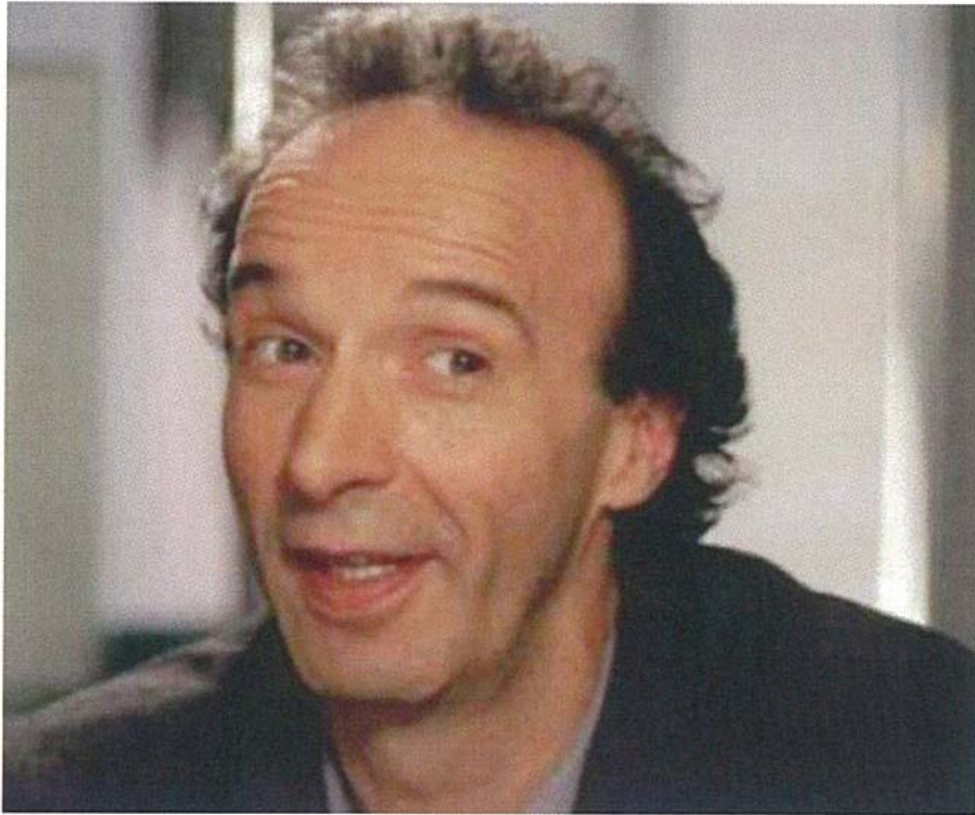


## Benigni to lead one-man show in Malta

by Valerie Fenech - valfen@di-ve.com  
Current Affairs -- 31 March 2008 -- 11:20CEST



Roberto Benigni

Italian award-winning actor Roberto Benigni is set to lead a one-man show in Malta, following his acceptance of an honorary degree as a Doctor of Literature from the University of Malta.

The 55-year old actor will be conferred an honorary Ph.D. in literature on April 22<sup>nd</sup> from the University of Malta, and perform in a one-man show on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Entitled "Tutto Dante", the show has drawn more than one million spectators in Italy since it was launched in July 2006.

On the night of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, Benigni will delve into a discussion about the 1<sup>st</sup> century poet Dante Alighieri with scholar Robert Hollander, Professor of European Literature Emeritus at Princeton University and the founding director of the Princeton Dante Project.

This will be followed by a recital of one of Benigni's favourite canti from Dante's Divine Comedy.

During his short stay in Malta, Benigni is also set to launch an exhibition of illustrations of Dante's epic poem by artist Monika Beisner at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Valletta.

03.31\_dive

## Benigni's Dante : a fusion of tradition and the contemporary

by Alan Fenech - fenechalan@yahoo.co.uk  
Local News -- 10 April 2008 -- 17:20CEST

The upcoming visit by Oscar-winning film director and actor Roberto Benigni and the programme of this visit were the subjects of a press briefing addressed by Prof. Dominic Fenech and Dr. Gloria Lauri Lucente on Thursday morning.

Benigni will arrive in Malta on Monday 21st April on a four-day visit, on the initiative of the Faculty of Arts. Apart from being honored with the conferment of a Doctor of Literature degree *Honoris Causa*, Benigni will also hold a "Serata Dantesca" and inaugurate an exhibition of illustrations of Dante's "Divina Commedia" by Monika Beisner.

The ceremony of the conferment of the degree will take place at the Jesuit's Church in Valletta on Tuesday 22nd April as will the inauguration of the exhibition while on Wednesday 23rd April there will be the "Serata Dantesca" at the Sir Temi Zammit Hall at the University of Malta, during which Benigni will recite part of the "Divina Commedia".

Speaking of Benigni's interpretation of Dante Dr. Lauri Lucente said that Benigni has been studying the works by the father of the Italian language for over 17 years specializing in the Tuscan traditions connected with the masterpiece. "Benigni's interpretation of Dante is therefore a fusion of the traditional with the contemporary" said the Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Arts.

Seats at the Sir Temi Zammit hall have been reserved mainly for students and the academic staff of the University of Malta, however the "Serata Dantesca" will be shown live on a maxi screen in the main quadrangle of the university campus. "Even though one would be watching the event on a screen it is an occasion not to be missed since the rights of the event belong solely to the agents of the actor and therefore it is up to them to decide whether to transmit it or not" said Dr. Lauri Lucente.

Accompanying Roberto Benigni during his stay in Malta will be Professors Robert and Jean Hollander, authors of the new annotated and illustrated translated of the "Divina Commedia". Benigni prefaced the Hollander publication.

