



Brian Roberts

# John Mamo

## – Celebrating 90 Years



I remember my first meeting with John Mamo. I was on holiday in 1992 when I was invited to a band practice at the Imperial Band Club. Although I was an experienced musician I had not actually played trumpet for many years. It was a great trepidation that I took my place in the band armed with a borrowed instrument.

I needn't have worried because John Mamo and the members of the band immediately put me at ease and very soon my confidence began to return. During my musical career I played under the baton of many distinguished conductors but I knew I was in the presence of a man who had exceptional musical talent. That first meeting, rekindled my love of playing, which continues to this day.

John Mamo was born in Birkirkara in 1917. He had a very impressive musical career as a player. Like most Maltese musicians of the day John Mamo's roots were with the Band Clubs. At the age of eight he joined the St Helen Band of Birkirkara. He spent thirty years as a player and soloist with the La Valette Band under the baton of famous Italian conductors and composers such as Respighi, Zandonai, Mule' and Refice.

Before the Second World War he was a resident musician with the orchestra at the Royal Opera House. Looking at the ruins left today it is difficult to comprehend those grand and flamboyant days. Men dress in suites, ladies in beautiful Ball gowns arriving in carriages at one of Europe's most prestigious musical venues to be entertained by the most talented musicians and singers of their day. It must have been an unforgettable experience for the young John Mamo. Unfortunately war cut short this exciting part of John's musical career. In fact he had only played in few operas but

the experience he gained was to stand him in good stead in his future musical development.

In 1939 he joined the Royal Artillery Band as a trombonist and also formed also part of the Army's Dance Band under the direction of Maj. Anthony Aquilina.

During his career as a player John gained a vast insight to all types of music ranging from classical to traditional band marches. He was also well versed in opera not to mention the experience of playing more modern music. This experience proved to be of great value when he chose to change his career from instrumentalist to conductor.

In 1980 John Mamo was appointed Musical Director of the Imperial Band. A courageous decision on his part when you consider that his predecessor, Anthony Sammut served as musical director of the Imperial Band for a staggering 32 years. It is a remarkable fact that since its inception, the Imperial Band has only appointed five musical directors and John Mamo was proud to be part of this long tradition. He served the Imperial Band for seventeen years with distinction and is still one of the most respected musical directors here in Malta. His contribution to the successful growth of the Imperial Band is now legendary and the traditional values he set over those many years continues to be a cornerstone of the musical methodology of this day.



Although musical styles have changed over the years and bands in general have encompassed a more international flavour to their repertoire, the Imperial Band is proud of its long and illustrious history and in particular to the contribution of John Mamo and his predecessors.

As a composer he composed over 1250 band marches, many of which are still firm favourites with musicians and audiences alike and continue to be part of the band's repertoire. His most famous is 'Ta' l-Iljun' composed specifically for The Imperial Band and is the Imperial Band Club's theme tune, and forms part of the climax to the bands contribution, during the feast in September when the trumpets stand on the balcony of the club with the band underneath in the square, and blow with gusto and pride the strains of this unforgettable melody.

In 2007 we celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of this truly remarkable man. To mark this important event John was invited to a surprise reception at the band Club on Tuesday the 17<sup>th</sup> of April.

No one will ever forget the look on his face when



he entered the club to the sounds of Ta' l-Iljun. Although he took the baton for only a short time, it was obvious to us all that magic was still there. His smile showed that he was happy to be back amongst friends and in the Club where he devoted so much of his life.

I hope God grants him many more years so he can continue to inspire the best in all of us.

*Żuru l-‘website’ tagħna*

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