

# MANOEL THEATRE



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*and*

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MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

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*and*

**CENTRAL CIGARETTE COMPANY LIMITED**

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*an*

**OPERATIC CONCERT**

*by*

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*Leader: GEORGE SPITERI*

*with the participation of*

**INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS**

**SOLOISTS :**

**SOPRANO**

**MEZZO SOPRANO**

**TENOR**

**BARITONE**

**CECILIA GASDIA**

**STEFKA MINEVA**

**ZDRAVKO GADJEV**

**STOYAN POPOV**

**Conductor: JOSEPH SAMMUT**

**SATURDAY, 7th AUGUST 1982**

**AT ST. PAUL'S SQUARE, MDINA**



# THE MANOEL THEATRE

**I**T IS VARIOUSLY CLAIMED that the Manoel Theatre in Valletta, 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 the 437 or so 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 Scipione Maffei. The setting was designed by Franco's 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 between impresario, 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 Lammermoor'.

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 1969 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.

## MDINA-

# ANCIENT CAPITAL OF MALTA

**M** DINA 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 northwest 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 different 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 as 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.

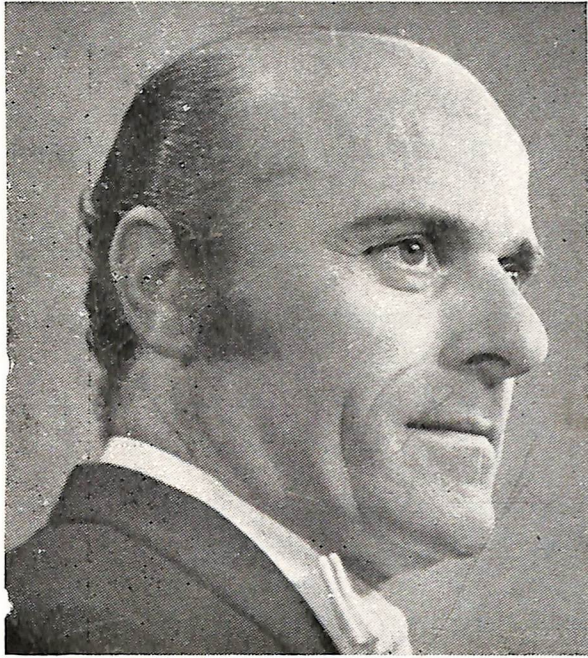
Michael Ellul.

A map on page 11 shows the position of the principal features of Mdina as numbered in this article.

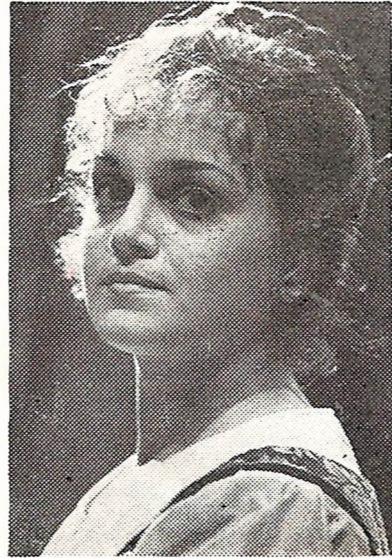
## PROGRAMME

✓ LA FORZA DEL DESTINO	OVERTURE	VERDI
✓ PAGLIACCI	PROLOGO	LEONCAVALLO
✓ LA FAVORITA	ARIA OF LEONORA — ATTO III	DONIZETTI
✓ LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR	FRA POCO A ME RICOVERO	DONIZETTI
✓ GIANNI SCHICCHI	O MIO BABBINO CARO <del>TRILCERU</del>	PUCCINI
✓ ANDREA CHENIER	NEMICO DELLA PATRIA	GIORDANO
✓ CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA	VOI LO SAPETE O MAMMA	MASCAGNI
✓ TOSCA	È LUCEVAN LE STELLE	PUCCINI
✓ MADAME BUTTERFLY	BIMBA, BIMBA, NON PIANGERE	PUCCINI
	I N T E R V A L	
✓ LA TRAVIATA	PRELUDIO ATTO I	VERDI
✓ PRINCE IGOR	ARIA OF GALIZCHI	BORODIN
✓ IL TROVATORE	CONDOTTA ELL'ERA IN CEPPI	VERDI
✓ LA TRAVIATA	ADDIO DEL PASSATO	VERDI
✓ LA BOHEME	MI CHIAMANO MIMI	<del>Puccini</del>
✓ RIGOLETTO	LA DONNA È MOBILE	VERDI
✓ RIGOLETTO	QUARTETTO — ATTO FINALE	VERDI





