

Blood brothers theatre evaluation drama gcse student

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Blood Brothers Evaluation Last week we went to the Phoenix Theatre in Leister Square to see Blood Brothers. When we walked into the theatre, I noticed that the proscenium arch stage was slanted which put everything on the stage in perspective. There was no live orchestra, and all the sound travelled easily throughout the room as it was quite a small theatre. Before the play, I had been told that the story was based in Liverpool and I had high expectations as it is one of the longest-running musicals in the West End. Behind the gauze, I could see the backdrop which was mostly grey and had houses and other buildings on it.

It looked as if the scene was set in the heart of Liverpool. Due to the artwork on the programs, it was obvious that this production would be about the life of two brothers, and the different ways in which they grow up. The use of the clasping of hands symbolised a forbidden or unlikely friendship between the different classes that there were at this time. At the beginning of the play we saw some men dressed in black suits putting two bodies into coffins, however the gauze curtain was still not raised. This seemed like the past and present of the story, as this first scene was the inevitable end.

I personally did not think it ruined the storyline by showing the end at the beginning, as I forgot this scene, and did not realise how vital it was to the production. I think it gave the whole play a more dramatic effect learning, that you had known the outcome from the very beginning. I think this scene proves that you cannot escape your fate. All the scenes were set in the same location; and the set design remained the same for the whole performance, even when the backdrop changed however, the insides of houses, occasionally descended from the ceiling to show the insides of each home.

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On the right side of the stage we saw some white-brown bricks and a window, at the back of the stage was a wall which had graffiti on it.

The wall was very dirty and the bricks looked old. The graffiti had some words written on it such as "Everton", "Liverpool" and "Mickey". On the left side of the stage were three front doors which seemed worn and tired. These bricks were also a grey-brown colour. Therefore the stage is set out so that we look at the front of the Johnston household, and the back of the Lyons household.

The overall look of the production is dominated by the use of colour.

For example, when the children are younger, they wear brighter colours, for Linda wears a bright red dress, and Mickey wears a tattered green jumper. When Linda is 18, she wears a purple-blue dress, high heels and a white cardigan. These simple clothes show that she cares about her appearance, and the way she dresses reflects her mood. When she is older, and is depressed, because Mickey is addicted to his depression pills, it is clear to the audience that she doesn't care about her appearance as she is wearing plain jeans and a dull blue shirt.

The lighting is also used to show mood change and is a major theme of the production setting. In the country the light is brighter, a "white" light, but in the city, the lighting takes on a gloomy "grey" tone. This mirrors the conflict between the city and the country, rich and the poor and Eddie and Mickey. The clever use of lighting also helps to convey the story, without the need for additional props; the cinema scene is shown by projection lights and most effectively the prison scene is conveyed by a gobo of prison bars projected

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onto the floor. The presence of police and police cars is indicated using blue and red flashing lights.

Towards the end of the play the moods of the brothers is also shown through lighting, when Eddie is on stage, the lighting is a red-pink colour, showing a positive, happy and successful individual.

For Mickey however, the lighting is blue; sad and depressing matching his mood. The characters were spot lit when they were singing or during a dramatic moment, ensuring the audience focused on the character, but the spotlight was not so great that it excluded the surrounding characters, so that the songs or the drama was seen in the context of the rest of the story, not as a standalone.

As well as lighting, sound was used very effectively to stage the story. For example "echoes" were created in the alleyways, to make us think that Eddie's house was a long way away. These echoes were also used to symbolise Eddie's loneliness. This could show that there is emptiness in Eddie's heart that can only be filled by a close friend or a brother.

There was a bold use of sound especially in scary, dramatic or important scenes. This added to the drama of the overall performance, it made the audience feel a variety of emotions. In the scene when Mrs.

Lyons tries to murder Mrs. Johnston, the sound affects really emphasised how Mrs.

Lyons was feeling and her sheer madness. The use of surround sound made me feel like I was in the scene and it made the whole performance much

more realistic. The use of props was used similarly to the set, to show the hierarchy of classes. In the poorer part of Liverpool the chairs used were plain and old, however in the richer part of town, the chairs used were smart and polished. During the financial depression, FOR SALE signs were hung from the ceiling, to show the hard times.

All the signs seemed to be situated in the poorer part of town.

