

The Scholars
24/10/75

**MALTA INTERNATIONAL
ARTS FESTIVAL 1975**



558

MANOËL THEATRE

The International Arts Festival 1975

is organised by the

Manoel Theatre Management Committee

on behalf of the Ministry of Education and Culture

Management Committee: Hon. President, G Muscat-Azzopardi

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Programme cover design by Richard England.

MALTA
INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL 1975

THE MANOEL THEATRE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

in association with

THE BRITISH COUNCIL

present for your pleasure

Britain's Outstanding Vocal Ensemble

THE SCHOLARS

NIGEL DIXON

MICHAEL LEIGHTON JONES

ROBIN DOVETON

DAVID VAN ASCH

ELAINE BARRY

THIS IS THE 15th EVENT IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL

Programme No 1 24. 10. 75.

Manoel Theatre
Friday 24 and Saturday 25 October
at 7.30 pm.





Stuart Bury

Margaret Dixon
Robin Doubar

THE SCHOLARS

Michael Leighton Jones

[Signature]

THE Scholars, originally composed of four male voices, took their name from the fact that each singer had been a Choral Scholar in the world-famous Choir of King's College, Cambridge. Having given several successful concerts while still at Cambridge they decided to 'go professional'. A series of concerts throughout Britain culminated in their London debut at the Purcell Rooms late in 1970.

Today they have the reputation of being one of Europe's foremost vocal ensembles. Two years ago they were hailed by the critics in Vienna as 'the sensation of the season'. They have given scores of radio and television broadcasts, and performances at many important festivals.

Nearly three years ago this talented young four introduced a female voice for the first time and they have continued to go from success to success. Already this year they have delighted audiences in Australia, the Far East and at festivals in France. Later this year they are visiting the United States.

The gramophone records of these five finely balanced voices have helped to give them a huge following; and their dedicated team work has led to a perfect blend without sacrificing the quality of their individual voices.

Their repertoire covers some 500 years of European vocal music — medieval music both sacred and secular, madrigals, glees, folk songs, spirituals and their own particular brand of close harmony and vocal jazz.

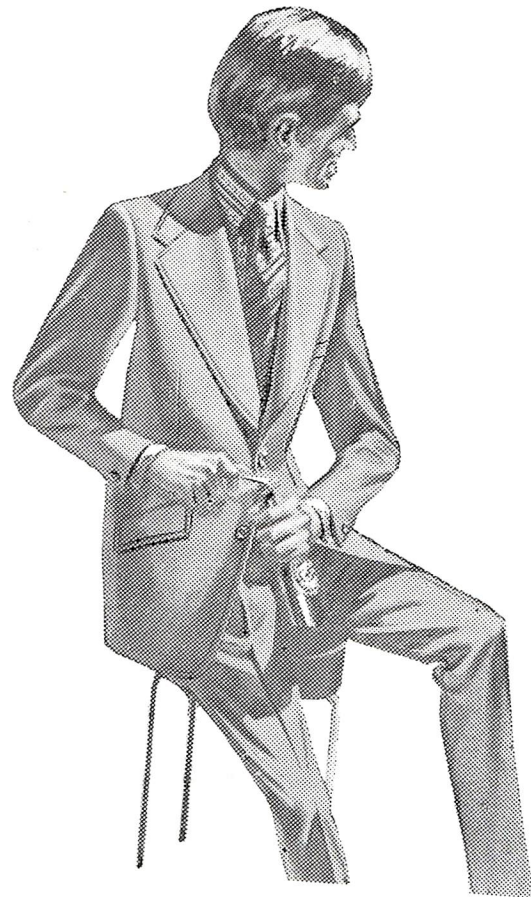
(Who are the Scholars? Pages 6-7 will tell you.)

The Scholars will be attending Matins at St. Paul's Anglican Cathedral on Sunday (10.30 am) where they have kindly agreed to sing an anthem.



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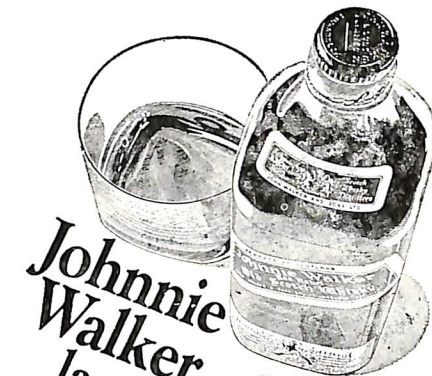


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PROGRAMME

Madrigals and Balletts

by Thomas Morley (1557-1603)

Now is the month of Maying
O grief, even on the bud
Damon and Phillis
Though Philomela lost her love
Aye me, the fatal arrow
Fire! Fire!

