

The Music of the Knights*

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As it is generally known, the Order of St. John arrived in Malta on 26 October, 1530, and was displaced by Napoleon on 12 June, 1798, a stay of well over two centuries and a half. The musical activities of the Knights during this long period were numerous, often innovative and wide-ranging, and consequently the consideration given in this short article cannot be more than an outline.

Unfortunately, no important manuscript of actual music meant for the Knights is known to be extant or has been identified — the exception being the sacred music Nicolò Isouard composed for the Conventual Church of St. John and portions of his Manoel Theatre operas, most of them later on reworked into the operas-comique he wrote for Paris. What we know about the music of the knights is therefore largely based on documentary evidence only.

MUSIC IN MALTA BEFORE THE KNIGHTS

What was the state of music in Malta at the time of the arrival of the Hospitaller Order of St. John? Through the work of researchers like Godfrey Wettinger and Stanley Fiorini who have transcribed and interpreted documents of late medieval and early modern Malta we now know more about it than we did, say, twenty years ago.¹

In 1530, the local population was around 20,000,² and of these about 70 per cent³ lived in the villages. They were the *biduini*, the peasants, whose life was spent in tending to the land and animals, one of the two mainstays of the economy at that time.⁴ The level of education was extremely low, with very few people who could read or

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1. Cf. e.g., G. Wettinger, 'The Militia List of 1419-20', *Melita Historica (MH)*, v, 2 (1969), 80-106; id., 'The Militia Roster of Watch Duties of 1417', *The Armed Forces of Malta Journal*, 32 (1979), 25-42; S. Fiorini, 'Church Music and Musicians in Late Medieval Malta', *MH*, x, 1 (1988), 1-11. See also J. Vella Bondin, *Il-Muzika ta' Malta sa l-Aħħar tas-Seklu Tmintax*, Malta 2000, Ch. 3.

2. J. Quintin d'Autun, *The Earliest Description* (Lyons 1536), trans. and ed. by H. C. R. Vella, Malta 1980, 28.

3. This is a rough estimate based on S. Fiorini, 'Malta in 1530', in *Hospitaller Malta 1530-1799*, ed. V. Mallia-Milanes Malta 1993, 126 (Table III).

4. The other was corsairing. *Ibid.*, 173.

write or speak other languages besides Maltese,⁵ the best educated being the clergy, notaries, doctors and teachers. Except for that enjoyed by the *gintilhomini* and the *homini facultusi*, who lived mainly in Mdina and owned enough property to permit comfortable living,⁶ the standard of living was extremely low, with poverty very widespread.⁷ There was very little intermingling between the social classes.⁸ But there was one factor, which must have united them: religion. For, as Wettinger states, "Religion (in Malta) was undoubtedly completely and strongly Christian by 1530, and had been so for at least 280 years."⁹

Making music is a social activity and no society exists without music. But the state of musical culture at any moment in time mirrors the state and concerns of the society which gives it birth. The more basic the society and its attentions, the more uncomplicated will its musical structures tend to be. This applies very much to Malta before the advent of the Knights.¹⁰

Catholicism was the most powerful influence in the inhabitants' day-to-day existence and it is therefore not surprising that whatever music existed was largely associated with the church and the main events of a generally impoverished but religiously-shaped life. Fiorini has shown¹¹ that the earliest evidence of consistent musical activity in Malta, going back to at least the year 1274, relates to the chanting of the Divine Office in Mdina Cathedral. By 1530, the complex services needed by an ever-increasing and more refined use of *cantus firmus* or plainchant had been replaced by the Cathedral Chapter. These included an organ and organist, a choir-master to teach and direct *cantus firmus*, and scribes to provide liturgical books.

The situation seems to have remained unchanged up to 1573 when it is known that the Cathedral employed the Sienese Giulio Scala to teach not only *cantus firmus* but also *canto figurato*.¹² For the first time, polyphony began to be heard in our Cathedral.

5. *Ibid.*, 180.

6. *Ibid.*, 142. They must have counted only a very few hundreds.

7. G. Wettinger, 'Malta fiż-żmien Nofsani' in *L-Identità Kulturali ta' Malta*, ed. Toni Cortis, Malta 1989, 220.

8. Fiorini, 'Malta in 1530', 145.

9. G. Wettinger, 'Aspects of Maltese Life' in *Maltese Baroque*, ed. G. Mangion, Malta 1989, 60.

10. I think that the exemption which proves this rule, at least on present evidence, is the solitary visit of the famous Provençal troubadour Peire Vidal to Malta in 1204 to sing songs to the Genoese Arrigu Piscatore known as the Count of Malta. Cf. J.M. Brincat, 'Le poesie 'Maltesi' di Peire Vidal (1204-5)', *MH*, vii, 1 (1976), 65-89.