The clothes line which appeared as one of the first props on stage, demonstrated to the audience how many children Mrs. Johnston had, due to all the baby grows hung up on the line. The clothes line was also used again as the judge's box when Mickey was in court. The clothes line is used as an adaptable prop to take the audience through the years from child to adulthood. Blood Brothers is set in the 1960s, and at this time people didn't believe in contraception, and that is maybe one of the main reasons for Mrs. Johnston having so many children.

The portrait of the Pope, which was used when the Johnston's were being rehoused, showed the audience that Mrs. Johnston was Catholic, this also helps to support the fact that Mrs. Lyons makes Mrs. Johnston swear on the bible to give one of her children away. Throughout the whole play guns are used. When the children are young the guns they use are fake air-pistols.

It is ironic how the children always wanted a real gun, and both brothers end up dying of one. The locket plays an important part in the storyline as well. The locket which Mrs.

Johnston gives Eddie, has a picture of Mickey when he is a baby and Mrs. Johnston herself.

She hopes by giving Eddie this, he will always remember her. One of the most important props of this production was the narrator. The narrator appeared in every scene, whether he was physically on stage or up on the balcony, he was always visible. He would stand and look over the actors, giving the scenes an eerie effect, as if there was always somebody watching over them. The narrator was tied in with many scenes, by singing along with the characters, or giving them props.

The narrator would also say what was on each characters mind, even if they said differently.

For the duration of the performance the narrator always wore a simple black suit with a tie. The narrator was a static character, nonetheless one of the most powerful forces on the stage. It seems the narrator acts as a ghost; he can only be seen by certain people. When Mrs. Lyons tries to kill Mrs. Johnston, she sees the narrator as he helps her up off the floor, although she is looking at the narrator, wide-eyed and shocked (as if she had just seen a ghost) it looks as if she is looking through the narrator, like he is transparent.

This is a powerful moment in the play, as it makes the audience feel slightly mad, as the narrator has been visible to them for the entire play. In contrast to the complex part of the narrator; Eddie and Mickey are more traditional in their characterisation and portrayal on stage. Eddie and Mickey are played by the same actors throughout the play. This is a risky strategy as it relies

wholly on the quality of the acting to lead the audience into suspending disbelief and to fully engage with both the child and adult personas.

In this production this aspects of the characterisation was completely successful and leads us to feel a real “ affinity” (connection) with the characters as we saw them literally “ grow up”. When Eddie and Mickey first meet at the age of 7, their personalities really show the difference between classes.

Eddie had an English accent, and pronounced his vowels clearly. He seemed quite timid when he talked and his voice was quite quiet; on the other hand, Mickey had a typical Liverpool accent, and sometimes it is quite hard to understand what he was saying, he spoke very loudly and confidently and spat everywhere when he spoke.

Even though when the children did stand up, and they were the same height as the other adult characters, you didn't think for one moment, that they were actually adults. Mickey was flailing around the stage using his whole body, he stumbled around the stage tripping over his own feet and swaying his body vigorously, whereas Eddie's body movements were completely different, he had a straight posture; he stood tall using his back, his shoulders were firm, away from his neck and his movements were defined.

Eddie and Mickey spent quite a lot of time on the floor, perhaps this was done to slightly detract from the height differences. When Mickey and Eddie cut themselves so they can become “ Blood Brothers”, Mickey cuts himself instantly, and Eddie seems a little worried about cutting himself.

It is ironic how they become blood brothers, when in actual fact they are brothers all along. In their acting Eddie looks up to Mickey, by copying what he does, when it should be Eddie looking down on him because he is in a higher class.

In this play the use of multi-role was very common; however it was only the costumes that changed their characters, it did not physically show in the actor that they were switching characters. I only have a few criticisms for this production. Firstly, at the end of the performance, it was not clear who shot who, and this is a big staging problem as this scene is one of the most important scenes in the whole play. Also at times I did not believe in the tale as is it real that a mother would give away her child? I do think the production did a very good job in making the audience think a person would do that.

My reflection on the performance is that almost every aspect of this piece was used effectively, and only once I thought about the performance in great depth, did I realise how the production team used costumes, lighting, sound effects, multi-role and many other things to connect every part of this production together. This is a performance in which the audience experiences many different emotions- the actors brought humour into their roles, while the dramatic and poignant ending had a resounding impact on the audience.