

## The future of Malta's music and dance

Life has inevitably changed dramatically since the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Music-making has had to bow its head to progress. Many musical customs, within all levels of society, have slowly lost the context within which they flourished.

Maltese traditional oral poetry has fortunately retained some of its previous popularity. Today, there are still groups of individuals of all ages who are happy to exercise their talent for poetry in a form of singing known as *ghana spirtu pront*, to the accompaniment of guitars (Plate 11). This type of *ghana* is made



Plate 12. Instrumentalists playing castanets, tambourine and accordion. Nadur Football Club, Carnival 1996.



Plate 11. *Ghana spirtu pront* accompanied by guitars, Feast of San Girgor, Marsaxlokk, 1999

up of quatrains in *abcb* rhyme which one *ghannej* will improvise and another will respond to with an amazing alacrity. Other forms of *ghana*, such as story telling (*ghana tal-fatt*) and the high pitched, melismatic *ghana fil-gholi* (also known as *la Bormliża*) still take place, but are, at present, less commonly encountered.<sup>23</sup>

Instrumental playing in Malta has dropped alarmingly in popularity over the last 60 years or so, except in the case of village brass bands which are still flourishing. Much recreational instrumental playing of fiddles, bagpipes, tambourines, mandolins, accordions, guitars, rustic pipes, friction drums etc., all previously so commonplace, have now been replaced by radio, CD players and other modern technological advances. Rustic dance used to be completely dependent on instrumental accompaniment. This type of dance has therefore also suffered a strong blow and has totally receded into oblivion.

Some vestiges of music-making on traditional instruments does still take place in a few villages of Gozo such as Nadur, Xewkija and Gharb, mostly over the Carnival period (Plate 12). The melodies played, however, are generally popular British or Italian songs mostly from the 1950's and 60's. Even these few groups are in danger of being ousted by the more popular disco music. Malta is facing a problem commonly encountered in all modern societies.