

The Manoel Theatre

FESTA BAROKKA 2005

3rd edition (9-14 May)

Valletta is a world heritage city, recognised internationally for its stupendous baroque architecture. Alongside the building of beautiful houses and palaces during the baroque era, great music was composed and magnificent pictures were painted. This was a time of immense creativity and artistic skill. Baroque Europe blends together in Malta – the multinational community of the Knights of St. John brought artists and architects from all over Europe to the island, creating a unique synthesis of baroque ideas and design.

As a baroque theatre, the Manoel Theatre has long recognised the importance of this aspect of Malta's heritage, and in May 2005 it organised the third edition of its 'Festa Barokka', offering a choice selection of excellent performances and events.



Florilegium

The festival hosted the internationally-acclaimed *Florilegium* – one of Britain's most outstanding period instrument ensembles. *Florilegium* has established a reputation for stylish and exciting interpretations of music from the baroque era, and performs at major international festivals each season. *Florilegium's*

programme at the Manoel in May was titled 'The Italian Connection', and included famous pieces by the popular composers Vivaldi, Corelli and Locatelli, as well as Ucelli, Frescobaldi and Gabrielli. The ensemble of four was led by Ashley Solomon.

The festival was also privileged to host the *Ensemble Européen William Byrd*, which is composed of some of the best solo singers of baroque music in France. The *Ensemble* has been heard in some of the most famous festivals in the world, and is directed by Graham O'Reilly, who has been directing specialist early-music groups for over twenty years. The *Ensemble's* performance at the Manoel, titled 'The French Connection', was a vocal programme with five singers. The pieces included a selection of French music by Charpentier, Dumont, Moulinie and Lully. The *Ensemble Européen William Byrd* attempts to recreate the historical context of the works being played, while also bringing out their universal nature to appeal to contemporary audiences of the 21st century.

Following the success of the baroque seminar at the last edition of the baroque festival in 2003, the International Institute for Baroque Studies at the University of Malta organised a seminar on the theme 'Baroque Connections' at St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity, with a talk by Mro Joseph Vella on baroque music.

'Baroque Connections' seminar

On 9 May 2005, a seminar titled 'Baroque Connections' was held at St. James Cavalier Centre for Creativity, as an introduction to the biannual Baroque Festival co-ordinated by Dr Petra Bianchi and organised jointly by the International Institute for Baroque Studies and the Manoel Theatre.

Mro Joseph Vella delivered a lecture on Maltese music of the baroque age, in which he discussed the position of Malta as a centre of musical excellence in the 17th and 18th centuries. He discussed Maltese baroque music extant in manuscripts that survive in Maltese archives, especially at Mdina. Mro Vella focused on the brilliant work of the earliest known Maltese

baroque composers, and also talked about the existence of two *capellas* in Malta, one in Valletta and one in Mdina, as well as the exchange of musicians between Malta and Italy in the baroque period. He used recorded examples of musical works by Maltese composers, illustrating local practices and standards.

The seminar was concluded with a short presentation by Professor Denis De Lucca about the musical archives of the Marche in Italy, which contain a rich repertoire of 17th-century music written for the archilute, the theorbo and the Spanish guitar, interpreted by Andrea Damiani on a CD, excerpts of which were also played to the audience.