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TEATRU MANOEL

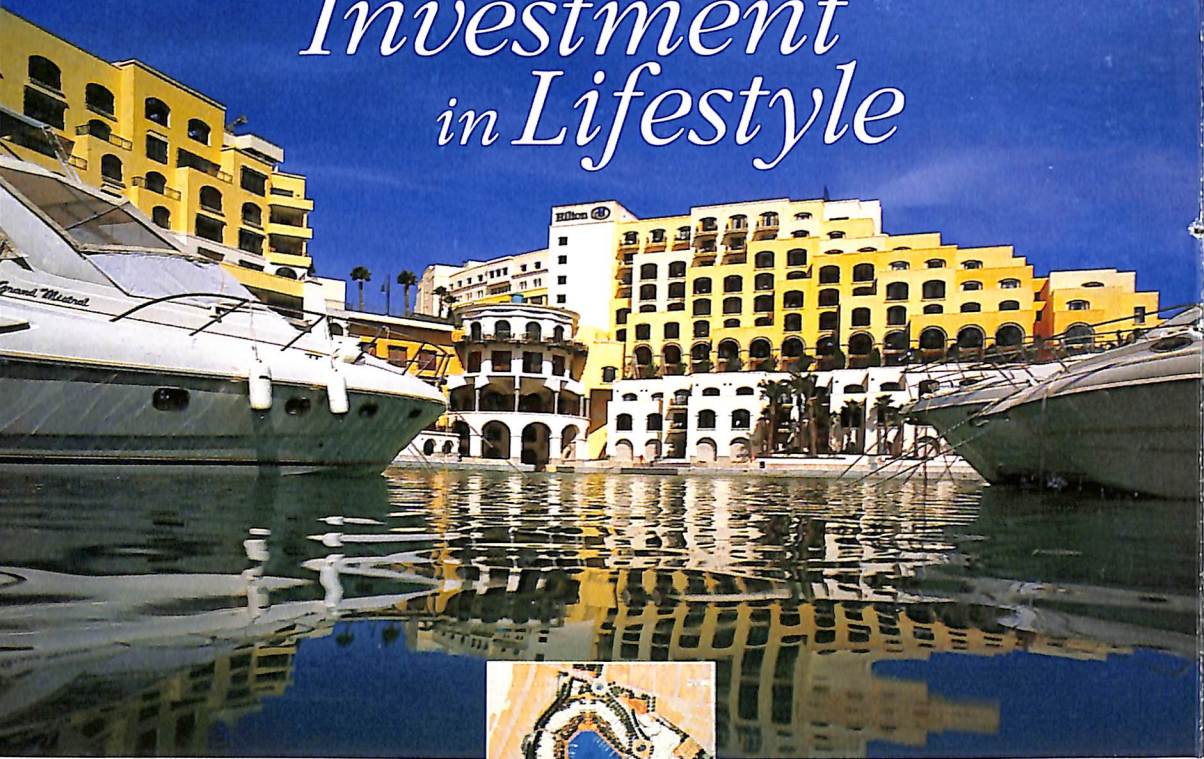
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PROGRAMME 2003 - 2004

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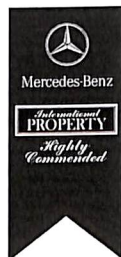
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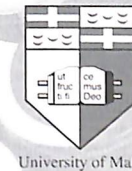
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Teatru Manoel

Windows on Music

at the
Sala Isouard
Thursday, 12 February 2004 at 19.30hrs

The Music of Joseph Vella

Programme

Pezzo Per Quintetto D'Ottoni op 55,
Segments No 3 op 95, Contrasts op 104,
Sequenza a 2 op 85, Karba op 102,
6 Preludes op 70, Segments No 1 op 93,
Duo Concertante op 91, Segments No 2 op 94

Performers

Caroline Calleja, Antoinette Camilleri, Maria Frendo,
The Festive Brass Quintet, Janascharco Trio,
Moods String Quartet, The Vallette Clarinet Quartet

MALTA
INTERNATIONAL
AIRPORT



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one and a half hours before commencement.

