Initial Work on the Malta Music Memory Project – and its connections with Oral History.

Toni Sant
Director of Research
School of Arts and New Media
University of Hull – Scarborough Campus

In 2009 I wrote an article for the *Journal of Music, Technology and Education* outlining plans to build a collaborative multimedia database of Maltese music and associated arts. In that article, I explained that the proposed collaborative project would rely on wiki technology to get going with capturing a living archive of past, present and future works of interest in connection to music and associated arts from and in Malta. I also identified various critical issues related to intellectual property rights, preservation policies and techniques, technical infrastructure strategies, and other similar topics, which need to be tackled through specially-developed postgraduate research studentships. Now, two years later, its time to assess what has happened in the initial attempts to implement the plans in the original outline.

From the outset, I argued that for such an undertaking to succeed it needed to be driven by postgraduate research projects, at least initially, to achieve longevity. Over the two years since I wrote that original article I proceeded to find collaborators to create the Malta Music Memory Project, focusing on systematic ways to address the need for a collaborative multimedia database of Maltese music and associated arts. Providing the initial technical infrastructure to enable the project to take on a physical manifestation beyond my preliminary ideas had to be the first step. Concurrently, there was also a need to actively seek to recruit a number of postgraduate students to work on related research projects at doctoral level, under my supervision.

In the process of setting in motion this two-pronged approach, a number of significant research areas have became evidently the core points of interest, stemming from the broad critical issues I had identified in the original proposal for the project. These areas of research can be gathered under two main keywords, each with its own related keywords.

Memory: accessibility, preservation, longevity.

Collaboration: openness, self-interest, crowd-sourcing, communities of practice.

These general areas of research are less generic than the ones I had identified earlier. They are also directly related to the work of the first three doctoral researchers who joined me on the quest to work on the M3P. The researchers come from very different academic and personal backgrounds, and are each focusing on related yet dissimilar research questions. A quick look at the essential aspects of their profiles gives more than a hint of what can be expected in the coming years from their work on and around the M3P.

Anthony Micallef-Grimaud came to the M3P as a musician and educator with many years of creative interactive multimedia activity on a professional level. His M3P-related research involves a discussion of the strategies for the preservation of mediated memories of music and

associated arts. Although his work involves close observation and active participation in the M3P, he is also looking at similar projects (mainly in the UK) to both compare and strengthen his analysis of the issues raised by such projects.

Steve Borg is primarily an ethnologist but also a library and information science professional, with a solid understanding of the dire need for the creation of national audio-visual archives in Malta. His doctoral research revolves around the salvage and preservation of lesser-known Maltese folk instruments and traditional singing (għana), with particular attention to the methods of dissemination of the same through a far-reaching archival project such as the M3P.

Darren Stephens is an academic support specialist at the University of Hull's School of Arts & New Media, with a longstanding involvement in academic aspects of computing and communication technologies. As an information technologist by training and a working professional involved in web development over more than two decades, he is well-positioned to conduct research on creating a technical framework that is robust enough from a technical perspective and most flexible, as well as useful, for an end user.

In the process of working with Micallef-Grimaud, we have identified a number of points to explore as potential strategic actions towards cultivating the development of collaborative work on a memory project, such as the M3P.[1] The six main lines of action can be summarized as follows:

- Reach out and marketing
- Training at various levels
- Embracing leaders of existing communities
- Taking the project directly into communities
- Organising oral history interviews with key stakeholders
- Ensuring the appropriate interface for the project (capture & dissemination)
- Securing funding towards longevity

This is a preliminary list based on observations of the activities we conducted in 2010 and 2011, both online and offline. These activities are described later, after I have provided a little more context for them.

Reach Out

Aside from the systematic academic research that's now underway, the work carried out during the first two years of the project revolved around the official launching of the project in September 2010 and a set of follow-up events in June 2011. These activities need to be considered in the context of audience relations – an essential aspect of any reach out strategy.

M3P's target audiences can be grouped into two broad categories: (i) collaborating members and (ii) anyone interested in Malta's music and associated arts. It is fairly obvious that while the first category is quantifiable and relatively easy to interact with, the latter is extremely broad and includes not only people of all ages and walks of life across the Maltese islands, but also others abroad ranging from expatriates to tourists and from cultural aficionados to academic researchers.

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[1] For Micallef-Grimaud's working notes on 'Proposed strategies for cultivating online collaboration' see http://www.m3p.com.mt/wiki/index.php?title=User:Tonygrimaud/Strategies - accessed 14 January 2012.