11. Fiorini, 'Church Music'; id., *The 'Mandati' Documents at the Archives of the Mdina Cathedral, Malta, 1473-1539*, Malta 1992, li-lvi. This is an updated version of the earlier publication.

12. G. Azzopardi, 'La cappella musicale della cattedrale di Malta e i suoi rapporti con la Sicilia' in *Musica sacra in Sicilia tra rinascimento e barocco*, Palermo 1988, 48.

Cantus firmus or plainchant is monody, the simplest form of musical expression that exists; *canto figurato* refers to polyphony, the sounding together of several melodic lines – the beginning of harmony.

Available evidence therefore shows that Malta lagged far behind continental Europe in the conduct of its church music. For 1573 was at least two centuries after early polyphony began to be heard in the main churches of Europe and at a time when it was reaching its perfection in the hands of Palestrina, and composers like Andrea Gabrieli were experimenting with double choirs and large forces and multi-instrumental accompaniment. In the hands of Josquin, who died in 1521, the motet, still unknown in Malta, had already grown into a great medium of the most able expression of the finest musical thought.

By 1530, secular music in Europe, though not as advanced as church music, had also developed in many directions and reached high levels of attainment in quite a few of them. Pure instrumental and orchestral music as we know it today was still a largely unexplored area – in fact what existed was principally intabulations, *recercari*, keyboard music, and 'wordless compositions' for up to four instruments.¹³

The standard instruments, which are familiar to us nowadays in the orchestra, have evolved through a long process of experimentation and change. Earlier instruments, some of which are no longer in normal use, were very different and not very refined, their tuning in some cases being very unreliable. At the beginning of the 16th century they still occupied a position in music secondary to the human voice.

Dance music was often provided by small instrumental ensembles and by 1530 various types of dance movements had been introduced – for example, the *basse-danse* and its Italian equivalent the *bassadanza*. The *branze*, the *moresca* and what can be termed folk dances were extremely popular both at court and village level. The writings¹⁴ of medieval authors are full of reference to the musical instruments that provided the accompaniment. Tambourines, drum and bells, pipe and tabor, lutes, viells, organetti, bagpipes, shawns and trumpets – in short, the entire palette of existing instrumental colours, either singly or in a variety of combinations, could be and were used to accompany dancing.

13. For amplification of these terms, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie, London 1980, s.v. See also id. vol. 17 s.v. 'Sources of instrumental ensemble music to 1630' and 'Sources of keyboard music to 1660'

14. *Ibid.*, s.v. 'Dance'.

But the highest peak of secular music was being achieved, in the hands of composers like Philippe Verdelot (?1470 - ?1550) and Costanzo Festa (?1490 - 1545), by the madrigal, the most popular form of vocal secular polyphony which replaced the *frottola* – the secular song of the Italian Renaissance.¹⁵

The only evidence available of the presence of secular music in Malta before 1530 refers to *joculaturi alias joculari et sonaturi*¹⁶ of musical instruments. The *joculaturi* (Fr. *jongleurs*) were entertainers consisting of small groups of all-purpose musicians trained to sing or play (*sonaturi*), to juggle and tumble (*joculari*), very popular in Europe during the 14th and early 15th centuries. The instruments which they played did not come together into standardised groups but were assemblies of whatever instruments were available. They were very popular among the common people and were also welcomed not only by the rich and important but also by administrators, as they were able to adapt their skills to whatever situation they were called to service.¹⁷

Among the local occasions where their services were demanded, probably the most important were weddings. They are mentioned as being present during the Gozitan wedding in early 1466 of Lisa, widow of Antoni de Naso, and Chanchius de Platamone when they had played a viola,¹⁸ a lute, trumpets and timpani and had also danced and juggled.¹⁹ Two contracts of 1467 refer to the partnership between Petru Muscatu and Micheli Galdes to provide music during weddings.²⁰

These musicians were also employed to accompany funerals²¹ and to play during important *festi*.²² *Joculari sive trubaturi* also found employment in the militia as the Militia Lists of 1417 and 1419-20 reveal.²³

The picture that emerges then is the presence of quite a good amount of musical activity both sacred and secular before the arrival of the Knights in Malta. But it was music that still reflected music common in the Europe of approximately two centuries earlier. “Polite arts are the children of affluence,” the musicologist Charles Burney

15. *Ibid.*, s.v. ‘Frottola’, ‘Madrigal’.

