

Reza Kerna Tal - Mellietta
13th to 15th Feb. 1976

**MALTA INTERNATIONAL
ARTS FESTIVAL 1975**



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

Chairman, A Agius Ferrante

Hon. Treasurer, Miss M L Bonnici, LRSM L.Mus.LCM FLCM

Consultants: Richard England, Michael Ellul and

Victor Castillo

Festival Director of Publicity: Victor Lewis FIPR (Tel 73912)

Programme cover design by Richard England.

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FESTIVAL INTERNAZZJONALI TA' L-ARTI

“META MORNA TAL-MELLIEHA . . .”

kummiedja soċjali għida

ta'

FRANCIS EBEJER

IL-HAMIS 8 ta' Jannar 1976

IL-GIMGHA 9 ta' Jannar 1976

IS-SIBT 10 ta' Jannar 1976

IL-HADD 11 ta' Jannar 1976

13, 14, 15 Feb 76.

Mario Ebejer



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'META MORNA TAL-MELLIEHA . . . ' hija t-tielet f'sensiela speċjali ta' kummiedji soċjali fuq Malta u s-soċjetà Maltija li Ebejer beda b'**Il-Hadd Fuq il-Bejt**' u '**L-Imnarja Żmies il-Qtil**'.

Kif '**Il-Hadd . . .**', trattat dwar is-snobizmu tal-klassi, '**Mellieha**' iddur fuq it-tema ta' snobizmu ieħor — dak tar-raba'. Biss, fil-każ tat-tnejn, il-ke'ma 'snobizmu' m'għandux wiehed iħares lejha min-naħa negattiva biss. Hekk ukoll, in-nies ta' dan id-dramm, u t-tixbiehat u l-kuntrasti ta' bejniethom, għandhom jiġu għudikati minn kull naħa li aħna niġġudikaw ir-raba' u l-hajja fl-għelieqi — hidma ta' fejda fuq naħa, u ta' għaks u tbatija fuq oħra; fertilità tan-natura u sterilità mentali; sens ta' altruizmu u possessività qerrieda; rejaltà iebsa u fantasija mrawma minn holm antik . . .

U jekk il-ħamrija hija mera ta' l-univers dejjiemi, kemm verament aħna mera ta' xulxin jew aħjar riflessjonijiet wiehed ta' l-ieħor fil-mirjiet u d-dellijiet infiniti tal-priżma.

'**META MORNA TAL-MELLIEHA . . .**' is the third play in a special series that Ebejer is writing on Malta and Maltese society. Whereas the first play dealt with class-snobbery, '**Mellieha**' deals with the peculiar snobbery of the soil and peasant life, though on both counts, 'snobbery' should not be looked at solely from the negative side.

The Mellieha family is dominated by the old peasant woman, ill, illiterate, but full of the supposed wisdom of the earth. Her family have all been educated, from the widowed mother down to the very young who naturally have had more schooling opportunities than any of the others.

Mario is pulled one way by his mother who refuses to allow him to go back to the life of his forefathers in the fields, and another way by his grandmother who maintains that education is useless if it is divorced from the lasting things and values of the earth, and wants Mario to give new life to their field that had been allowed to go fallow.

The family are visited by another from Ħamrun. Yvette considers herself modern and old and wise, in whatever order. The son, Ġoġ, is studying to become a scientist, and finds a kindred spirit of sorts in Mario's sister, Louise. Together these two youngsters wage an undeclared war on their elders; a war with ramifications running deep through all sectors of the generations with the old woman the arbiter of, nearly, everyone's fortune.

The good/bad earth calling her own?

That sun-golden siren that goes to people's heads and fills them with phantoms and fantasies, some more real than others . . . whom will she capriciously save this time, or merely destroy?