One of the main goals of the project is to bring Maltese music and associated arts to new audiences and, as such, exists to ensure that audiences that would otherwise not have access to Maltese music and associated arts in the future are ensured that these are preserved through an elaborate plan for long-term appreciation.

Preliminary Activities

Following the creation of a website at http://www.m3p.com.mt in the spring of 2010, the official launch of the Malta Music Memory project consisted of a day of events held on the 25 September 2010. A 4-hour symposium was organised at the St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity in Valletta and followed by music shows at the same venue and across the street at Hastings Gardens.

Introducing the M3P at the opening of the symposium, I spoke about documenting live music through a collaborative multimedia database, essentially presenting salient point from my 2009 article.[2] My main collaborators on the launch, Alex Grech and Michael Bugeja, spoke about their involvement from their own perspective. Bugeja's presentation was particularly well-received by the audience as it was based on his long-term involvement in the local music scene - from being a fan to playing in bands to writing about bands and producing shows of Maltese rock music on one of Malta's national radio stations. He outlined his initial efforts to chronicle the local music scene in print (mainly through weekly features in the Malta Independent and the Sunday Times) and on the internet (via a now-defunct Geocities website) and pointed out the benefits that a structure such as M3P will offer towards documenting the history of music in Malta. Special mention was made of openness and longevity, two of the keywords subsequently identified through the work by the postgraduate students.

After the introduction, I chaired a panel of invited speakers who recently conducted extensive research on popular music in Malta during the twentieth century. Albert Bell presented a case study of Maltese heavy metal subculture drawing from the findings of his recently-completed doctoral dissertation on heavy metal in Malta and his long-standing involvement in the music scene as fan, mediator and musician. Bell examined myriad social constructs of heavy metal subculture in Malta including the trajectories and contingencies that immersion in the subculture entails. Andrew Alamango presented his project 'Malta's Lost Voices: The collection, digitisation and preservation of 78rpm recordings (1931-32)' just weeks before his book and double CD was published by Filfla Records and professional archivist Noel D'Anastas gave an outline of his MA dissertation in Maltese Studies entitled 'Discussing a Maltese National Cultural Identity through Malta's Pop and Rock Groups since 1964', which he as since successfully presented at the University of Malta.

The symposium came to an end with intellectual property lawyer Jeanine Rizzo, discussing intellectual property issues raised by the M3P from a legal perspective, while Steve Borg brought the proceedings to a close through a detailed response to all the presentations, while highlighting some of the potential ways forward for the M3P. The symposium was also open to questions and comments after each speaker, which made for a very convivial sense of community among those present for the event.

To mark the start of M3P musical explorations, we produced a live acoustic recital with singer-songwriter Rita Pace in the Music Room at St James Cavalier. This show featured

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[2] Audio recordings of the entire symposium are available at
http://www.archive.org/details/M3pInauguralSymposium

guitarists Kalcidon "ta' Mustaċċa" Vella, Denise "ta' Kalċ" Vella, and Willie Saliba, as well as pianist Clifford Borg. Traditional għana was blended with popular Maltese songs written mainly by Pace and Borg.[3] One of the driving ideas behind this session was to present music and singing associated with relatively large-scale festivals (such as the Malta Council for Culture and the Arts' *GħanaFest* and Y.T.C.'s *L-Għanja tal-Poplu*) into an intimate setting, as well as presenting songs that are rarely featured on the same bill due to the perceived difference in genres between traditional heritage related to folklore and popular contemporary culture. This approach was intended to herald the M3P's indiscriminate interest in all genres and styles of music.

To drive the point home and build on the idea of exposing different types of live Maltese music to audiences that do not normally have easy access to them, the first of M3P's events under the banner *You Rarely Hear This On The Radio* was presented at Hastings Gardens, as part of Notte Bianca 2010, a large-scale public event designed to bring the capital city to life throughout the night.[4] Hard rock and heavy metal have a broad and dedicated following across the Maltese islands, but they are usually underrepresented at mass audience events such as Notte Bianca. Lining up six of Malta's foremost hard rock and metal bands on one stage was therefore something rather unusual for this popular annual event organized by the Malta Council for Culture and the Arts. Each of the bands was selected by a panel of rock and metal connoisseurs, which included Albert Bell, Michael Bugeja, and Winston Degiorgio. This was the line up for the evening:

- R.A.S. are Malta's longest standing old school punk band; they have been active since 1995. The fact that their current lead singer is German is also significant in terms of intercultural reach out beyond Malta's shores.