### 04.10\_dive

## Roberto Benigni to visit Malta

4/10/2008 4:23:45 PM

*Awtur: Fabian Demicoli*

The director of the film 'La Vita e Bella', the famous actor Roberto Benigni will be in Malta in the coming days to receive an *Honoris Causa* from the University of Malta. Benigni will not only be in Malta to be honoured since at the Sir Temi Zammit Hall at the University of Malta he will participate in an evening about Dante as he will be interpreting pieces from Dante's *Divina Commedia*. This evening will be open to the Maltese public and will be free.

Since the hall only takes 900 people, in the quadrangle at the University a big screen will be set up so that those who do not manage to find a seat they would still be able to see. Benigni is expected to be in Malta on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April.

Details about this visit will be given in a press conference. The Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Dominic Fenech said that during his four day visit in Malta, Benigni will also address the Maltese media. He will also be inaugurating an art exhibition by Monika Beisner.

Accompanying Benigni to Malta will be Professor Robert Hollander and his wife Jean Hollander, the authors of the translation of the *Divina Commedia*. The Dante Evenings - on the Italian national station Rai Uno - are followed by 12 million people.

### 04.10\_maltarightnow

## Press Review

by di-ve news - editorial@di-ve.com  
From the media -- 13 April 2008 -- 09:10CEST

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A vast array of subjects made it to the headlines on Sunday's newspapers.

**The Sunday Times** presents a story in which it says that the MLP government in 1997 had planned to re-route Malta towards EU membership. In another story the weekly speaks of patients who should not be at Mater Dei hospital.

**The Malta Independent on Sunday** accuses local councils of hijacking and blocking the waste separation scheme leading to the absence of an agreement a mere two days before it was to begin. It also presents two stories one with regards to a Malta-based Italian who is accused of arms trafficking and the other about an Islamic extremist who paid 2000 pounds sterling to be smuggled from Malta to the UK.

**KullHadd** in its front page presents a story with regards to the alleged abuse which went on at Lourdes Home in Ghajnsielem in the 1970s and 1980s and speaks of allegations of sexual abuse as well as the physical abuse already cited.

**Il-Mument** speaks of the upcoming elections of the new MLP leader and says that Joseph Muscat has hurt MLP supporters especially with regards to his position on whether Jason Micallef should still occupy the post of party general secretary which is still unclear. The PN weekly also speaks of Helena Dalli as a possible candidate for leadership.

**It-Torca** speaks of the reforms in pensions and says that the government intends to the process it began in the last legislature in the next budget. The weekly also publishes a story about what it calls a u-turn with regards to poly-clinics.

**MaltaToday**'s main story speaks of the four persons who were arrested in connection with an sms which incited hunters to go to the streets and raze the country to the ground. In its front page the newspaper also speaks of what it calls a farcical cleaning at MEPA before Gonzi's visit and the decision of Roberto Benigni not to hold any official appointments with public figures.

**Illum**'s main headline chooses to speak about the number of people who are managing to obtain a divorce from abroad. It also presents a story about PBS having turned down a programme proposal for dramatized Maltese novels saying that they are not commercially viable.

04.13\_dive



## Benigni: To hell with officialdom

media. And just like Dante, he is relegating officialdom to the circles of hell as his agent has made it clear there will be no time for official appointments, from the President downwards.

The news came a bit like a cold shower for politicians and other opportunists waiting to get their 15 seconds of fame, appearing next to the Oscar winning actor and director in the photos and video clips.

Yet the idea to grant the honorary doctorate to Benigni has meant that Malta will be getting its serata Dantesca for free as opposed to the sky high fees usually charged for his performances.

As for the disappointed public figures, Benigni has overlooked them much like Dante's Virgilio himself dismissed the ignavi – those cowards not even worthy of entering hell: "Non ragioniam di lor, ma guarda e passa" ("Don't pay them any mind, just look and walk on").

See full story on page 7 ►

**MAVERICK** Italian celebrity actor Roberto Benigni will be taking Malta by storm next week when he comes to get his honorary doctorate from University and perform pieces from Dante's *La Divina Com-*

# Benigni to recite Dante in Malta

DAVID DARMANIN

**WORLD-RENOWNED** thespian and cinema all-rounder Roberto Benigni will be flying in to Malta on 21 April, where he will be conferred a doctorate honoris causa by the University of Malta for his contribution to the humanities.

Benigni's four-day programme is expected to peak on the Wednesday with an evening event in which he will be reciting excerpts from *La Divina Commedia*, the early fourteenth century epic that has earned its author, Dante Alighieri, the title of "the father of the Italian language".

Benigni, who hails from the same Italian region as Dante, has been commended for reviving the Tuscan traditional form of poetry recital a mente, which was dwindling in popularity over the recent years.

"A mente recital is unique in that it popularised the *Divina Commedia* also among the illiterate in Tuscany," said deputy dean of the Faculty of Arts Gloria Lauri Lucente, the brains behind Benigni's trip to Malta.

"The first thing that springs to mind when Benigni is mentioned is 'Life is Beautiful', and



Benigni claiming his Oscar for *La Vita È Bella*

the Oscar awarded to him for this film," Lauri Lucente said.

At the Oscar awards ceremony in 1998, announcing the Best Actor award was Italian veteran actress Sofia Loren, when filled with emotion she called out: "Roberto!"

Benigni had made his way up on stage hopping on seat backrests, boisterously making his

way through the seated gala night attendees. Hugging co-national Loren on stage, he marked one of the most memorable Oscar moments.

"His first recital of the *Divina Commedia* was in 1989 and throughout the years he made extensive efforts in popularising Dante. His recitals in Florentine squares have at times attracted larger audiences than the Palio di Siena," she continued, referring to the traditional Tuscan horserace attracting massive numbers of tourists to the region every year.

