt at narrative nonfiction in Maltese. This time around it's not autobiographical. I'm not comfortable saying much else about it just yet but I've shared drafts of a couple of chapters I've already written with three people who are very closely associated with it and their reviews have been significantly more positive than I expected. If it wasn't for the corona pandemic, they'd be pressuring me to finish it up now. "Some guys have all the luck."

Editorial Note: If you wish to contribute your own Covid diary please email mboenit@hotmail.co.uk