

University to award Benigni honorary degree



Italian actor, director and overall funnyman Roberto Benigni will be conferred with the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature in Malta in April.

The conferment of this degree recognises 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 will be awarded to the Oscar-winning director during a ceremony at the Jesuits' Church in Valletta on April 22.

The oration will be delivered by Gloria Lauri-Lucente, senior lecturer in Italian and comparative literature and deputy dean of the Faculty of Arts, and will be followed by Benigni's acceptance speech.

Much to the delight of the numerous Benigni admirers among the faculty members and the undergraduates, many of whom have recently watched the successful series of performances *Tutto Dante* on Italian television. Benigni will also be treating the University to a 'Serata Dantesca' on April 23.

The evening at the Sir Temi Zammit Hall 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.

After the discussion, Benigni will give a 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 members of the public. 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 Benigni published in 2007.

Benigni is best known outside Italy for his 1997 tragicomedy *Life is Beautiful* for which he won the Best Actor award. His walk towards the podium and his acceptance speech where he said "there must be some terrible mistake" goes down in Oscar history as one of the most amusing.