

Serracino-Inglott insists theatre without a roof is useless

Christian Peregín

One of the Nationalist Party's longest standing strategists has criticised the way the Prime Minister has tackled the issue of Renzo Piano's controversial roofless theatre. "The Prime Minister's failure to handle this small point is already leading to an anti-Piano reaction to the whole project," Fr Peter Serracino Inglott said yesterday.

The priest philosopher was one of the 128 prominent signatories of a petition against the concept of an open-air theatre presented to the government last week.

Days later it was announced that there would be a partial roof added to the designs to protect performers and equipment from the elements.

But Fr Serracino Inglott was unimpressed and said Lawrence Gonzi should tell the world-famous architect to add a whole roof to the proposed theatre, even if this would cost more money or cause a slight delay to the timeline.

He added that the arguments being used to "rationalise" the project were "rubbish" and risked ruining the reputation of Mr Piano.

"To say that Malta has no roofless venues and that this is a new concept is simply untrue and is causing many to reject the idea of having a foreign architect instead of one who understands the real needs of the Maltese."

A theatre without a roof was "useless", he said, adding that the recently-mentioned partial roof was there in the original plans and was, therefore, not new as described. Even an extended roof, that would fail to provide total shelter, would not be functional.

"My wish is to see a whole retractable roof," he said.

He also queried the "ambiguous" relationship between architect and client that has developed since Mr Piano decided against Dr Gonzi's original intention to build a Parliament on the old Opera House site.

"This should be the client's decision," he said, referring to the roof issue.

Meanwhile, *Flimkien għal Ambjent Aħjar* spokesman Astrid Vella said that, while the partial roof protected the equipment and performers, it did nothing to solve one of the people's main concerns, the sound of fireworks.

Her sentiments were shared by poet Mario Azzopardi who said this had become a really "shoddy affair" and that the partial roof was "the latest instalment in an opera *buffa* of national dimensions".

"I am surprised that a world-class architect is deciding so whimsically on a project that is getting even more absurd. Will it be proposed next that there should be umbrella-and-non-umbrella patrons at Piano's Theatre?"

He said that, perhaps, Malta was getting what it deserved because the Maltese tended to have a particular appetite for fetch-and-carry solutions.

Comments

Henry Galea Souchet (7 hours, 1 minute ago)

@ j.ebejer

Fair enough, out of all the existing Cities, you have chosen to quote the City of Bath. I have no intention to enter into any polemic with you or any one else for that matter, but I would certainly refrain from confusing an additional adjunct such as a reflecting medium with a project involving a significant degree of restructuring in a prominent and cardinal area (the entry) to a City adopting a type of architecture which clashes horribly with the general theme and style of the rest of the edifices!

Who cares what "The English" decided to do ! – the best of British luck to them all ! Just because they did whatever they chose to do, should anyone of us assume that there should be a commitment at this end to follow suit ?

BTW you left so much unanswered.

j ebejer (9 hours, 9 minutes ago)

Henry Galea Souchet says "Which country has ever allowed any architect (local or foreign) to play about with the character of its Capital City?"

This is an extract of a UNESCO World Heritage Committee report on the City of Bath (UK) which is a World Heritage Site. The comment refers to the "Thermae Bath Spa" (completed in 2006).

"The architectural partipris is definitely contemporary, with a glass façade which elegantly reflects the adjacent Georgian buildings without any adverse impact on the Outstanding Universal Value and integrity of Bath."

@Henry Galea Souchet The English found no difficulty letting the architect "play around" with the character of Bath, which has immense historical value, even if not a capital city.

As for London, one could mention the London Eye which is on the River Thames opposite the Houses of Parliament.

Raymond Sammut (9 hours, 43 minutes ago)

@ Joseph V. Grech

Sorry for the misspelling. I actually meant "L'Imnarja". I also meant SJC, rather than SCJ, which I wrongly typed in twice in my latest comment.

Just as a matter of interest, the former apparently is a derivative of the Italian word "Luminaria" (public illumination).

"You must really be disappointing readers with your insistence..."(Grech)

Mr Grech, I am not "insisting" on anything, as you are alleging. I am expressing my views, and providing reasons for my views. Nor do I have any intention to please or

disappoint readers as you are implying. Readers are, of course, free to agree or disagree with views expressed on this comments board.

Raymond Sammut (9 hours, 58 minutes ago)

@ j ellul --"...I do not think your criticism of Fr. Peter is fair."

My first comment expressed in this thread in reference to Serracino-Inglott's stance - as reported in this article by The Times-- was what you have just said it was: "criticism" --nothing more, nothing less. I also accept and fully respect your view that my criticism was not fair. It is your view, to which you are fully entitled, and which is not necessarily in accordance with the facts.

g.portelli (10 hours, 5 minutes ago)

@ Joe Micallef

An affront to creativity and innovation? The real affront comes from creatively challenged politicians who cannot see the wood from trees!

@ Dominic Fenech

New singer perhaps but the sudden appetite for demythologising Father Peter is definitely something new.

Henry Galea Souchet (10 hours, 58 minutes ago)

Why all this controversy and opposition to restoring the World Heritage Site of Valletta to its pre-war splendour ? Which country has ever allowed any architect (local or foreign) to play about with the character of its Capital City. Where is our National Pride ? Do we really have any, after all ?