16. G. Wettinger, ‘The Young Widow on Gozo who Remarried too Soon’ *MH*, xii, 2 (1997), 149

17. H. Raynor, *Music in England*, London 1980, 33-35.

18. Probably a type of Renaissance fiddle

19. G. Wettinger, ‘The Young Widow’, 139-150 *passim*.

20. G. Wettinger and M. Fsadni, *L-Ghanja ta’ Pietru Caxaru*, Malta 1983, 36.

21. *Canti et suoni di instrumenti* during funerals were banned by Grandmaster Claudio de la Sengle by a *bando* of April 13, 1555. Cf. National Library of Malta. *Libr. Ms.* 149, 144.

22. Fiorini, ‘Malta in 1530’, 188.

23. G. Wettinger, ‘The Militia Roster’ and ‘The Military List’.

wrote in 1776,²⁴ “and depend upon superfluity for support.” Clearly the poverty widespread in Malta before 1530 was not supportive of expensive musical activities.

It required the affluence of the Hospitaller Order of St. John to introduce radical changes to bring music in Malta to the standard of contemporary practice in Europe.

THE SACRED MUSIC OF THE KNIGHTS

I have been emphasising 1530, the year when the Hospitallers arrived in Malta, as a convenient demarcation point. However, for me, the operative date for all subsequent initiatives by the Order is 1565, the Year of the Great Siege against an enemy held invincible by all contemporary Christian potentates, the year of victory over Islam after so many humiliating defeats and retreats, the year in which the Order finally justified its gradual transformation into a military monastic order from its origins “as a charitable monastic institution devoted to the care of Christian pilgrims in the East”.²⁵

To Fernand Braudel, the Knights’ victory was one of the “great events” of the 16th century.²⁶ For Christian Malta’s future, it is likely to have been a determining event. It is useless to speculate what might have happened if the Order had been defeated, but a very likely outcome would have been its summary expulsion from Malta, its latest convent – an outcome which the Order had experienced so many times before.

In any case, as Victor Mallia-Milanes rightly affirms, the resounding victory enabled the Order to regain “its strength, its purpose, its sense of direction”.²⁷ It was the spectacular start of the Order’s realisation of its zenith of power.

New members in its four branches²⁸, often coming from the richest and most powerful families in Europe,²⁹ enhanced the Order’s *Comun Tesoro* (the Treasury) with their *passaggio*³⁰ and, when they died, their *spoglio*.³¹ Its rebuilt war fleet brought

24. Quoted in Raynor, *Music in England*, 43.

25. V. Mallia-Milanes, ‘Introduction to Hospitaller Malta’, in *Hospitaller Malta 1530-1798*, ed. V. Mallia-Milanes, Malta 1993, 1

26. F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. S. Reynolds London, 1972-73, 1017.

27. Mallia-Milanes, ‘Introduction’, 11.

28. Cf. C. Testa, *The Life and Times of Grand Master Pinto*, Malta 1989, 9-19.

29. Cf. e.g. Archives of the Order of St. John, National Library of Malta (AOM) 368 *Processi prova nobiltà Cavalieri Francesi*.

30. The substantial payment an approved person had to make before being admitted into any one of the four branches of the Order.

31. That substantial part of his property a member was required to leave to the Order on his death.

rich plunder, including slaves, from sacked Muslim galleys and xebeks. The continuous flow of revenue was invested lavishly on the island, focusing on the building of the Order's new Convent – *Humilissima Civitas Vallettae*.

Perhaps, the crowning glory of the Order's new Convent was its Conventual Church, at first intended to be built near the Order's hospital³² but changed to its present site on considerations that its bells would disturb the sick and that its proposed placement was a peripheral corner of the new city.³³ Given the monastic character of the Order making the Conventual Church the fulcrum around which the Convent revolved, one of the first considerations the Order gave was to the question of liturgical music.

During its deliberations on De Ecclesia, the Chapter General held in 1574³⁴ decreed: *Si è ordinato che si trattenga una buona musica figurata per le feste principali governata da un valente maestro di cappella*.³⁵

Unfortunately, documentation on the early history of the Order's *cappella*³⁶ is extremely scant. It is however known that instrumentalists, other than the organ, came increasingly to be included in the 15th- and 16th-century chapels, particularly in Italy³⁷ and one cannot imagine the Order, in its newly found self-confidence and with its close cultural ties to Italy, establishing a *cappella di musica* in its new magnificent temple consisting of voices and organ only. Instruments, probably string only at first, must have been included.