"Furthermore, he has extended this form of recital on television, where on his Rai programme *Tutto Dante* he managed to attract an audience of 12 million a

few months ago," she said.

The idea of flying over Benigni to Malta came about when Lauri Lucente made contact with artist Monika Beisner, who illustrated a recently published English translation of "The Divine Comedy" authored by Dante scholar Robert Hollander. Benigni, who wrote the forward to this publication, will also be inaugurating a preview exhibition of Beisner's illustrations at the Italian Cultural Institute while in Malta.

Hollander, who will accompany Benigni throughout his stay in Malta, will be co-hosting the evening recital.

"Hollander and Benigni admire each other reciprocally," Lauri Lucente added. "They had been planning on working together for years."

On his part, Faculty of Arts Dean Dominic Fenech explained that the seats available at Sir Temi Zammit hall on the night "have all been spoken for", adding that students have been given priority.

"However, on the night, we shall be placing a maxi-screen at the university quadrangle

for the general public to follow the event from the outside," he said.

"A lot of universities in Italy would wish to have this type of opportunity," he stated.

Commenting on Benigni's explosive character, Fenech recalled when "once he called Gloria on her mobile phone while I was next to her. You can only imagine what a scene there was in the whole room."

"Anything can be expected," he said, warning of the joyous impulsiveness the 'Maestro' is known for.

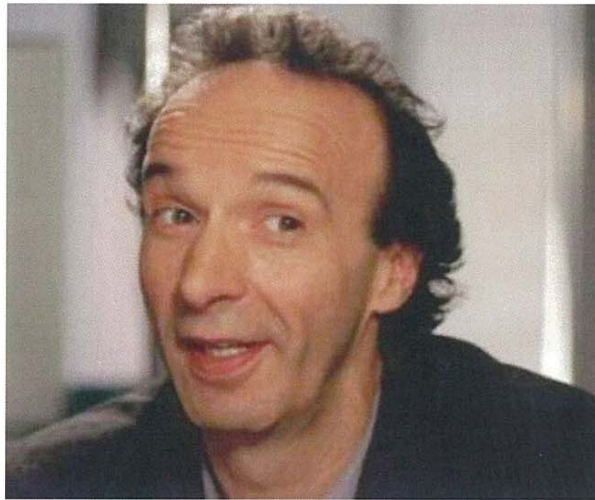
In 1980, when Benigni was more or less at the start of his career, he was censored when, invited as a special guest of the 30th edition of the San Remo song contest, he delivered a speech on free love. In the speech he referred to Pope John Paul II as "Woytilaccione" (big, nasty Woytila), concluding his act by kissing the then sex symbol Olympia Carlisi, who was presenting the show.

**MEMORABLE OSCAR MOMENT**  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8cTR6P8frs>  
**BENIGNI'S CONTROVERSIAL SPEECH AT SAN REMO**  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIWzSm5afY>

04.13\_maltatoday

## Roberto Benigni to receive honoris causa degree in Malta

by Alan Fenech - alfen@di-ve.com  
Current Affairs -- 22 February 2008 -- 17:55CEST



Oscar-winning film director, screenwriter and actor, Roberto Benigni will be honoured by the University of Malta with the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature on April 22nd.

A press release issued by the University of Malta explained how the conferment of this degree recognizes not only Benigni's distinctive exploration of the emotional range possible in cinema, but also the significant contribution to Dante scholarship, to the study of literature and, by extension, to the humanities in general.

The degree of Doctor of Literature will be awarded to Benigni in a ceremony which will be held on April 22 at the Jesuits' Church in Valletta. The oration will be delivered by Dr. Gloria Lauri-Lucente, Senior Lecturer in Italian and Comparative Literature and Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Arts, and will be followed by the acceptance speech of the Honorary Graduand. The Dean of the Faculty of Arts will be sponsoring.

Much to the delight of the numerous Benigni admirers among the faculty members and the university students, many of whom have recently followed on Italian television the enormously successful series of performances TuttoDante, Benigni will also be treating the University of Malta to a "serata dantesca" on April 23 on the University Campus at the Sir Temi Zammit Hall.

The evening will start with a discussion on Dante between Benigni and the eminent Dante scholar Robert Hollander, Professor of European Literature Emeritus at Princeton University and the founding director of the Princeton Dante Project. Following the discussion, Benigni will give a much-anticipated recitation of one of his favourite "canti" from the Divina Commedia.

A maxi-screen will also be set up on campus to relay the performance in order to extend the benefit of the "serata" to non-university members.

While in Malta, Benigni will also be inaugurating an exhibition of illustrations of the Divina Commedia by the artist Monika Beisner at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Valletta. The illustrations form part of a translation into English of the Divina Commedia by Robert and Jean Hollander with a Preface by Roberto Benigni published by Edizioni Valdonega in 2007.

04.22\_dive

## Benigni honoured with Honoris Causa

4/22/2008 7:20:04 PM

Awtur: Fabian DEMICOLI

A unique ceremony held at the chapel of the Old University in Valletta - with the presence of the country's highest authorities; film director of 'La Vita e Bella' and famous actor Roberto Benigni was given his doctorate degree in literature as an acknowledgement of the University of Malta for the hard work he conducted during his career.

After a speech by Gloria Lauri Lucente, Senior Lecturer at the University of Malta, the actor of international fame, Roberto Benigni was called before the Rector of the University of Malta to collect his degree.



However in one of the most serious moments of the ceremony, Benigni cracked everybody with his humour. While the rector presented him the Honoris Causa Benigni felt emotional and praised the Maltese.

Due to the emotions overload, Roberto Benigni expressed his gratitude to the President of Malta Eddie Fenech Adami in a euphoric way. Benigni proceeded praising the Maltese in the Maltese language.

