

Arts

The prehistoric angle

Mariella Cassar Cordina



Silvio Camilleri

The Maltese islands boast of prehistoric sites of world heritage status. *The Ġgantija Collaborative Project*, which was launched a few years ago, is yet another tribute to these sites. The project also illustrates how Maltese artists seem to be de-emphasising traditional descriptive qualities in favour of more spontaneous responses to a particular subject, in line with contemporary artistic trends. Artists are also exploring possible connections between different media.

According to composer Mariella Cassar Cordina, *Ġgantija* constitutes an integral aspect of our contemporary identity and therefore goes beyond mere folkloristic or nationalistic concerns.

“Our prehistoric locations are still relevant to present-day people, rather than serving exclusively as a relic”

The initial plans and studies for the *Ġgantija* project date back to 2009 and years later evolved in various interactive sessions. Curated by Vince Briffa, the project includes the music of Cassar Cordina, the visual art of Victor Agius and the poetry of Immanuel Mifsud.

Agius created various works in connection with this project, including three-dimensional ones which apart from their visual appeal can serve as percussion instruments. Made in terracotta or found objects such as pebbles or sea shells, these fascinated the percussionist Renzo Spiteri who used them in some performances.

The final phase of the project culminated in a multi-media exhibition, where visitors

may appreciate new works by Victor Agius and the music of Cassar Cordina, enhanced by Mifsud's poetry.

Cassar Cordina's expression is particularly suited for such project. Her willingness to experiment is attested by the way she occasionally incorporates instruments which do not commonly feature in contemporary repertoire, such as the harpsichord or celesta.

This willingness also featured in the artist's composition *Ġgantija 2013*, and they find their parallels in the art of Agius, which features organic materials such as raw clay, sand and vegetation, assembled with minimal human intervention.

Cassar Cordina has now composed a second movement, to the work *Ġgantija 2013* performed by the Ars Vitae Ensemble.

The response of the artists to the work of their collaborators is an interesting aspect in multi-disciplinary projects. Cassar Cordina noted that both her music and Agius's visual output evolved in response to each other's works, discussions and joint research.

Mifsud's contribution has similarly changed, since whereas last year's lyrics featured an emphasis on sounds and vowels, the subsequent poem is a freer response to the *Ġgantija* theme.

Mifsud was aware that the text for the initial composition entailed leaving room for improvisation on the part of soprano Miriam Cauchi, whereas in the succeeding poem he exercised less consideration for musical requisites. While only parts of Mifsud's poem feature in Cassar Cordina's new composition, the whole work will be recited by the author during the upcoming musical performance.

It is encouraging to note that our prehistoric locations are still relevant to present-day people, rather than serving exclusively as a relic.

The multi-media exhibition runs at St James Cavalier, Valletta, until August 24. The concert takes place on Wednesday.