This conclusion is also suggested by Decree 13 promulgated by the 14th Chapter General held in February 1604 under Grandmaster Wignacourt. It states that the *cappella cantus figurati* was to be retained and the Grandmaster was to have every prerogative to change, punish and fix salaries of the *magistrum cappellae* and of the *cantoris et musicos*.³⁸ This decree seems to be distinguishing between *cappella*

32. Now the Mediterranean Conference Centre.

33. B. dal Pozzo, *Historia della Sacra Religione Militare di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano detta di Malta*, Venezia 1703-15, Parte Prima, Libro Secondo, 72.

34. Under Grandmaster de la Cassiere. It was the ninth convened in Malta but the first held in Valletta. On Chapters General, Cf. Testa, *The Life and Times*, 36 n8

35. AOM 290, f. 28v

36. For a fuller consideration, see J. Vella Bondin, 'The *Cappella di Musica* of the Order of St. John', *The Sunday Times* (Malta), 24 January 1993, 28-28; 31 January 1993, 30-31; 7 February 1993, 20-21. Cf. also Vella Bondin (2000), Ch. 4

37. *The New Grove*, s.v. 'Chapel'.

38. AOM 1654, f. 40r

members who sing (*cantoris*) and those who play the musical instruments (*musicos*).³⁹ It was also ordered that the musicians were to enter the chancel without arms and to be properly dressed.⁴⁰

The continuing need of instrumentalists by the Order for its *cappella di musica* was an opportunity for the noble Tomaso Ponso, born in Messina in 1613, to be accepted as a donat or *confrate*, the fourth branch of the Order, without having to pay the *passaggio*. He had shown his skill as a *sonatore di violino parecchi volti* by playing the instrument with the *cappella* and was allowed, on 7 June 1631, to pay his *passaggio* of scudi 134 by serving the *cappella nel sonar il violino per sei anni senza alcun stipendio come ha offerto altrimenti di pagar il passaggio intieramente e perder qualche haveesse servito*.⁴¹

The amount the Grandmaster could spend monthly on salaries to the *Cantores & Musicos...compræhensis stipendijs Magistri Cappellæ & Organistæ* was not to exceed scudi 60 monthly⁴² — or scudi 720 annually. This amount is much less than the maximum amount Bishop Cagliares was given permission by Rome to spend on the Cathedral's *cappella* — scudi 1000.⁴³ The two amounts, however, may not be comparable for the Cathedral's scudi 1000 were meant to cover music, choral singing and the divine office⁴⁴ while the Grandmaster's scudi 720 were only for *cappella* salaries.

The Order had another body under a maestro del canto to teach canto fermo a tutti i diaconi, a post created by the Chapter General held in Rhodes in 1459.⁴⁵ This body, made up of *diaconi*⁴⁶ and *coristi*,⁴⁷ had to provide the *canto fermo* whenever it was

39. Available evidence indicates that the *cappella* of the Mdina Cathedral introduced instruments other than the organ after the 1619 pastoral visit of Bishop Baldassere Cagliares. Though this conclusion is mine, for the evidence see G. Azzopardi, 'Il-Katidral ta' l-Imdina: Kappella Muġikali u Arkivju Mużikali' in *Oqsma tal-Kultura Maltija*, T. Cortis, Malta 1991, 101-102.

40. AOM 1654, f. 40r.

41. AOM 5255, ff. 70-79. See also AOM 737 f. 53v and Notarial Archives, Valletta (NAV), Notary Joannes Tholossenti, R454/36 ff. 110v-111r where Ponso is named *musico sonando violinum*.

42. AOM 1659, 37

43. Azzopardi, 'Il-Katidral ta' l-Imdina', 101.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Fra O. Garcin, *Culto Divino con Relazione della maggior chiesa Conventuale di San Giovanni Battista*, Library Manuscript Collection, National Library of Malta (NLM Lib.) 271, 216.

