An exhilarating Christmas gift for Melitensia addicts, history buffs, theatre habituës nad Joe public was *Ir-Rewwixta tal-Qassisin*, presented at the Manoel Theatre, by Actors Studio in collaboration with the Bank of Valletta.

The production makes full use of the ploy of a play within a play. A class of seminarians is prevented from holding their usual rag day, and is instead ‘encouraged’ to present a play; the penalty for not complying would be botched examinations ....

Renald Galea, as the Rector, prepared the way for any production hitches – for the most part intentional – by expansively excusing his students, and therefore the cast. But he need not have worried; they did him proud. Of course, there was Michael Fenech’s expert direction too!

Mario Attard, with his slightly effeminate gestures and postures, made an excellent Ximenes, vain and power-crazy. John Grech and Brian Muscat were two Knights in tarnished raiment; disciples of Might is Right.

The script was peppered with allusions, covert, implied, and outright, to the political and social conditions of the day. They are as pertinent to 1986; a fact which was greatly appreciated by the Sunday house. The laconic Bishop Labini was played by J.C. Caruana; he was roused to action late in the second Act when his interests were at stake.

The *bandu* of February 14, 1773 nearly gave Joe Camilleri, as Pellerano, apoplexy. One would think his diet consisted solely of rabbit and pigeon; in reality he took the bylaw as a threat to his power.

**ACTORS**

It is interesting to note that throughout the play, the actors were completely aware of the audience; though they talked to us as if we were their contemporaries, all their arrows hit their target. Truly, he has ears who will listen – even though the devil can cite scripture to suit his own purpose.

Aldo Briffa, Hubert Mugliette, David Agius and Simon Gatt, as led by Paul Schembri, provided a dash of local colour and public opinion. Lilian Pace and Marianne Muscat, alias Cetta l-Koka and Karmena l-Fattiga, were ostensibly allowed to take part in a play presented in front of a Bishop because they were old, ugly, and exemplary.

Dominic Said, quite at home in his soutane, played the young Dun Gaetano Mannarino, the young idealist who earns twenty years’ imprisonment for his troubles. It seems that he never learns that idealism and realism are strange bedfellows, and J.P. Borg, as the old Mannarino, has plenty of apposite things to say ....

Manoel Pirotta composed the music for this production. He played the piano, Eric Benn played the clarinet, and Daniel Azzopardi played the violin. The music was an integral part of the production; I loved the way the actors broke out into forceful singing, sometimes without any warning whatsoever, to make their point.

Ivan Fenech was the Student chosen for the part of Narrator. He recites, improvised and bluffed his way throughout the production perfectly, drawing several loud guffaws from the least likely people.
It is interesting to note that the clerical costumes were authentic; Sylvia Azzopardi was in charge of the costumes, while Josephine Ellul and Annabelle Grech were Wardrobe Mistresses.

*Ir-Rewwixta* proper was not included in the production – the Seminarians rightly said that blots on the Island’s history should be forgotten, not embellished and remembered. Living for tomorrow, or yesterday for that matter, is fools’ wisdom. After all, as Labini misquoted, sic transit gloria mundi!

*DAILY BREAD by The Times critic, The Times 29-12-1986*