About time we roll up our sleeves and put our thinking caps on – start guarding ourselves from stepping over some banana skin round the corner ! How long is it going to take us to learn ? We do have our share of competent personnel – what's wrong in deciding to utilize their know-how ? What kind of faith does this administration have in its 'workers' ? Is it all a big load of bla bla bla ?

j ellul (11 hours, 17 minutes ago)

@ Frans Sammut

The wisdom of Fr. Peter Serracino Inglott is not in doubt although it does not mean one has to agree with his views on the subject. I certainly disagree with him when he says that the open air theatre will be useless.

@ Ray Sammut As much as I disagree with the views he expressed, I do not think your criticism of Fr. Peter is fair.

Joseph V. Grech (12 hours, 30 minutes ago)

@Mr. Raymond Sammut

Sorry but your latest Comment addressed to myself certainly does not provide feedback to my earlier Comments. Anything but!

You elected NOT to refer to the points I had sent in earlier, choosing instead to provide historical information that in no way impinges on the subject readers are discussing.

You must really be disappointing readers with your insistence on the attractiveness of the Open Air Theatre Concept per se which you state is "so suited to Malta's long most pleasant summer nights." :)

You deviate widely even choosing to refer to "church/band-club ...typical festa week-end" activities and (unbelievably) even into "Imnaghajra (your spelling) traditionally attracting thousands of people every year spending a whole night at Buskett! " The cherry on the cakes comes when you declare "The open-air is in Malta's blood --breathing fresh not conditioned air."

Sorry but I really believe your contributions are really dragging this important subject down into the mire of nonsense!

I am still awaiting plausible Comments from other commentators including THE MAIN STAKEHOLDERS to the suggestion presented earlier - that Ordnance Street, and possibly just a small part of Freedom Square be incorporated into the existing Bombed Site footprint.

Joe Micallef (12 hours, 35 minutes ago)

I find the objections to Piano's design raised by Profs. Serracino Inglott as reactionary, superficial and a straight forward affront to much needed creativity and innovation! The latter is surely the most worrying.

Raymond Sammut (22 hours, 39 minutes ago)

@ Joseph V. Grech

Malta, as an independent state, should have a free standing Parliament House. This objective should have been priority one in the sixties under the administration of Dr Borg-Olivier. Unfortunately, Borg-Olivier built shops instead, massacred city-gate, and left SJC Hastings end undeveloped. He also wasted resources rebuilding the Law Courts in the wrong place. These were very serious mistakes. Then came the 70's, and under the Mintoff administration the massacre continued. More shops and even flats were built, and Misraħ-il Felsien degenerated into a car-park. This all amounted to mismanagement and gross under-development. Malta, as a tourist revenue-earner, suffered heavy financial losses as a result. I agree with Parliament House next to SJC CentralBank end with the proviso that flats/shops are pulled down and build Law Courts next to SCJ Hastings end for symmetrical balancing of Valletta's entrance.

The Open-Air theatre concept next to SCJ is suited to Malta's long most pleasant summer nights. How many people, for example, you find inside the church/band-club over a typical festa week-end? Why Imnaghajra traditionally attracted thousands of people every year spending a whole night at Buskett? The open-air is in Malta's blood --breathing fresh not conditioned air.

Frans Sammut (1 day ago)

As usual one finds oneself unable to disagree with the wisdom of the Rev Professor Peter Serracino Inglott who will not be intimidated by the antics of Minister Austin Gatt and his ilk. PSI was, is and will continue to be one of Malta's best assets. I am inclined to believe he will score another victory over Minister Gatt et al.

j ellul (1 day, 2 hours ago)

Back to the future: A timesonline news item in December 2011;

“After a protracted debate where all the 400,000 experts-on-everything-under-the-sun expressed an opinion, it was decided to survey people’s opinions on the open air theatre. 20% want it as designed by Piano, another 20% want a retracting roof, another 20 % want a permanent roof, another 20% refuse to give a reply because

they want the Barry opera built whereas another 20% will only accept a national theatre. So what do we do now? Government decides to build the open air theatre as proposed by Piano anyway. At least now we know what we have supposed all along – that there are countless different opinions and views. It is now established that whatever government decides, at least 80% will think it is the wrong decision. ”

I hope works on site get started as soon as possible. There is no time to lose.

Peter Serracino Inglott (1 day, 2 hours ago)

As a septuagenarian nearing the golden jubilee of his priesthood, I am grateful to Mr. Raymond Sammut for electing me as target of his vituperation. The personal insults delivered with the exact accents of a verbal mercenary practically constrain me to overcome my ineptness at blogging, pardonable perhaps at my age. I must contest the suggestion that I described myself as a "PN strategist" or "priest-philosopher" as special entitlement to an opinion about the relative merits of roofed and roofless theatres. I may, however, remind Mr. Sammut that I had been appointed by a PN Government as Chairman of the jury that was to judge the architectural competition for rebuilding the Opera House site. On the present occasion, I did not even volunteer my opinions, but only responded to questions that were pressed upon me by a friendly newspaper, while I rejected several invitations to give my views on the subject on various media. I confess, however, that I am unable to resist re-acting when spin-doctors do their best to antagonise any fair-minded art-lover towards the admirable architect and personal friend of mine, Renzo Piano, with ludicrous eyewash.

