



1732

Manoel Theatre

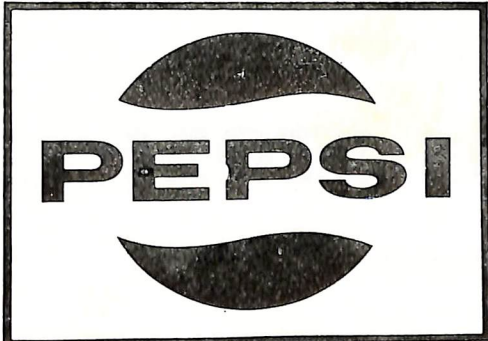
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THE MANOEL THEATRE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

present

A COMMEMORATION CONCERT

ON THE FIRST DECADE SINCE
THE MANOEL THEATR'S REHABILITATION

1960 - 1970

A HOMAGE TO MALTESE TALENT AND TO ALL THOSE WHO HAVE
COLLABORATED WITH THE MANAGEMENT IN ACHIEVING THE
PURPOSE WHICH INSPIRED GRAND MASTER MANOEL DE VILHENA
TO BUILD THIS THEATRE.

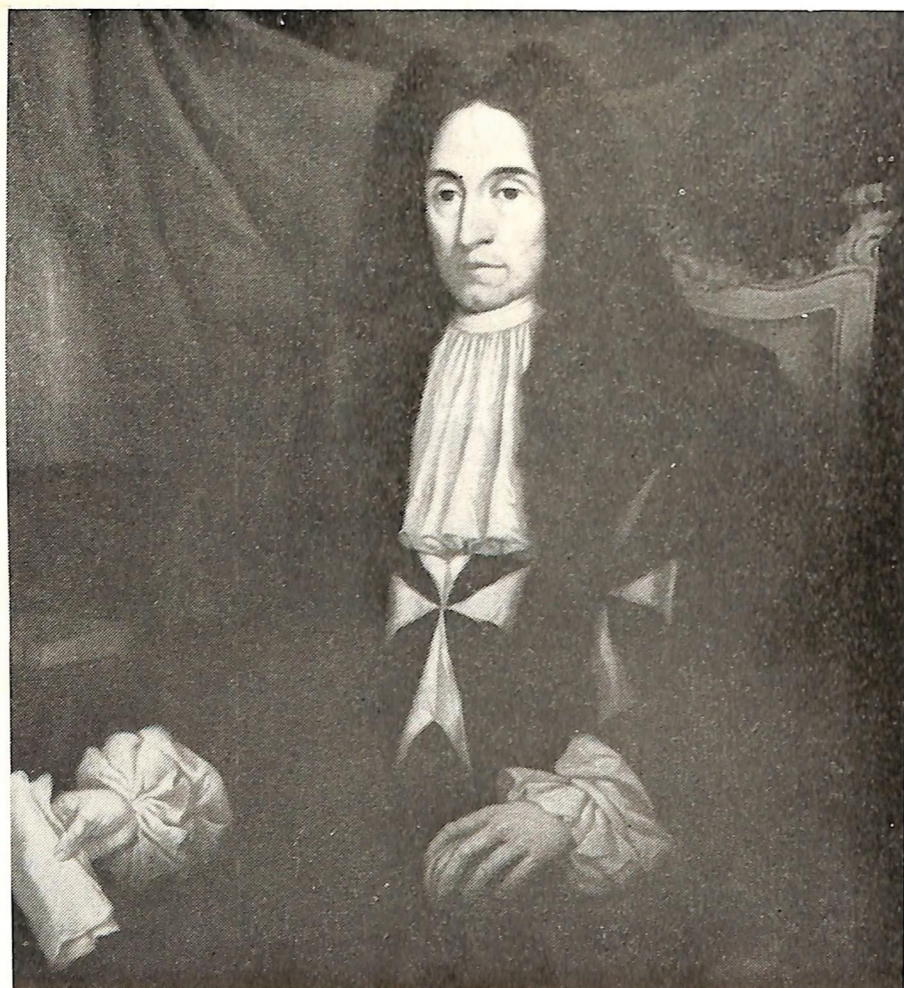
"AD HONESTAM POPULI OBLECTATIONEM"