46. These consisted of the *Chierici*: young boys between the ages of 10 and 15 destined to become members of the ecclesiastical branch of the Order (*Ibid.*, 132-133) and *Diaconi di mezza tavola*, boys with good voices who were admitted to compensate for an insufficient number of chierici and were paid an annual salary (*Ibid.*, 220-221)

47. Normally priests who probably provided the *organum* (harmony) to the *diaconi*'s plainchant.

needed.⁴⁸ *Canto fermo* was in use daily, for sung masses and the canonical hours and for any plainchant versification required during celebrations of solemn feasts and rites when the *cappella di musica* was also involved. It seems that, at times, there were complaints about the quality of plainchant singing. As a consequence, on 13 July 1662, the Grandmaster-in-Council decreed that, in order to practice singing properly, the *chierici* could not leave the convent to go abroad on whatever excuse before the age of 15 and in all cases had to serve the Conventual Church for at least 3 full years if their novitiate was to count towards their seniority.⁴⁹

The excellence of the *cappella di musica* was obtained and assured by hiring the best possible available talent, the majority of musicians enrolled trained in Naples in one of the four conservatories.⁵⁰ However, 17th century documentary evidence available so far has turned up very few names. We know that organist Fra Prospero Coppini had his monthly stipend raised by 5 scudi to 15 scudi on 10 June 1619.⁵¹ Ponso's agreement to serve the *cappella* as violinist for 6 years has already been mentioned. On 8 June 1641, organist Gio. Batta Santamaura received a payment of 12 scudi as part of an inheritance from Donna Isabella Ramundo.⁵² Grandmaster Nicholas Cotoner informed Cardinal Hassia on 8 June 1668 that he could not let him have the services of musician Fra Francesco Colangeli since the Order's *cappella* could not do without him.⁵³ On 16 December 1682, Grandmaster Carafa conceded castrate soprano Francesco Bazzati's petition for a rent-free room in the Camerata.⁵⁴ Data available for the 18th century is more abundant⁵⁵ and includes the names of the *maestri di cappella*. Fra Giuseppe Vivier was still active in 1714.⁵⁶ Following the death of her husband, *maestro di cappella* Carlo Saviola, Isabella was granted a monthly pension of 5 scudi.⁵⁷ Fra Giuseppe Sammartino, a student of Naples' *Consevatorio della Pietà dei Turchini*, commenced his 41-year long incumbency on

48. In 1757, the *maestro di canto fermo*, who was paid 36 scudi annually was Fra Salvatore Uzzino. The *coristi*, each paid 48 scudi annually, were Don Giuseppe Bartolo and Don Giovanni Antonio Sammut. The *diaconi di mezza tavola* were each paid 30 scudi annually. Information obtained from AOM 998, ff.1, 2, 6, 7, 14-16.

49. AOM 121, f. 269. Seniority in the Order was a very important consideration. It was taken into account in appointments to pertinent lucrative posts which the Order administered.

50. About these see *The New Grove*, s.v. 'Naples'.

51. AOM 664, f.3r

52. AOM 737, f. 106v

53. AOM 1443, f. 133r

54. AOM, f. 230v

55. For more information about the *cappella's* musicians, see Vella Bondin, 'The *Cappella di Musica*' (The Sunday Times).

56. AOM 648, f. 112v

57. AOM 649, f. 14r

4 November 1724⁵⁸ while his nephew, Melchior Sammartin, also contracted in Naples, took over from him on 1 December 1765.⁵⁹

The *maestro di cappella* who should have succeeded Melchior Sammartin was to have been Nicolò Isouard.⁶⁰ Although the number of Maltese musicians who served the *cappella* was numerous,⁶¹ especially during the second half of the 18th century, Isouard on available evidence would have been the first Maltese to fill that exalted position. But the ever-developing events of history turned into nothing Isouard's aspirations for, when the French took over Malta in June 1798, Melchior Sammartin was still the Order's *maestro di cappella*.

One of the first decisions the French invaders took was to disband the *cappella*.⁶² No more was the colossal barrel-vaulted nave of St. John's, filled with the Order's richly gowned members, and the shadowy corners of its side chapels to reverberate with the radiant sounds of its finely executed music, tintured tantalisingly with the castrati's ethereal vocalisations. Sadly, an important phase of the music of the Knights had come to an abrupt end.

