

Review: Blood Brothers ****



Written by the legendary English dramatist, lyricist and composer Willy Russell, *Blood Brothers* is set in 1960s Liverpool and tells the story of two brothers, Eddie and Mickey, separated at birth as a result of their mother, Mrs Johnstone, being unable to afford to keep them both. She reluctantly agrees to give one of her babies away to her employer, Mrs Lyons, sensitively played by Sarah Jane Buckley.

Mrs Johnstone is played by Lyn Paul, still remembered as a member of the successful 1970s pop group New Seekers, whose huge hit '*I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing*' sold over 20 million records. Ms Paul also starred in Bill Kenwright's production of *Cabaret* with Will Young in 2013.

Middle-class Mrs Lyons chooses Eddie but doesn't want him mixing with the working-class Johnstone family who are, as they might say in Liverpool, a right bunch of scallywags. The Lyons move away to the countryside and live in blissful peace for the next seven years. But when the estate they live in is earmarked for demolition, the Johnstones also move and are once again in close proximity to the Lyons.

Eddie, played by Mark Hutchinson and Mickey, played by Sean

Jones are back together as they reach their mid-teens and adulthood. Despite their lives having been separated the pair, unaware they are siblings, eventually become best friends. But as young men their lives go on very different paths with one becoming a councillor and a respected pillar in the community while the other is unemployed and ends up in prison.

When they both fall in love with the same girl their friendship becomes irreparable – and eventually leads to tragedy.

All the cast are excellent, but a special mention must go to Sean Jones who gave one of the most powerful stage performances I have seen. From playing a cheeky little toe rag as a child to a young man with mental health issues, Jones is simply immense. The whole production is a rollercoaster of emotion, having you laugh out loud one minute and feeling a lump in the throat the next.

Among the repertoire of songs is *Bright New Day*, *Marilyn Monroe* and the emotion-wringing *Tell Me It's Not True*.

At two and a half hours *Blood Brothers* certainly provides value for money and is hugely entertaining. It begins with the ending of the story but then goes on to tell the tragic tale of how the conclusion was reached. Perhaps the first half of the show could be a bit shorter. Much is told about Eddie and Mickey's childhood while the shorter second half seems to skim the details of Mickey's demise and Eddie's success – until tragedy strikes.

Nonetheless, *Blood Brothers* tugs at your heart strings and never lets go. Yet, as with so much of Willy Russell's work, it is funny and warm as well as being heart-rending.

At the end of this magnificent show I thought I caught Lyn Paul wiping a tear from her eye as she gave her powerful finale. If she did, believe me, she wasn't the only one as a hugely appreciative Edinburgh audience gave the cast a richly

deserved standing ovation.

Edinburgh Reporter rating: ****

Directed by Bob Tomson and Bill Kenwright, *Blood Brothers* is at the Edinburgh Playhouse until Saturday 10th March. Tickets [here](#).