Music from the court of Henry VIII

I am a jolly foster
Ah Robin
Madame d'amours
Pastime with good company

Anon
William Cornysh
Anon
Henry VIII

Folk Songs

A collection of British folk songs for solo voices

INTERVAL

NIGEL DIXON. Counter tenor; is 27. Studied at Royal School of Church Music and University of Dublin. Won a Choral Scholarship to Durham Cathedral Choir. Was a lay clerk at St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle.

ROBIN DOVETON. Tenor; born 1945. At Cambridge read Music, specialising in composition. Several of his works have been performed by Guildford Cathedral Choir.

Contemporary Songs

'The sun on the celandines': a song cycle for five voices (Robert-Walker: b 1947)

1. *For 'X'*
2. *Ballad of the Londoner*
3. *Juliet*
4. *In a Bath tea shop*
5. *Madrigal*
6. *Celandine*

Spirituals (arr. Bartholomew)

The animals
Little innocent lamb
Steal away to Jesus

In Lighter Mood

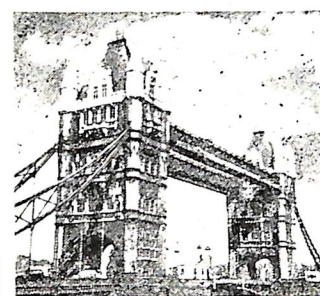
A selection of songs from the lighter side of The Scholars' repertoire

INNU MALTI

MICHAEL LEIGHTON JONES. Baritone; born New Zealand 1947. Played French Horn in New Zealand National Youth Orchestra. Studied Theology at Cambridge. Sang in Choir of Westminster Abbey 1971-74.

DAVID VAN ASCH. Bass; aged 30. Read Economics & Anthropology at Cambridge. Was responsible for forming The Scholars. Was bass soloist in EMI recording of Vaughan Williams' Mass in G Minor.

ELAINE BARRY. Was Scholar at Royal College of Music; then worked with Glyndebourne and Wexford Festival Operas and, for two years, with the Welsh National Opera. Has sung all over Eastern and Western Europe and Canada, and with Peter Pears at Aldeburgh Festival.



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THE MANOEL THEATRE

IT IS VARIOUSLY CLAIMED that the Manoel Theatre in Valletta, focal point of this International Arts Festival after the opening concerts in Mdina, is 'the third oldest theatre in Europe' and 'the oldest theatre in the Commonwealth'. However that may be, the fact is it dates back to the earlier decades of the eighteenth century, when the Grandmaster of the Knights of St John of that time, one Antonio Manoel de Vilhena, decided one March day of 1731 to build a public theatre — mostly out of his own pocket — 'for the honest recreation of the people', a purpose which is recorded to this day in a Latin inscription above the main entrance.

That there was a demand for such an institution was certain, for drama and opera had flourished — and continued to flourish — through all the years of the Sovereign Military Order's rule over the island. The vows of charity and chastity to which the Knights were committed did not prevent them from indulging in theatrical activities and it is on record that at the various Auberges (headquarters), and in the open, pageants, operas and dramatic offerings were put on by amateurs and professionals and a love for the theatre had spread through the population.

Grandmaster de Vilhena was no time waster and the building of the theatre started the very day the deed of transfer for the site was signed. In ten months the job was finished. The original interior, constructed entirely of wood, was similar in design to the Palermo theatre of that time and is generally believed to have been modelled on it, being semi-circular with straight sides projecting to the stage. There have, of course, been many

alterations through the years, bringing the auditorium to its present effective oval shape.

Originally it was called, prosaically, 'Public Theatre'. Later it bore the title of 'Theatre Royal' but eventually and rightly, in 1866, in tribute to its founder, it became and has remained the Manoel Theatre.

The first night of all first nights was on 9 January 1732 with a presentation of 'Merope', a grand tragedy in the classic style, by Scippione Maffei. The setting was designed by Francois Moudion, who was the architect of the Order of St John, and it was played by the Knights.