Whilst saying that he was impressed with the beauty of various localities around Malta and Gozo as well as the surrounding islands.

During his spontaneous speech, Roberto Benigni expressed his enthusiasm for the Dante' evening which will be held on Wednesday evening at the University of Malta where he'll be meeting with the Maltese and Gozitan students.

**04.22\_maltarightnow**

## Benigni pleases Malta: Beautiful

4/22/2008 4:42:14 PM

Awtur: Annette VELLA

A few hours before being given the Honoris Causa, the Italian comedian Roberto Benigni addressed a press conference at the Aula Magna, in Valletta. During the conference and for all questions asked, Roberto Benigni replied in his usual style: making fun of everything and is difficult for one to make out whether he is actually being serious or whether he is joking.

This is the first time Roberto Benigni visited Malta but he said that he finds the country beautiful, with a language that contains the best of all the languages it is made up of. Roberto Benigni is currently in Malta after an invitation by the Faculty of Arts of the University of Malta, and it was the faculty itself that requested that he will be given the Honoris Causa for his work and the love he has towards Dante Alighieri's "Divina Commedia"



Whoever follows Roberto Benigni knows him as a comical person. But when asked whether life for him is one continuous joke or not, he said that like everyone else he goes through emotional moments but he always looks for something comical to help him move on.

During the press conference, the Italian comedian did not keep back from hinting on Italy's politics. He said that while in Malta we have the Order of the Knights, in Italy there is only one Cavalier: Silvio Berlusconi. He also mentioned the fight against Head of Italy's Opposition Walter Veltroni, who according to Benigni, he brought his candidature forward when in actual fact he does not understand anything on politics.

04.22\_maltarightnow

## Roberto Benigni awarded today Honoris Causa

4/22/2008 10:01:05 AM

Awtur: maltarightnow.com

Italian actor and film Director in 'La Vita e' Bella' Roberto Benigni is in Malta to be honoured with a doctorate honoris causa for his contribution to humanities at the University of Malta. The ceremony which starts at 4:00pm is being held at the Jesuits Church in Valletta and will be presided by the University Chancellor.

A press conference shall be addressed earlier on, and later in the evening, he will be opening an artistic exhibition by Monika Beisner, at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Valletta.

Roberto Benigni is tomorrow taking part in the Serata Dantesca, where he shall be interpreting pieces from Dante's Divina Commedia. The event, which is free entrance is open to the public.



04.22\_maltarightnow

## Benigni takes the degree conferment ceremony by storm

by Paul Cachia - pcachia@di-ve.com  
Local News -- 22 April 2008 -- 19:30CEST



Photos by Fernando Sanchez

An exuberant Roberto Benigni was conferred with the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature by the University of Malta and the Italian film director showed his delight at the award by kissing the feet of President Edward Fenech Adami.

Roberto Benigni is renowned for his slapstick pranks. At the Oscars ceremony in 1999, he climbed on the back of his seat and applauded the audience.

This time, at the Church of the University in Valletta, he offered hugs to random strangers, scholars and dignitaries alike.

As he took centre stage after the conferment of the degree, Dr Benigni babbled few words in Maltese: "*Il-lallu, Il-lallu, qalbi qed thabbat, inhobbkom hafna*" and went on to pronounce a number of Maltese villages including Siggiewi, Birkirkara, Valletta, Birgu and Filfla.

He then joked at Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and the political elite. "You have the knights of Malta, we have just one - Berlusconi but he is terrible [*in Italy, Berlusconi is popularly known as Il Cavaliere*]".

"In the past years, we had the general elections and I found refugee here in Malta. Presidente Adami [*Fenech*] ghinuni, ghinuni [*please come to my rescue*]", he uttered.



“ There is only one Charles Chaplin, one Buster Keaton, One Stanley Laurel and one Oliver Hardy, one Toto’. And there is only one Roberto Benigni ”

Gloria Lauri-Lucente

On a more serious note, Dr Gloria Lauri-Lucente paid tribute to Benigni as a "unique artist who enables us to suspend our disbelief and draws us into a fantasy world where everything is dreadful and everything is joyous, where everything is sad and everything is funny".

"There is only one Charles Chaplin, one Buster Keaton, One Stanley Laurel and one Oliver Hardy, one Toto'. And there is only one Roberto Benigni", she said.

With his typically tongue-in-cheek playfulness and deep reverence, Benigni lectured on Dante to three-quarters of a million people in the past two years alone, she added.

"Dante was too much forgotten [*but thanks to Benigni*] is as relevant today as it was more than seven hundred years ago", she said.

04.23\_dive

## "Life is something extraordinary" - Roberto Benigni

by Alan Fenech - alfen@di-ve.com  
Local News -- 22 April 2008 -- 14:10CEST



Photos by Fernando Sanchez

**UPDATED 1610CEST** - What was to be a normal press conference addressed by Oscar-winning actor Roberto Benigni soon became a show in itself with the actor from Tuscany answering the questions in a manner so typical of him.

After having made just a few steps inside the Aula Magna at the Old University he started joking with photographers. Those present soon found themselves in a theatrical atmosphere in which Benigni's role brought to mind characters such as Johnny Stecchino.

When asked how he feels about being in Malta he said that life is something extraordinary. "I am not here to seek asylum from the new Berlusconi Government," he joked, "but I would not mind at all to be one of the knights of Malta since in Italy we have only one cavaliere," with obvious reference to the Italian PM.

In response to the question on which part of the Divina Commedia he would see himself in, Benigni took the opportunity to mount further satirical attacks on his country's politicians: "probably in hell... it's ok as long as it's in one of the sections as far as possible from Berlusconi... but then again Veltroni has no idea of politics."

