

Blood brothers: overview



Blood Brothers is a musical by Willy Russell which was written and first performed in 1981. The musical is about twin brothers, separated at birth, with one kept in a low-class family and the other adopted into a wealthy family. The characters of Mrs Johnston and Mrs Lyons, the mothers, are total opposites. Mrs Johnston is a struggling, single mother of seven, with another two on the way, whereas Mrs Lyons is a privileged, yet childless, married woman. One of the main themes of the musical is superstition for example; the song 'shoes upon the table' is all about superstition.

Another big theme of the musical is fate. Eddie and Mickey meet almost as if they are meant to, and instantly take a liking to one another. When they lose contact, they meet again, proving they are supposed to be a pair. Also the narrator plays the role of the devil and he sings the song lyrics 'you know the devil's got your number' and that is implying that no matter what, fate is going to happen wherever the characters are living or whatever they are doing. The last theme to the musical is social class, the whole way through the musical we are being reminded about how different these characters are to each other.

Willy Russell shows this by their clothes, accent or speech. The opening scene started with a funeral we saw some men dressed in black suits putting two bodies into coffins (Mickey and Eddie) 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 think that was effective because it immediately gets your attention and you become eager to know what's going on. Mickey and Eddie lay side by side both dead. The narrator then

tells us the story of what happened. This is cross-cutting as it shows a different time period then returns to the current one.

When we are first introduced to Mrs Johnston, she is a single mother ever since her husband left her for a younger woman. She is not dressed in the best of clothes as she does not have much money and her job is cleaning Mrs. Lyons house. Mrs. Johnston is a low-class Liverpudlian, who is extremely hard working. Mrs Johnston is shown as a woman in her thirties but a very worn out woman because of the stress of work and her children. Mrs Johnston stutters at times because of her being under pressure, like when Mrs Lyons is persuading her to give away one of the twins.

And by Mrs. Johnston stuttering it shows she is unsure and pressured into something she doesn't want to do. Willy Russell presents Mrs Johnston to the audience as a decent woman, who gives lots of love to her children, but she can't give them more than that because she hasn't got a well-paid job and she is working as Mrs Lyons' house maid, which takes a lot of her time, which could be spent with her children instead. That is why Mickey and his siblings are left to learn about life themselves on the streets. That makes the audience sympathise with the poor people.

She shows that to the audience after she learns she is going to have twins by saying: " With one more baby we could have managed. But not with two. The Welfare have already been on to me. They say I'm incapable of controllin' the kids I've already got. They say I should put some of them into care" so because she loves her children and wants to keep them she makes the sacrifice of giving Eddie to Mrs. Lyons with hope that he will have a better life then what she could give him. Even though she regrets giving Eddie to Mrs.

Lyons her superstitions stops her from telling anyone about what she has done out of the fear of killing her own children.

Mrs Lyons contrasts really strongly against Mrs Johnston. At first, Mrs Lyons is shown as a bright person in her thirties, unlike the stressed Mrs Johnston who is the same age. Mrs Lyons is an upper middle-class woman. She is dressed very smartly as she has the money to have nice clothes. Mrs. Lyons is a very patronising woman, who is forceful and pressurising. Mrs Lyons uses negative views about extra children so that Mrs Johnston will have to give away one of the twins to her. She doesn't do this in an aggressive way, but in a dangerously sweet way. So that Mrs.

Johnston doesn't feel like she can cope any more. Willy Russell also shows Mrs. Lyons to be self-centred as Mrs Lyons is willing to take a child away from its mother, so that she can save herself. Mrs Lyons is a very sly and devious woman, as she uses superstition against Mrs Johnston, so that she can keep one of the twins. Her facial expressions are very stern and persuading and her body language comes across very confident as she knows that's she is manipulating Mrs. Johnston. The Narrator is also a very important part to the musical; he acts as a shadow of the other characters. Firstly he was like the host.

He constantly kept appearing and kept the performance flowing. It seemed as if he had the remote to slow things down and also to speed things up when he wanted. He wore a smart black suit which gave him a high profile. His voice was used quite well because he adjusted it to make it loud and directive as a narrator should have but it also had a bit of power in it. During the performance he popped up here and there just to clarify things for the

audience. The Narrator is there as a reminder of Mrs Johnston and Mrs Lyons' agreement. The other characters don't acknowledge him which shows he is of a ghostly nature.

The Narrator raises suspicion and builds up tension between the characters. The Narrator also has no emotions and he comes across as a very cold person which makes the audience feel as if he is like a devil type figure. Although he is a devil like figure, he is a neutral character because he doesn't choose sides and we don't know anything about him, other than he knows the fate of each character. The Narrator is trying to tell Mrs Johnston and Mrs Lyons that their pact won't work, because the truth will be known. He uses repetition and rhyme, so that his lines are more catchy and memorable.

The character of Mickey was portrayed really well as the person playing this role was showing great child like movements such as pulling his jumper over his knees and also by the way he was speaking. The way Mickey was speaking came across very child like as he was doing a lot of rhyming and simple sentences. Mickey also plays childhood games, like mounted Police and Indians, and runs around with a toy gun. When Mickey was playing his cowboy like games he pretended to have a horse between his legs and he galloped around the stage like a child would do.

As Mickey got older he showed he was acting more mature and he understood that life wasn't going to be easy for him and he needed to work for things unlike Eddie who had everything sorted out for him. When Mickey has got out of prison he is really unsteady and has to take pills to calm himself even though he doesn't need the pills, he just thinks he does. But

when Mickey takes the pills, Willy Russell uses stage directions to give the characters emotion with their physical movement, so when Mickey takes the pills the lights come up on Mickey.

We see him go to take his pill, we see him struggle not to take it” Russell does this to get the audience to feel sad and sympathetic for Mickey. So 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. 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. Eddie is the complete opposite to Mickey as he was raised in a wealthy family and he shows this in his body language because he stands up straight, speaks politely and is never rude. When Eddie first meets Mickey, Mickey speaks in common English and uses slang around Eddie and he finds it amazing because he has never heard any one talk like that. Eddie seems to have grown up very fast because at the age of seven, he is already very polite and well spoken. His parents have influenced him because he is like a miniature adult.

Throughout the whole of the musical Mrs. Johnston sings about Marilyn Monroe, Marilyn Monroe is a very clever icon to use throughout the musical. This is because using her as a reference sets us in the correct time period. She is also a good symbol, because she has links to many of the themes in the play including death, addiction and beauty. 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.

One the right side of the stage was a wall which had graffiti on it and that represented the lower class type of area that Mickey and Mrs. Johnston would live in. Class difference is displayed very clearly in Blood Brothers, in particular the difference in wealth between the two families. Eddie's parents ensure that he has a comfortable upbringing and is able to study at university and receive a qualification, resulting in a highly paid job. This is completely different to Mickey.

He comes from a poor family which meant that he was stuck in a dead end job in a factory. " I bleeding hated it, standing there all day never doing anything apart from putting cardboard boxes together. " This reflects Mickey's frustration and highlights the lack of opportunities open to him, which adds to the dramatic effect of the musical because it prepares us for trouble in the future. A good example of dramatic irony in the musical is when Eddie and Mickey decide that as they are such good friends they will become blood brothers. Hey, we were born on the same day. That means we can be blood brothers. " The audience knows that they were actually brothers so that creates dramatic irony. I really enjoyed the musical Blood Brothers and it helped me understand the class difference which is displayed very clearly in the difference in wealth between the two families. I also liked the way the actors never came out of role when bringing in props e. g.

chairs, tables and carpets. I also loved how the lighting would make a very serious point feel more real and intense.