



CONCERT

in honour of

His Excellency

The President of the Portuguese Republic
and Mrs Mario Soares

hosted by

The President of Malta
and Mrs Mifsud Bonnici

Manoel Theatre

Sunday, 9th October, 1994

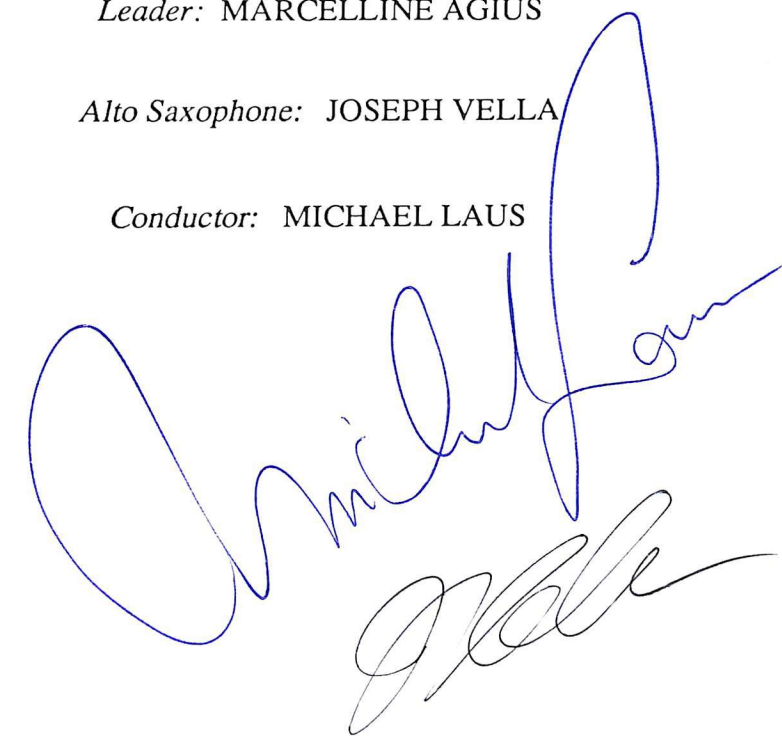
1578
1473

CONCERT
BY THE
MANOEL THEATRE ORCHESTRA

Leader: MARCELLINE AGIUS

Alto Saxophone: JOSEPH VELLA

Conductor: MICHAEL LAUS



Manoel Theatre

Sunday, 9th October, 1994

PROGRAMME

LE MEDECIN TURC

overture

Nicolò Isouard (1775 - 1818)

ĠĠANTIJA

suite

John Galea (1960 -)

CONCERTO FOR ALTO SAXOPHONE AND ORCHESTRA

Ronald Binge (1910 -)

VALSE TRISTE

waltz

Jean Sibelius (1865 - 1957)

MASQUERADE

suite

Aram Khachaturian (1903 - 1978)

LE MEDECIN TURC

overture

Nicolò Isouard

Isouard studied music in Malta, Paris and Naples. In November 1791 he became assistant to Vincenzo Anfossi, the organist at the conventual church of St. John. In 1798 the commander-in-chief of the French occupational forces, General Vaubois, appointed him as *Protettore*, or general-manager, of the Manoel Theatre. He settled in Paris and wrote forty-two comic operas some of which have been very successful. *Le Medecin Turc* is a one act opera based on a libretto by Villiers and Armand Gouffè. It had its French premiere at the Opéra-Comique theatre on the 19th November 1803 and was translated and performed in German, Spanish, Russian and Polish. It is a light and lively piece with an emphasis on percussion instruments which in the composer's time were associated with oriental music. A lengthy crescendo, reminiscent of Rossini, carries this overture to its final conclusion.

ĠGANTIJA

*suite: Prelude, Processional,
The Reaction, Finale*

John Galea

The Maltese composer John Galea has graduated with honours in composition from Durham University, U.K. The present work is a selection from a larger choral work, based on a poem by the poet George Pisani who, like the composer, hails from Malta's sister island, Gozo. The poem is inspired by the megalithic temples of Ġgantija, Gozo (the name means 'gigantic'), the oldest free-standing structure of their kind in Europe, dating from before 2000 B.C.

The *Prelude* is intensely lyrical, and creates a musical atmosphere consonant with the subject. The *Processional* is an incantation to the gods in order to liberate the island from a severe drought. The third movement is the reaction of the crowd to the oracle of the gods, that demands a human sacrifice. In the *Finale* the mood is again happy and relaxed, with the themes of the prelude and the processional appearing simultaneously.