Benigni described Dante's "Divina Commedia" as a beautiful encyclopedia, nearly like internet, where one can seek biographies of persons such as Farinata which might be unknown to the masses.

The Italian actor went on to say that he would not know if he preferred the stage to cinema or vice-versa.



"Surely I have changed along the years. You should see my photo at three years of age. Seriously, I think that life changes a person's soul and personality. Life is a journey. I am sure I have changed along the years. We all live to seek something in life..."

When asked whether he would consider filming in Malta, Benigni said that he would, since he likes the country and loves the sea.

"At the moment I'm trying to come up with a story. If my time in Malta inspires me to it, then I see no reason why I should not produce the film here."

According to the Italian star, the "Divina Commedia" is too vast to make a film out of. "It is full of filming techniques if one looks closely. Two hours would not be enough for just the first 'canto' of the 'Inferno'."



### Roberto Benigni addressing the press conference

Roberto Benigni, who won 1999's Best Foreign Film Oscar for his film "Life Is Beautiful", will receive the Doctor of Literature "honoris causa" at 1630CEST on Tuesday and will then treat an audience at the Sir Temi Zammit Hall at the University of Malta to a "Serata Dantesca" on Wednesday.

All photos by Fernando Sanchez

04.23\_dive

## Life is Beautiful: With Roberto Benigni

by Charles Mifsud - editorial@di-ve.com  
Opinion -- 21 April 2008 -- 09:55CEST



Charles Mifsud speaks to Dr Gloria Lauri-Lucente in an exclusive interview for [www.di-ve.com](http://www.di-ve.com) about Roberto Benigni's artistic performances and his visit to Malta.

Just whispering his name evokes so many memories of comic moments often punctuated with a tear of compassion. Roberto Benigni's talent as actor and comedian resonates with moments where humanity shines through his performances.

In the film *Life is Beautiful* (1997), Benigni plays the part of Guido who is held captive with his son in a concentration camp. Benigni's sparkling eyes and blissful smile divert his son's attention from the unfolding tragedy as he spins tales to his son and captivates audiences worldwide. Benigni's role in the Oscar-winning *Life is Beautiful* was to a certain extent inspired by the real life experiences of his father, who spent two years in a work camp.

But what makes Benigni's performances deeply touch our emotions? I discussed the topic with Dr Gloria Lauri-Lucente, a film scholar and Senior Lecturer in Italian and Comparative Literature and Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Arts. Dr Lauri-Lucente will also be delivering the oration during the ceremony where Benigni will be awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature by the University of Malta on the initiative of the Faculty of Arts.

Dr Lauri-Lucente explains in an interview that the role of a "misfit" often played by Benigni brings out the "pathos" of human nature. His performances are interwoven with comic instances, while the tragic moments are tempered with humour.

In the film *Il Mostro* (1994), Benigni plays the part of Loris who is suspected of being a serial killer and a sexual maniac because of his eccentricity which makes him the classic misfit. His real life wife Nicoletta Braschi plays the part of the police officer Jessica Rosetti, who is asked by the investigators of a series of crimes to try to seduce him in order to prove he is really the "mostro". Loris is completely unaware of her intentions, and his gestures and reaction lead to a series of hilarious situations.



In another role as a misfit in *Johnny Stecchino* (1991), Benigni plays the double role of two characters that are identical. One is a gentle bus driver called Dante, whose naivety enables him to understand only the literal meaning of words. The other role is that of Johnny Stecchino, a dangerous "pentito" and member of the Mafia. When Dante is mistaken for Johnny Stecchino, a burst of comic situations follows, many of which are based on a series of puns and "doubles entendres".

But who of the most famous comedians inspire Benigni? Dr Lauri-Lucente mentions Charles Chaplain and Buster Keaton as two of his mentors. However, she added with an eloquent laugh that she will delve more into the subject in her oration in the presence of Benigni during the Ceremony where he will be honoured.

Dr Lauri-Lucente refers to Benigni's physical gags and slapstick comedy whose origins hark back to the Italian "Commedia dell'Arte", but also stresses that one should not overlook the underlying intellectual depth and wide range of emotions.

Was this the key of the success in the recent performances of the *Divina Commedia*, a literary work over 700 years old?

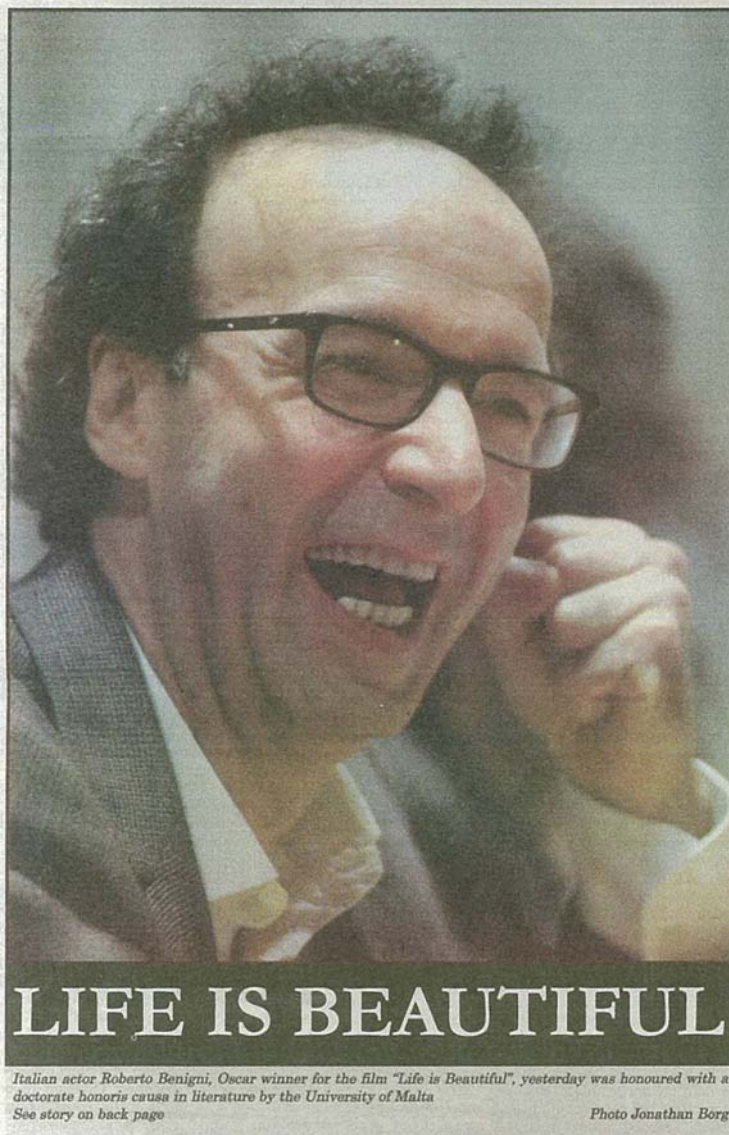
It was Benigni's unique ability to fuse his intellectual in a contemporary performance of Dante's unsurpassable work that captivated the attention of whole audiences across Italy.

