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MANOEL

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**Atturi Productions**

in collaboration with

**Central Cigarette Company Limited**

present

**THE GINGERBREAD LADY**

by

**Neil Simon**

directed by

**Victor Soler**

at the

**Manoel Theatre**

**4, 5, 6 November 1988**



Antoinette Soler — Evy



Hubert Puglisevich — Jimmy

RESERVED AND RESILIENT — THE COMEDY KING — MASTER OF MONEY MAKING MOVIES — THE ESTABLISHED PLAYWRIGHT WHO HAS YET TO CONVINCE HIS CRITICS THAT HE IS AN ARTIST AND NOT A MERCHANT.

## NEIL SIMON

For some strange reason the name Neil Marvin Simon never seems to merit more than a ten-line entry in any prestigious publication on contemporary theatre. His own published works always carry the same hackneyed blurb listing plain dates and titles. Yet this playwright has been pulling off one amazing hit after the other since the early sixties. His name is revered by the calculating impresarios who are responsible for putting plays onto a competitive stage. Locally he was introduced to the Manoel audiences by Maleth in the mid-sixties and has since proved his popularity with all our major theatrical enterprises; for as those who are familiar with audience's whims are apt to put it, "His humour fits..."

Born in 1927 Simon embarked on his career in his mid-twenties by writing gags and humorous sketches for the radio and revues, much in the same vein as the other contemporary masters, Dudley Moore and Woody Allen. In 1961 with the collaboration of his brother Daniel he produced his first Broadway hit, *Come Blow Your Horn* (later filmed with Sinatra and Lee J. Cobb in the title roles. It was adapted in the vernacular by Frank Ganado and entitled: *M'intix miżżewweġ? Mela Buffu!*).

The following year he was engaged by the novelist Patrick Dennis to collaborate on the musical version of his book, *Little Me*. The partnership proved to be highly successful, and two years later, in 1963, Simon's *Barefoot in the Park* was also based on the Dennis's book. The comedy carried the day on Broadway and London's West End simultaneously — a remarkable feat!

The late sixties found the Neil Simon forge pulling out successful comedy productions like hot chestnuts. *The Odd Couple* and the *Star-Spangled Girl* both premiered in 1966 were followed by the delectable *Plaza Site* in 1969.

In the meantime Simon's brand of popular light humour, which blends the burlesque with the petty foibles of human nature, was seized upon by the moguls of the big screen and television. Suffice it to say that almost all the author's material has been adapted for the camera and circulated on celluloid amongst all the English speaking countries; for "the humour fits!" almost everywhere. His knack for producing hilarious situations and witty dialogue, coupled with his proven crowd

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# THE GINGERBREAD LADY

*(in order of appearance)*

Jimmy Perry	<b>Hubert Puglisevich</b>
Manuel	<b>Renato Dimech</b>
Toby Landau	<b>Monica Attard</b>
Evy Meara	<b>Antoinette Soler</b>
Polly Meara	<b>Isabelle Attard</b>
Lou Tanner	<b>Mario Attard</b>

## **Act I**

A Brownstone Apartment in the West — seventies — mid-November — late afternoon.

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## **Act II**

Three weeks later — about 9.00 p.m.

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## **Act III**

The following morning

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*There will be two intervals of 15 minutes each*

## *For The Atturi Productions*

Stage Manager	<b>Marlene Dimech</b>
Assistant Stage Managers	<b>Nicki Rosser Elizabeth Agius Fenech</b>
Wardrobe Mistress	<b>Lina Galea</b>
Assistant Wardrobe Mistress	<b>Connie Schembri</b>
Set Design	<b>Victor Soler</b>
Make-Up	<b>Lina Galea Cumbo</b>
Hair Styles	<b>Lucia Pace</b>
Publicity	<b>Plus Advertising</b>
Production Co-ordinator	<b>Anthony Bezzina</b>
Acknowledgements	<b>Paola Borg, Antiques Formosa Cane Works, Ta' Qali, Wands Ltd., Marsa Max Factor, Lija Touch of Class G. Fenech Azzopardi, Republic Street, Valletta</b>

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## *For The Manoel Theatre*

Lights	<b>Vanni Laus</b>
Stage Carpenters	<b>Emmanuel Dalli Francis Mifsud</b>
Booking Clerk	<b>Michelle Muscat</b>

NEIL SIMON - cont'd from page 3

pulling reputation easily marked him as the top exponent of the Broadway musical — that American legacy. Simon showed his mettle with *Sweet Charity* and *Promises Promises*; and both achieved tremendous runs all over the states.