On October 16th, 1992, this suite was performed in London by the St. Martin-in-the-Fields Sinfonia conducted by Anthony Goodchild. The entire work was also performed during last year's edition of the Malta International Arts Festival.

CONCERTO FOR ALTO SAXOPHONE AND ORCHESTRA

Allegro Spiritoso - Andante Espressivo - Rondo - Allegro Giocoso Ronald Binge

Ronald Binge started his career as a session musician on the organ specialising in the soundtracks of films. Later he started composing some of the soundtracks himself or in collaboration with Mantovani. His better known film music comprises *Elizabethan Serenade*, *Spitfire* and *The Thames Rhapsody*. He later branched into composing for various solo instruments. His alto saxophone concerto is a typical Binge composition where all the instrument’s possibilities are given the maximum opportunity. Split into three movements, this concerto is light and breezy and does not make undue demands on the listener, although, of course, the same cannot be said for the soloist.

VALSE TRISTE

waltz Jean Sibelius

Illness shadowed much of Sibelius’ life. From 1901 to 1905 he suffered severely from a disease of the ear which, for a while, threatened total deafness. Later a growth in his throat was diagnosed as cancerous and was successfully operated in Berlin in May 1908 but the fear that malignancy might return haunted him for years.

This may be the reason why some of the music he wrote in the years between 1900 and 1910 is filled with melancholy, at times even despair. *Valse Triste*, the highly popular salon piece, was written in 1903 and introduced in Helsinki on April 25, 1904, the composer conducting.

This slow, lugubrious melody in three-quarter time is a tonal picture of death as it comes to claim a woman who recalls feverishly the gaiety of a ball; but its deep rooted pessimism reflects some of Sibelius’ own morbid feelings at a time when he thought he was going deaf.

MASQUERADE

suite: Waltz - Nocturne - Mazurka - Romance - Galop Aram Khachaturian

The Armenian composer Aram Khachaturian is quite well-known for his brilliant composition, particularly the *Violin Concerto*, the film-music to *Spartacus*, and the ballet music *Gayaneh* of “Sabre Dance” fame.

The present work is taken from the incidental music he wrote for a 1939 Moscow production of the play *Masquerade* by the early nineteenth century Russian poet Lermontov. The play depicts the glitter of the life of high society, at the midst of which exist hypocrisy, jealousy and intrigue.

The *Waltz* has unmistakable undertones of sadness in a world of swirling dancers. The *Nocturne* consists of a dreamy violin solo over veiled harmonies. The *Mazurka* returns to the world of the *Waltz*, though the brilliance is even more feigned. The *Romance* is in a more traditionally Romantic mood, with an Armenian tinge. The final *Galop* races on *a la Offenbach*. A brief reflective pause leads to a noisy ending.

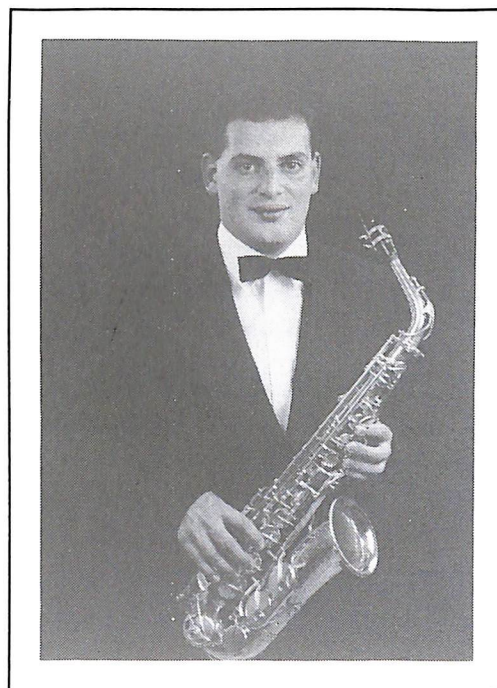
JOSEPH VELLA

started his musical studies with the well known Malta born clarinettist Freddie Mizzi.

He attended master classes at the Brereton International Music Symposium and the Internationaler Sommerakademie Mozarteum in Salzburg, with saxophonists Eugene Rousseau (USA) and Jean-Yves Fourmeau (France).