Dr Lauri-Lucente also recalls the first time she saw Benigni on television. She was still in her teens, and every Sunday afternoon she used to wait with trepidation together with her brother for Benigni to appear on *L'Altra Domenica*, a programme conducted by Renzo Arbore. Benigni played the part of a confused film critic whose extraordinary improvisational linguistic skills gave rise to a series of comic situations.

I also reminded Dr Lauri-Lucente that Benigni is known for his improvisational and comic moments during official ceremonies. Who knows if this will be the case this time in Malta? Well, Dr Lauri-Lucente responded, we will just have to wait and see!

*N.B. - During his visit to Malta, Benigni will also be treating the University of Malta to a "serata dantesca" on April 23 on the University Campus at the Sir Temi Zammit Hall. The evening will start with a discussion on Dante between Benigni and the eminent Dante scholar Robert Hollander, Professor of European Literature (Emeritus) at Princeton University and the founding director of the Princeton Dante Project. Following the discussion, Benigni will give a recitation of one of his favourite "canti" from the Divina Commedia. A big screen will also be set up on campus to relay the performance in order to extend the benefit of the "serata" to the general public.*

04.23\_dive



Italian actor Roberto Benigni, Oscar winner for the film "Life is Beautiful", yesterday was honoured with a doctorate honoris causa in literature by the University of Malta  
See story on back page

Photo Jonathan Borg

04.23\_themaltaindependent

# Funniest graduation ever

BERNARD BUSUTTIL

The funniest-ever graduation in the University of Malta's 500-year history took place yesterday at the Jesuits' Church in Valletta as Roberto Benigni was bestowed with the doctorate of literature (*honoris causa*).

The congregation of academics, politicians, members of the judiciary and other invitees will surely never forget the maestro's plight for political asylum following Silvio Berlusconi's return to power. He directly addressed a bemused President Edward Fenech Adami to grant him asylum and threw himself at his feet pleading for his benevolence. The comic sketch came to an end with a hearty embrace between the two.

Dottor Benigni's first words after he was conferred his doctorate were "Bongu sinjuri u grazzi hafna. Qalbi qed

thabbat hafna", to which he was greeted with a rapturous applause. After managing to say that he was feeling an indescribable joy, he switched back to his perfect Maltese exclaiming, "Mallu! Mamma mia!"

Remembering previous graduations in other countries, Mr Benigni told his audience "you prepared for me a feast fit for my instalment as your Archbishop." Immediately, he apologised to a smiling Archbishop Paul Cremona who was seated just opposite him.

His went on to thank, in Maltese, the towns of Birkirkara, Siggiewi, Birgu as well as Gozo and Filfla.

He brought down the place after telling the audience that "Malta will always have a special place in my heart, *inhobbkom!*"

Mr Benigni then proved his mettle as



University Rector Prof. Juanito Camilleri conferring the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature on Roberto Benigni  
Photos Ben Borg Cardona

he launched into an exuberant rendition of how Dante, the *Divine Comedy*, poetry and humanism in general brought mankind closer than ever to God.

He also recited two sonnets by Dante, one addressing his friend Guido Cavalcante and the other to his beloved Beatrice.

Faculty of Arts Deputy Dean Gloria Lauri-Lucente lauded Benigni's work, saying he "enables us to suspend our disbelief and draws us into a fantasy world where everything is dreadful and everything is joyous."

She praised Mr Benigni for his renditions of the *Divina Commedia* which drew thousands of attentive listeners to the public squares of Italy. Dr Lauri-Lucente explained Mr Benigni's interpretation of the story of Pinocchio,

which he transposed to cinema in 2002 and underlined his ability of "discerning the comic even within situations which are desperately fraught and tinged by the tragic." He did so marvelously in his Oscar-winning movie, *La Vita è bella*.

The hilarity at the Jesuit's Church started when Mr Benigni was ushered in front of the University chancellor John Rizzo Naudi and Rector Juanito Camilleri as Faculty of Arts Dean Dominic Fenech, who was the Italian's sponsor, asked the rector in Latin to confer upon him the doctorate.

As the usher robed him in a toga and beret, the comedian behaved like a clumsy skinny ring bearer at a wedding, whose childish exuberance rips away formality from any serious ceremony.



