

Thursday, 29th January 2009 – www.timesofmalta.com

Producers to defy stage ban

'Sad and funny but not shocking'

Christian Peregin

The producers of *Stitching*, a "shocking" play that has been banned by theatre classifiers, will be staging the performance even if they have to "get arrested".

"It is absurd to gag an artist in this day and age. This is the end of democracy, and whoever does not believe that, does not understand freedom of expression," the outraged director, Chris Gatt, told *The Times*.

The play, written by Scottish writer Anthony Neilson, is about a couple in crisis coming to terms with a loss, and deals with themes that include death and abortion.

It was "banned and disallowed" by the Board of Film and Stage Classification - but the decision has sparked a storm of indignation as well as fuelling interest in the controversial production.

The production company, Unifaun, have now asked the board of classifiers to reconsider the script and to give it an 18 classification rather than have it banned altogether. The board has 10 days in which to reply but until then, rehearsals will continue. St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity, which is government funded, will be taking a decision on whether or not to allow the play to be staged in its theatre.

If permission to stage the play is not granted, it will be taken elsewhere, said Mr Gatt.

"It's such an intimate play it can even be staged in your living room. In fact, it should," said Mr Gatt, who is also general manager of St James.

When it was performed at the Edinburgh festival in 2002, some people walked out in disgust at scenes of mutilation and assault, according to press reports then.

However, the producers' lawyers have assured them that since the play is not blasphemous or obscene, if they do put it up anyway they can only be found guilty of small contraventions and petty fines, rather than police arrests and prison time.

Mr Gatt is actually worried that people who watch the play will be disappointed because it is not even that shocking.

"It's sad, funny, tragic, but not shocking. This is not the play to have a Holy War about. It's not going to make history. So don't expect any refunds if you don't get shocked!" he added jokingly.

The whole issue seems to have sent shock-waves through the community of theatre-lovers. Even before the news broke word travelled fast throughout the internet. Many expressed their support and even said they would help fund the play.

The classification board has not officially given the production company its reasons for the ban. Its chairman, Therese Friggieri, could not be contacted for comment yesterday.