Joseph Vella has attracted the critics' attention with his confident playing following his numerous stage concerts and television appearances. He introduced the Ronald Binge concerto to the local music lovers during the open-air Mdina concert marking the thirtieth anniversary of Malta's Independence.

The twenty-five year old Joseph Vella is a music tutor at the Johann Strauss School of Music in Valletta.



MICHAEL LAUS

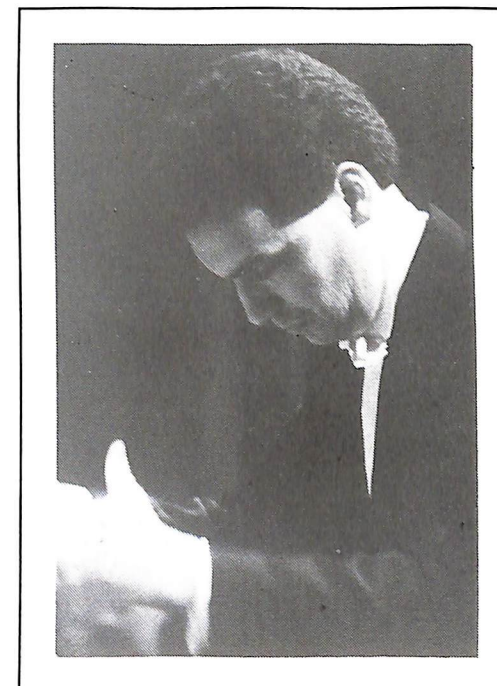
was born in Malta in 1960. After his early musical training in Malta where he obtained the Licentiate of the Royal Schools of Music in pianoforte, he was awarded a scholarship by the Italian Government which enabled him to continue his studies at the Conservatorio Giuseppe Verdi of Milan, where he graduated in piano, harpsichord, composition, and conducting. He later attended master classes in conducting with George Manahan of the New York City Opera, and Vladimir Delman in Bologna.

After appearing as a concert pianist in the hall of the Milan Conservatory, in 1984 he conducted his first public concert with soloists from the Centro di Perfezionamento Artisti Lirici of La Salle in Marseilles, and with the Orchestra and Chorus of the Teatro Comunale of Bergamo in Milan.

He has appeared as guest conductor with the Youth Orchestra of the Moscow Conservatory, the Orchestra Filarmonica di Parma, the New Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, and, in January 1994, with the orchestra and chorus of the National Theatre of Georgia in a production of *Madama Butterfly* at the Mediterranean Conference Centre (Malta) with Miriam Gauci in the title role.

Michael Laus is Professor of Music Studies at the University of Malta and Music Director of the National Theatre of Malta since 1991, where he regularly conducts operas, including *La Boheme*, and the first performance of *Compostella*, by the Maltese composer Charles Camilleri, besides numerous symphonic concerts every season.

Michael Laus has recorded music by Maltese composers on the labels DISCOVER INTERNATIONAL and UNICORN-KHANCHANA.