Peter Bonnici (1 day, 3 hours ago)

we will cringe at the sight of this theatre in a few years time, just as we do at the sight of City Gate today, barely 40 years after we built it.

Myriam Warrinton (1 day, 3 hours ago)

I am quite sure that after listening to the people, the prime minister will have the good sense and humility to admit that this whole idea is just wrong. He would be greatly admired for it.. There are so many valid reasons for Piano's (ugly -my opinion) plan not to materialise. Besides, with Malta being in such a bad financial situation at the moment, could we really afford this project? Especially when there are historical buildings which need restoring, like St. Elmo. And why shouldn't parliament be housed at the bottom of Valletta? I think that makes more sense. Either MCC which is hopeless for acoustics as a theatre, and being such a beautiful, prestigious and historical building, it would be perfect to house parliament. Or else St Elmo. Regarding the theatre, it might actually be silly to build a replica of something old, as it will be just that - a reproduction with no value. But surely Maltese (able architects) could come up with something more befitting our great city, other than Piano's glasshouse - possibly bigger than the old one, with great acoustics. Citygate should be changed into something of stone, but nothing modern.

Astrid Vella (1 day, 4 hours ago)

@ C Bonello: re what you say "It will not serve the purpose of a national theatre for holding grand opera because of its limited footprint. If we encroach on Ordinance Street and Freedom Square the result will be a new distinct edifice, probably obliterating in the process the historic ruins."

I stand to be corrected, but as I recall the Trevisan plans respected the exterior ruins of the Opera House and could still seat over 1,000, so a national theatre which respects this site is not impossible.

As for an extension onto Ordinance Street, this would could serve as the foyer area, freeing up more of the inside space to the stage and stalls. Piano has cleverly located changing rooms etc across the road under the present police station, so the potential of site is great. Of course it would be a "new distinct edifice" but isn't that what the modernists are clamouring for?

As for the Conference Centre, it is precisely large productions that its shallow stage cannot cope with. Any extension backstage would mean building into the bastion which is what lies behind the stage and would not solve the acoustics problem.

T Camilleri (1 day, 4 hours ago)

Ian Fenech Too small for Parliament? Then how many BIGHEADS do we have in Parliament?

J Martinelli Then can you tell us how operas were held before the theatre was Luftwaffed?

Raymond Sammut (1 day, 5 hours ago)

@ wally vella-zarb

We could "almost" say the same thing for Mdina (where, incidentally, I was raised -- from 4 to 19--). If we were to look at detailed city plans, we are likely to find that they are not strictly rectilinear. I would suspect, however, that the knights would have originally gotten the idea from Mdina when they were designing Senglea and later Valletta, after having resided in Mdina before they moved to the harbour forts. Also, when we say "city" we are referring to major cities, like Melbourne, where I lived for several years. Melbourne is the only rectilinear city in Australia. Another major city which is rectilinear is in Canada, but the name escapes me. Rectilinear cities satisfy strict criteria in civil design. Strangely enough, there are not all that many of them. Probably because major cities around the world evolved over the years, and were not holistically pre-designed like Valletta (and like Melbourne which was planned and built long after Sydney, which is a maze) --hence they are likely to have expanded mostly ad hoc.

All this, however, is from the top of my head.

Joan Nelson (1 day, 5 hours ago)

Hey,

Since they like the idea so much, why not give Parliament a roofless building to match as well!!

Then not only will we hear the clowning that goes on in the theatre but in parliament too.

They will also gain access to open weather as well. We must return the favour.

Joseph V. Grech (1 day, 5 hours ago)

@Mr. Raymond Sammut

Could you please reply to my Comment beginning: "Thanks for taking the trouble to reply..."

I had visited the Renzo Piano Plans Exhibition in Valletta but accessed the site indicated anyway.

There is MUCH that I like in the Plans but admittedly do not like the Open Air theatre concept. I would prefer to have Parliament sited elsewhere

The Open Air theatre is exhilarating in concept - BUT it remains impractical for two reasons - Insufficient Space and Openness to the elements and Surroundings.

Should the adjoining Ordnance Street be added to the site this will make a bigger roofed Arts Centre possible.

May I please point out:

- the area can still remain pedestrianised;
- admittedly "the open air...outdoor lights, and exposure to St. James Cavalier..." would not be there but neither would the related inconveniences;
- The "open air design", attractive on paper, will require costly and ongoing maintenance
- A truly genuine theatre art experience NEED NOT be in the open!

-Renzo Piano CAN come up with something better if only we let him use the adjoining Ordnance Street!

Why insist so much on a "differentiated theatre art experience"?

k azzopardi (1 day, 5 hours ago)

A man of the cloth "One of the Nationalist Party's longest standing strategists" ? Not a very nice image for the Ecclesiastical Authorities with more than half of the Island giving support to other Political Parties.

C Bonello (1 day, 6 hours ago)

The onus here is the preserving of the remains of a national icon for posterity.