producer

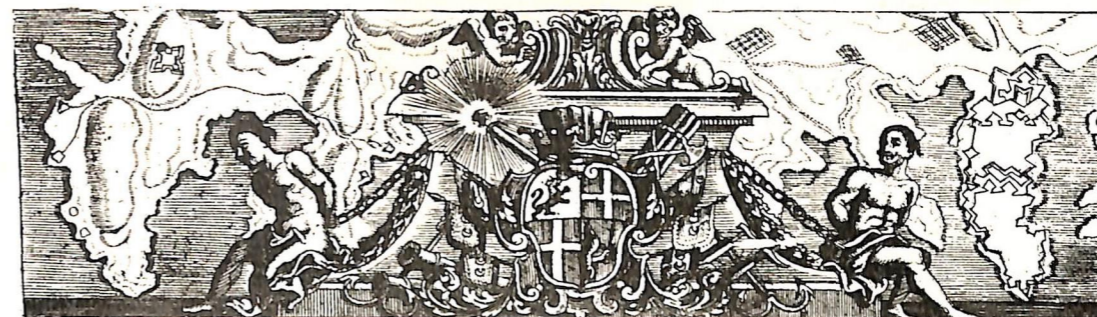
V.M. PELLEGRINI

MANOEL THEATRE

SUNDAY, 27th DECEMBER 1970



*U LILEK jien insejjah, Kbir Gran Mastru
Antonio Manoel De Vilhena
 biex tigi hawn fostna, f'darek, halli tilqa'
 ta' qlubna l-ghajta u t-tislina
 ta' radd il-hajr
 li ghan-nom tal-poplu kollu
 hawn migburin lilek irridu naghtu
 b'weghda shiha u solenni
 li gatt ma jkun li nongsu ghar-rieda taeghek
 li dal-gojjell ta' arti u ta' mhabba
 jithalla jibred jew jintesa',
 li nghozzuh dejjem b'rieda azzarija
 u li nzommuh ewlieni f'qalbna u f'mohhna
 f'gieh artna, f'gieh ilsienna u f'gieh ismek
 ghall-gid tal-Poplu u tan-Nazzjon Maltija.*



The first decade

When the Manoel Theatre opened again its doors on the 27th December 1960, to present to the people of Malta, for the first time, a full length Ballet: "Coppelia" by Saint Leon, music by Delibes, performed by the internationally famous "Ballet Rambert", two important events were registered by History: the fact itself that Grand Master Antonio Manoel de Vilhena's bequest to the people of Malta was still valid and fully operative, and that at last, Malta's public was regaled by a full length Ballet, a feature in the musical field which had so far been totally neglected.

The Manoel Theatre had in the past been famous for its operatic activities, no less than a nine months' season of lyric opera each year, from the beginning of September to the end of May.

At that time the enthusiasm of the audience equalled, if not surpassed, that of the nearby Italy, and it is known that singers who achieved the approval of Malta's critics, had, so to say, a pass-port to the Great Theatres of the peninsula. A good number of fledglings, in fact, after having had their baptism in Malta, became famous and most sought later.

Tempora mutantur, and besides Opera other activities began to grace the Manoel Theatre Boards: operettas, straight plays, concerts, recitals, and after a dull period, in which the Manoel was used as a Picture House, with sporadic live shows, the glory that was, returned to it again, thanks to the Government's effort to restore to its pristine grandeur this gem, which fascinates those who really know how to appreciate works of art.

During these ten years the Management Committee, faithful to Malta's traditions has kept alive the flame that now has been burning at the Manoel for 238 years, and respecting the charming tribute once paid to Maltese audiences by an Italian historian viz: "I Maltesi furono sempre appassionati per il teatro lirico, dove mostravano esempio di rispetto, tacendo durante le rappresentazioni, non giungendo in ritardo, non facendo rumore coi programmi ecc.", has kept vigorous discipline both front house and back stage, which has given a character to the theatre, second to none the world over.

Company Directors and foreign visitors alike have nothing but praise for the Management of the Theatre and the impeccable neatness everywhere has become legendary in the eyes of those who are at home with other theatres.

The amount of work done speaks for itself. No less than three hundred shows have so far been presented, with at least one thousand performances, not a small achievement, and now with the availability of spacious and up-to-date new Rehearsal Rooms, that number will be augmented.