THE SECULAR MUSIC OF THE KNIGHTS.⁶³

The assiduous cultivation of secular music by the Knights of St. John who, through their continuing family, social and economic relations with the European mainland were well aware of contemporary trends, also changed Malta in this field from a musical backwater to a nation on equal terms with it. As in the case of liturgical music for their Conventual Church, this remarkable feat was accomplished by enlisting the best possible available Italian talent — the only conceivable solution since locally appropriate musical resources were not available.⁶⁴

Perhaps the most exciting musical development in early 17th century Italy was the introduction of opera. The performance of Jacope Peri's *dramma per musica* 'Dafne' in Florence during 1597 marks its generally accepted birth. Claudio Monteverdi, the

58. AOM 648, f. 342r

59. AOM 999, f. 23v

60. J. Vella Bondin, 'Nicolò Isouard: His Years in Malta', in *Nicolò Isouard de Malte*, ed. J. Azzopardi, Malta 1991, 23

61. For information about two of them, see J. Vella Bondin, 'Żewġ Kantanti Maltin tas-Seklu Tmintax' in *Pronostku Malti 1995*, 181-201.

62. Vella Bondin, 'Nicolò Isouard', 25

63. See Vella Bondin (2000), Chs. 7 and 9.

64. This was the reason why the Mdina Cathedral Chapter started sending promising local musicians to be trained in Naples when it started finding difficulty in obtaining Italian *maestri di cappella*. Cf. G. Azzopardi, 'Il-Katidral ta' l-Imdina', 105-106.

first composer of genius to write music for opera, took it over to Mantua where he presented his first opera, *'L'Orfeo', favola per musica*, in February 1607.⁶⁵

It is a clear sign of the Knights' intuition of what was valid in ongoing musical development that only 24 years later, earlier than in many prominent Italian cities and other European countries,⁶⁶ opera came to Malta. Appropriately, it was the Knights of the Italian Langue who took the initiative and brought over from Italy singers, musicians and other artists to perform a *dramma per musica* in their Auberge.⁶⁷ What it was, who wrote the libretto and composed the music are, regrettably, not known.⁶⁸ What is documented is that this historic happening was an entertainment for the Knights and some Maltese friends during the Carnival⁶⁹ of 1631.

The novel spectacle was so enthusiastically received that practically every year thereafter, at Carnival time, a *dramma per musica* was offered in the Auberge d'Italie.⁷⁰ It is known that, in 1650, the Italian Knights authorized the spending of 30 scudi, then considered a considerable sum, to have *un'opera tragica* performed.⁷¹ It was not, however, before 1664 that we come across the first title — *Annibale in Capua*, libretto by Nicolò Beregon (1627-1713), music by Vincenzo Tozzi (?1612-?1675), composed specifically for Malta.⁷² Tozzi was well-known in Malta because, between 1649 and at least 1664, he was working in Messina and a number of his compositions were performed in the Mdina Cathedral, with some of the manuscripts still conserved in the Cathedral Museum Archives.

65. However, *'L'Orfeo'* may not have been the first Monteverdi opera. On this point, see *The New Grove*, s.v. 'Monteverdi' – Early Dramatic Works.

66. In Venice, the first opera performed was *L'Adromeda* in 1637; in Palermo, it was *Giasone* in 1655; in Naples, it was introduced in about 1650 – probably Cavalli's *Didone* in October 1650. In France, the first opera was performed in Paris in 1646 – Luigi Rossi's *Orfeo*.

67. In Merchants Street, until recently the General Post Office.

68. A. G. Miceli, 'History of Opera in Malta', *Times of Malta*, 7 January 1972, 16; G. D. D., 'Pagine di vita maltese (il secondo centenario del Teatro Manoel)', *Malta, Organo del Partito Nazionale*, 18 Gennaio 1932, 1.

69. According to Iacomo Bosio (*Dell'Istoria della Sacra Religione et Ill.ma Militia di S. Gio. Gierosolmitano*), Carnival was first celebrated by the Knights in Birgu in 1535 but research by Fiorini show that its roots go back much earlier. Ref. in J. Cassar Pullicino, *Studies in Maltese Folklore*, Malta 1992, 48 and especially footnote 25.

70. Miceli, 'History of Opera', 16.

71. G. D. D., 'Pagine di vita maltese', 1

72. This is based on information given in *The New Grove*, s.v. Tozzi. Vincenzo. U. Rolandi, *Musica e Musicisti in Malta*, Livorno 1932, 15, footnote, indicates that the opera performed in Malta is the one by Ziani. However, between 1662 and 1669, Ziani was working in Vienna and it was only after 1673 that he was in Naples. Because of this, the information in *The New Grove* seems to be more credible. For information about the librettist, see also *The New Grove*, s.v.