Performances start at 7.30pm Mondays to Sundays. Latecomers have to wait for a suitable pause in the programme before being ushered to their seats. The Verdi Room in the foyer includes a close-circuit television where one may view the performance. The management reserves the right to alter the programme and the performance time of any production.

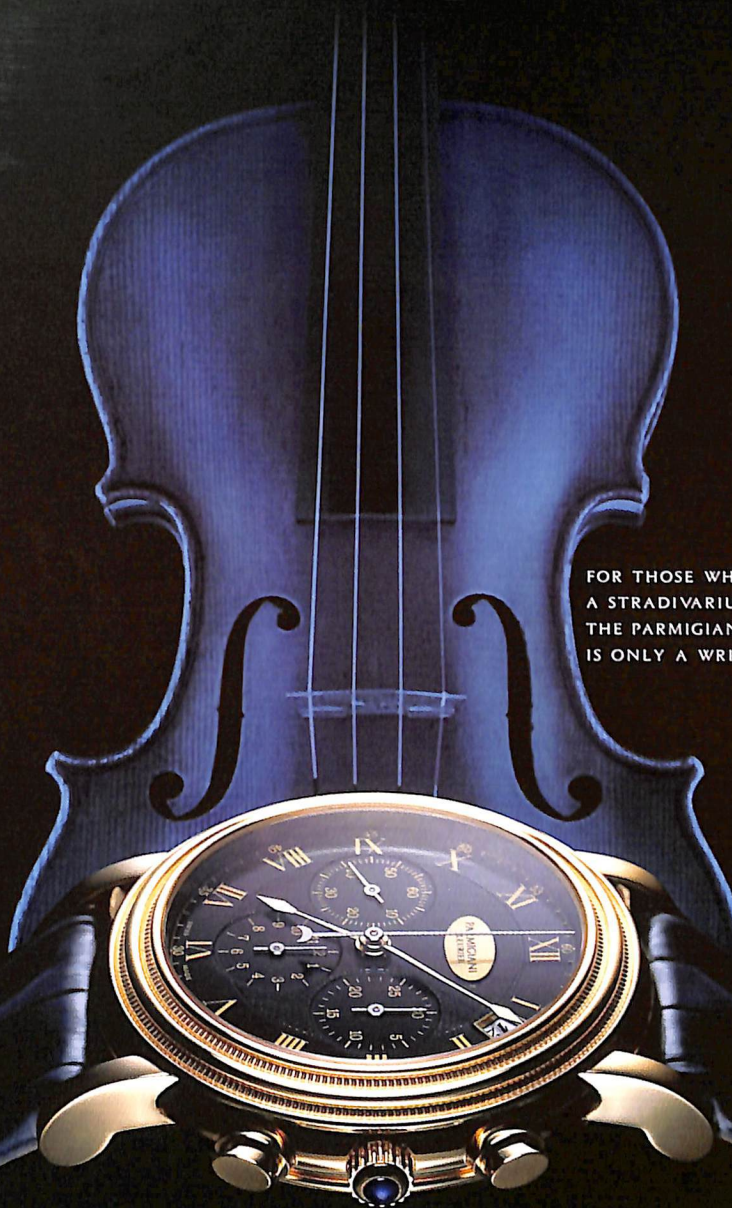
FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Friday 13 to Sunday 15 February
CHICAGO, Kander & Webb - FM Theatre Productions (The programme will be repeated on February 19-21)

Monday 16 February
Pianist **CHRISTOPHER LANGDOWN** and the **MARTINU STRING QUARTET**
play the Elgar and Dvorák piano quintets

Wednesday 18 February
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JOSEPH VELLA



As a composer, conductor, educator, and researcher, Joseph Vella has left an indelible stamp both on a national and international level. One can think of any major developments in the course of music-making in Malta for the last 30 years or so (the introduction of music studies at tertiary level; the use of Maltese as a language medium in 'serious' composition; the opening of the School of Music in Valletta; the editing and performance of old music manuscripts; the establishment of the National Orchestra) and somehow, somewhere, Vella's name features prominently either as an absolute protagonist or else as an integral part of the pioneering team.

