

Band Concert at
Mdina 30th August 1977

**MALTA INTERNATIONAL
ARTS FESTIVAL 1977**



MANOEL THEATRE

The International Arts Festival 1977
is organised by the
Manoel Theatre Management Committee

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programme cover design by Richard England
printed by Giov. Muscat & Co. Ltd.

ON THE OCCASION OF THE
INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL 1977
THE MANOEL THEATRE MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE

PRESENTS A

BAND PROGRAMME

BY

THE KING'S OWN BAND CLUB

AND

THE SOC. FIL. NAZ. 'LA VALETTE'

Conductors:

C. CARUANA, — JOSEPH SAMMUT

at St. Paul's Square,
Mdina.

TUESDAY, 30TH AUGUST 1977

MDINA —

ANCIENT CAPITAL OF MALTA

M *MDINA IS THE ANCIENT CAPITAL CITY of Malta, its origins lost in antiquity though it is known for certain that it was inhabited even in prehistoric times. To the Greeks and the Romans it was known as the principal town of the island and was in all probability the oppidum — the fortified city — described by Cicero. It certainly occupied the most advantageous site for the island's main citadel, as it lies almost equidistant from the large shallow bays to the north west and south east, and from the natural harbours to the north. The hill on which it was built gave it a natural defensive position and its walls, rising sheer from the ridge, gain additional height from the base of the escarpment below.*

In Roman times its walls extended over a much longer perimeter than they do today, for Mdina was reduced to its present size, for defence purposes, by the Arabs after 870 AD. The ditch which today defines Mdina's southern boundary was dug by the Arabs; the rest of the city's boundaries are delineated by fortifications which follow the contours of the Mdina hill itself. Some of the existing walls date from the Middle Ages but extensive modifications and additions to Mdina's fortifications were carried out during the period of the Knights of St John in Malta.

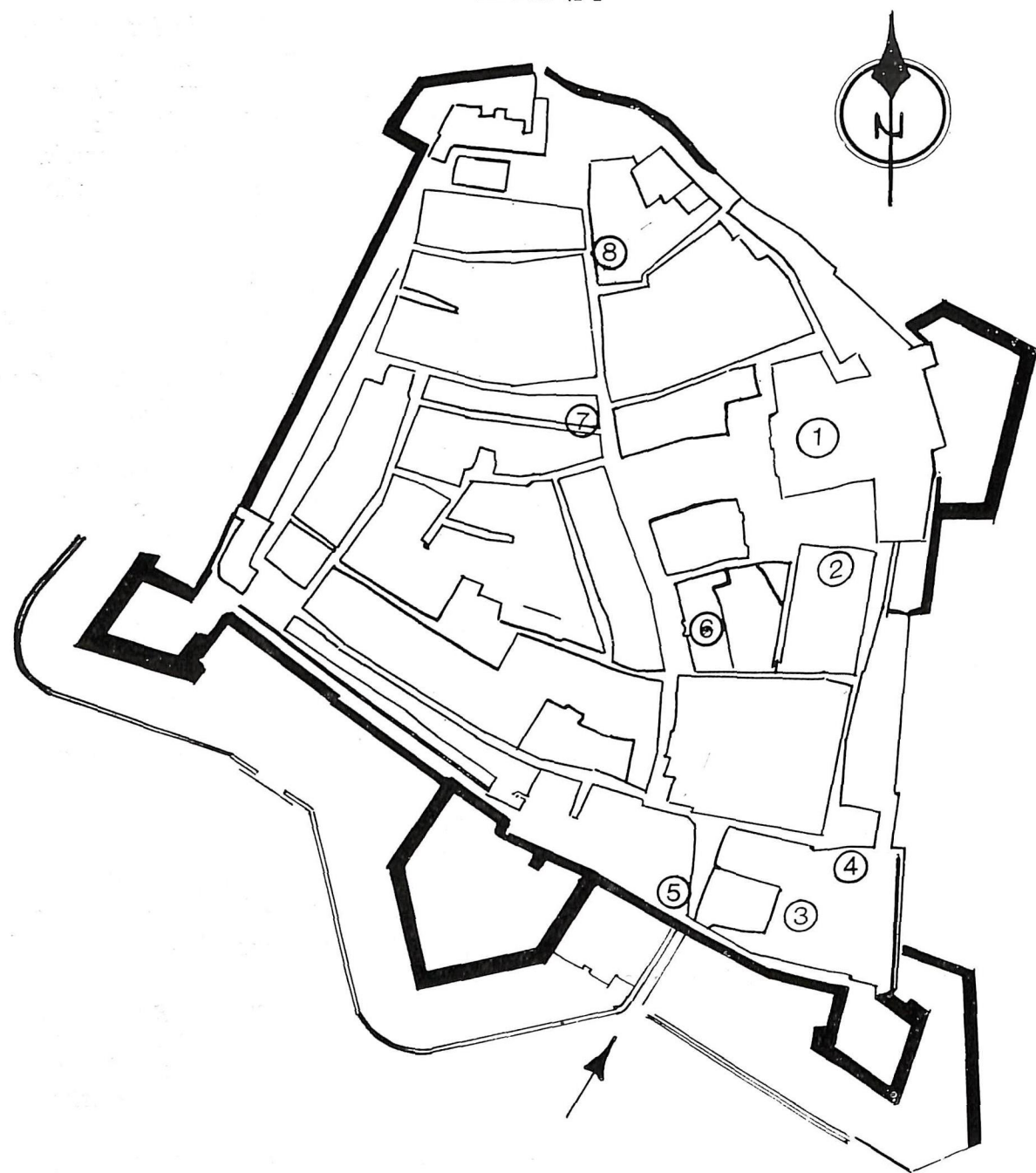
The street plan of Mdina is most interesting and dates from early mediaeval times. Most of the present buildings were constructed during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries but earlier buildings can be seen.

