

# Opera house live crib attracts 80,000 visitors

Fiona Galea Debono



Housing Parliament in the Old Opera House may have raised controversy but converting the ruins into a live crib over Christmas did not raise any objections.

On the contrary, about 80,000 visitors "lived" the walk-through experience between December 12 and Christmas Eve, project manager Noel D'Amato said.

The live crib, organised by the Malta Council for Culture and the Arts, also attracted many tourists, with groups showing up and individuals visiting as many as six times, he said.

They were mesmerised by what artistic director and scenographer Ino Bonello described as "uprooting a piece of a Maltese valley and plonking it into the heart of Valletta".

"You often stumble upon a scene in the countryside and liken it to a crib. We transposed it into the midst of the baroque architecture, where it is not expected."

The council has been working on the crib since mid-October and it took three weeks to build the set in time for the opening.

On weekend evenings, over 40 actors went about their tasks on the Maltese farm - smell and all - with farmers tilling the land and selling their produce, while craftsman, including a blacksmith, baker and potter, demonstrated their traditional skills. During the week, they were replaced by life-size statues while the number of animals, including sheep, goats, chickens and ducks, was reduced.

The animals came from a Bidnija farm and they also played their role. Farmer Jimmy Buhagiar brought them to Valletta every day and returned them home at night, ensuring they were looked after during their working hours.

The set capitalised on the opera house's architectural features, said Mr Bonello, who treated its creation as though it were a movie set, integrating it with the location. "The idea is that you do not know where one starts and the other finishes."

Mr Bonello roped in the assistance of his sons, limiting the resources used by recycling waste wood, donated by the Agriculture Ministry, for construction purposes.

The Tourism Department and council workers focused on the building while the dressing and finishes were in the hands of the experts, who work on movies with Mr Bonello.

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## Comments

Antoinette Mascari (2 days, 6 hours ago)

Well done to the organisers, artists, farmers and all those who took part to show the world that Malta has so much to offer in art and artistic direction. The Historical sight has served as a stage for the world to see this magnificent live Nativity scene. Hoping it is not the last time to use the ruins of the Opera House of which many of us never saw as we were born post war.

Congratulations to Malta Council for Culture and the Arts. This shows that "together you can all do it and achieve professionally." Happy Christmas Tidings and a Happy Healthy Peaceful and Prosperous New Year to all on the Maltese Islands. You all have come along way with innovative ideas. Keep up the spirit of Christmas as this tradition lingers on for many years to come with all the children as we were children and still remember and live to pass on our Christmas Culture from our childhood. Today as our Parish organist Mr Chalres Galea played "Ninni la tikbix izjed" all Maltese congratulated him for the nostalgic moment though the other parish members were not aware of our feelings. Maltese traditions are still with us.

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