It is practically inconceivable to rebuild the Royal Opera House as a replica of its former glory. It will not serve the purpose of a national theatre for holding grand opera because of its limited footprint. If we encroach on Ordnance Street and Freedom Square the result will be a new distinct edifice, probably obliterating in the process the historic ruins.

We do not need a new theatre on the site to preserve the ruins, however, if in the process this hallowed ground will also be used as performing arts venue albeit roofless, as proposed by Renzo Piano, we would solve the issue admirably.

The MCC, with major additions backstage, can be used for big productions. If the MCC is still not adequate and we shall still insist on a proper state of the art theatre this could be built somewhere else in Malta. (I just do not know how to fill this new theatre with 'paying' patrons for the classical fare)

The new Parliament Building should, in my humble opinion, be built on top of the Italian Cultural Institute and not in Freedom Square.

wally vella-zarb (1 day, 6 hours ago)

@ Raymond Sammut

"In fact, Valletta was the first rectilinear city ever built in the world"

I don't think that is correct. Senglea, where I was raised, is a rectilinear city that was built before Valletta. Grandmaster De la Sengle had considerable impact on the military strengthening of Malta, notably by initiating in 1554 the development of the city of Senglea, which was later named after him and bears his coat of arms. Claude

de la Sengle (1494 – 18 August 1557) was Grand Master of the Maltese Knights (Knights Hospitaller) from 11 September 1553 until his death. His successor was Jean Parisot de la Valette. As far as I know, Valletta was built after Senglea.

John Grima (1 day, 6 hours ago)

So,,,,,,,,, please, please Mr. Prime Minister. Roof or no roof. We beg you to scrap the whole design and save the money for the rebuilding of the ORIGINAL monument. Use the money instead as the first donation towards Mario Phillip Azzopardi's so called, "impossible dream", to rebuild the Royal Opera House. It is NOT an impossible dream. It IS the only way, donations by Maltese everywhere, that this phoenix can rise from the ashes.

Raymond Sammut (1 day, 7 hours ago)

Those who may not have seen them yet, there are some very detailed pictures of the open-air theatre proposal by Mr Piano here:

<http://www.dive.com/default.aspx?id=146&Search=True&MediaDBSearchCategory=@155@>

Please keep in mind that Mr Piano is prohibiting all vehicle traffic flow around the relevant sites, so this is a very pedestrian friendly proposition by the Genoese architect. Note also how the open-air theatre would offer crisp clean natural air on a typical Malta summer night, with lots of outdoor lights, high-tech acoustics and exposure to the nearby Saint James Cavalier. This design would make a truly genuine theatre art experience to everyone who can appreciate the open-air environment within an historic ancient city that is Valletta. Utterly unique in the world. Nowhere else to be found. We needed a Genoese architect to make the Maltese people aware of the potential we are looking at here --a totally differentiated theatre art experience. Please don't let the voices of darkness blind you and mislead you. Let Mr Piano convince Dr Gonzi to proceed as is. The Australian people continue to regret until this day what they had done to Jørn Utzon in 1966. The Maltese people shouldn't repeat the same mistake now in 2010.

Joseph V. Grech (1 day, 7 hours ago)

@Mr. Raymond Sammut

Thanks for taking the trouble to reply. Quite valid point on your part.

So you believe my suggestion is not really recommendable for the reasons you explain.

Excuse me but I do not really believe my suggestion, if taken up, will necessarily change Valletta's intrinsic "rectilinear" characteristic.

Also if we are sensible - and I strongly believe the architect Mr. Renzo Piano possesses this attribute - there is no reason to believe that the suggested building just cannot be built without being also "reasonably proportional" as you explain it so well. We need not build a Mammoth of a building mind you!

I tend to agree with you: excavation may indeed not be recommendable but I really believe that there may just be a chance that extensive excavation won't really be necessary.

I thank you again for your feedback and anxiously await other Comments from other stakeholders - especially people like Fr. Peter, the Hon. P.M. Renzo Piano, Astrid Vella, Mario P. Azzopardi, Joseph Calleja etc.

Hopefully a way out will be found - for the good of our beautiful Valletta.

j ebejer (1 day, 7 hours ago)

The theatre/ performing space may not be the perfect venue for all forms of artistic self-expression. There are however countless activities of varying artistic and cultural

content which could be held within the proposed performing space. The number of open air cultural and entertainment activities held in the open in events like Notte Bianca is proof of this.

I also like the idea of having an open public piazza within the site, when the theatre is not in use. The use of audio and the projection of images on the translucent wall elements will make this urban space all the more attractive and unique. With good attention of detail, it will make a fantastic piazza in the winter months.

Raymond Sammut (1 day, 8 hours ago)

@ Joseph V. Grech --"Does this suggestion make any sense please - or am I writing just silly, impractical ideas?[Reco]mendations?"

No, Mr Grech. No suggestion can ever be silly.

Combining sites in Valletta is not appropriate because one of the important features of Valletta is that Valletta is a rectilinear city. In fact, Valletta was the first rectilinear city ever built in the world. The City of Melbourne, for example, was designed on the same principle.