1. **THE CATHEDRAL.** *The present Cathedral stands on a site hallowed by time and tradition. According to that tradition the first Christian church in Malta was built on the site of the house where Publius, 'the chief man of the island', lived and was converted to Christianity by St Paul. One of the first acts of Roger the Norman after his landing in Malta in 1090 was to reconstruct, on the same site, a new cathedral. The eminent Maltese architect Lorenzo Gafà (1639-1710) was responsible for the present building, which is one of the best examples of Baroque art in Malta.*
2. **THE CATHEDRAL MUSEUM.** *In a charming little square on the left of the Cathedral is a magnificent building erected in 1733 as a seminary. The facade presents a distinct departure from the previously static Maltese Baroque; the centrepiece, with its open stone balcony supported*

by Atlantes, and the concave recess above, are particularly interesting. Today this building houses the Cathedral Museum and contains paintings, silverware and sculpture of high artistic value, as well as an extensive Dürer collection and other valuable items. It is also the repository of the Cathedral Archives and of the Inquisition records.

3. **VILHENA PALACE.** *One of the greatest patrons of the arts among the Grandmasters, Manoel de Vilhena constructed this palace for his own use in 1730. Built on three floors around three sides of a courtyard, it is screened from the street by a high wall with a fine gateway. The timber gate itself is of first class workmanship and a very good example of the local craft of the early eighteenth century. The courtyard is of the cloister type with open arcading, the arches becoming flatter as one proceeds upward. The main door is one of the finest in Malta.*
4. **OLD COURTS OF LAW.** *Known also as the Corte Capitanale, this building formed part of the Municipium, or seat of the Municipality of Mdina, which had control over most of the internal affairs of the commune. In one of the halls of the upper floor can be seen the coat-of-arms of what was known as the Captain of the Rod, who presided over the Courts of Law. The facade is a mixture of styles and is undoubtedly the work of various architects of different periods.*
5. **TOWER OF THE STANDARD.** *This is the first building on the left as one enters the city of Mdina. It was built by Grandmaster Manoel de Vilhena during the reconstruction of the fortifications and was the main City Gatehouse. As the name implies, it flew the Standard of the Order. It replaced a much older tower which, along with the Cathedral bell tower, was visible from most of the coastal towers.*
6. **TESTAFERRATA PALACE.** *This is a magnificent building and a very important link in the history of the development of palace architecture in the Old City. One of the later palaces to be built, it was the house of the Marquis of St Vincent Ferreri. Its facade is one of the most restful and elegant in the whole of Mdina.*
7. **PALAZZO SANTA SOFIA.** *Reputed to be the oldest surviving building in Mdina, a tablet gives the date at 1233, but this almost certainly refers to an earlier building on the same site, as the present palazzo belongs to a later period. The first floor is a recent addition constructed in 1936.*
8. **THE NORMAN HOUSE.** *One of the best known buildings in Mdina. Although much restored, it still retains its mediaeval character. The string course, a double row of inverted triangles with balls as pendants, is typical of the period, as are the pointed windows, hood moulds and double windows separated by slender circular columns.*

