

## **Fejn Marru l-Ulied? (Where have all the children gone?) This is the story in a nutshell.**

This play, written and directed by Lino Ferris, will be performed on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> November 2003, by Atturi Salesjani, the resident Drama Group at the Salesian Theatre, in Sliema, to mark the centenary of the Salesian Work in Malta, since 1903.

The story spans over a period of 100 years, precisely up to 2003 involving four generations, over the turbulent period of the early twentieth century. At the turn of century, Sliema was a small town, expanding rapidly. The Strand was a hub of activities, dominated by the Royal Navy, and many boys ran around in the area, plying for jobs or carrying out some mischief!

Wenzu is a typical boy, aged 12 roaming the streets. His mother rented a room in Strait Street, Valletta and could care less about her own children. Is- Sur Fons, a great philanthropist corresponded with the Salesian Fathers in Italy, with the scope of building a college, rather a reformatory for young delinquent boys. St. Patrick's college was built and soon Wenzu found himself with Fr Patrick O Grady, who soon took care to talk to Wenzu's mother as she never turned up to see her son. The sheltered days at the college are over, and Wenzu together with his close friend Duminku left the college on the memorable day of 7<sup>th</sup> June 1919. They found themselves in the Streets of Valletta, now two youths full of enthusiasm and zeal towards life itself. Soldiers marched by, and shots were fired and the crowd panicked. Marija a young lady, who was knocked down, was sheltered by Wenzu in his mother's rented room, which by now was abandoned. Wenzu and Marija fall in love and are married to build a handsome family. Wenzu joins the navy, and during the war with eight children to care for, he realised that his wife is yet pregnant again, this time expecting twins. Wenzu is lost at Sea when his ship accompanied the Malta convoy, and Maria gives birth to her twins on "Mnarja Night", the feast of St. Peter and Paul. It was therefore befitting to name the twins Peter and Paul. In order to help out, Marija assisted a rich family from Ta Xbiex, and the lady, Lina, who was now turning into her mid forties, did not bear any children. Her rich elderly husband, lived in the UK and escaped the terror of war in Malta. Lina persuaded Marija to pass on one of her twins, as her own, and wrote to her husband claiming that finally she was pregnant before he escaped to England!

Marija was compelled to keep her promise and one night, pretending that one of her sons passed away, she reluctantly gave away Peter. Soon the rich family departed from the scene and years went by without seeing each other.

One evening, the sound of the Salesian Boys Brigade Band, attracted attention and Paul who was in Uniform met for the first time his own twin brother Peter, without realising their blood connection. They became close friends and Lina who adopted Peter soon realised the situation. The boys grew up together, at the Oratory and they mixed around a group of friends at Ghar id-dud. In their youth, Peter and Paul were both attracted to a young lady, but during Carnival night, Paul realised that Anna was more attracted to Peter, perhaps since he came from a rich family. The ties of friendship are broken and Anna is pregnant. On their wedding day, Peter falls ill and is later diagnosed to be suffering from Leukemia. We are now in the sixties and some experiments in the U.K. for bone marrow transplant were underway. Lina persuaded Marija to ask her son Paul, to be the donor and they all had to fly to the U.K. for the operation. It is unfortunate that during the intervention, Peter and Paul succumb in the intervention and both pass away.

Naturally, over a span of 100 years we encounter characters that lived earlier and passed away. However their spirits roam with those who are living, and continuously we encounter inter spiritual appraisal of our inner most feelings. Wenzu who passed away, lost at sea is seen around and encounters in the afterlife, his twins whom he has never meet in real life. Wenzu is the living link with the characters and the audience, and the play flows from one scene to another.

Anna gives birth to her child, Brian who is spoilt by the rich environment. A young lad, sporting a powerful motor cycle flirts around with all the girls of the youth centre. One evening, whilst on their way to take part in an important ladies basketball match Brian is involved in a fatal accident and his pillion rider is dead! Suddenly, this young lad is seen all alone, a new character, looking at life with a fresh dimension. His life is dramatically changed, and his girlfriend, whom he loved closely, spoke to him in his dreams or perhaps in real life which goes on in its mysterious ways.....