

Play Review



Entertaining 'Blood Brothers' at Regent

THE Christchurch-based Arena Theatre Company put on a polished and highly entertaining production of the 1983 musical 'Blood Brothers' at the town's Regent Centre.

The funny yet ultimately tragic tale follows the lives of twin brothers born into a large working-class family and what happens when their mother has one of them adopted by an upper-class family because she cannot afford to bring them both up.

Playing the brothers were Tom Ford as Mickey and Sam Stevenson as Edward. Both gave extremely funny and strong performances as the play tracked their growth from children to young adults. At times they had the audience in fits of laughter.

Directed by Bernard Dunleavy, the play detailed the differences and conflicts of their upbringings: Mickey with his real mother Mrs Johnstone, superbly played by Louise Thomas, and Edward with adopted and sometimes highly strung mother Mrs Lyons, who was well portrayed by Natasha Green.

But the boys become best friends and the story looks at their relationship with each other and their mothers. Pete Griffiths' exuberant performance captured the aggressive nature of Mickey's older brother Sammy, and Jenny Trapp provided some comedy moments as Mickey's friend and later partner Linda.

James Hoare was competent as Mrs Lyons' husband.

Throughout the play a convincingly menacing narrator (Pete Beebee) and chorus (Charles Furness, Penelope Wright, Barry Gunner and Eben Skilliter) vocalised the thoughts and fears of the mothers: Mrs Johnstone's regret at giving her child away and Mrs Lyons' superstition (which she tells Mrs Johnstone) that if twins separated at birth learned they were once a pair they would both die immediately.

The cast spoke in unfaltering Liverpool accents and music from the 1950s through to the 1970s marked the passage of time, providing a perfect soundscape to the story.

The set showed the brothers' separate lives by transforming into different houses on either side of the stage. The story was gripping and the two hours 10 minutes running time flew by.

In a dramatic final scene Mickey, armed with a gun, confronts Edward but is shot by officers and accidentally kills his brother just as their true relationship is revealed.

Arena Theatre's production was energetic and professional. It kept the audience engaged and made for an enjoyable evening at The Regent Centre.

M.R.