The programmes have been varied and the Management has catered for all. Besides nine opera seasons, operettas, pantomimes, straight plays, vocal and

orchestral concerts, piano and other instruments' recitals, poetry readings and lectures, a short-term drama school was held and now with the creation of the Manoel Theatre Orchestra, open-air activities during the summer season, especially at Vilhena Palace, Mdina, are being also provided. A biennial Arts Festival is adding new scope to the Manoel, and last but not least, more liberal opportunities are now being offered to Maltese talent, in various spheres of the arts, which enhance the ideal for which the Manoel Theatre is intended.

In the first programme it was pointed out that "because the arts are not limited by geography the people of Malta, need the opportunity to see and hear fine artists from abroad. They must also have the opportunity to express their own culture on equal terms. These two purposes must be balanced and fulfilled. The standard of both must be kept high, worthy of Malta, worthy of the Theatre and of its founder's precept".

On the whole the Management has adhered to this policy and at no time has it ever shrunk from its responsibilities. It has indeed kept the Manoel Theatre doors wide open, "Ad honestam populi oblectationem" and the response has been gratifying.

To-day we are commemorating the first decade since the Manoel Theatre's reopening as the National Theatre of Malta and as Producer, I have thought it fit to present a full programme dedicated to Maltese talent in its various aspects of literature and music: Maltese composers, Maltese singers, Maltese poets, Maltese artistes and readers are here to render homage to Malta and to the Founder of this theatre; also as a tribute to our European culture, a selection of poems in various languages has been included.

As a people advanced in culture, whose love and respect of the Arts has never faded, a further opportunity is being provided to express outwardly our national soul through a national performance, a tribute to our Island and a promise for further achievements.

V.M. PELLEGRINI.

MANOEL THEATRE



MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

1732

FIRST DECADE COMMEMORATION CONCERT

1960 + 1970

PART ONE

Joseph Magri	MALTESE RHAPSODY	Manoel Theatre Orchestra
George Zammit	VICINO ALL'EREMO DI SANT'ANNA	George Zammit
Giovanni Curmi	FINESTRE ILLUMINATE	Maria Pisani
F.X. Pisani	ANCHE SE TU NON M'AMI <i>(Lyrics by A.M. Cassola)</i>	Franz Frendo
J.E. Cassar	STRANGE BUT TRUE <i>(Lyrics by J.B. Cassar)</i>	Merga
C. Zammit	TORNA DA ME <i>(Lyrics by A.M. Cassola)</i>	Aurelio Micallef Grimaud
George Heym	HYMNE	G. Mercieca
G. Tonna Barthet	ADIEU	Maria Pisani
F. Garcia Lorca	MUERTE DE ANTONITO EL CAMBORIO	Jos. M. Vassallo
Carmelo Pace	VARIATIONS	Manoel Theatre Orchestra

