Tony Cassar Darien

At a meeting of the artists who wrote to the Prime Minister regarding their disappointment at the plans for refurbishing the ruins of the Opera House, at least two weird facts emerged. Throughout the lengthy proceedings, the local practitioners of the Arts were not consulted, while Renzo Piano’s drawing for the theatre is a replica of the design commissioned by the Manwel Theatre committee six years ago. Submitted to a leading local architectural firm, an en-masse rejection of the original was unanimous. Piano’s scheme was clearly a failed-fledged theatre.

Actually, when theatres dating back from early periods were refurbished, it was not only because the ravages of time or the ravages of war, but also because of their being perceived by the community as monuments with sufficient architectural, artistic, and popular significance to form an integral part of the national identity. In fact, the most remarkable feature of the immediate post-war period was the hiatus with which the ruined or unoccupied cities reopened their theatres.

As the German economic miracle of the 1950s developed, there followed an intensive programme of theatre construction. Massive stage areas with complex technology to allow for constant scene changes, something which was characteristic of modern theatre. In Britain there dwelled the realisation, long pursued by the civic theatre, to try and commercialise once more. It was a desire to be part of the public amenity (the same thought must have influenced the Manwel government to bid for the Manwel Theatre to the nation having previously acquired it from the Golicher Foundation). The London visits of Brecht’s Berliner Ensemble had rallied in favour of theatre in a societal and political social role. Dealing with a handmade’s egoism, rather than the influence of beautiful sights and sounds.

In the cases of Britain were proudly functional. Small playhouses were preferred to the large theatre-in-the-round. The idea of either face-faced or shuttered, was the most popular. Perhaps something, unless it was black. What eventually became known as the 'reper- toire model', was designed to be facilities that would open all year long, not just on a few hours in between.

In recent years, the construction, of the drama department of the University of Malta, has led to the development of regional theatre. Total theatrical flexibility was so desirable, that the phrase 'adaptable theatres' and turned to machinery to achieve it.

This concern mainly a modular floor with sections raised or lowered using complex hydraulic systems to stage stage area for the needs of the configuration. Many solutions have been pro- posed and tried concerning adaptable theatre. The best results have been in the larger modern audio theatres, where the tendency is to settle for just two or three basic formats. Certainly there are options and limitations. Pragmatism and com- promises are unavoidable, but each decision has to result from an informed debate. This should cover type of performance, mode of operation and format of stage area with the audience.

Performances come under four headings: 'Drama', demanding close contact between the actor or audience, allowing for facial subtleties to be apparent and speech to be lengthy and lyrical, needing more rapport with the audience. 'Burlesque' mechanisms do not intrude on choreographic images of dancers or choristers. The visual require- ments need to be matched by the musical range possible in this small size, for maximum reverberation to enhance the sound.

'Concert', where the emphasis is on the quality of natural sound; while for 'theatre-in-the-round' (with micro tech musicals or pop shows), one is after the broad visual effects, electronically controlled sound, and a performance that aspire to the style, quality and volume of a DVD.

A theatre’s format and its opera- tional mode is intrinsically linked. In terms of intimacy and acoustic: most theatrical and musical theatre are virtually identical, visually there is little difference, neither noise nor heat. But the overall impact may be less satisfactory. Should we build positively in a format guaranteed excellence in a particular genre? Or should we compromise to so as to provide for limited flexibility? The answer lies in the brief.

For a theatre, the preparation of the brief is particularly tricky. Any future shortcomings of its required functions can be traced directly to a lack of initial clear consensuses to its outcome.

The exactness of decisions to be made and the client has the responsi- bility, but he must be aware of all the options, especially if he has not built many theatres before. More disillusioned - governmental officials are basically transient but the theatres built in concrete are not easy to alter. Therefore, debate on all decisions involving all the options are important.

The local theatre practitioners (and not just the foreign experts) must be present to discuss pros and cons and assess their viability. There is also the need in establishing the best kind of theatre in cases where there is unavailability or even the complete absence of any of the idea of a theatre.