The theatre was run by a Senior Knight of the Order, who bore the title of 'Protettore' and managed the house generally, approved each season's programme of plays (in the main lyric opera and French tragedy), acted as censor and dealt with 'difficulties' which arose from time to time betwixt impressario, performer and subscriber. Maltese playwrights and opera composers gradually earned their place alongside foreign authors and it was a Maltese — Nicolò Isouard, also known as Nicolò di Malta — who eventually became Commissioner (new name for Protettore) during Napoleon's siege of Valletta in the last two years of the eighteenth century.

Despite his great faith in the power of the stage Isouard was fighting a losing battle. For a time the theatre carried on notwithstanding the near starvation of the garrison and the besieged population, and 'despite the occasional shots from the Maltese mortars that passed over the roof of the building'. But there came the time when the players could no longer bear the strains of war as their dwindling wages proved insufficient for survival, let alone for the rigour of singing and acting. An amateur group, fired by the desire to keep up morale, took over and 'the show went on' until the siege was raised. But dark days followed for the Manoel.

With the arrival of the British the Theatre came to life again and throughout the first half of the nineteenth century there was a nine-months season of opera each year from September to May. There were nights of splendour, like the fourth of December 1838, when this jewel-box of a theatre shone in all its pristine glory when Queen Adelaide, widow of King

William IV, came with cheers, anthems and a guard of honour to see a performance of 'Lucia di Lamermoor'.

Strangely it was the very prosperity of the latter years of the nineteenth century which brought the eclipse of the Manoel Theatre. The large garrison, the fleet, and an increasing number of tourists, rendered the theatre inadequate. In 1861 it became private property. With the proceeds of the sale a new Opera House was built and Grandmaster Antonio Manoel de Vilhena's little house fell into disuse. For a period it was a doss-house for beggars. And then, suddenly, some of the old glory returned when the Royal Opera House was destroyed by fire in 1873. Grand opera replaced the evicted beggars until the Opera House was reconstructed and then the once loved little place in Theatre Street looked to be on its deathbed. It served, fitfully, as dance hall and, in this century, as cinema.

But then, once more, the fate of the Opera House brought revival to the Manoel. The former was completely destroyed in the Second World War. Dreams of bringing the Manoel back to life turned to reality when the Malta Government acquired the building in response to public appeals. Experts from Britain and Italy were called in and under their supervision and with loving care the delicate process of restoration was carried out by Maltese artisans.

All sorts of technical improvements were made on stage and back stage, with the lighting and an enlarged orchestra pit. Comfortable stalls replaced the old wooden seats and there was a rearrangement of boxes. But, in particular, the once lovely decoration of the auditorium was restored from behind the grime and whitewash and even paint which had for so long hidden the theatre's beauty. Inch by inch the great ceiling with its 22 carat gilding was restored; the dozens of tiny attractive panels and paintings which decorated the tiers of boxes were brought to life again. This jewel box of great warmth and beauty glowed with a radiance deeply moving to those who had seen their theatre in distress. More than two hundred thousand pounds sterling were spent on re-acquisition and restoration.

Came one splendid December night in 1960 and a grand opening performance — the famous Ballet Rambert company's presentation of 'Coppelia'. And on all sides there were gasps of

delight as the audience walked in to find this new and shining jewel in Malta's national heritage.

'The Manoel' is now officially Malta's National Theatre. The duties of the early Protettores are now entrusted to a Management Committee who run the theatre on a non-profit basis. Under their guidance the theatre has maintained a very high standard. International celebrities who have graced its stage include the like of Yehudi Menuhin, Rostropovitch, Boris Christoff, Leon Goosens, Richter, the Berlin State Opera Ballet; Sir Donald Wolfitt, Margaret Rutherford, John Neville, Louis Kentner, Moura Lympany, John Ogdon, Ram Gopal and a host of others, to say nothing of a great deal of local talent including distinguished concerts by the Manoel Theatre's resident orchestra.

By the end of this International Arts Festival a whole gallery of famous names will have been added to those who have graced the Manoel — solo performers and companies from many nations taking part in this Festival organised for the Ministry of Education and Culture by the theatre's Management Committee whose only reward is the satisfaction of their devotion to the furtherance of that enterprise first created by Grandmaster Manoel de Vilhena 'for the honest recreation of the people'.

Victor Lewis.

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