- Memento Nostri are one of the more interesting up and coming acts on the local metal scene. Their work is most notable in its engagement with elements of traditional Maltese cultural identity, such as the use of motifs from għana tal-fatt (a type of traditional Maltese narrative singing) and iconography from the Order of the Knights of St John, particularly the eight pointed cross. Their appearance coincided with the launch of their CD album Pro Patria.

- Loathe are Malta's best-known hardcore metal band. Their fans generate a veritable mosh pit whenever they appear live, and this phenomenon was systematically captured on professional video for the first time in Malta during this event. The claim for a first here is confirmed by the musicians themselves as well as mainstream television production company Where's Everybody?, which requested subsequent use of this footage for one of its primetime television talk shows.

- The Lesser Gods was a short-lived "supergroup" made up of Maltese musicians who have played in various rock bands since the 1980s. As their appearance during this show had been video recorded with a multiple camera shoot, in years to come this will be an appropriate document of their brief existence, when their presence will have undoubtedly faded away from popular memory. Interestingly, although they recorded an album earlier that year, this was never officially released (a copy has been deposited with the M3P, but not through the wiki, raising internal questions about such situations) and the strong online presence they created through an official website, as well as Facebook and MySpace pages, was gone (and not archived publically) by mid-2011.

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[3] Video of the recital is available at http://www.archive.org/details/m3p-ghanja10

[4] Video available at http://www.archive.org/details/m3p-nottebianca10

- Norm Rejection are recognized widely as Malta's foremost protest rock band; they have been active since 1994. Their most relevant songs in this vein are in Maltese and feature themes such as youth alienation, political corruption, postcolonial identity issues, and environmental awareness. They have very rarely been featured on radio or television.

- Forsaken are Malta's longest standing doom metal band; they have been active since 1990. Albert Bell is the band's bassist. Seeing him on stage adds an essential dimension to understanding his doctoral research on heavy metal subcultures in Malta, documenting how and why such performers are able to maintain a loyal following from their fans over such a long period of time. Having presented his research during the afternoon symposium, it seemed very appropriate to see him perform live with his band in front of a sizeable audience in Valletta.

From the impetus derived through the official launch and the subsequent interest demonstrated by key stakeholders in the project, it was decided that a legal entity should be established to cater for the sustainable development of the M3P beyond the initial activities. A voluntary organization was therefore organised systematically within the next couple of months and registered officially with the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector, under the name of M3P Foundation.

Here are the general aims of the M3P Foundation as listed in its founding statute:

   1. to raise awareness in regard to Maltese music and associated arts in the Maltese islands and beyond;

   2. to preserve the cultural legacy of the Maltese nation through its expression in Maltese music and associated arts;

   3. to facilitate pedagogical resources and academic research on Maltese music and associated arts.

The Foundation also has the following other objectives:

   a. to advocate the power of music and associated arts in inter-cultural understanding;

   b. to promote Maltese music and the associated arts, in and as of themselves, as well as effective educational resources;

   c. to empower original artistic expression, inspire creativity and nurture emerging talent in Maltese music and associated arts, both in Malta and abroad;

   d. to embed music and associated arts in the heart of Maltese civil society.

  From these aims and objectives, it is fairly evident that the M3P Foundation has methodically positioned itself to develop cultural literacy among audiences of Maltese music and associated arts, particularly with regards to memory preservation, in the context of the ever-growing personalized new technologies. M3P's primary interface with its audiences and the greater public, through the open wiki at www.m3p.com.mt, enables full and inclusive integration of all sorts of audiences interested in accessing, contributing and interacting with the wider scope of the M3P Foundation.

First annual conference

In line with some of the strategies outlined in Micallef-Grimaud's study, the M3P organized its first annual conference at St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity in Valletta on 3 and 4 June 2011. The theme for this two-day conference was *Ensuring Longevity On Collaborative Memory Projects Online* and the proceedings included parallel sessions in the cinema on the top floor and the studio next door to the Music Room on the ground floor.[5] The workshops were lead by Anthony Micallef-Grimaud, and addressed the first four strategies outlined earlier. The participants included musicians and singers of all ages, interested in a variety of genres, as well as several people associated with the broader cultural scene. Introducing the conference on the first day, I summarized the work undertaken since the launch in September 2010 and facilitated an open seminar on Intellectual Property Rights led by Jeanine Rizzo. This seminar built on the presentation she gave at the inaugural symposium, and addressed several hypothetical scenarios, some more likely than others, for the M3P and similar projects, in terms of copyright, intellectual property rights, and related matters.