Christians and Muslims in Arab Malta

- Prof. Stanley Fiorito (The Sun- day Times, April 25) is now dis- tancing himself from the theory of the ummam-pect. He would have saved us much trouble had he never broached the idea which, after all, he imposed on the 13th century poem by not understanding the reference to the 'Pact of the', his reading and translation.

He now turn to the 'convenience of all data, old and new, available to date', to prove his point, that the continuity of Christianity on Gozo, another point imposed in his poem, which only referred to Christians without saying where they came from.

I find it difficult to understand Fiorito’s frame of mind because of what seems to me to be some confusion of facts. He apparently rejects the radical nature of what happened in Malta (including Gozo) in 870 AD because of recent archaeological discoveries, allegedly referring to people at Miluna at the end of the 10th century at the earliest.

As far as I know, no claims to the discovery of Christian remains have been made. He apparently believes that survivors of the cat- astrophe of 870 lived on. Unaccountably, he believes I think, that the Christians surrounded their bishop’s throne in 1127 "were the great grandchild- ren of their emancipated forefa- thers who after 1091 had con- verted to Christianity", even though I made it clear that local Christians were not involved in what we know about the events of 1191, and that one cannot reach the conclusion that the ghaba of ca. 1048 were normally under- stood to be Muslims.

Fiorito also ignores completely the relevance of yet another Arab writer who has not been properly appreciated so far by our histori- ans, namely, Ibn al-Haqq, who died after 977. Before historians were born, al-Haqq’s observations are a testimony to the reality of a Christian Arab presence in the island.

As for the 'uninhabited', the picture one has now is that of a complete depopulation in 870, only the people occasionally present being those visiting the island for honey, fish or timber (like the Haqual); three or more gener- ation, lived together. As a result, it was an uninhabited island; with visitors bringing their own provi- sion, and developing wild donkeys for which there was a demand on foreign markets, and hunting wild sheep.

We can perhaps add at least a further point. This is the incident set- tlement of herdmen who managed the sheepfolds or shears that arose in the late Middle Ages, developed, only documented so far by the Middle Ages. Then, towards the middle and later years of the 13th century as well as during the 14th, occurred the widespread development of pastoralism in area, a change in habi- tation and the constructed rebuilding of Miluna: Enclosed fields (gazaza) were arranged with a dry-to-the-wool Nationalist Fuzzy activist who kept making the point, very vigorously, that Malta cannot support a full-scale opera house. He insisted we can easily make do with the admittedly inadequate Manwel Theatre and Mediterranea Centre (or the 'admittedly' hardly justifiable performances in Gozo).

Government thinking seems to be based on the principle, so far, not a question of whether an alternative exists. (Triviant and Cameron have both proposed seemingly viable alternatives.)

My overall opinion on the whole Valletta entrance project can be summed up in its following: this government has a crim- inal philistine attitude towards culture, as evident from the shutting of Radio Borma some years back. (Campus FM, its natural successor, happily turned out to be a far better radio station than the other, but that is hardly the point.)

2. The open air theatre idea is just a ridiculous idea.

3. The parliament house still stands, slab bang at the entrance of the city, is just plain megalomaniac. There are several practical - and not one is in establishing the best kind of theatre in cases where there is an absence of any kind of a theatre, and the result is not pleasing. Look at Perugia and Umbria, or Bologna and Casevan.

Having said this, I admire Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi for taking a decision; it was about time someone did. But according to a government to be a massive segment of the population, the decision has been (quite fitfully) misguided.

Michael Camilleri

Not-your-Piano project

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Michael Camilleri

Sultana Ray

Birdlife is doing over it

I am not a hunter or a bird trap- per, but I feel that the net comforts of it all. I am not a hunter or a bird trap- per, but I feel that the net comfort of it is. I am not a hunter or a bird trap- per, but I feel that the net comfort of it is. I am not a hunter or a bird trap-per, but I feel that the net comfort of it is. I am not a hunter or a bird trap- per, but I feel that the net comfort of it is. I am not a hunter or a bird trap-per, but I feel that the net comfort of it is. I am not a hunter or a bird trap- per, but I feel that the net comfort of it is. I am not a hunter or a bird trap-per, but I feel that the net comfort of it is. I am not a hunter or a bird trap- per, but I feel that the net comfort of it is.