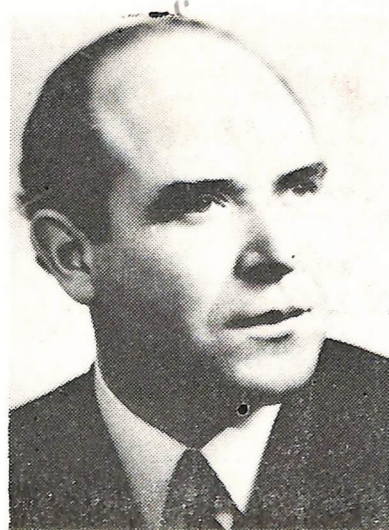
Mro. JOSEPH SAMMUT



Soprano  
CECILIA GASDIA



Mezzo Soprano  
STEFKA MINEVA

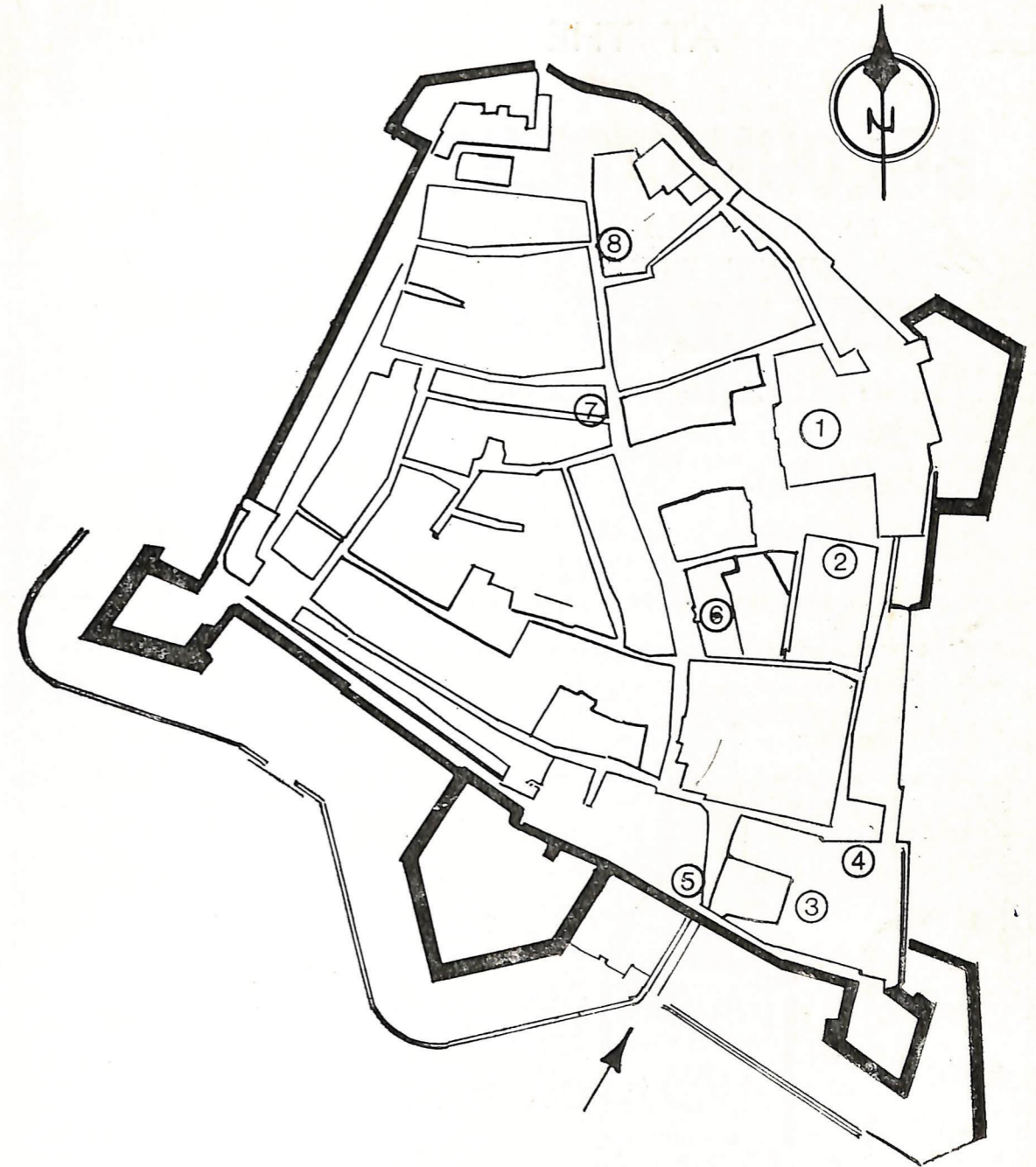


Baritone  
STOYAN POPOV



Tenor  
ZDRAVKO GADJEV

# MDINA



## LEGEND

- 1 Cathedral
- 2 Cathedral Museum
- 3 Vilhena Palace
- 4 Old Courts of Law

- 5 Tower of The Standard
- 6 Palazzo Testaferrata
- 7 Palazzo Santa Sofia
- 8 The Norman House



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A large graphic of a spoon is the central element of the advertisement. The bowl of the spoon contains a black and white photograph of a restaurant interior with several people seated at tables. The text of the advertisement is arranged around the spoon. The top part of the text is inside the spoon's bowl, while the bottom part is to the right of the spoon's handle. The entire advertisement is framed by a decorative floral border.