The next problem is that individual buildings should be reasonably proportional. In fact, when we look at an aerial photograph of the Barry design we quickly note that even the Barry designed theatre was somewhat too large when compared with nearby buildings. One of the strengths of the Piano design is its sense of proportionality.

The other problem with your suggestion is that one cannot start "excavated", layer upon layer, within the Valletta periphery. This for the simple reason that it could cause land instability to neighbouring structures.

Raymond Sammut (1 day, 8 hours ago)

Do we need to know that Serracino-Inglott, who insists that the open-air theatre is "useless", is a "priest philosopher"? Does a "priest philosopher" understand architecture and theatre art more than anyone else? What makes Serracino-Inglott think that he is better than anyone else, so much so that he can judge the Prime Minister as "failure" with the way he has handled this "small point"? Will there ever be an end to this type of intellectual arrogance on Malta? When will the Maltese people be ever free from domineering, unelected and self-important individuals? No amount of so-called "credentials" can give a person the right to dominate over others when it comes to free thought. Serracino-Inglott has no right whatsoever to claim a greater right to free thought than anyone else. His opinion on the Piano designed Open-Air Theatre has no greater preponderance than that of any other person on Malta. He has no right to keep exerting this kind of pressure on the Maltese prime minister, and Serracino-Inglott should know how to back off and learn how to mind his own business.

Joseph V. Grech (1 day, 8 hours ago)

Dear Hon. P.M., Architect Renzo Piano, Astrid Vella and all the others discussing this problem of inadequate space, may I respectfully suggest that:

-the two sites (old theatre site and the site earmarked for the new Parliament plus Offices) be combined into one

-to this further add the upper part of Ordnance Street which anyway is not really serving any useful purpose whatsoever.

Surely these three combined areas will produce a big enough site to build:

-- a lovely Renzo Piano designed Arts and Community Centre where Operatic and

other Shows may be produced.

--very probably there will be ample space left for a modern Parliamentary Building to be built also. Remember it would be possible to excavate at least two or three separate building layers.

World renowned Renzo Piano would I am sure produce beautiful plans and indeed even make use of at least a number of plans he has already designed.

Does this suggestion make any sense please - or am I writing just silly, impractical ideas?mendations?

E. Ciantar (1 day, 8 hours ago)

What a red herring this roof of a building in Valletta, which for 60 or so years has had no walls either.

I am sure that all those blogging here for a roof have already set aside 33c a day into their piggy bank in the last couple of weeks to finance a new design to be proposed by the People. Perhaps that is why they are complaining about the electricity bills.

I believe that Mr. Piano's concept for the theatre site is not that of building a new theatre, but of conserving the ruins, retaining an open space, and retain, as far as possible, the role of theatre that this space once had.

People, it is now time to move on and do something. Stop moaning.

Apologies to Mr. Piano for the insults on this blog - there are surely better ways one can disagree with an Architect. I am sure Mr. Piano will not loose his reputation because of proposing a topless theatre in Malta.

Mario Philip Azzopardi (1 day, 8 hours ago)

Thank you Father Peter for speaking out in favour of Maltese national cultural interests.

Joe Vella (1 day, 8 hours ago)

I feel that we are missing a very important point, that Malta is one of the very few (if not the only) countries in Europe without a national theatre! It is not true that we have already 3 theatres in Valletta. We only have ONE, and that is the Manoel. Then we have 2 studio theatres, the MITP and St James and conference hall, MCC. If we want to save millions of euros, then Parliament should be transferred to MCC, use the existing Royal Opera site together with part of Freedom Square and turn the axis of the theatre site through 90 degrees to make it parallel with Republic street.

wally vella-zarb (1 day, 9 hours ago)

@ J.Martinelli

"The LP/GWU claim to speak for half the country, therefore it is safe to assume that half the country cannot afford their electricity bill, so the new 'theatre' can only be supported by half the country.

That makes a lot of sense!"

The fallacy of your nonsensical 'witticism' is that it will be ALL of the Maltese who will be paying for Gonzi's Folly, and not just the half that, presumably, 'can afford it', whoever they are. If we cannot, as a country, afford so many things of vital importance, how are we expected to finance an extravaganza that gives us neither fish nor fowl, a gateless gate, a main traffic artery that jumps 150 metres through the air over Republic street, a roofless 'theatre'? The only part that is arguably relevant would be the 'parliament-on-stilts' in that it symbolises a Government that is totally detached from the reality that surrounds them!

Dominic Fenech (1 day, 9 hours ago)

So what's new in this repetitive song, except the singer?

wally vella-zarb (1 day, 9 hours ago)

@ J.Martinelli

"The LP/GWU claim to speak for half the country, therefore it is safe to assume that half the country cannot afford their electricity bill, so the new 'theatre' can only be supported by half the country.

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Astrid Vella (1 day, 10 hours ago)

@ Ian Fenech: in saying "one of our greatest palaces is closed to the public as it is being used as a parliament" you are just repeating the spin that Fr. Peter is protesting against. The Palace is NOT off-limits because of Parliament as that mainly convenes in the evening when all our museums and palaces are closed.

The Palace is closed during public visiting hours when the President is in office receiving dignitaries etc. and the President is rightly going to remain in office there, so public accessibility is not going to change much and is no reason to break the Structure Plan which says that Parliament and the Ministries have to concentrate in the palaces and auberges of Valletta.