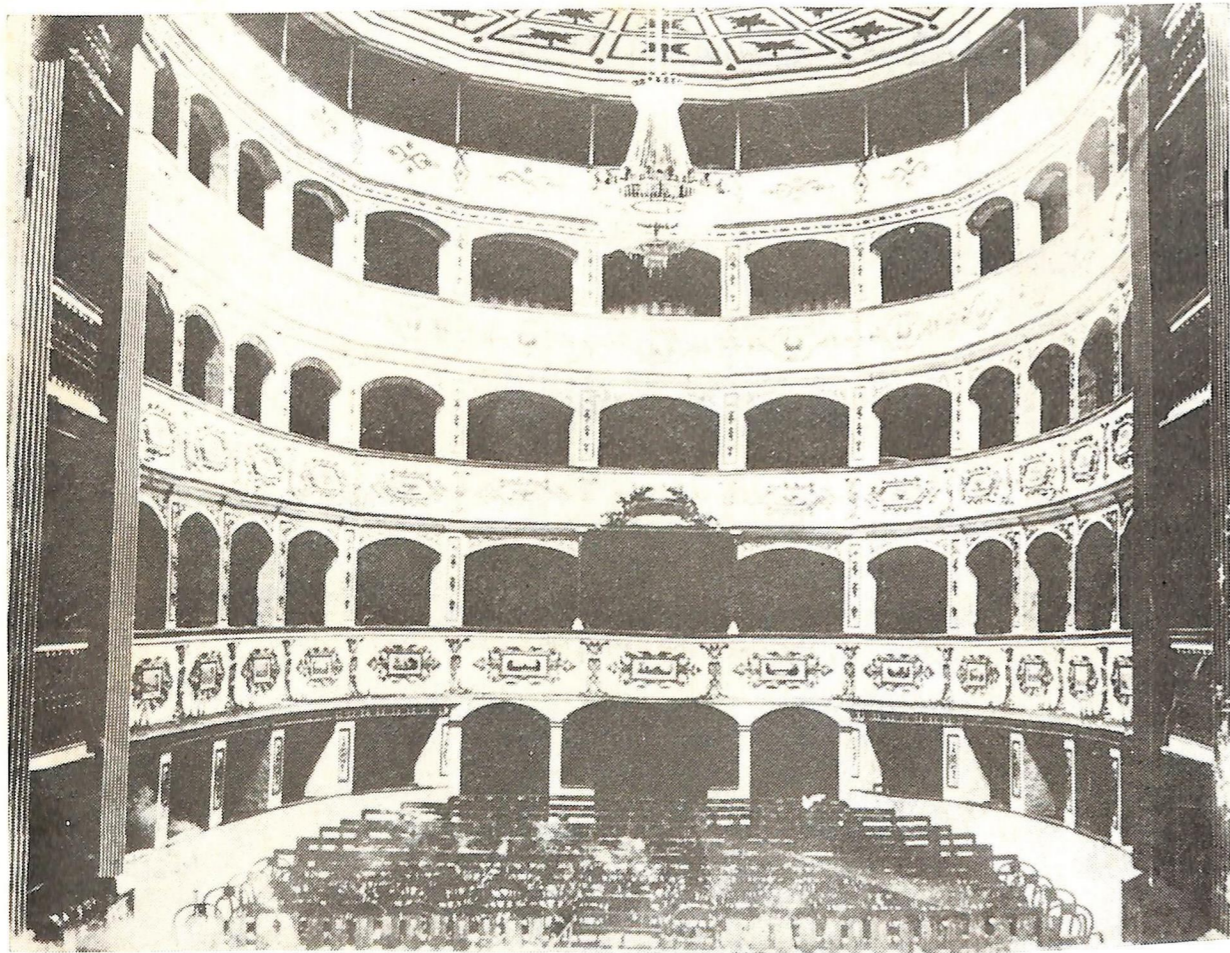
I N T E R V A L

PART TWO

Joseph Vella	THREE MOOD PIECES	Manoel Theatre Orchestra
Oscar Wilde	SCENE FROM "THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST"	Beatrice Dennis J.C. Mompalao de Piro
Carlo Diacono	"QUANDO SULL'ORLO AL BARATRO" <i>From the Opera "L'ALPINO"</i> <i>(Libretto by R. Barbaro)</i>	Joe Huber
Antonio Nani	"L'HO PERDUTA, L'HO PERDUTA"	A. Sapiano
Dun Karm	"O MEMORIE SUBLIMI" <i>Both from the Opera "I CAVALIERI DI MALTA"</i> <i>(Libretto by E. Golisciani)</i>	A. Miggiani
Rużar Briffa	XENQET IR-RABA'	Charles Abela Mizzi
V.M. Pellegrini	L-GHANJA TA' L-IMNIKKET	Karmen Azzopardi
Carmelo Scerri	ĠIEH LILL-GRAN MASTRU	V.M. Pellegrini
Carmelo Pace	"VOS OMNES"	Chorus Melitensis and the Manoel Theatre Orchestra
	"O DIO DEGLI ESERCITI" <i>From the Opera "I MARTIRI"</i> <i>(Libretto by V.M. Pellegrini)</i>	Soloist: Joe Fenech

Conductor – Maestro JOSEPH SAMMUT

The oldest known photograph of the Manoel



THE MANOEL THEATRE AS SEEN BY PETER BOYDELL IN 1958

Theatre Street, in Valletta, the capital of Malta, is a narrow, busy and somewhat dusty street which leads down the hill from the Governor's Palace in Kingsway to the district of Marsamxett Harbour. About half way down, on the right, opposite a barber's shop, is a tall, grey building of decayed, yet aristocratic, appearance.