The following day, the proceedings were opened by M3P Foundation Director Michael Bugeja, who followed on with observations from the communities of practice that have formed around the project and issues that need to be addressed to ensure longevity on this particular memory project. In an attempt to share good practice and synergize on development plans, Jez Collins gave a detailed presentation about the Birmingham Popular Music Archive, which he founded in 2008.[6] Developed in association with Birmingham City University, this UK-based project led by Collins has become a strategic ally of the M3P Foundation in seeking to preserve cultural memories of a geographically-specific community. A technical roundtable with M3P Foundation members Darren Stephens from the University of Hull's School of Arts & New Media and Saviour Zammit from the University of Malta's Department of Communications and Computer Engineering, yielded an interesting discussion with all present about some of the more pressing technical issues. This line of discussion is helping the M3P Foundation formulate its technical strategy for the foreseeable future. It has also greatly informed the postgraduate research that Stephens is now conducting for his PhD, which will in turn feed into further technical strategies for the future.

Each day of the conference ended with live music at four different venues. Continuing to build on the idea of exposing different types of live Maltese music to types of audiences that do not normally have easy access to them, lead to the second of M3P's *You Rarely Hear This On The Radio* events.[7] Over the past decade there has been a steady rise of Maltese language songs in the alternative local music scene. One of the new venues for this particular type of music opened its doors in May 2011 and it was deemed appropriate to capture the spirit of this place with a crop of some of the better acts in this vein. The musical genres this time were quite diverse, ranging from punk rock to alternative cabaret. Due to the explicit nature of the language used by all three acts, their songs are never played on the radio or featured on television. However, similar lyrics in English or Italian are not unfamiliar to radio listeners and television viewers in Malta. The performers were selected by Michael Bugeja and Anthony Micallef-Grimaud, and this was the line up for the evening:

- Pupi tal-Logħob have been active for more than ten years; they formed under a different line-up in 2000. They are among the more popular performers in their genre to sing in Maltese.

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[5] Conference proceedings in print are forthcoming, but audio recordings of the presentations and open seminars from the conference are available at http://www.archive.org/details/M3pInauguralConference - accessed on 20 January 2012.

[6] Available at http://birminghammusicarchive.com - accessed 20 January 2012.

[7] Video available at http://www.archive.org/details/m3p-vgen11

Remarkably they also do Maltese-language cover versions of songs by other Maltese punk bands such as R.A.S. and Xtruppaw. It is indeed quite rare for Maltese rock musicians to cover each other's material.

- Duo Kukkanja is a fluid group of musicians that appear on stage two at a time. Justin Galea accompanied Claire Tonna for the first part of their set, playing half-forgotten Maltese-language songs from the 1980s. Steve Delia (aka Id-Delli) later joined Justin Galea to perform a number of Maltese pop songs, along with a couple of their own originals written in recent years.

- Ċikku l-Poplu is the cabaret guise of respected classical composer Alex Vella Gregory. His original satirical songs are a prime example of twenty-first century Maltese popular song writing. He has managed to attract the following of several loyal admirers, many of whom are largely unfamiliar with the instrumental and choral works he produces at classical music venues.

To ensure that the M3P reaches some of Malta's jazz aficionados, the launch for Maltese jazz guitarist Marc Galea's CD album Easy Dialogue was presented at the St. James Cavalier as a live music event at the end of the second day of the M3P Conference.[8] The highlight of the show was the first-ever live jazz rendition of the popular song *L-Aħħar Bidwi f'Wied il-Għasel* with the tune's composer Paul Abela playing piano and keyboards during this concert. Incidentally, this was also one of the songs performed by Duo Kukkanja the previous night.

The M3P Foundation board of directors felt that the most appropriate way to end the two-day conference was to listen to a live electronica set at popular nightlife venue Gianpula just outside Rabat, by South Central, a Maltese duo based in Brighton (UK) and familiar names on the international scene for this genre of music.[9]

While all the live music events produced and presented by the M3P in 2010 and 2011 were intended to reach out to existing communities of interest and establish initial contact with existing communities that the project is aimed at, it is unlikely that such events will be towards the top of the agenda in the coming years. To facilitate the type of memory gathering that the project was created for, it is more likely that events will revolve around oral history interviews. The first such event was also the very first activity held at the end of the first day of the two-day conference in 2011.

Oral History Interviews

On Friday 3 June 2011, the National Archives hosted the M3P for an evening of music and oral histories with the Galea Family, at its main premises in Rabat.[10] Composer/pianist Sammy Galea, singer and vocal coach Doreen Galea, were accompanied by their sons Dominic (composer/pianist) and Benedict (percussionist), as well as niece Leontine Spiter (nee' Camilleri), who is also a singer. I interviewed the family at length between performances of the most significant songs and compositions they have written and performed throughout their careers. The Chief Executive of the National Archives, Charles Farrugia, was present for this event and hailed it as a first for his institution, expressing a desire for more such events to be presented by the M3P Foundation in collaboration with the National Archives in the coming years. It is therefore among the M3P's foremost plans to organize further oral history sessions in collaboration with the National Archives in 2012.