Anyone wanting to object to the Valletta Rehabilitation plans as presently proposed, can do so at: <http://www.ambjentahjar.org/Form1.htm>

You will get an email from MEPA saying that you're too late to be a legal objector but no problem, hundreds were in time. The main thing is to let MEPA and the authorities know your stand.

Ian Fenech (1 day, 10 hours ago)

J.Martinelli,

I have to agree with you about the footprint of the theater being too small to make a state of the art theater. I have pointed this out myself many times and recently so has Renzo Piano. However he has also pointed out that the site is also too small for parliament too.

What can be done with the site I don't really know. The obvious question here would be which is needed more?

People have to wake up and smell the coffee and realise, they are fighting a losing battle with regards to the theater. No matter how hard they try, the fact remains there is not enough space. What about the fact that one of our greatest palaces is closed to the public as it is being used as a parliament? Now you tell me which is more necessary

Astrid Vella (1 day, 10 hours ago)

@Carmel Callus & JoeAzzopardi: you are right that we don't need a third theatre, we need two fully-functioning ones that have the minimum theatrical requirements since Baroque times, ie. good acoustics and workable facilities, and the Mediterranean Conference Centre has neither. That's why it would be the ideal candidate to be transformed into a new Parliament, thereby saving us millions of Euros, while the theatre could be rebuilt on the Opera House site, expanding out onto Ordinance Street and Freedom Square as suggested by JV Grech. That would leave most of the square free for public enjoyment as suggested by JoeAzzopardi.

@ J Martinelli: you are conveniently forgetting that the new theatre as proposed by the British theatre designers brought over by Minister Zammit Dimech had a capacity of 1,000 – 1,500 a far cry from the 500 you mention.

And yes, the country is facing an economic crisis. So why are you opposing a new theatre that could cost as little as €16 (Trevisan's plan) and will create employment and tourism, and yet support an extravagant new parliament which will employ nobody?

@Leon Zawadzki; you are right. We are still colonised in our own country.

v zammit (1 day, 10 hours ago)

"...but those who do not want to listen, will not!"

Very well said, too.

As I humbly submitted (Comments: 20.2.2010 – "Roofless theatre unworthy of artistic tradition (1)" by Mario Azzopardi, Toronto, Canada), if otherwise Mr Piano will put his foot down, and all his pens and brushes, and say "Take it or leave it", deep down, I believe, for a roof to be or not to be, we will be the poorer. Without it ever crossing my mind to belittle Fr Feter's views (he is wise enough not to doubt that), it is easy to criticise, even positively, and for some to belittle and poke fun of, than to do and create.

Joseph Grech (1 day, 10 hours ago)

@Mr. J. Marinelli

Thank goodness you have sent in a Comment! I address my question to you confident that you will provide the CORRECT and UNBIASED reply :)

Upset by the ongoing Valletta Roofless Theatre cum Parliament cum Ancillary Office Block debate I could not go to sleep last night. I kept thinking...asking myself: "What can we do to save our capital city from the impending disaster?"

Eureka! It suddenly hit me!

Why not combine the two sites (plus that little bit of Ordinance Street which is not really serving any purpose anyway) into ONE enlarged site and build a beautiful Arts Centre / Community Building thereon? We could excavate you know....why not?

If a Parliamentary Building can be included so much the better....

I ask Mr. J. Martinelli - what do you think please? Do send in a reply.

jsaliba (1 day, 11 hours ago)

1. No hint about the meeting gonzi/piano/elite proposed by the p.m.

2. Nothing wrong or absurd in a 'roofless' theatre. Same as nothing absurd with the Reverend's wishes or friend mario's verses.

3. Still waiting for an historical discussion which according to my humble opinion should end with a conclusion.

One last question: Had the other Piano national projects had such a reaction/discussion in the other countries before they were carried out? Although, I find nothing absurd whatever the answer.

Muscat. Pat (1 day, 11 hours ago)

GonziPN .s legacy is going to be a "kaxxa (ta Malta) bla qiegh, and a "tejatron bla saqaf!"

Joseph Brincat (1 day, 11 hours ago)

How blind all of us have been.

It is now more clear that the PM is playing for time, come summer and the people will all go out forcing him to call election.

This project was never meant to be realized.

Joe E Galea (1 day, 11 hours ago)

I am waiting for the usual PN slurpers to attack Serracino-Inglott calling him a traitor and that he is now sleeping with PL and any other name imaginable.

But everyone knows that once Gonzi has decided there is no way of turning back...u kien jghidu ghal A Sant. Ara veru l-ispizjar milli jkollu jtik. The only honourable way left for Gonzi is to resign and call it a day. The more time passes the more he drowns in his own dirt.

J Martinelli (1 day, 11 hours ago)

"Mr Piano must have had a reason for doing the theatre roofless"

Very well said and he gave reasons why, but those who do not want to listen, will not!

To build a theatre/opera house on the existing footprint is to build a venue not much bigger than the Manoel Theatre. The restrictions will be such that most operas will be out as is the case with the Manoel, and with a seating capacity of less than 500.

