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# Valletta's opera house project has been hijacked for Parliament (1)

Arthur Muscat, Floriana



Where is the project to rebuild the opera house? All that is being proposed is a consolidation of the ruins of the building together with a recommendation to carry on utilising the site as an open-air theatre. Is this an acceptable response coming from the mythical Renzo Piano?

Fair enough, there can be merit in the proposal as it is being made, but is this what we have waited 60 years for? As a concept, is Mr Piano considering our opera house ruins on a level similar to the Taormina amphitheatre, or the Coliseum in Rome? Are we paying for a project or an opinion?

I do not know, I am lost. I do know however that open-air theatres can be utilised and enjoyed only in cool summer evenings, as in practice we are currently doing with our beloved ruins. So what's new?

And where is the project for the new City Gate and the general renovation of the city entrance area? The project appears unbelievably simple - basically demolish the present horrendous gate and don't touch the resulting gap in the fortifications! Again, fair enough. But did we have to wait 60 years, and did we have to engage one of the world's most renowned architects to make us aware of a solution that has been adapted to our fortifications for over 150 years?

So what is new about Mr Piano's project so far? Practically nothing, except that it seems he was given a very different brief from what all of us believed. The brief was not to rebuild an opera house or a cultural centre. The brief was not to create a new City Gate and renovate the city entrance area. How stupid we all are! The brief was, build us a new Parliament House. And frankly that is what Mr Piano has delivered.

That is his project, a new Parliament House with all the modern amenities that will also include a comfortable underground car park for the convenience of our Honourable Members of Parliament. It now looks very obvious how the budget for the Renzo Piano project will get apportioned: two per cent Royal Opera House, three per cent the gap in the wall and 95 per cent for our dear Members' House. In other words we have all been fooled. The opera house and City Gate projects have been hijacked from under our noses and subordinated to the building of a new Parliament House.

Should we all rise and protest? I do not think it is worth our while.

We have waited so long, we have put up with such a mess of a City Gate for all this time, now all we want is to get on with it. But it is a pity that an opportunity for the creation of something extraordinary and magical is being wasted. In consolation we are getting a Parliament building where extraordinary and magical events will, I am sure, keep happening.

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## Comments

Joe Xuereb (6 days, 11 hours ago)

, a chauffeur's son, would die without my operatic moments. That said, the medium has very limited genuine appeal. It needn't be but it is elitist. How to educate the younger sets away from what passes for music to the sort that uplifts? Needs to be tried to find out.

A theatre/arts complex would better serve the people. Historically, a decision was reached to build a theatre in front of the Ferreria. Was it etched in granite that any future theatre had to be built on the same spot. I doubt it. If money is not a concern, build an arts complex just outside the city walls, thus retaining the connection to the capital. Height, width, depth not a problem. A wonderful building, sans the surrounding clutter, for the people, from the elitist to the least. And ground-breaking theatre to broaden the mind.

Parliament can wait. Politics are at the forefront of the Maltese mindset. This must change. I understand political scene is vibrant for the wrong reasons. Largely stagnant. Let it stagnate in some backwater. Let the people breathe. With dereliction, Freedom Square and a 'missing front tooth' in the wall, out of sight. Symbolically, at least.

C.ZARB (1 week, 2 days ago)

"Increase our salaries, give us new cars, pay our phone bills, build us a new meeting place complete with a fully equipped cafeteria, let the people out there grumble - we don't care as long as we live untouched and comfortable. In case we need more money we just tax them - they wouldn't be bothered as long as we keep them divided. With all due respect to all MPs!!! sic."

With all due respect Mr Agius but that's exactly what a 'responsible' government would do in the middle of a recession. I doubt that the MPs are finding it hard to pay the bills considering their 300 euros per week increase.

Antoine Vella (1 week, 3 days ago)

Paul Borg and Daniel Russell

Your innovative (I wouldn't call them eccentric) ideas have inspired me to dream up a new solution which I hope Piano will take on board. Why not rebuild the Royal Opera House but on a floating raft in front of the new parliament on Manoel Island?

It would be the first floating theatre in the world with an added bonus that, with modern technology, it would be possible to submerge it and turn it into a submarine theatre when, for example, musicals like *The Little Mermaid* were being produced.

Daniel Russell (1 week, 3 days ago)

What a disgraceful insult to the fine architecture of the former Royal Opera House. Is Piano trying to show a phoenix rising from the ashes (of bad taste)?

Paul, excellent suggestion about relocating parliament to Manoel Island, what about Fort St Elmo also? I like your idea and style here and can see what you are making. A key architectural principle used by planners of cities such as Washington DC, Paris and others belonging to the City Beautiful Movement was "to awe and impress" and that vista which you show of looking from Valletta to the Government House across Valletta would certainly achieve that and would also be a fantastic sight for foreign powers visiting Malta.

C.Agius (1 week, 3 days ago)

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Paul Borg (1 week, 3 days ago)

Not too late to relocate and build Parliament House and all supporting infrastructure on Manoel Island centred on the Fort. Island probably large enough to be developed as the Civic Centre of Malta with all government building and ministries located there. The original plan of Valletta did NOT include a separate Parliament House as the "governing power" as integral to the position of GrandMaster and an Advisory Council which explains why the meeting room was located in the Grandmaster's Palace. As to the argument that Parliament House must be located in the capital city, if we have to be "hide bound" by tradition, the government can always legislate to integrate Manoel

Island into Valletta. But imagine of the grandeur of looking at the Parliament House of the Government of Malta across Marsamxett Harbour from the walls of Valletta. Think of the Houses of Parliament in London across the River Thames or the House of Parliament in Budapest across the River Danube.

Dominic Chircop (1 week, 3 days ago)

Why are people grumbling against the building of a new Parliament ?

To my mind, Renzo Piano's concept of this building really encapsules the actual state of affairs.

It will be built overhead and above ground level, wherin politicians will be housed above the heads of the people. Rather like the way they are cut off from the common people.

A master conception of things.

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