At the level of the first floor of this building is a small and elegant balcony. On the front of the balcony is a date — MDCCXXXI — and the coat of arms of Antonio Manoel de Vilhena, the Portuguese Grand Master of the Order of St. John who reigned in Malta from 1722 until 1736. Those arms and that cracked and faded face conceal one of the most perfect playhouses in the world.

Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena built it, as the Court Theatre of Malta, in the shape of a horseshoe, with a pit, four tiers of boxes and a gallery. The boxes which formerly surrounded the pit have been removed; the other tiers of boxes remain. The three boxes in the centre of the first tier were for the Court. Even today, despite its shabby air, it is a work of exquisite beauty.

The Manoel opened, on January 19, 1732, with a performance of Maffei's tragedy "**Merope**", which had been greatly admired by Voltaire and which was later translated into English. For more than a century it presented not only tragedies and comedies, but also opera and masque. In her work, "Malta of the Knights" (Heinemann, 1929), Miss Elizabeth Schermerhorn wrote:

"In the Teatro Manoel which he built in 1731, a charming affair of gold and white, with delicate passages and graceful floral designs painted upon the ivory panels of its stalls, and his enormous escutcheon above the proscenium, were produced many of those Masques and Comedies and Divertissements — 'Piety Crowned' or 'The Rivals of Glory' — in which the eighteenth century delighted, crammed with thinly veiled complimentary allusions to the Magisterial virtues. The performers were sometimes professional actors and musicians brought from abroad, but more often the parts were taken by the Knights themselves, the Novices, we are told, filling the female parts admirably".

In the 18th century the Manoel sparked. Today it glows. The curtains from the boxes have gone long ago. But the pelmets, which remain, show the last scheme of decoration to have been royal blue velvet and gold. A ventilator, of great beauty, is in the richly ornamented and encrusted ceiling. Each of the boxes bears a fresco — now faint — of a country scene. The floor of the pit is composed of coloured tiles. There was formerly an orchestra pit which is now replaced by seats. The pit has 370 seats. The balcony has space for about 100 people, and there are three tiers each of 17 boxes. The capacity, is therefore, approximately 650. The auditorium is 60 feet from the back of the pit to the stage and it varies in width between 25 feet at the stage to 30 feet in the middle.

At the front of the theatre is a small but neat foyer, slightly reminiscent of Chelsea's Royal Court Theatre which otherwise the Manoel does not greatly resemble. The proscenium opening is 23 feet. The stage, which is slightly raked, is 43 feet wide (including wing space) and 40 feet deep. The acoustics are excellent. Behind the stage are 15 dressing rooms. It is uncertain whether the stage machinery is the original equipment, but it is, in character, if not in fact, the 18th century equipment appropriate for changing the scenery, as if by a miracle, before the eyes of the audience

MANOEL THEATRE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Colonel G. C. GATT — *Chairman.*

Dr. VICTOR A. MERCIECA, LL.D. — *Hon. Treasurer.*

Mr. A. AGIUS FERRANTE, L.P. — *Hon. Secretary.*

Mrs. INES BONELLO CASHA — *Member.*

Notary Dr. V. M. PELLEGRINI, LL.D. — *Member.*

Mr. MICHAEL KISSAUN — *Manager.*

This is another important and valuable feature of a superb and remarkably little known playhouse, which is one of the oldest post-Elizabethan playhouses still in use.

To describe it as still in use is unhappily no longer accurate. Since its days of glory in the 18th and 19th centuries it has suffered many humiliations. It was at one period a lodging for the destitute. At another, a cinema. Brave efforts have from time to time been made, until recently, to raise it again to its former grandeur. On January 11, 1951, an orchestral concert in the Manoel was graced by the presence of Her Majesty the Queen, then Her Royal Highness the Princess Elizabeth. But it is now three years since a human voice was publicly heard from the historic stage. It has dwindled into a cinema, and, lately, into nothing at all.

On October 15, 1955, it was requisitioned by the Malta Government, from the owners as an Ancient Monument. Two days later an Italian film was shown, and since that day the Manoel has been both dark and silent. The future is obscure, but the future of the Manoel could be as glorious as its past.