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[8] Video available at http://www.archive.org/details/m3p-jazz11

[9] Video available at http://www.archive.org/details/m3p-southcentral

[10] Video available at http://www.archive.org/details/m3p-galea

The first M3P oral history session also highlighted the necessary elements that make such undertakings successful from this memory project's perspective. While the video recording may suffice as a primary document in itself, it is through the integration of the information shared during the oral history session into other accessible formats in the multimedia database that the memories deposited with the project can be captured in a way that is as elaborate as possible. A basic transcript of the interviews is essential. This can (and ideally should) be enhanced by reproductions of any relevant artefacts associated with the subjects of the oral history interviews: photos, souvenir programmes, recordings, press cuttings, instruments, written notes, scores, publicity materials, and so on.

One approach that the M3P has taken to facilitate this endevour is through the hands-on workshops delivered around each of the other public events organized by the Malta Music Memory Project in 2010 and 2011. The workshops aimed to make people aware of the importance of preserving memories that would otherwise be lost, and presented the M3P website with the hope of making it easier for individuals to contribute their memories and related mediated memories to the online database. The workshops were designed to cater for three levels of users of the M3P wiki: beginners, intermediate, and advanced. The first two groups were for those who were quite novices in using the wiki software on which the M3P website runs. Topics covered included registering, creating a page, text formatting, internal and external page linking and uploading pictures and other media. The significance of preserving memories and mediated memories of music and associated arts was also discussed at length. The urgency for archiving Maltese music and associated arts was also a regular topic that arose in discussions among participants during these workshops.

In our evaluation of these preliminary workshops, three points became very evident: (1) there is a need for more M3P workshops, (2) outreach is essential for better collection of data, and (3) social media networks such as Facebook can aid in crowd sourcing memories. In producing our first oral history event at the National Archives we saw the huge potential in such work but recognized that it is essential to do more than simply record interviews, if we want the collaborative element of the project to flourish. A hands-on workshop with key stakeholders in the subject associated which each session needs to take place immediately before the recording of the oral history and will continue immediately afterwards, with potential follow-up sessions on an individual basis. The individual sessions must follow on from the recorded oral history sessions and in some cases may consist of further oral histories interviews captured in private residences, particularly when the subject is disabled and/or too elderly to take part in an event at a public venue selected by the M3P to draw broader attention to the project. In most cases, a preparatory individual workshop will also take place at the subject's place of residence and/or public venue they are associated with and to capture data about artefacts and materials that can be gathered are at high risk of neglect and/or potentially on the verge of being lost forever.

The project is deliberately inclusive and focused actively on subjects that are too elderly and/or disabled to be involved in mainstream media, as well as others whose work is vulnerable due to institutional neglect and/or its ephemeral nature. To ensure that endangered memories are preserved as soon as possible, special attention needs to be given to subjects that are of an older age, individuals who are seriously ill, and subjects that have received little or no mainstream media attention in recent memory regardless of age or personal health. It is realistic to expect that such activities, particularly when taken in the context of the aims of the M3P Foundation, will foster a greater public awareness of the need to preserve mediated memories of music and associated arts. M3P aims to achieve its objectives, in part, by systematically and strategically aligning itself with key national stakeholders, such as the National Archives, the Birmingham Popular Music Archive, and eventually others both in Malta and elsewhere, towards the

establishment of a practical and wide reaching strategic plan for the preservation of mediated memories of music and associated arts.

In conclusion, M3P needs to develop practical ways to capture materials deposited with M3P, either through its administrators or through the wiki and other technological set ups that can be implemented in the coming years. As participation in the project is open to all, it follows that M3P must assist those seeking to enhance their cultural literacy through the new media technologies employed by the M3P in its core work to ensure that their memories are preserved appropriately and not only captured and shelved without further dissemination. The anticipated long-term outcome of the M3P is the gathering of substantial memories of Malta's music and associated arts, ensuring that these are kept in posterity for current and future generations though the inclusive online repository that the M3P Foundation is now strategically planning to continue developing over the coming years. Furthermore, the project seeks to foster transnational cooperation, particularly with expatriates as well as with like-minded organisations around the world. The fact that there has never been a systematic attempt to do anything similar by any of the major institutions you would expect to be potentially involved in doing this, makes this project all the more essential.

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