THE MANOEL THEATRE

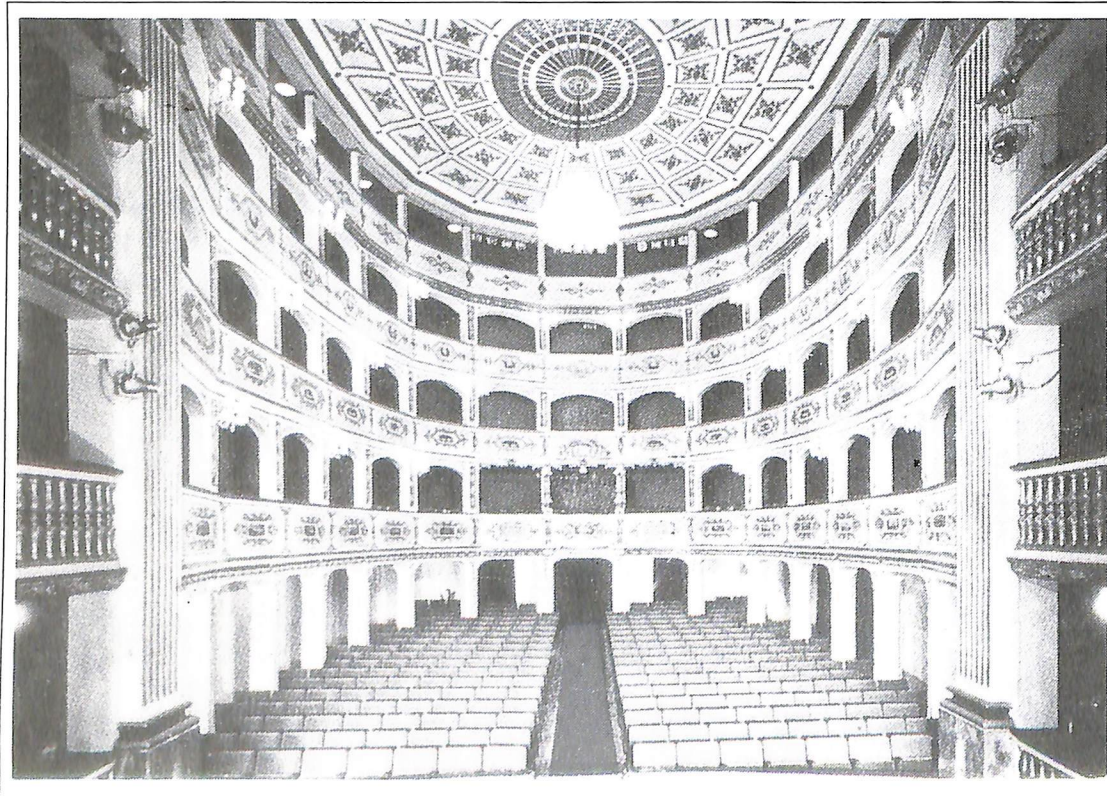
It is claimed that the Manoel Theatre in Valletta is *the second oldest theatre in Europe* and *the oldest theatre in the Commonwealth*. It dates back to Grandmaster Antonio Manoel de Vilhena, who decided on one March day in 1731 to build a public theatre *for the honest recreation of the people*. The Latin inscription is still recorded to this day above the main entrance.

The vows of charity and chastity which bound the Knights of the Sovereign Military Order of St. John, did not prevent them from indulging in theatrical activities. It is on record that drama, pageants and operas had flourished, making the demand for such an edifice rather necessary.

Grandmaster de Vilhena wasted no time. The building started on the very day that the deed of transfer of the site was signed and the work was finished in ten months. The original interior, constructed entirely of wood, was similar to the Palermo Theatre of that time and is generally believed to have been modelled on it.

It was opened on the 9th January, 1732, with a presentation of *Merope*, a grand classic tragedy by Scipione Maffei. It was designed by the architect of the Order, Francois Moudion, and all the roles were played by the Knights.

Originally called *Public Theatre*, it was later called *Theatre Royal*; but in 1866, in tribute to its founder, it became known as the Manoel Theatre.



It was run by a Senior Knight who was called *Protettore*. He supervised the choice of the programme, acted as censor and was responsible for liaising between impresario, performers and the public. Gradually, Maltese playwrights and composers established themselves and it was eventually a Maltese – Nicolò Isouard, also known as Nicolò of Malta – who became the Theatre's *Protettore* during the French occupation of Malta in the last two years of the eighteenth century.

During the uprising of the Maltese against the French "there came a time when the players could no longer bear the strains of war as the dwindling wages proved insufficient for survival, let alone for the rigours of singing and acting."

During the first half of the 19th century, with the arrival of the British, the Theatre again came to life with splendid nights like that of December 4, 1838, when Queen Adelaide, widow of William IV, attended a performance of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lamermoor*.

However, the large British presence and the ever increasing number of visitors rendered the Theatre inadequate. In 1861 it passed into private hands and with the proceeds of the sale, a new opera house was built. The Manoel Theatre fell upon hard times and was even used as a doghouse for beggars. Then, in 1873 the Royal Opera House was destroyed by fire and, for a time, until it was rebuilt, the Theatre regained some of its old glory. However, once the Royal Opera House was rebuilt, the Theatre served, fitfully, as a dance hall and a cinema.

Again destiny interfered. During the Second World War the Opera House was completely destroyed and in response to public appeal the Government endeavoured to bring the Manoel back to life. Experts from Britain and Italy guided the Maltese artisans under whose loving care the delicate process of restoration was embarked upon.

The Ballet Rambert's presentation of *Coppelia* marked its re-opening in December, 1960, as gasps of delight echoed the public's sentiments with the re-discovery of this shining jewel in Malta's National Heritage.

Since then, various international celebrities as well as the best of local talent have graced the boards of Malta's National Theatre. The purpose remains the same as that coined by its founder: *For the honest recreation of the people*.