However, as he would be the first to admit, it is Composition that has been his first and lasting love. In this field he has achieved wide international recognition and his works feature regularly in concert programmes abroad. Although Vella feels quite at ease composing in different styles, it is in the medium of chamber music that he bares his most intimate rapport, and comes to terms, with the complicated trapping of abstract musical concepts and their eventual fruition. It is this kind of deep searching insight and finger-tip technical dexterity that, over the years, have paved the way to Vella's firm entrenchment in the realm of Maltese symphonic music. Three full-blown Symphonies, namely, op 11, op 48, and op 104, and two Sinfoniettas, op 36 for Strings, and op 100 for 13 Woodwind Players, unquestionably attest to this fact.

Joseph Vella's very latest composition is a work for Piano solo commissioned by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music in London. *Playing 6.5.4.3.2...* will be included in the album *Spectrum 4*, to be published shortly, the purpose of which, in the words of the Associated Board publishers, "is to expand the contemporary repertoire of short, musically serious pieces written by some of the finest composers in the world".

PROGRAMME NOTES

PEZZO per QUINTETTO d'OTTONI op 55

This brass quintet was commissioned by the Sofia Brass Quintet, and was in fact world premiered by them in Stuttgart, Germany, on 10.04.92, during a Festival of Music for Brass.

This piece is in one movement with a short *Più Calmo* middle section making a loose ternary structure. The Quintet is built around a closely-knit thematic development on short germinal ideas. Typical of Vella's idiosyncrasies, contrapuntal and harmonic/rhythmic sections are alternating and complementing each other throughout the work. Elements of cross-rhythmic structures (the very first bar, for instance) betray influences of jazz practices. The *Più Calmo* section, written in 5/4 time, presents material of a distinctly more 'melodic' and expansive nature. Although the last section makes some cursory reference to the material from the opening section, the ideas presented are quite new. There is no recapitulation, strictly speaking, but the very first bar serves as a unifying factor.

The Festive Brass Ensemble

Trumpet 1: Kevin Abela
 Trumpet 2: Sigmund Mifsud
 Horn: Etienne Cutajar
 Trombone: Jesmond Azzopardi
 Tuba: Paul Borg

SEGMENTS no 3 op 95

Segments No 3 is written for Clarinet and Pianoforte, and was first played on 17.04.00 in a concert held at the Phoenicia Ballroom featuring clarinettist Michael Pirotta and pianist Anthony Sammut. Notable performances of this piece include the one at the *Cairo Conservatoire* in 2001 (George Debono: Clarinet, Eric Azzopardi: Piano). The segments in this composition are not really segments in the sense of 'divisions'. They are, in fact, knit into one continuous fabric from beginning to end. Throughout the piece the 16th note serves as the basic time unit (9/16, 12/16, 6/16, 3/16) with a short section towards the middle of the piece in 4/8 and 2/8 time. The piece is marked *Andante Mosso*.

Clarinet: Godfrey Mifsud
 Pianoforte: Caroline Calleja

CONTRASTS op 104

Contrasts was written for and dedicated to the *Vallette Clarinet Quartet*. The writing reflects the technical and artistic prowess of the members of this fine quartet of musicians and it was they who premiered the work last July during the Victoria International Arts Festival. The Bass Clarinet plays an important part throughout the piece, and the composer often uses it as a link bridging one idea to another. Contrasts starts with an *Adagio* section which makes way to a jagged *Allegretto* in 7/8 time, where the Eb Clarinet expounds a melodic line floating above an accompaniment provided by the other three instruments. A dreamy *Moderato* (mostly in 5/4 time) leads to an *Andantino*, built around contrapuntal and canonical ideas. These devices are further and more concisely used in the *Più Mosso* that follows and on which this difficult and quite complex work ends.

Clarinet in Eb: Michael Pirotta
 Clarinet in Bb 1: Johann J Fenech
 Clarinet in Bb 2: Ronnie Debattista
 Bass Clarinet: Godfrey Mifsud

SEQUENZA a 2 op 85

Crucem sanctam subiit qui infernum confregit. Accinctus est potentia surrexit die tertia. Alleluia. (He took up the Holy Cross and overcame the power of darkness; girded with strength He rose up on the third day. Hallelujah).

