

MEMORANDUM BY THE HON. MINISTER OF EDUCATION FOR
CONSIDERATION IN CABINET.

Acquisition of Premises at 115, Old Theatre Street, Valletta to meet the essential requirements of the Manoel Theatre and for its development as a Centre for the cultivation and growth of Drama, Music and Ballet.

Preliminary:

The Manoel Theatre was acquired by Government following the Muscat Azzopardi Report and reports by Vera Lindsay and Dr. Richard Southern. Since its rehabilitation and re-opening in 1960 the Manoel Theatre has become known and admired by leading personalities in the world of Drama and Music, some of whom have specially visited it and written about it. Many companies and individual producers have expressed a wish to perform in it.

From the experience gained the Management Committee feel that subject to the provision of the facilities outlined below the Manoel could, with proper support, grow into an international centre of Art, to the benefit of indigenous talent and the Tourist Industry.

Foyer: This is necessary for the relaxation and comfort of patrons who attend the Theatre in search of culture as well as entertainment.

Bar: The present Bar is far too small. Experience has shown that an adequately sized Bar would be a source of substantial revenue to the Theatre. Because of its small size the Management has been unable over the last few years to run the Bar profitably. It is now common knowledge that patrons use bars outside the Theatre precisely because of the inadequacy of the present Bar.

Cloakroom: The present only cloakroom is inconveniently placed and too narrow. Its location is so inconvenient that patrons have now taken a habit (contrary to all Theatre etiquette) to keep their coats with them in the Auditorium.

Booking Office: This is sited too close to the auditorium with consequent annoyance to audiences in the stalls, resulting from the noise and chatter by persons booking seats, making enquiries and using the telephone. There is no provision for an advance Booking Office unlike other Theatres.

Toilet Facilities: There is a small ladies toilet in the 2nd Tier and a ladies and gents toilet, with a common entrance, in the auditorium. None in the 3rd Tier and the Gallery.

Entrances and Exits: Owing to the narrowness of the doors leading to and from the stage and the dressing rooms, ordinary stage furniture cannot be moved in and out. Furniture acquired has been left unused. Because of this serious disability certain stage scenery cannot be used.

Emergency Exits: The only one available is a death trap and it is being used as a cloakroom.

Storage space: This is completely lacking. Luggage containing valuable costumes and properties have to be deposited in the common entrance to the privately inhabited Flats with the risk of their being tampered with or damaged. Theatres use a considerable amount of paper, cloth and timber. Most of this, in our case, is stored beneath the stage against all Fire precaution rules.

Dressing Rooms: These are sited at an inconvenient height necessitating artists and technicians mounting from over 30 to more than 100 steps!

Scene Dock - Paint Shop - Carpenter's Shop: Owing to the absence of this all painting and construction of scenery is being done on the stage with consequent damage to the stage-floor. Apart from this, work on the stage is curtailing activities, for neither rehearsals nor performances may be properly held while work is being carried out on the stage.

Rehearsal Rooms: These are non-existent with great embarrassment to Producers and consequent deleterious effects on productions.

Wardrobe - Costumier - Properties Store: There is no space for these which are often of great value.

Fire Risk: For the reasons stated above, and independently of the inhibitions outline, the present arrangements constitute a serious potential danger from fire. So critical is the lack of space that there is nowhere where a Concert Grand Piano, for which funds have been recently made available, may be stored.

All the above essential requirements and facilities could be provided if with the acquisition of premises 115, Old Theatre Street and entrance hall of the present National Lottery Office at 73 and 74 Old Bakery Street were made available for conversion into an entrance to the stage of the Theatre.

The acquisition of premises at 115, Old Theatre Street was recommended by the Manoel Theatre Rehabilitation Committee at paragraph 9 of their report.

As long term policy the premises in question could be developed for use as a school of Drama, Music and Ballet and could possibly house a Permanent Arts Exhibition and the Malta Arts Council. The administrative of the National Orchestra could operate from these premises too.

The acquisition in itself will not solve the problems enumerated above since funds will be required for the reconstruction of these premises. In the past the Manoel Theatre Management Committee had approached the Gulbenkian Foundation for financial assistance but in the absence of definite Government direction on the question of acquisition, negotiations fell through.

If Government decides that the premises in question will be acquired for the purpose indicated above I will endeavour to obtain financial support from international and other resources.

It is therefore recommended that:-

- a) Premises No. 115, Old Theatre Street be taken over immediately on public tenure terms. This would involve the payment by the management of the sum of £120 yearly for its use. The management has funds to meet this recurrent expenditure.
- b) The Director of the National Lottery be prevailed upon to hand over immediately to the Manoel Theatre Management

Committee, the entrance hall referred to above for use as a direct access to the stage. Rent for use of this Hall will also be defrayed out of the Management's fund.

- c) The acquisition of the property at (a) above on possession and use, terms should, however, be followed by outright purchase on terms to be arranged with the owners. This is also recommended by the P.W.D. I shall endeavour to obtain financial assistance from international cultural organizations as well as from the private institutions towards this project.

Ministers are requested to give full support to the project.

23rd August, 1966.