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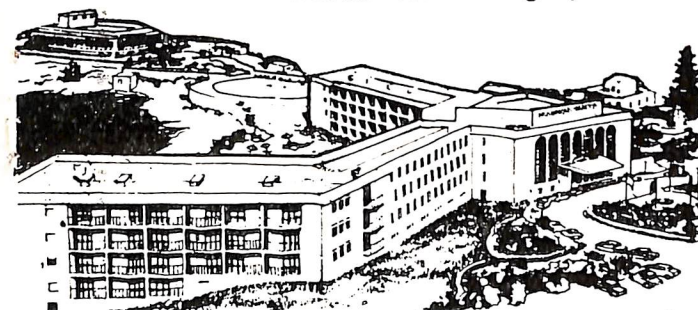
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"META MORNA TAL-MELLIEHA..."

Jieħdu sehem (fl-ordni tad-dħul):

LOUISE

MARIJA

RIKKARD

MARJO

NANNA

PAWLU

YVETTE

GORG

MARLENE FITENI

JOSEPHINE MAHONEY

LINO GRECH

JOHN SUDA

MELITA CUTAJAR

KARMENU GRUPPETTA

DOREEN GRECH

HECTOR BRUNO

Direzzjoni ta' FRANCIS EBEJER

JUM TAR-REBBIEGħA.

ATT I — Qabel nofsinhar.

ATT II — Wara nofsinhar.

ATT III — Għad-disgħa ta' filgħaxija.

(Ikun hemm żewġ intervalli ta' 15-il minuta l-wieħed bejn l-Atti)

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Asst. Direttur tal-palk
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VANNI LAUS
E. DALLI; F. MIFSUD;
J. AZZOPARDI

GHALL-ATTURI, HECTOR BRUNO, MELITA CUTAJAR, MARLENE FITENI, MARILU GENUIS u JOHN SUDA, dan hu l-ewwel dramma ta' EBEJER li fih qegħdin jieħdu sehem.

KARMENU GRUPPETTA kien Menz f'"Menz", u ħadem partijiet oħra fil-'Hitan', 'Il-Ħadd Fuq il-Bejt', 'L-Imnarja Żmien il-Qtil'. 'The Cliffhangers', 'Persuna Qiegħda Tiġi Investigata Dwar . . .' 'Hemm Barra', 'Is-Sejħa ta' Sarid', 'Ħefen Plus Zero' u f'xi radjudrammi.

LINO GRECH ħadem fi 'Il-Ħadd Fuq il-Bejt', 'L-Imnarja Żmien il-Qtil', 'L-Imwarrbin', 'X'Ma Kixifx il-Ħajt!', 'Ħefen Plus Zero' u 'Vum-Barala-Zungarè'.

DOREEN GRECH kienet f'"Persuna Qiegħda Tiġi Investigata Dwar . . .', 'L-Imwarrbin' u 'Sefora'.

JOSEPHINE MAHONEY ħadmet f'"Imnarja Żmien il-Qtil", u f'radjudrammi.

(L-Għaqda Drammatika Teatru Manoel trodd ħajr lis-Sur E. Tonna, Sec. Onorarju tas-Socjetà Nazzjonali għall-Immankati, għas-self tal-wheel-chair. Ħajr ukoll lil Square Deal, Tower Road, Sliema).

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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 the French occupation of Malta 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 white wash 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.

FESTIVAL DIARY

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE MINI MUSICAL

Saturday 17th at 6.30 p.m.
Sunday 18th at 6.30 p.m.

MALTA TALENT ARTISTES GENN U L'IBEN L'IEHOR (Maltese Plays)

Friday 23rd at 7.00 p.m.
Saturday 24th at 7.30 p.m.
Sunday 25th at 6.30 p.m.