The composer shows a scholarly interest in the historical aspect of musical formal structures. The term *Sequenza* refers to a type of Latin hymn, usually in couplets, with the music repeating in the pattern AA BB CC DD. Up to the eleventh century, a typical *Sequenza* has some six to twelve pairs of lines, each pair of a different length. Unlike Gregorian chant, which tends to dwell on ornamental figures, there is clarity and a strong sense of direction in the *Sequenza*. Originally, a *Sequenza* was part of the festal *Alleluias* of their time. Vella's *Sequenza*, composed in a contemporary musical language, harks back to the typical late Mediaeval/Early Renaissance idioms – Landini cadences, pedal points (Tenor), melismas, and so on. After singing solo statements, the voices at times combine and at other times get involved in a musical dialogue which creates a 'question and answer' atmosphere. This very difficult piece is brought to a close with a characteristic *Alleluia* flourish.

Cantus: Maria Frendo
 Altus: Antoinette Camilleri

KARBA op 102

Karba (Maltese for 'sigh') is an unpretentious piece written for Clarinet, Bass Clarinet and Pianoforte. It is being premiered this evening. The quaver figure heard at the outset on the pianoforte is a germinal idea used throughout the piece as a unifying factor. It is mostly as an accompaniment, but in several places it is also implemented melodically. Marked *Adagio*, the music unfolds mostly in triple meter but, as often happens with Vella, is spiced up with time-signature shifts which further help to give the music a spatial, dreamy, evocative atmosphere, which is, after all, the *raison d'être* of the piece.

Clarinet: Michael Pirotta
 Bass Clarinet: Godfrey Mifsud
 Pianoforte: Caroline Calleja

6 PRELUDES op 70

The *Preludes* is a set of six relatively short, contrasting pieces meant to be played not separately, but as a group. In this way, the contrasts and over-all planned structures come out more clearly. Untypical of the composer are his tempo indications in English. The first *Prelude*, marked *Playfully*, announces a sextuplet figure, under which the left hand plays melodic 'fragments'. However, the opening figure permeates the whole piece. With a *Sway* is the indication for the second *Prelude*, basically a *Moderato* piece in triple meter, with subtle hints at waltz idioms as found in 'classical' jazz. The third *Prelude*, *With Decision*, alternates mostly between 12/8 and 15/8 rhythm. The fourth *Prelude*, *Dreamily*, is yet another of the composer's 'night' pieces. The melody floats along above an *ostinato* left hand. The dynamics hardly ever go above *mezzo piano*. Using a 5/8 time-signature throughout the fifth *Prelude*, *With Simplicity* brings this set of pieces to a fitting close.

Pianoforte: Natasha Chircop

SEGMENTS no 1 op 93

This work is the first of a group of three compositions bearing the same title. No 1 is for Flute, Violin, and Pianoforte; No 2 is for String Quartet, while No 3 is for Clarinet and Pianoforte.

All three works are basically serially constructed. However, the note-row technique used is quite a personal one. Unlike the 'traditional' forms of Original, Inverted, Original Retrograde,

(continued...)



and Inverted Retrograde, the composer takes note No 7 of the Original and moves sideways (backwards and forwards) to create a new row, note No 7 of which then becoming the starting point of the next row. This gives the composer a set of ten rows, together with another ten starting with note No 6.

In this work, there are six Segments. The first one, *Un poco Lento*, leads without a break into the second, *Alla Marcia*, where the main thematic material is mostly shared by the Flute and the Violin, with the pianoforte supporting with a steady rhythmic pattern. A short codetta on the Violin takes the music to the *Tempo di Sarabanda*. Throughout the fourth Segment, *Deciso*, there is a constant appearance of a *sforzando* which is used as a unifying element in an otherwise strongly rhythmic section. This calms down slightly towards the end with the solo Flute introducing the *Adagio*. Most of this Segment is a dialogue between the Flute and the Violin, the pianoforte coming in later on with a melody of its own. The closing Segment, *Moderato*, mostly alternates two bars of 5/8 with another two of 6/8. This irregular drive is kept right up to the end, when all three instruments play in unison.

Segments no 1 was premiered by the *Janascharco Trio* at the Stable Theatre and Art Gallery, Hastings, UK, in 1999.