Notwithstanding his phenomenal success and the resulting showers of dollars, Simon's comedies were still being regarded as "light" stuff by most of his critics. The author's known reluctance to "stop, chat and chum" the press did not exactly help. The contracts continued to pour in and the Neil Simon organisation did not do much to challenge the existing impressions.

However, in his later works, like *The Last of the Red Hot Lovers* (1969) and tonight's fare by the Atturi, *The Gingerbread Lady* (1970), Simon seems to strike a more serious, mature, note. Whilst still maintaining all that scintillating Neil Simon vintage stuff, these works provide moving studies on aspects of human frailty; like the ageing singer who is a compulsive alcoholic in *The Gingerbread Lady*. Such portrayals are certainly not "funny"; in fact they are most "serious". I am reminded of the remarks made to Oscar Wilde whilst at the height of his popularity. "In order to be great you must be serious" (as commented upon by Dr Paul Xuereb in his pre-play lecture entitled *Wilde Times* at the Foyer last Saturday).

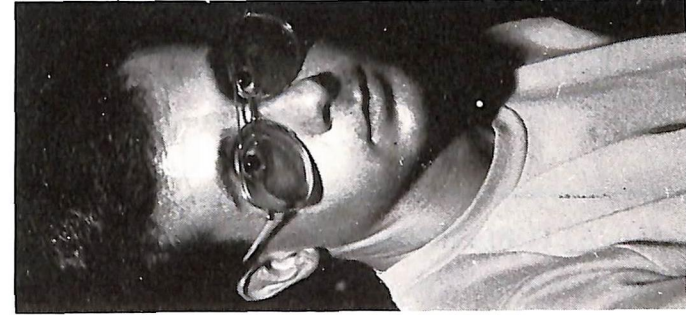
I have always believed that the humourist, ipso facto, belongs to the lower order of writers. He might very well be the pet of readers but then, he is the stepchild of critics. Even when brilliant he only seems to have a limited appeal. Tears may be reckoned superior to laughter since tears cleanse us whilst laughter makes us feel guilty. Euripedes appeals to wider emotions and probably achieves deeper and more lasting effects than Aristophanes. However, great tragedy is more emotional, and consequently less intellectual, than great humour. But nowadays, being intellectual has not the supreme absolute value our age is inclined to attribute to it; *katharsis*, in Aristotle's sense of the word, remains the supreme achievement of the literate theatre.

Since humourists try to achieve their intended effect by humorous means they are looked down as lightweights. Some of them tend to become conscious of it. They try to become more serious, not by saying something more serious in their own manner, but by saying something in a more serious manner. It is the age old story of the clown who wants to play *Hamlet*!

Neil Simon has started in a certain vein and never apologised, never faltered until in *Lovers* and *Lady* we perceived this new touch of the "serious". Quo vadis, Mr Simon?



Isabelle Attard — Polly



Renato Dimech — Manuel



Monica Attard — Toby



Mario Attard — Lou

## ATTURI PRODUCTIONS — the success story

In April 1974 the sheer hard work and determination put in by Karmen Azzopardi and her small nucleus of pioneers made its impact on the then indifferent theatrical scene. The Phoenicia Playhouse production of Pirandello's *Six Characters in search of an Author* hit the boards with a deafening bang, proving that the *Atturi* were in business.

Since then the versatile ensemble has presented quality plays, in English and in Maltese, ranging from the classical to the modern, from drama to farce, thus providing a varied programme to suit different tastes.

**Atturi** have sought to present works of international playwrights to local audiences, fostering a love for the theatre, whilst enabling local authors, actors, actresses and directors an opportunity to show their mettle, on a regular basis.

Amongst the many memorable productions, one may recall a few which cling nostalgically to the mind, such as Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Rose Tattoo*, Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, Chekov's *The Seagull*, de Filippo's *Filumena Marturano* and *Saturday, Sunday, Monday*.

**Atturi's** theatrefare last year, comprising Pielmeier's *Agnes of God*, Feydeau's *Hotel Paradiso*, Durrenmatt's *The Visit*, Williams' *Sweet Bird of Youth* and Sophocles *Women of Trachnis* has convinced the seasoned theatregoer that the energetic group possesses, the mix and the magic, the air and the flair for producing that elusive minor miracle which we nonchalantly refer to as Theatre!

### ATTURI PRODUCTIONS BOARD

*Hon. Life President:* Comm. P.J. Naudi KM, MBE, CMM

*Chairman:* Karmen Azzopardi

*Members:* Antoinette Soler  
Lino Farrugia  
Hubert Puglisevich  
Anthony Bezzina  
Marlene Dimech

*USA Representative:* Mario Philip Azzopardi

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