Then we will have to be charged prices well above what we have been used to in order to attract opera companies of any renown, we will certainly start complaining and the government (taxpayer) will end up subsidizing the theatre.

At the same time, this past weekend, thousand flocked to Valletta at the call of the LP to protest the increase in electricity tariffs! Put these two together and one can see the incongruency of the arguments. The LP/GWU claim to speak for half the country, therefore it is safe to assume that half the country cannot afford their electricity bill, so the new 'theatre' can only be supported by half the country.

That makes a lot of sense!

A Abela (1 day, 11 hours ago)

Fr Peter is getting old now, we have to be modern.

vincent a galea (1 day, 11 hours ago)

What will it take for the PM to realise that the whole PIANO PROJECT is a waste of time and money, and pathetic?! The writing is there for all to see!

HAS HE BY ANY CHANCE FORGOTTEN HOW TO READ? !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Joseph V. Grech (1 day, 11 hours ago)

Can we - or can't we - join the two sites together and including the bit of Ordnance Street that's in the middle and serving no real purpose?

Please refer my earlier Comment below. Could somebody reply please? Tks a lot.

Joe Azzopardi (1 day, 11 hours ago)

It seems Fr Serracino Inglott wants to have the cake and eat it too. "My wish is to see a whole retractable roof," and just where would this cumbersome retractable roof be stored while the space is serving its most needed function – that of an open square.

Frankly I don't really care for another theater. There are already enough in Valletta for the rare occasions when there is something worth watching. But a square surrounded by the beautiful and dramatic ruins of the old opera house reminding all how foolish men can be is a much more desirable, functional, and cost-effective thing. Besides it will be enjoyed by all and not just the few theater goers. So Dr Gonzi, do what you may with their theater but leave us our square.

Lawrence Fenech (1 day, 11 hours ago)

I believe that Mr Piano is letting his imagination run away with him in the wrong place in the wrong country.

Leon Zawadzki (1 day, 11 hours ago)

It's about time that the Maltese had faith in the Maltese. Why is it that every time a project is mentioned the Maltese have the habit of looking for foreign consultants ?. The Maltese have an inferiority complex with no trust in their own abilities. I have met many bright, intelligent individuals who are screaming out for the chance to air their abilities, but being Maltese no-body hears them. I am sure there must be a good half dozen Maltese architects capable of designing an opera house, be proud and give them a chance. I strongly believe that most people in power only listen to foreigners and not to their fellow countrymen. As a foreigner living in Malta, I have great faith in the Maltese individual, it about time that the Maltese government also showed faith and pride in their own people.

victor pulis (1 day, 12 hours ago)

This is certainly not professional. Mr. Piano is risking his reputation as an artist. The partial roof solution is no solution. What about the patrons? and as astrid commented, Will a partial roof keep out the background din of people moving about outside not to mention the yearly aerial bombardment during festa season? Furthermore, I still feel that a parliament building besides being a waste of money will deprive us of an open space which could be better utilized. Let us have a proper art centre wherein one would find represented all the art forms, music, drama, visual arts.

carmel callus (1 day, 12 hours ago)

In my opinion this country does not need more theatres. What we have is enough ...! Whye should we have more white elephants? It would have made more sense where that site with turned into parliament's building as originally proposed.

j ellul (1 day, 12 hours ago)

If we procrastinate any further we will end up with neither a theatre nor a performance space nor a parliament; just acute embarrassment and the current dismal state of city gate for many more years to come.

Stella Farrugia (1 day, 12 hours ago)

Many Maltese with refined tastes will never like Piano's disgusting designs for our Baroque & glorious Valletta. I am not the least impressed with Piano's supposedly 'world renowned' architecte & his plans. There are so many excellent local architects who would have done a better job than him & who would have been sensitive to our tastes & needs. Thanks Fr. Peter & all the others who are opposing the sheer arrogance of Piano's impositions and Gonzi's lakey attitude. Give Valletta its glorious

architectural pre-war buildings with today's needs. The original theatre should be rebuilt & the roof issue is completely nonsense. Ideally Piano's plans for Valletta should be ditched. We do not need him to ruin forever our capital city.

Walter Busuttil (1 day, 12 hours ago)

if we are to finally do something - lets do it right, first time! Partial roof or no roof is same difference for the audiences present. Lets have a retractable roof which could be used in all type of weather and seasons. Do we have to carry an umbrella with us in case it rains or protect us from the pigeon droppings. A bit of further thought is asked for. Such an expensive project surely requires deeper thought before we proceed. We are the customer!!!

Pierre Fiorentino (1 day, 12 hours ago)

If the PL had said these things, then we would have some rubbish comments that the PL always criticises everything and this sort of stuff. But now that people with certain backgrounds are claiming the same it is credible.

Ah bdw, this episode shows once more how hard-headed is our Prime Minister!

Paul Borg (1 day, 12 hours ago)

Can we have a net as well for any bird droppings ! Wouldn't want an opera singer ending up with bird droppings in his or her mouth !!!!