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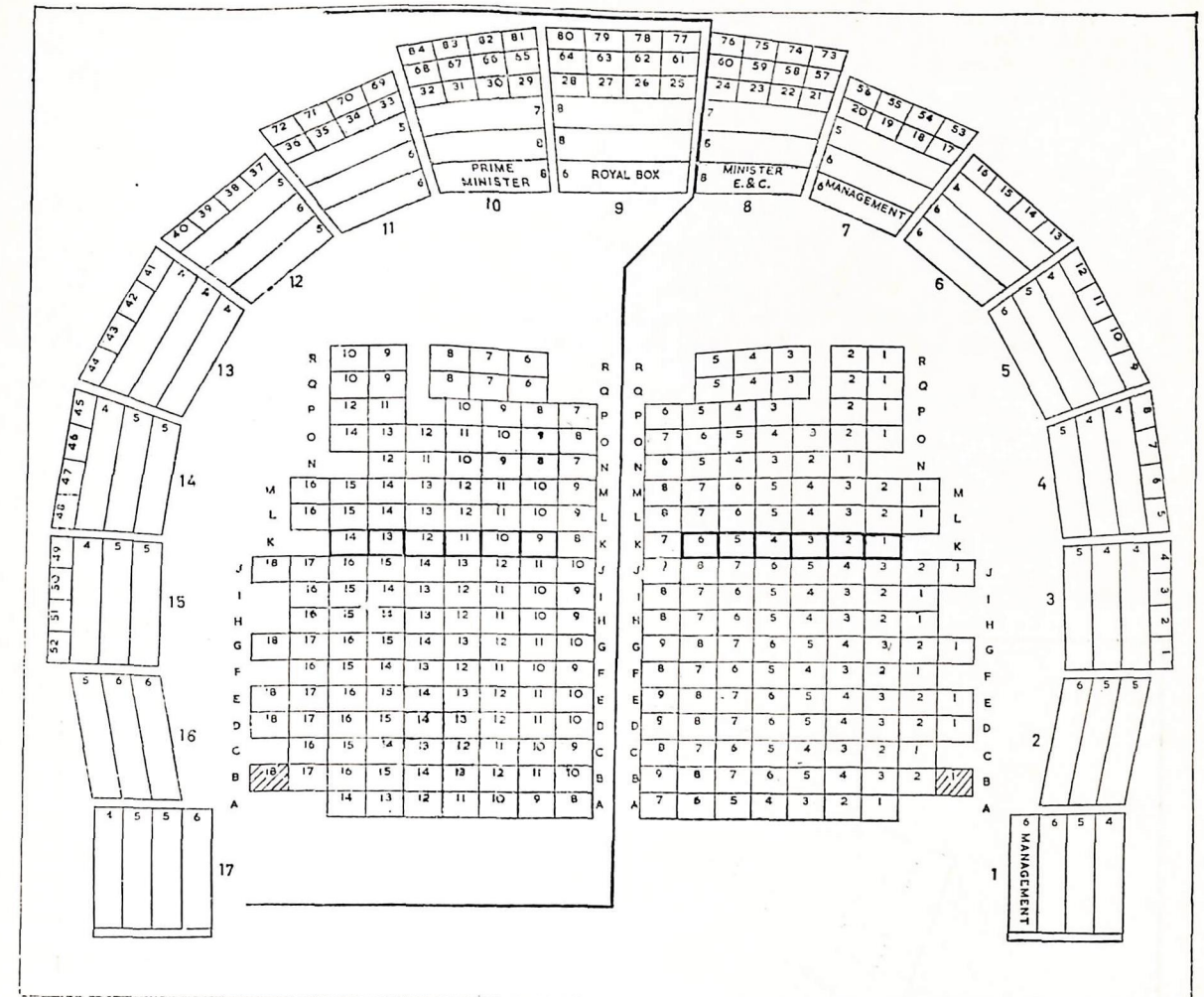
## Antonio Manoel De Vilhena

Grand Master *Antonio Manoel de Vilhena*, a Portuguese, was elected Grand Master in 1722. A man of great intellectual qualities, he was popular with all, and "savoir faire" earned him everyone's love.

At the beginning of his reign, fearing a second Turkish invasion of Malta, he promptly took steps for such an eventuality, and the enemy, seeing his preparedness, sailed away without even attempting a landing.