Roberto Benigni throwing himself at President Edward Fenech Adami's feet, while jokingly asking for asylum

04.23\_ themaltaindependent

## 'Ejjeu kollha' – Roberto Benigni

BERNARD BUSUTTIL

"Ejjeu kollha". With these words, pronounced in seemingly fluent Maltese, the bubbly Italian actor and director Roberto Benigni yesterday invited all and sundry to this evening's recitation of passages from Dante's *Divina Commedia* at the University campus.

During a news conference held at the Aula Magna of the Old University in Valletta, the media had the opportunity to bombard the Oscar-winning actor with questions from which he inevitably shot off at a tangent and lost track.

He declared to the media he was going to ask President Edward Fenech Adami and PM Lawrence Gonzi for political asylum since Silvio Berlusconi had returned to power in Italy.

He told the bemused journalists that Malta had many knights, but there was only one in Italy, "and he is terrible". Thus he will be raising an army of knights to conquer Italy back from the Celtic warriors of the north – a clear reference to the Northern League, a key Berlusconi government ally.

The Tuscan showman said he did not know whether Dante would put him in Heaven, Hell or Purgatory and pointed out that he would be happy to stay



Photo Jonathan Borg

anywhere, just as long as he was far away from Berlusconi.

In jest he said that he would be joining Berlusconi's party and jokingly accused opposition leader Walter Veltroni of "lack of political skill".

Benigni said he was elated to receive his first Maltese degree, as he later received a doctorate *honoris causa* for in literature. He described how he greeted the news with somersaults and fits of joy.

He was also impressed with Malta, which he called "a new-born old lady" in reference to the island's freshness despite

its millennial history. He described the Maltese language as a marvellous medley of influences from all four winds, and compared it to the *Commedia* which was written using a mixture of languages used in the fragmented Italy of the 13th century, the reason why Dante is regarded as the Father of the Italian language.

Benigni described the poem as the first encyclopedia or web browser, as it brought various disciplines to the people, such as psychology, which was discovered much later. Dante did all this, he said, by forgoing

Latin, which was the scholarly language that only scholars and clerics understood, and donating it to the people. Thus, he said, Dante "decentralised" culture.

Transposing the *Commedia* to cinema, said Benigni, was close to impossible as perfection would not remain thus if tampered with in any way. However, he said making a film in Malta would be interesting and he hoped that a muse would tickle his imagination during his stay here.

Asked whether Dante would have encountered any new sins

had he been alive today, Benigni said he would surely have put a section for those caught by the Italian police through phone call interceptions. He added that lust and gluttony were sins which have resurfaced strongly in today's society.

He was asked how he would he recite his Dante with the late Neapolitan actor Massimo Troisi, with whom Mr Benigni had co-starred, written and directed the 1984 comedy *Non ci resta che piangere*.

Immediately, the actor started acting out imaginary sketches with the Arts Faculty Deputy Dean, Gloria Lauri Lucente, a cinema connoisseur.

After saying that he missed the late Troisi very much, Benigni laid out a brief plot of how the two would meet Dante, as they had met Leonardo da Vinci in their movie and how Mr Troisi would act in Neapolitan while he would do so in Florentine.

He then greeted all present with "Habib minn Zabbar, Birgu, Siggiewi: ejjeu kollha!"

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# Benigni moved by Malta's warmth, sensuality

DAVID DARMANIN  
FRANCA PULIS

MAKING a grand entrance at a press conference at the Old University building by exclaiming "Bongu, hbieb!" (Good morning, friends!) in broken Maltese, Roberto Benigni yesterday confirmed that even beyond the TV screen, his persona remains explosive, jolly, and eccentric.

"It does not happen every day that one receives a degree from Malta," he began, referring to the conferment of his honoris causa doctorate. "When I received the telephone call announcing that the university would bestow me this honour I was overjoyed, making a scene and jumping on the table."

"It's not like I came to Malta to seek asylum after the Italian elections... In Malta you have a lot of knights. In Italy we only have one,



After receiving the diploma, Benigni warmly hugged the University officials and went on to deliver his speech. "Grazzi Malta," he started, to hearty applause. Followed by any random phrase in Maltese that popped to mind, including "Il-Allu," he said: "I was not expecting such warmth. I thought I would be awarded the degree and sent home. My thanks go to the sensuality of this island: Birkarkara, Siggiewi, Gozo, Comino and Filfla and the whole Maltese world."

"I have sought refuge on this island after the elections in Italy," he continued before proceeding to address President Edward Fenech Adami, who was seated at a distance of some 15 metres by shouting: "Ghinuni! Ghinuni!" (Help me, help me!) He then darted off to the President's seat, knelt down before him and asked him for asylum, since Berlusconi was elected to power.



and he's not like the ones you have in Malta. I will be asking Gonzi for help to send your knights up to Italy and confront the Gueffi," he said in allusion to the pro-Catholic faction in a medieval political battle between the empire and the Holy See.

In Dante Alighieri's epic *The Divine Comedy*, of which Benigni will be reciting excerpts on the university campus this evening,

this political conflict is very much brought out with a slant in favour of the opposing, anti-clerical camp: the Ghibellini.

Asked a hypothetical question on whether Dante would have placed him in Hell, Purgatory or Heaven, Benigni said: "I was not expecting such a question. I was hoping for something more on the lines of where Dante would have put Berlusconi."



Describing Malta as "a newborn, old woman", Benigni explained how he fell in love with the country, comparing the language to a pot containing a mix of all languages on the boil. "Your language makes you want to eat it," he said.

Benigni was accompanied by acclaimed Dante scholar Robert Hollander, who recently pub-

lished a full English translation of the *Divine Comedy*, with a foreword penned by Benigni himself. At one point, Hollander turned to Benigni to remind him of an idea suggested by his wife Jean about a comedy in which Benigni would play the part of Dante Alighieri. After reacting with surprise, Benigni later answered a question on what his next international film will be about by saying: "You read my mind. I was about to explain my new idea. I thought of a comedy where I would play the part of Dante. I'll speak to Jean about it to see what she thinks."