Charles DeMicoli (1 day, 12 hours ago)

Thank you Fr. Serracino-Inglott for stating the obvious.

v zammit (1 day, 13 hours ago)

Mr Piano must have had a reason for doing the theatre roofless. But as I respectfully submitted in a previous comment to "Fr Peter's Perspective" (Sunday Times - 21.2.2010) time still is to modify, adjust, change... Artist/architects are known to do that. I am no expert, but for one, I am thinking of the Louvre and National Gallery (London) versions of Da Vinci's "Virgin (sometimes 'Madonna') of the Rocks". Whatever might have been the reason. Other 'changes' famously include the 're-doing' of David's nose by Michaelangelo to satisfy his critics. But, obviously, that is not the case here. Consultation and time do wonders. The greater problems (to my mind) are the siting of Parliament and the building of a new Gate. They are more context-related.

Anthony A. Mifsud (1 day, 13 hours ago)

Perhaps now that Fr. Peter has spoken, we change the roofless theatre to one with a proper roof.

Do we have the money to spend?

Or the Central bank will issue a other allotment of unsecured bonds?

The problem is one only ,we have a hard headed Prime Minister, who doesn't give a hoots about what the people who will use this theatre think, or that it's an unnecessary , what does he know?

Grazzi

Toni

R Agius (1 day, 13 hours ago)

If it is not controversial then its probably not worth doing - so let's just get on with it please!! Our procrastination has gotten us nowhere! Its not like our future depends on it!

Ray Mangion (1 day, 13 hours ago)

Serracino-Inglott, having been the ex Prime Minister`s personal advisor, should head an official objection to the Prime Minister`s plans and stop this nonsense and

egotistic move, which in the process, is going to ruin Valletta and keeping our place as a Heritage City. Has not the Prime Minister been reading what is being said? This talk about building "another theatre"; we need an Opera House, which is the creme` de la Creme` of theatres and if managed properly by the right people appointed, and not those given the responsibility because they know someone, it should create jobs, brings more cultural tourists following the opera stars, hotels will be fuller and the economy in general will improve. Some people, including the Prime Minister, have no idea how effective the Performing Arts are. We have a talent for producing good voices and should be nurtured. Joseph Calleja is respected all over the world now. What do we do here? We abuse him by using his talent and abuse his generosity. An Opera House should be built in his name. Build an Opera House to match Valletta`s Baroque buildings; it will need a larger footprint and there is room for that.

mike farrugia (1 day, 13 hours ago)

@ Julian Esposito

Most maltese want a pre-war design. That's what they cried for when they asked for the theatre to be rebuilt.

Mario Bonnici (1 day, 13 hours ago)

So two days after the government confirmed the new electricity tariffs, Fr. Serracinio Inglott is proposing to spend more money on a roof for the theatre.

This is an insult to the taxpayers.

Matthew Bugeja (1 day, 13 hours ago)

as i look forward to study design! i always thought that his highness mr renzo piano was a god in these type of design sector!! but in my humble opinion this is a real flop!! to me it will be just a panel closed car park like the current use!!!

please authorities reconsider this design about the opera house

A.Busuttil (1 day, 13 hours ago)

Instead we walk Republic street in protest we should organise a cultural day on the theatre site and square (Sunday) in protest about our topless theatre

Joseph V. Grech (1 day, 13 hours ago)

Thank Heavens there still are people like the Rev. Fr. Peter Serracino Inglott, Mr. Mario Azzopardi, Ms. Astrid Vella, etc.

I'm no architect and rarely do I go to the theatre. But may I please suggest a possible way out of the embarrassing and crucially important problem - crucially important not just for us Maltese but also for the administration and our capital city.

Could the two sites be combined into one - ie. that of the bombed out site and the one where the two Parliamentary Buildings are to be built?

The common site would possibly be built as one lovely building - an Arts / Community centre where Operas might possibly also be staged.

If it would be possible to accommodate the Parliament and ancillary offices on this common site so much the better - we could use underground levels also, why not? World renowned Renzo Piano would I am sure produce beautiful plans and indeed even make use of at least a number of plans he has already come up with.

People will be sending in Comments. Could somebody please tell me whether this suggestion has been forwarded already and whether it can actually be done?

ASpiteri (1 day, 13 hours ago)

As someone once said...

The madness will be remembered as the last miserable act of this miserable government...

...and I also add...

...the project that helped Renzo Piano losing his 'world renowned' status!

Adrian Borg Cardona (1 day, 13 hours ago)

I look forward to seeing the PN sycophants attacking Fr. Peter as being ignorant of theatre matters and asking him to shut up as he is not an architect - just as they told those who disagreed with the topless theatre.

Julian Esposito (1 day, 13 hours ago)

Call me old fashioned, but I would love to see the exterior rebuilt to the pre-war design. I would not mind the interior being redesigned as required though.

John Schembri (1 day, 13 hours ago)

The problem of us Maltese is that we have a hard headed Prime Minister, who doesn't give two hoots about what the people who will use this theatre think, or that it's an unnecessary extravagance in this time of PN brought on austerity. He knows best and that's it. And we all clap and cheer him on. Let the madness continue.

g. scerri (1 day, 13 hours ago)

Perhaps now that Fr. Peter has spoken, those who were against this concept from the very beginning will no longer be derided. As a people we no longer need to go down on our knees every time a foreign "expert" speaks.