MDINA



LEGEND

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Cathedral | 5 Tower of The Standard |
| 2 Cathedral Museum | 6 Palazzo Testaferrata |
| 3 Vilhena Palace | 7 Palazzo Santa Sofia |
| 4 Old Courts of Law | 8 The Norman House |

THE KING'S OWN BAND

IT IS PARTICULARLY appropriate that the King's Own Band of Valletta is taking part in this international festival, for it is the third year of their second century of existence. In 1874 the band, now known as the King's Own Band, was founded in the Parish Church of St. Dominic and was called *La Stella*. Its promoter, and first Director, was the youthful Giuseppe Borg, the son of Andrew Borg who had founded similar bands in Żebbuġ and Rabat.

Indeed, in its time the band has had a number of fascinating names — *Ta' L-Istilla*, *La Nazionale* and *La Nazionale Vincitrice*. When it was only two years old Prince Albert, son of the reigning Queen Victoria, granted permission for it to be called 'His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales Band'. At the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 Prince Albert succeeded her on the Throne as King Edward VII and graciously gave permission for the band to assume the title of 'The King's Own Band'.

When King Edward visited Malta in 1903 he presented to the King's Own Band, personally, his Royal Standard, which had been offered by the British community in the island. The Standard, unfortunately, was damaged almost to destruction in the Second World War and is today preserved in a glass case, but in 1954 a 'replica' was presented to the band by Sir Edmund Schreiber, then Governor of Malta.

As with titles, so with 'homes'; the band has had many, the first in St. Elmo Square, then in an apartment in St. Nicholas Street, then to St. Dominic Street, later to Palazzo Spinola and finally to its present premises in Republic Street, on the corner with St. John Street.

The King's Own Band has been fortunate in a long line of distinguished Bandmasters and in 1912 it gained the Degree of Excellence in the International Musical Competition in Algiers and repeated the performance in the Competition in Como in 1927.

PROGRAMME

KING'S OWN BAND CLUB

OVERTURE WILLIAM TELL G. ROSSINI

OVERTURE MALTA P. VASSALLO

MARCIA SLAVA P. TSCHAIKOWSKY

SUITE SCENES PITTORESQUES G. MASSENET

 I. MARCH

 II. AIR DE BALLET

 III. ANGELUS

 IV. FETE BOHEME

Conductor: C. CARUANA

Interval

SOC. FIL. NAZ. "LA VALETTE"

CORTEGE PROCESSION OF NOBLES RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

 EDITH CAVELLE VASSALLO

 (INTERMEZZO)

SELECTION ADRIANA LECOUVREUR CILEA

Conductor: JOSEPH SAMMUT

THE SOC. FIL. NAZ. "LA VALETTE"

The Filarmonica Nazionale "La Velette" was founded on the 20th October, 1874, in virtue of a public deed in the records of Notary Giovanni Pullicino by Paolo Darmanin, a merchant, and a group of fifty musicians.

Its first appearance in the public was on the 28th May, 1875 under the direction of Mro. Luigi Carabott and thereafter rendered musical programmes throughout the Island in connection with village Feasts and special occasions.

Awarded the Highest Honoured of "Excellency" in Bona and Algiers in 1908.

Maestro Alessandro Vessella reformed the Band on a modern organic, who later, on his advice the Committee acquired the services of Maestro Cardenio Botti.

Under the able baton of Mro Botti, at the International Musical Competition at Como in 1927, on the occasion of the Centenary of Alessandro Volta, the Soc. Fil. Naz. "La Valette" again was awarded for its perfect performance with another Highest Honour of "Excellency".

Other famous Maestros directed the Band, such as Riccardo Zandonai, Giuseppe Mulè, Ottorino Respighi and Mons Licinio Refice.

For a full period of thirty three years the direction fell under the baton of Mro. Giuseppe Camilleri, and in the year 1970 to that of the present Mro. Chev. Joseph Sammut who conducts also the Manoel Theatre Orchestra.

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, 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 9th 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 mani 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, Alberto Lupo, Nicanor Zabaleta, Alirio Diaz 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 by the 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.

AUSTRALIA

DENMARK

FRANCE

GERMANY

ISRAEL

ITALY

MALTA

SPAIN

UNITED KINGDOM

U.S.A.

U.S.S.R:

