

Blood brothers

Literature



I went to see Blood Brothers, by Willy Russell on October 15th 2009 at the Manchester Opera House. The story is set in Liverpool in the 1960s and it centres on Mrs Johnston and her family. It tells a demoralizing tale of two twin brothers separated at birth that grew up in two different social classes and how their lives become unavoidably linked ending in them finally becoming reunited in death. It tells the agonising story of a mother's utter anguish of losing her child and shows us the impoverished life she led and her financial desperation which resulted in her striking a deal with an affluent, infertile woman trading in a human life.

The show is based around the superstition that " If either twin learns that he was once one of a pair, they shall both immediately die". The pressures of superstition, economics and class trap both brothers and seal their fate - their paths are destined to cross again in both friendship and anger with the most tragic consequences imaginable. Blood Brothers is a powerful and moving story, with both lively and sad parts. It's a wonderful tale that will capture your heart and leave a lasting impression. The show is both hilariously funny and deeply moving.

I think that one of the most effective scenes was when Mickey came back home from prison and is going through the depression phase. In this scene the lighting is really dim, which reflects on Mickey's thought processes which are slow and aged. You can see from this scene that prison has aged Mickey beyond doubt. Sean Jones playing Mickey used movement and his voice to really portray Mickey's vulnerability. Mickey's movements were slow and it seemed like every step he took was agony. His speech was slow, and his voice was extremely quiet.

He walked hunched over, as if trying to protect himself from an unknown fear and his face was mostly expressionless, showing that he had no feelings left, as if he was just a body without a spirit or soul inside. It was almost like something had suddenly died inside this young man. Mickey stayed away from the front of the stage as if the audience were somehow a threat to him. Jones had really grasped Mickey's depression as he struggled to come to terms with being unemployed and an ex- convict. It was an exceptional performance from a very capable, excellent young actor.

I think that the reason the director had Jones portray Mickey like this after he was released from prison was that he had given up hope of living and that he was only alive because of the depression pills he was taking, it made the audience realise that Mickey had lost everything, but he thought he could maybe gain something from those pills. I think that the director had Mickey illustrated as this old ancient man even though he was only in his twenties because on the night he had watched Sammy kill that man, it seemed like the man Sammy had killed had been the person inside Mickey, like Mickey himself had died that day.

In this scene I thought that Mickey's interaction with Linda was rather brusque, rough and really distanced, like prison had detached their relationship and caused separation between them both. I thought this was an effective scene because from the way the actor portrayed Mickey you could feel pity for this young man and you almost felt like that man up there was somehow related to you and you had to help him, it really caused me to connect with what was happening on stage. I think it was all of the above techniques used by the actor that really made this scene stand out to me.

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I thought that the most effective actor in this play was Mickey. Sean Jones gave an utterly remarkable performance while playing Mickey as a child, teenager and adult. Jones convincingly played Mickey at the age of seven. He captured every aspect of childhood, from Mickey's boundless energy to his apathetic attitude and absolute innocence of the world around him. While performing, Jones used both his voice and gesture to emphasize his characters' feelings and actions. Mickey would always run happily and confidently to the front of the stage, facing the audience without any fear.

As a little Boy Mickey energetically ran around the stage mirroring the behaviour of young children to perfection of those who show so much tremendous energy. All of Mickey's movement and gestures were extremely eccentric and overdone with a very young and boyish excitement. Mickey's childish games of riding invisible horses and shooting at Indians highlighted childhood innocence and portrayed a child's avid imagination. Jones really portrayed a young boys' restlessness and energy to perfection, because even when sitting down Mickey still fidgeted about, unconcernedly tapping his feet and swinging his head in boredom.

Jones spoke highly and used very childlike language to express a small child's way of speech. All of these things helped him to really play a seven year old to utter conviction, and it really was a joy to see a grown man adopt such a childlike manner, resulting in the audience laughing in complete delight. Then, as the play moved on to the teenage years Mickey's energy all but disappeared. Mickey seemed to have left behind his innocence and now walked slower and heavier, along with his voice that became deeper and

steadier he seemed almost non-recognisable to the young child who was earlier bounding around the stage.

Jones really portrayed Mickey's embarrassment when it came to Linda. His speech was very stuttered and blunt when he answered her confidently asked questions. Mickey always spoke with a hint of irritation when speaking to his mother. Jones really captured the difficulty of teenage years and played a very believable character confidently. Finally the play moved on to adulthood and this was when Jones acting skills really were at their best. After Mickey was released from prison we saw a completely changed man. Jones used movement and his voice to really portray Mickey's vulnerability.

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Mickey is a very hard character to play due to his growth from a child to adult in the play, this was a huge challenge for Jones but he took it up making it really seem like 3 different actors played Mickey as he developed into adulthood. The set throughout the play varied little, there being only one main set change between Acts one and two. Many of the smaller set changes

were shown by adding extra furniture and extra props. Act one centred around about 3 rough, crimson terraced houses. The houses are extremely small and all have the same look of being overcrowded and confined to an undersized space.

The houses all have the same rudimentary appearance to them. Towards the back of the stage is a darkened alley which has been smothered in graffiti which portrays crime and destruction which would have been common in places like that. The houses loom over the stage, showing lack of space and although the stage is brightly lit this contrast greatly with the dark red of the bricked houses. The overall mood is one of poverty and the constant fight for endurance. Opposite the terraced houses was one large house that represented Mrs. Lyons house, there was a gap between the terraced houses and Mrs.

Lyons house, this shows the class divide between the rich and the poor. Act Two begins with a great feeling of hope and new beginnings. Because the family have now been re-housed we can now see a difference in the once claustrophobic set. Although the houses are still terraced, the sinister alleyway has disappeared being replaced with a fence and style and vast fields that stretch into the distance lit by a brilliant blue sky, which gives an overall feeling of space and freedom and makes the set seem larger than the original. The doors have been painted, portraying the family's fresh start in a bright new destination.

The Colours are now bright, like the blue of the sky and vivid green of the grass which just adds to the optimistic mood of hope. The Set now appears

to be cleaner and fresher and lacks the depressing feeling that it carried during the first act. Many other smaller set changes and props were made but these were simply flown in from the wings to show a change in scenery, for instance Mrs Lyons house. In Mrs Lyons house props such as the wide selection of books portrayed wealth and a well decorated wall defined the size of the house which contrasted hugely to the impoverished street that Mrs.

Johnstone lived in. These few simple props worked to great effect and really helped to highlight the Lyons luxurious surroundings. Another factor that I had noted was that while the Johnstone's lived in their old neighbourhood, we never got a glimpse of the inside of her house, which would show that she was ashamed of her house and yet as soon as she moved into the countryside we were allowed to see inside her kitchen, which tells us that she was proud of her new house and wanted to show it off.

Backdrops were used constantly throughout the scene, like when the Mickey, Eddie and Linda went to the carnival. Costume in this play was crucial because it could highlight many of the characters roles. Mrs Johnston was dressed in basic garments of unadorned colours and plain styles. Her costume helped to express her character and showed us her responsibility of both mother and cleaner. Her clothes seemed to be very old and looked as if they needed to be replaced which emphasised Mrs Johnston's poverty.

Mrs Johnston was dressed as any other normal working class women in the 1960s. Mrs Lyons was dressed in fashionable, neat clothes of vibrant colours that really helped to indicate her prosperity. Mrs Lyons shoes were always

high which symbolised that she didn't do practical work and that her wealth secured her a future free of work. As children when Mickey and Eddie first met, you could see that he was wearing stretched out shirts and shorts, which clearly told the audience that they were hand me downs, and he wore a tank top that had holes in it.

The shorts and shirt showed that Mickey was a child because those are the types of clothes children tend to wear, and also as his clothes were so much bigger for him, they made him look younger. I noticed that throughout the play Mickey wore green or his belongings were green, which symbolised his jealousy and envy of Eddie. If this were contrasted with Eddie, you could see that as a child Eddie wore grey, which is considered as a boring colour, and this could probably tell us why he and Mickey became best friends because Eddie wanted some excitement in his life.

Lighting was also used very effectively, such as when the narrator sang songs such as 'Shoes on the table', the light turned very cold using blues and whites, but also there was an undercurrent of red which seemed to me as though it was signifying the devil or hell. It was used when the idea of superstition was brought up. One of the most memorable scenes where lighting was concerned, had to be the Madwoman chant, where Mrs Lyons stumbled into centre stage and fell to the floor, the stage was red washed and signified her spiralling down into her own personal hell.

It was the abrupt change in lighting that impressed me. My favourite scene for lighting had to be the 'mad woman' scene. This was after Mrs Lyons tried to attack Mrs Johnstone with a knife and was called "crazy" by Mrs

Johnstone. Mrs Lyons slowly stumbled to centre stage and looked helpless. The stage was red washed and children's voices were heard taunting Mrs Lyons with almost a skipping rope chant or game; it began, " High upon the hill, the mad woman lives, never eat the sweets she gives, just throw them away and give them to your dad, high upon the hill there's a woman gone mad... Mrs Lyons fell to her knees screaming and trying to block out the sound.

The lighting used was to try and create a hellish image, representing Mrs Lyons personal spiral into a madness created by her own superstition that her son would die if he found out the truth. Also the red flashing lights used could have represented Mrs Lyons a dead end because red is the signal used for stop, and here everything comes to a halt, this would show that she has come to a dead end, therefore her own personal hell has begun because there's no going back now.

She can't turn the clock and undo what had happened, she can't go back in time and change the past. Personally, I enjoyed this play. I think it carried across a message of destiny, when you are meant to be with someone no matter what you will always be together in a way. In this case, Mickey and Eddie were born together and died together. I also believe that this play carries a message of love, but also how love can bring you hatred. Mrs. Lyons love for Edward brought her hatred for Mrs.

Johnstone, who was the woman who gave her the child in the first place. And finally, I believe the play contained a message of wanting more than you can have. All of the characters wanted something in their lives, but even when

they had what they wanted, they all had a downfall. Receiving what they wanted only brought them misery. I think that the director was successful in his aims of achieving the effect that he/she had been looking for, and I think their aim was to achieve awe, wonder, grief, elation and pain.

I think that their aim was to have the audience so deeply involved that it felt like you were part of what was happening on stage and not just watching it from the sidelines and I think that the director managed that spectacularly. I thought the play was really powerful and I was really moved by what I saw on stage, I think that I will remember this play because of the message it carried out to me, (The truth will always be known, no matter how much you try to hide it). Overall I thought that the play was amazing and I would definitely recommend it.