

OVAL HOUSE

Sunscreen/Phantoms

HANDS REACHED across the ocean when London's Moonshine Community Arts Workshop sponsored a Maltese youth theatre group on its first British tour. The Young Atturi Theatre presented two works by national experimental playwrights to audiences in community centres throughout London.

'Sunscreen', a short choreographed poem by Alfred Buttigieg, incorporates verse, movement and mime to create an abstract dialogue between an old woman from the nether world, and a girl full of the brash impetuosity of youth.

As the two garishly made-up women recount the painful experience of living, their bodies interact in a slow dance of communication. Ceremonial passages, such as the enactment of the birth rite behind a blood-stained sheet, constitute the most powerful moments in the piece, as the lines of poetry themselves are often obscured by too-rapid delivery.

Written in the midst of Malta's struggle for independence, 'Phantoms' by Oreste Calleja uses the structure of role-playing to make a socio-political point.

A gentleman, the embodiment of the bourgeois standards imposed on art, comes searching for the ultimate performance. What he finds instead, in the guise of the colourful, stylised characters of commedia dell'arte, is a group of performers whose repression by a culturally sterile society has translated their comic tradition into a tragic reality.

The presence of the spectator, unwitting symbol of the oppressor, provokes the troupe to commit an act of violence which is ultimately fatal.

The ambition this young company exhibited in their choice of material is well-matched by their bold staging and sincere performances – particularly Simone Zammit's baiting, mischievous Arlekkinu and Mario Attard's tearful Pierot.

***Maltese youth theatre makes its political point* by Barbara Schulman, THE STAGE and TELEVISION TODAY, 6-5-1982**