

# Valletta FIESTA Week – Celebrating the European Capital of Culture

*Malta January 2018*

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Ask anyone you meet on the streets or markets of any town on the island of Malta about what event gives him or her the greatest pleasure during the year and the answer will be a spontaneous and enthusiastic FIESTA. You will be told how the whole village or town comes together mostly in summer for a week of celebrating their Patron Saint through music, dancing, street performances, processions, fireworks and of course the local FIESTA food.

When the City Council of Valletta received the happy news from the European Union that their beloved city (together with the Dutch city of Leeuwarden) had been chosen as the European Capital of Culture 2018 there was an unanimous agreement of inviting the whole of Europe to a grand opening FIESTA in January that would sound the starting bell for 140 projects and 400 events planned for the whole year..

Most FIESTAs in Malta (about 60) are held during the summer months. In the winter the main feasts are dedicated to Patron Saint of Malta, who according to the Acts of Apostles shipwrecked on the island on his way to Rome in the year A.D. 60 (The Feasts of the Conversion of St. Paul in Medina and St. Pauls Shipwreck in Valetta).

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The actual idea of instituting a European Capital of Culture originated in another city of Antiquity – Athens and can be traced to the famous actor, singer and political activist Melina Mercouri. From its very start in 1985 with Athens as the first elected capital, the project was designed by the Council of Europe to

- Highlight the richness and diversity of culture in Europe
- Celebrate the cultural features Europeans should share
- Increase European Citizens sense of belonging to a common cultural area
- Foster the contribution of culture to the development of cities

The Valletta FIESTA week actually started on January 13th with the arrangement in the Teatru Manuel, one of the oldest working theaters in Europe, also fulfilling its role as National Theater, of the 6th consecutive season for the Valletta International Baroque festival, with chamber music spanning from the opening presentation of Vivaldi's Four Seasons to A Baroque treasure hunt for all the family, Baroque meets Jazz, Bach's Musical Offering and Goldberg Variations to Music of the Neapolitan Baroque Masters that inspired their Maltese students. It also included a presentation by VIBE-Valletta International Baroque Ensemble of Music from the Archives of the Cathedral Museum.



Figure 1. Views from the festivals.

Then on the opening on January 20, all along the Republic street and neighboring venues, besides enjoying spectacles by international and local music, dance and theatre groups adding to the street artists that had been performing during the whole week, the packed street audience could now experience a 3D multimedia mapping project From the depths of the past to the heights of the future or the premiere of the Two Thousand and Eighteen choral symphony both with accompanying projections covering the Baroque facades of major city monuments. All in all an opening spanning from the sharing of a common European historical past of music and dance to displaying the exuberant spirit of a FIESTA extravaganza.