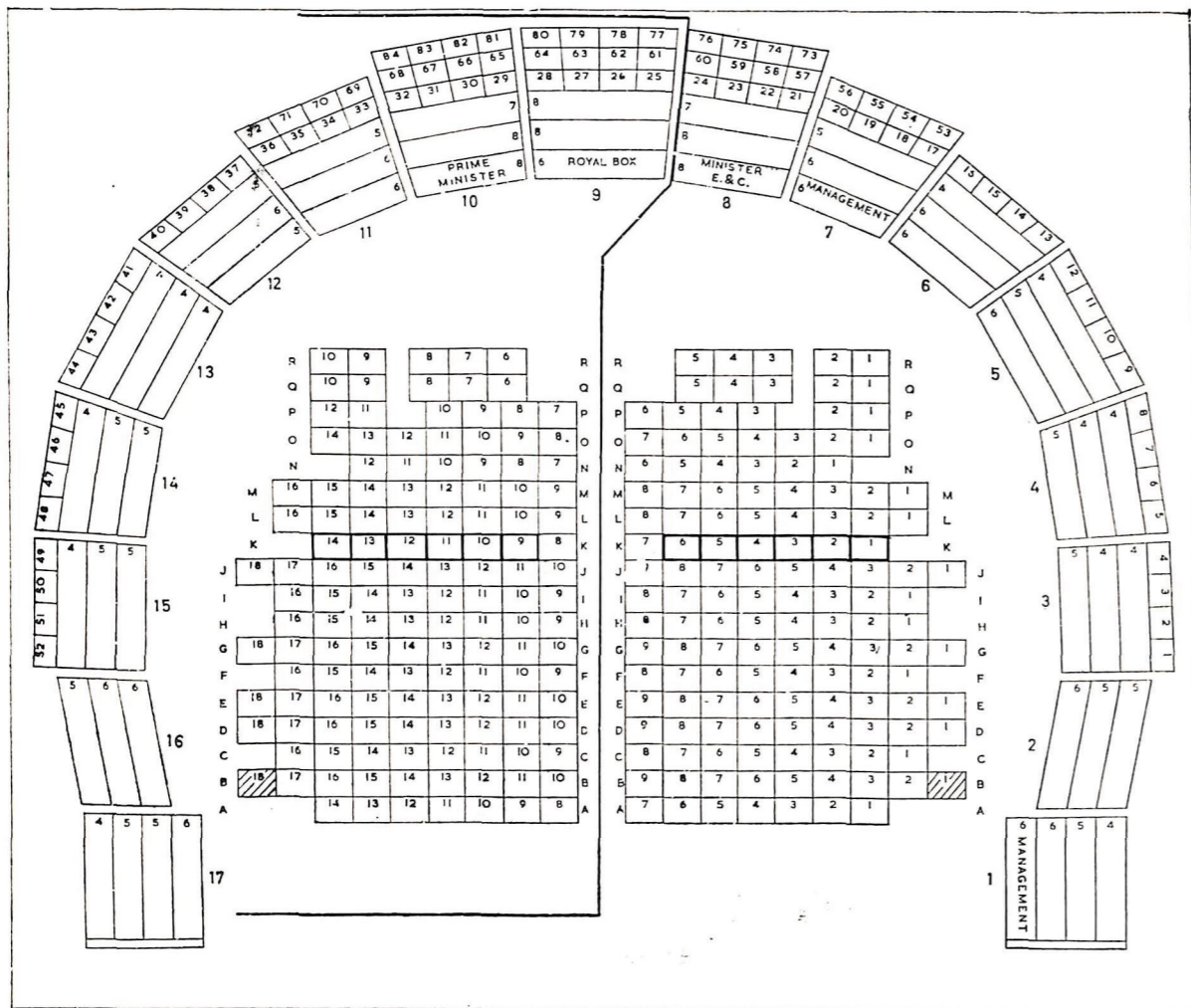


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MANOEL THEATRE BOOKING PLAN

Late comers will not be admitted to the Auditorium.

Smoking is not permitted in the Auditorium, in the Boxes and in the Gallery.

The Management reserve the right to vary or omit any part of the programme without previous notice.

Patrons are reminded that the taking of photographs during the performance is not allowed.

Children even when accompanied by their parents, will be required to occupy a seat.

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