

Strait Street: Valletta's cash cow which has run dry

One of the best known streets on this island is undoubtedly Strait Street in Valletta, popularly known as *Strada Stretta*.

It is a street which also sticks like a fossilised icon in the collective memory of most members of the British forces and other navies who spent time at 'The Gut' as they called it. Alas the street is now deserted.

Strada Stretta: It-Triq li xegħlet il-Belt – Strait Street: The street that once breath life into Valletta written by George Cini was launched today.

The book is the first of its kind as it provides a history of this infamous street through a series of interviews with some of the most colourful protagonists who worked or knew this street well.

Strait Street was but an alley that was full to the brim with bars, music halls, restaurants and lodging houses.

Wine, women and song were the ingredients that made for such an allure. The fascination was akin to that of mythical sirens that tempted weary mariners.

Prior to the Second World War, the street was alive with the sound of swing. Smartly dressed musicians won their stripes down The Gut as they accompanied showgirls and other entertainers brought over from England, the US and Hungary among other places.

The amount of money that was made in Strait Street was beyond comprehension when one considers how poor people were at the time.

“For example, not taking tips into account, musicians earned £7 a week when the average weekly wage of a civil servant was about £1.10s. Through the use of tokens, barmaids made loads of cash for the drinks they ordered on their own behalf and on behalf of clients.

“It was the type of alley one visited to seek vices of all kinds,” George Cini, author of *Strada Stretta* said.

The book includes newly published photographs and vivid watercolours by Paul Caruana that spice the stories by some of the key players of Strait Street of yore.

Strada Stretta: It-Triq li darba xegħlet il-Belt was designed by MediaMaker Ltd and printed at Progress Press by Allied Publications.

The book can be bought online by going to www.timesofmalta.com by clicking on

Comments

Robbie Ritchie (1 week, 4 days ago)

I was just about to order this book for myself as an early Christmas present, when I realised its in Maltese. Dont wait too long before its translated please! This street has allways fascinated me. And any time I mention strait street or the Gut to some older men in my village and surrounding area who were in the Navy usually brings a reaction of instant laughter and you can literally see their thoughts going back in time to the fun they had there. I hope the book is a success, I am sure it will be.

Anne-Marie Willows (2 weeks, 3 days ago)

I agree with the previous comment - I also would welcome a copy of George Cini's book if it is published in English. My late mother was born and grew up in Valletta and would have loved to read Cini's book. Nevertheless I am pleased that it is of course primarily published in Maltese. Please let us know if and when an English version becomes available.

John Forster (2 weeks, 3 days ago)

Time changes everything but how sad to see the demise of Strait Street.

Going down the " Gut " as it was known , everybody knew they would be ripped off for drinks etc but it was the best place to go for a lively night out.

Well remebered are establishments like the " Silver Horse saloon" known by British sailors as the " Galvanised Donkey " and the " sticky green drinks " for the girls.

Barry Bates (2 weeks, 3 days ago)

I would love a copy in English

Antida Rogers (2 weeks, 3 days ago)

I would really like a copy of this book if it is available in English.Is it being published in Maltese only? And if it is where can I get a copy please.

paul mizzi (2 weeks, 4 days ago)

Prosit Gorg! Konvint li hdimt bicca xoghol ta' veru! Grazzi u prosit tal-hidma tieghek.

Pawlu Mizzi

Joe Xuereb (2 weeks, 5 days ago)

I imagine this book about the famous/infamous little street - just the name was (and still is?) used euphemistically for all things steamy - does not overlook that very British import, the cross-dressing entertainer. We 'up-and-coming' young gay blades had nowhere to go at the time so we used to hang out in some of the bars, living our fantasies. Thus we coined the phrase 'sejjer naghmel landa' (I am going to get me a token[as mentioned in this article]), meaning, I am going cruising. In gay parlance, that means I am going to seek an encounter. If nothing else, we practised our English with the British Navy representatives, Greek with Greeks, French with matelots, and so on.

Of course the Street was about prostitution but there was humanity there. I remember one battleaxe of a bar-owner resenting my clique dallying with her mariners to the detriment of her 'girls'(her business). She threw us out and forbade us returning. I remember one member of Her Majesty's Navy even standing up for us. Maybe secretly, he was one of us?

I wish George Cini the author every success with his book. I cannot wait to get my hands on a copy.