Janascharco Trio
 Flute: Natasha Chircop
 Violin: Tatjana Chircop
 Pianoforte: Marco Rivoltini

DUO CONCERTANTE op 91

The Duo Concertante op 91 received its world premiere at the Chiesa di San Donato in Genova on 24/11/99. It was played by Marcelline Agius (Violin) and Stephen Galea (Viola).

For his inspiration, in the Duo Concertante the composer harks back to the duet string structures so popular with composers during the prae-classical period, albeit done in a completely different language medium. The two instruments involved, namely, the Violin and the Viola, share all the thematic interest alternating their function as a leading voice or as accompanist. As is usual with Vella, strong rhythmic devices (triple, duple, hemiola, etc) are used quite liberally.

Violin: Marcelline Agius
 Viola: Stephen Galea

SEGMENTS no 2 op 94

Like many of Vella's compositions, this piece also had a foreign world premiere. In fact, it was first played at the Chiesa di San Donato in Genova on 24/11/99, during a week-long Festival of chamber music organized by the Conservatorio di Musica of Genova. It was played by a String Quartet from Malta, namely, Marcelline Agius, Nadia Debono, Stephen Galea, and Valeriu Popovici.

This piece is the second one in a group of three works all bearing a common title – Segments. The other two have both been performed this evening. Segments no 2 for String Quartet is the only one of the group that is constructed as five distinct short sections, in a way presenting a 'suite' of contrasts. In the first section, *Largo*, the 1st Violin carries the main line supported, as it were, by the other instruments. In the second section entitled *Andante*, the violoncello comes out to the fore. There is a striking pizzicato passage and liberal use is made of repeated notes. No 3, *Molto Sostenuto*, is a dreamy-like section with measured sforzandi and starting from top to bottom. A 6/4 bar in the middle acts as a fulcrum after which the idea is taken up in reverse – bottom to top. A short 3-bar codetta brings the movement to a close. No 4, *Tempo di Valzer*, is exactly that – a sophisticated short waltz. The last section, *Giososo*, is a lilting piece in 9/8 time.

Moods String Quartet
 Violin 1: Marcelline Agius
 Violin 2: Tatjana Chircop
 Viola: Stephen Galea
 Violoncello: Angelica Galea



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TEATRU MANOEL

'Ad honestam populi oblectationem'

The Teatru Manoel, built on the initiative of Grandmaster Manoel de Vilhena, was inaugurated on January 19, 1732, with Scipione Maffei's tragedy *Merope* acted by the Italian Knights. It was meant to be an all-purpose theatre, a cultural and entertainment centre for plays, operas, cantatas and comedies, as well as other spectacles and Carnival balls. Hence its Latin inscription, which means "For the honest recreation of the people".

During the 19th century operas became the principal attraction and the Manoel gained a reputation in Europe for quality and innovation in this field. However the inauguration of the Royal Opera House on October 9, 1866, overshadowed and subsequently engulfed it. The Manoel, now privately owned, lost its pre-eminence and although a few operas were still held, plays and later on films became the main fare. Sadly the building's scope was completely changed and it went through many decades of neglect.

The bombing and complete destruction of the Royal Opera House on April 7, 1942, ironically restored the Teatru Manoel's importance; more so when the Maltese Government decided that, on the pattern of culturally advanced nations, Malta should have a national theatre. The required procedures were instituted in 1957, and after radical renovation the Teatru Manoel reopened on December 23, 1960, with a splendid performance of Delibes' *Coppelia* by the Ballet Rambert.

Since then the Manoel has seen a continual development of facilities in order to improve standards. Among the more recent developments are the Sala Isouard which functions as a second auditorium suitable for chamber concerts, the Theatre Museum and the establishment of the theatre archives, the Café Diva and the Ristorante di Vilhena in the restored basement galleries, the innovatory retractable canopy over the courtyard making it an all-season functioning area, the orchestra pit lift which lends the stage further depth when needed, and the opening of a retailing outlet for the sale of theatre-related merchandise.

Above all, Teatru Manoel has grown in artistic stature and is today well known for the quality fare it offers its patrons. The Manoel is now reputed to be the oldest European theatre still functioning within its original structure.