Having fortified the Island, he began to find ways and means to encourage civil enterprise, and in the political field he managed to negotiate a treaty of peace with the Sultan of Constantinople.

As a befitting gesture towards the People of Malta, he built in 1732 the Manoel Theatre, a living monument to his achievements, which keeps his memory fresh and glorious in all those that cultivate the Arts and all those who seek an honest recreation, as the Theatre's motto implies: "*Ad honestatem populi oblectationem.*"



### MANOEL THEATRE BOOKING PLAN

Late comers will not be admitted to the Auditorium.

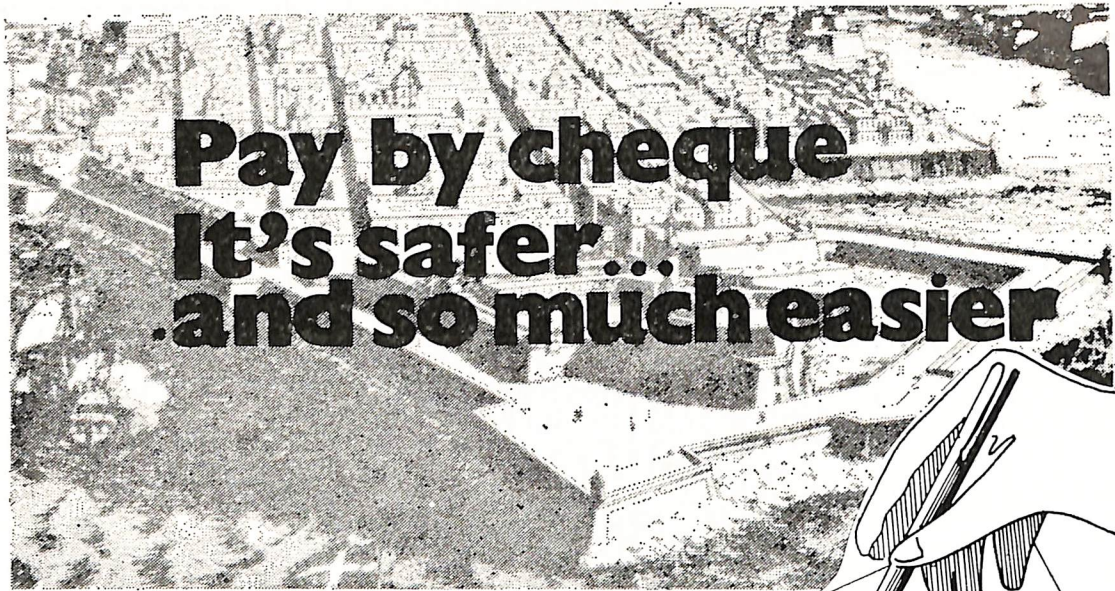
Smoking is not permitted in the Auditorium, in the Boxes and in the Gallery.

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

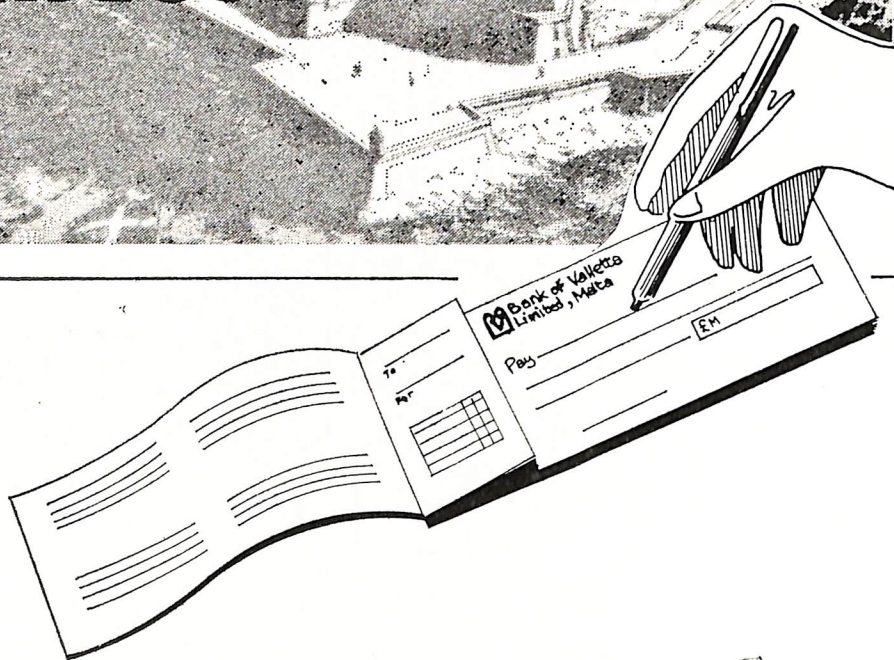
Patrons are reminded that the taking of photographs during the performance is not allowed.

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





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