The Order's penchant for fresh avenues of entertainment for its members and friends led to the introduction of other forms of secular music. Unfortunately, available records seldom refer to occasions when the Order's collective patronage was extended to pure instrumental music. The only important one on record seems to be the *accademia* held in the Teatro Manoel on 19 November, 1790, and even on this occasion, instrumental music accounted only for part of the programme. The vocal items were operatic arias for soprano (from an opera by Antonio Tozzi) and basso *buffo* (from one by Giovanni Paisiello), a recitative and rondo for tenor (from an opera by Pasquale Anfossi), a rondo for soprano (from one by Giuseppe Sarti), a trio (from Pasquale Anfossi's *Zenobia in Palmira* – premiered in Venice on 26 Dec 1789) and, as the closing item, a 'quartetto serio' from an opera by Pietro Alessandro Gugliemi. The orchestral and instrumental items were a Haydn 'gran sinfonia' and another two 'sinfonias', two violin concertos by Ferdinando Fränzl (Fraenzl), and a 'sinfonia concertante' for two violins. The concert was organized by Fränzl, the most important German violinist of Spohr's generation and a talented composer. The violinist who played with him in the 'sinfonia concertante' for two violins was the Maltese Emanuele Nani who was also a virtuoso violinist and, like Fränzl, had also undertaken many concert tours.⁷³

Available evidence suggests that pure orchestral music was played more in church than in the theatre! For it was the normal custom during that period to perform orchestral music before or during important liturgical celebrations. The presence of a grandmaster during a high mass in the Cathedral often resulted in orchestral music being played in his honour in order to reinforce the solemnity of the occasion.⁷⁴ Mention could also be made here of a 'sinfonia da chiesa' executed during the *Sollenità della Crociata* celebrated by the Order in February 1743 while the solemn procession carrying the prized relic of the Holy Cross was entering the Grandmaster's Palace chapel. *Subito nella sopradetta Cappella comincio' la sinfonia di tutti I migliori virtuosi della Citta' con Cimbalo, quantita di violini, oboe, Trombe di Caccia, contrabassi, violoncelli, Fagotto, quell Sinfonia duro' sinche arrivo' il molto Reverendo Priore della Chiesa.*⁷⁵

However it was vocal music that had the primary interest, an interest that was also manifested in the presentation of what today we designate a *cantata*, the most important and omnipresent form of vocal music of the Baroque period outside opera.

73. A photo of the bill advertising Fraenzl's *accademia* is to be found in P. Xuereb, *The Manoel Theatre, a short history*, Malta 1994, coloured photo insert. No details about the orchestra are given. Presumably it was the one working in the Manoel at that time. About Fränzl, Ferdinando, see *The New Grove*, s.v.

74. F. Bruni, 'Musica, cerimoniale e teatralità alla cattedrale di Malta nel XVII e XVIII secolo', *Melita Historica*, Vol. XII n.3, 1998, 287

75. AOM 269, f. 274r.

The presentation of a specially-written secular⁷⁶ cantata was the focal point of May Day (*Calendimaggio*), an important folk festival rigorously observed by the Order annually. The cantata was performed on the eve of May Day, 30 April, towards sunset, in Palace Square, probably on a purposely-set platform⁷⁷. It is not known when this consuetude began but Laurenza⁷⁸ has identified 44 of them, performed between 1720-1777. However, evidence in the form of a manuscript exists of a much earlier cantata executed in 1713 during Grandmaster Perellos's reign.⁷⁹ The work is set for 3 voices and very interesting is the opening instruction: *Sinfonia di Trombe breve ma strepitosa*. The names of the author and the composer are not stated but this is also true for a number of cantatas identified by Laurenza.

However, the known composers indicate that the Order contacted some of the most famous names to set to music the specially-written texts. They include Giovanni Paolo di Dominici (cantata for 1726), Giovanni Antonio Giay (1727, 1728), Matteo Capranica (1748) and Gianbattista Lampugnani (1753).⁸⁰ Also commissioned were two Maltese composers, Fra Filippo Pizzuto and Don Michel' Angelo Vella.⁸¹ They were the only two Maltese to provide cantata music for the Knights.

The next obvious step in the Order's growing involvement in secular music was to build a proper theatre. The Teatru Manoel is one of the outstanding monuments of its regime and not only of Malta but now also of Europe.⁸² Opened on 19 January 1732 with Scipione Maffei's tragedy *Merope*, it was intended to be a general purpose theatre⁸³ but opera and musical offerings soon became its main fare until the Royal

Opera House was opened in 1988.⁸⁴ It rapidly gained a European reputation and countless petitions were presented to the Grandmaster by parties wanting to produce the latest operas and other works,⁸⁵ with a number of important operas also being premiered there,⁸⁶ a clear sign of the importance musicians gave to provide music for the Knights.