Programme notes: Karl Fiorini
Programme editor: Victor Fenech

The Theatre Museum

*A walk through Malta's
theatrical history since 1732*



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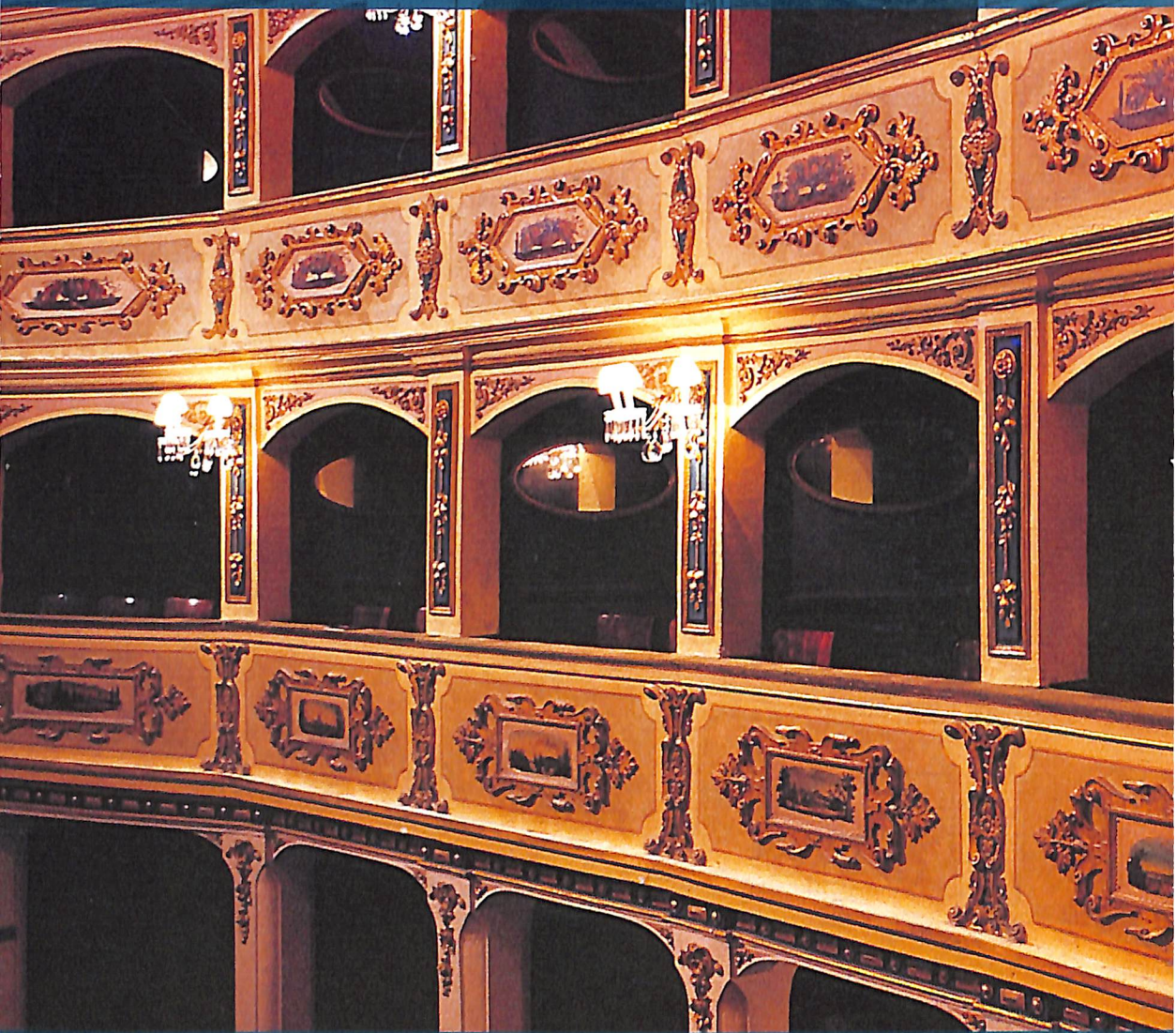


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