At the graduation ceremony later, Benigni listened to a four-page eulogy on Benigni delivered by University professor Gloria Lauri Lucente, the person behind the entire event. As she concluded, Benigni jokingly said that he had no idea the speech was about him.

Moved by this stunt, Fenech Adami helped him rise, hugged him warmly and kissed him on the cheeks. "Inhobbkom! Inhobbkom hafna," (I love you, I love you a lot) Benigni said, this time pronouncing his Maltese flawlessly.

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## Benigni jingħata l-Honoris Causa

Fabian DEMICOLI  
22 t' April, 2008 19:20 CET

F'ċerimonja unika li saret fil-Knisja ta' l-Universita' l-Antika fil-Belt Valletta - fil-preżenza ta' l-ghola awtoritajiet tal-pajjiż - id-direttur tal-Film 'La Vita e Bella' u attur ċelebri Roberto Benigni ingħata Degree tad-Dottorat tal-Letteratura bħala rikonoxximent mill-Universita' ta' Malta għax-xogħol kollu li wettaq tul il-karriera tiegħu.

Wara d-diskors ta' Gloria Lauri Lucente, Senior Lecturer fl-Universita' ta' Malta, l-artist ta' fama internazzjonali Roberto Benigni issejjah biex imur quddiem ir-Rettur ta' l-Universita' ta' Malta biex jippreżentalu id-Degree.

Iżda f'wieħed mill-aktar mument i serji ta' ċerimonja ma naqasx li Benigni jkompli johrog il-komiċita' tiegħu. Hekk kif ir-rettur ppreżentalu l-Honoris Causa Benigni ħassu emozzjonat ħafna u grat lejn il-poplu Malti kollu.

Sforz l-emozzjoni Roberto Benigni saħansitra b'mod ewforiku esprima r-ringrazzjament tiegħu lill-President ta' Malta Eddie Fenech Adami. Bl-ilsien Malti Benigni komplja jesprimi l-emozzjonijiet tiegħu.

Waq t li qal li kien impressjonat bis-sbuħija f'ċerti lokalitajiet madwar Malta u Għawdex u saħansitra l-Gzejjer ta' madwarna.

Matul id-diskors spontanju tiegħu Roberto Benigni esprima l-entuzjazmu u l-istennija tiegħu biex fis-serata Dantesca li se ssir l-erbgha filgħaxija fl-Universita' ta' Malta jiltaqa' ma' l-istudenti Maltin u Għawdxin.



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## Benigni jfahħhar lil Malta: Sabiħa

Annette VELLA  
22 t' April, 2008 16:42 CET

Ftit sigħat qabel ingħata l-Honoris Causa, l-attur komiku Taljan Roberto Benigni indirizza konferenza ta' l-ahbarijiet fl-Aula Magna, il-Belt. Matul il-konferenza u għal kull mistoqsija li saritlu, Roberto Benigni wieġeb bis-soltu stil tiegħu: iwaqqa' kollox għaċ-ċajt u diffiċli biex wieħed jagħmel differenza bejn dak li jkun qed jgħid bis-serjeta' u bejn dak li jgħid biċ-ċajt.

Din hi l-ewwel darba li Roberto Benigni żar Malta iżda qal li jsib li l-pajjiż hu sabiħ, b'lingwa li tiġbor fiha l-isbah affarijiet tal-lingwi kollha li sawruha. Roberto Benigni jinsab Malta wara stedina li saritlu mill-Fakulta' ta' l-Arti fl-Universita' ta' Malta, li kienet hi stess li ressqet it-talba biex jinġhata l-Honoris Causa għax-xogħol tiegħu u l-imħabba li għandu lejn id-"Divina Commedia" ta' Dante Alighieri.

Kulmin isegwi lil Roberto Benigni jafu bħala bniedem dejjem jiċċajta. Iżda mistoqsi jekk il-ħajja għalih hijiex ċajta kontinwa jew le, hu qal li bħal kull bniedem iehor jgħaddi minn mumentu emozzjonali imma dejjem ifittex xi ħaġa komika biex tkompli tmexxieh 'il quddiem.

Fil-konferenza ta' l-ahbarijiet, il-komiku Taljan ma naqasx milli jiffa' botta dwar il-politika Taljana. Hu qal li filwaqt li Malta għandha Ordni tal-Kavallieri, fl-Italja hemm biss Kavallier wieħed: Silvio Berlusconi. Ma naqsitx ukoll il-battuta kontra l-Kap ta' l-Oppożizzjoni Taljan Walter Veltroni, li skond Benigni ressaq il-kandidatura tiegħu meta ma jifhem xejn fil-politika.



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## Benigni at the University of Malta

4/23/2008 7:47:08 PM

Awtur: Michael Caruana

Italian Artist Roberto Benigni this evening gave an excellent performance at the Notte Dantesca held at the University of Malta.

Benigni was greeted by a loud applause as he went on stage with the hundreds waiting in the hall at the University and from the crowd which was seeing the show from the big screen outside. At the beginning of the ceremony a short feature was shown with the best cinematic moments of the Italian actor, amongst which were pieces from La Vita e Bella, the oscar winning film.

Roberto Benigni gave an excellent interpretation of La Divina Comedia together with an actor renowned for his love for Dante's work, Robert Hollander. Roberto Benigni, just like yesterday, chose to joke with everyone around, making fun of himself, jumping and dancing on stage. He did not miss out on showing everyone all the Maltese words he has learnt till now in his visit in Malta.



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