Earlier on, I referred to instrumental music and suggested that for general entertainment, the Order apparently did not give it much patronage. But there was one area in which the retention of musicians to provide instrumental music was accorded great importance. Just like the European households of princes, bishops, nobles and the highly placed, the Grandmaster and a number of senior Knights maintained a musical organization as part of their dignity and a contribution to their pleasure. This patronage resulted in a number of first class musicians working for a while in Malta. One was Tommaso Prota who was in Malta in the first half of the 1750s, employed as *virtuoso del Signor Cav. Fra D. GIUSEPPE CARAFFA dei Principi di Colubrano*.⁸⁷ But it was the Grandmasters that consistently maintained their chamber musicians. Perhaps the most important of these from the point of view of the musical history of Malta was the Venetian Angelo Nani who, in 1766 when the Grandmaster was Pinto, at the age of 15, became *virtuoso di violino del Cammarier Magisteriale*.⁸⁸

Angelo Nani spent the rest of his life in Malta, married locally and this was the beginning of the Nani family of musicians, which dominated Maltese music for over two centuries. Together with the Teatru Manoel and so many other musical treasures, the Nani family is another Maltese legacy of the music of the Knights.

76. Sacred cantatas were also popular and a number of their texts are to be found in the National Library (e.g. NLM Lib. 1, 316-321; NLM Lib Misc. 247 Nos. 9 and 18). The printing of libretti before performances of both operas and cantatas was very prevalent during the times of the Knights and thanks to this practice we know more about music in Malta than we would otherwise have known. Copies were deposited in the National Library of Malta.

77. The building of platforms for the placement of musicians was extensively utilized. Thus for the funeral mass of Grandmaster de Vilhena celebrated on 14 January 1737 at St. Paul's in Valletta, a wooden platform was erected in a side chapel. It was big enough to take 40 musicians (and their accoutrements). NLM Lib 9, 164.

78. V. Laurenza, 'Calendimaggio seicentesco a Malta', in *Archivum Militense*, ii, 18-19, 1913-1914, 187-203.

79. NLM Lib 19, ff. 272-278

80. Information in *The New Grove*, s.v.

81. J. Vella Bondin, 'Maltese Composers of *Calendimaggio* Cantatas', *The Sunday Times* (Malta), 15 May, 1994, 28-29; 22 May, 1994, 28-29.

82. The Teatru Manoel is the oldest European theatre still functioning within its original building. It has also been called one of the most beautiful Baroque theatres in Europe.

83. Xuereb, *The Manoel Theatre* is a good history. See also *The Theatre of Malta*, ed. C. Xuereb, Malta 1997, especially the first 4 articles.

84. A. Miceli and C. Xuereb, 'Opera in Malta during the Eighteenth Century' in *The Theatre of Malta*, 29-36. For operas by Maltese composers produced at the Manoel, see J. Vella Bondin, 'Maltese composers and opera composition' also in *The Theatre in Malta*, 63-80.

85. The article by G. Bonello, 'Grins and groans at the Manoel Theatre' in *The Theatre in Malta* and Xuereb, *The Manoel Theatre* refer to a good number of these. Three petitions so far seem to have escaped the attention of scholars: Impresario Giulio de Santis's successful request to be allowed to have the Theatre again *per il venturo anno del 1756 e per tutto in carnevale dell'anno 1757* after already having administered it for three years (AOM 1189, f. 280); Antinio di Salvo's similar and also successful request to have it to *fare Comedie con intermezzi in Musica* during 1760 (AOM 1190, f. 125) and a request by *Una Compagnia di Gioventu' Academica* to perform at the Manoel *alcune Comedie Nuovissime d' Illustri e recenti Autori arricchendole con intermezzi in Musica* when the Theatre would not be in use *cioe per doppo Pasqua di Resurrezzione*. On 27 Feb. 1772, this plea was also acceded to (AOM Treasury Series A Vol 32, not paginated).

86. These included Tommaso Prota's *L'abate* (1752) and Gioseffo Catrufo's *Il Corriere* (1792) and *Cajacciello disertore* (1792). Luigi Mayr's *Elisa* was also premiered in the Manoel (1801).

87. Title page of libretto for the cantata *Dialogo da Cantarsi per la solenne festività del S. Angelo Custode*, text by Giannantonio Ciantar, music by Tommaso Prota (NLM Misc. 247 No. 9).

88. AOM 654,24