In his work on Malta (An Account and an Appreciation, Harrap, 1949), Sir Harry Luke wrote of the Manoel:

“It is easy enough to appreciate how daintily graceful it must have looked when the audience, arrayed in the brocade and perukes of the eighteenth century was assembled to witness some comedy of Molière or Goldoni”.

Today its lustre is somewhat dimmed. But even so there is no more beautiful theatre in Europe and there is hope that the Maltese Government recognise the aesthetic and cultural value of their possession. When the theatre was requisitioned it was their intention to turn it into a People's National Theatre. To advise them on the problems involved in this project they invited Miss Vera Lindsay (Lady Barry) and Dr. Richard Southern to visit Malta and to prepare reports, the former on the possibility of re-opening the Manoel Theatre and the latter on the technical equipment of theatres in Malta. Their reports were published in October 1966 and the Maltese Government then set up a committee to consider their recommendations.

* * *

The result of these recommendations was exactly the rehabilitation of this historic Theatre which ten years ago re-opened its doors to recapture the Ideal which had inspired its Founder 238 years before. May we hope that this Ideal may inspire others to keep the flame burning and to pass it on to future generations.

MANOEL THEATRE STAFF

PERMANENT STAFF

S. Azzopardi
M. Caruana
M. Bugeja
J. Portelli
C. Ferò
J. Laus
E. Dalli
F. Mifsud
J. Azzopardi
N. Spiteri
M. Callus
A. Farrugia

Archivist
Sec. to Manager
Booking Clerk
Ass. Booking Clerk
Messenger
Electrician
Stage Carpenter
Stage Carpenter
Stage Carpenter
Charwoman
Charwoman
Watchman

CASUAL STAFF

C. Borg
A. Psaila
A. Tabone
V. Grech
U. Arena
C. Scicluna
J. Ellul
H. Borg
E. Magro
A. Grima
T. Micallef
G. Camilleri

Curtain Raiser
Curtain Raiser
Stage Doorman
Fireman
Ticket Controller
Commissionaire
Usher
Usher
Usher
Usher
Usherette
Usherette

THE CHORUS MELITENSIS



THE MANOEL THEATRE RESIDENT ORCHESTRA

GEORGE SPITERI — Leader
 JOSEPH GALEA — 1st Violin
 LOUIS SCERRI — 1st Violin
 VICTOR MICALLEF — 2nd Violin
 ARTHUR PACE — Viola
 ALFRED TONNA — Cello
 VICTOR MIGGIANI — Double Bass
 JOSEPH CORRADO — Flute

JOSEPH BUSUTTIL — Oboe
 CHARLES CAMILLERI — Clarinet
 JOHN AQUILINA — Basson
 ANTHONY GALEA — French Horn
 JOSEPH AGIUS — Trumpet
 CLEMENTE SCIBERRAS — Trombone
 JOSEPH CURMI — Percussions

Conductor — Maestro JOSEPH SAMMUT

The compilation, layout and editing of this programme was carried out by Dr. V.M. Pellegrini; the printing by Giov. Muscat & Co. Ltd., Valletta. Cover design V.M. Pellegrini. Photo Hans Wild.

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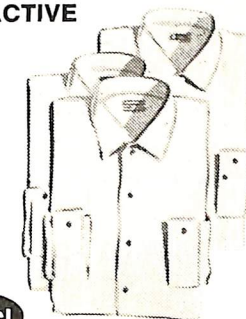


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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

ARIEL PLAYERS — "Aladdin" — 31st December, 2nd & 3rd January 1971
THEATRICAL ENTERPRISES (MALTA) LTD. — "Plaza Suite" — 6th to 10th January 1971
M.T.C.M. — Violin Recital "Alfredo Campoli" — 11th January 1971
MALTA TALENT ARTISTES — "Nisa korah" — 16th & 17th January 1971
M.T.M.C. — Violin Recital "Denes Zsigmondy" — 18th January 1971
UNIVERSITY PLAYERS — "A Yard of Sun" — 21st to 24th January 1971
CIA: FILODRAMMATICA CARLO GOLDONI — "L'amica di tutti e di nessuno" — 30th
January 1971
M.A.D.C. — "Salad Days" (Musical) — 5th to 7th and 9th to 14th February 1971

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