

Fringe 2024 – Brothers

Alcoholism. Anxiety. Arthritis.

You'd maybe not think a show about subjects like these would be the most uplifting. But you'd be wrong. *Brothers*, a new drama by Raised Voices Theatre, isn't performed by seasoned actors, but by people with lived experience of the issues it highlights and a huge commitment to their art. Nothing is sanitised, and there are no easy answers, but this raw, honest piece of theatre has hope at its core. And it even has good jokes.

Eddie and Grant are brothers. As the play opens Eddie (Colin Brown) is just back from his holidays, and he certainly looks like he's had a great time. He and Grant (Matthew Power) warble along to *He's Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother* and have a laugh about Eddie's terrible singing.

Eddie's a good time guy. He likes a drink, or several and he can't say no to a party. He can, however, say no to repaying the £150 he's borrowed from Grant. Grant has his own problems, his mental health is not great and his anxiety isn't helped by his money worries. How's he going to pay his rent if Eddie doesn't repay him? He'll be evicted! Although he knows he has to attend his DWP appointments, his anxiety is making him feel too ill to go – but what if they cut off his benefits?

Grant's had enough of Eddie's excuses. Soon the brothers aren't speaking.

As Eddie's drinking gets worse and Grant's mental health deteriorates, the solid rock between the two of them is their mother Louise (the excellent Katy Greeney.) Louise and her friend Christine (Liz Hill) meet regularly to chew the cud. Their support for one another is beautifully conveyed; they're both working class women, their lives are far from easy, but as Louise says,

'You just have to get on with it, don't you?'

So that's what each of them does. Chris is arthritic, Louise worries about her sons, but the two women have the odd night at the bingo to cheer them up. Chris is often keen to go for a drink, Louise is more reluctant ('let's get a pedicure instead' – 'what, a toe job?'), her caution perhaps hinting at previous issues with alcohol.

Grant begins to deal with his problems, and finds that getting help isn't quite so bad as he'd feared. Things aren't going so well for Eddie though; Brown portrays his character's desperation and misery with real pathos. Only when he reaches his lowest point does help comes from an unexpected source.

The story's far from over there, worse is to come before things get better. It's a credit to this cast that, despite the brevity of the show and their own inexperience, we are very soon immersed in each of their stories and rooting for them all the way.

Brothers takes an unfiltered look at the way in which alcoholism takes hold of its victims, its tentacles reaching out to crush everyone in reach. But *Brothers* also celebrates the strength of family bonds and the support we can all offer one another if we care enough to put aside our differences.

The show's excellent lighting and sound are by Martin Splatt.

This is a very different show from most Fringe productions. It isn't too polished, it isn't professional, but it is deeply truthful, heartfelt, entertaining theatre and I challenge anyone not to be moved by it. I'm not going to try to give it stars, it's in a class of its own.

Raised Voices is an award-winning Edinburgh-based charity for those who have experienced or are experiencing homelessness, addiction and mental health issues.

Brothers is at Venue 52, theSpace @ Surgeons' Hall at 11.55 every day until 24th August. Please note there is **no** show on Sunday 18th August. Tickets [here](#).

