

ORPHANS

[Blue Fruit Theatre](#)

[Bakehouse Theatre](#)

Until 23 Nov 2013

Review by [Tony Busch](#) for Adelaide Theatre Guide

What is stronger... blood or duty? What is more important...truth or relationship? And when does the response to fear stop being justified by self-preservation and become vengeful? These are some of the questions posed by "Orphans".

Director Shona Benson has assembled a fine cast for this psychological thriller by Dennis Kelly.

Anna Cheney is Helen and Charles Mayer is Danny, a seemingly average couple at home for a romantic night in when Helen's brother, Liam, arrives covered in blood, setting off a train of events that will force them to confront everything they hold dear.

Cheney is taut and brittle as Helen whose fears are consuming and who uses them as a goad both for herself and her husband. She does well to bring balance to a flawed character whose seemingly blind commitment to her brother is neither explained nor justified, with the revelation near the end of the play of a childhood choice raising more questions than it answers, and seeming somewhat a playwright's contrivance.

Mayer is convincing as Danny, making much of a difficult role, often when there is little to work with. His focused stillness at times is breathtaking.

Sam Calleja plays Liam, the catalyst for the action, and it is a towering performance. His physicality is relentless and his delivery razor sharp. It's a performance not to be missed.

All three handle the difficulties of cross-threaded and topped lines well, with only a few missed beats and all three are finely attuned to each other's energies.

Shona Benson's direction is tight and disciplined and keeps the action on a knife-edge, while giving her actors scope to blur the edges.

The play does deal with universal issues, but it is puzzling why Benson chose to set it in Adelaide, rather than in its original London setting, when little attempt is made to alter the vocabulary or references to suit the new locale.

The set is simple and effective with excellent lighting by Alexander Ramsey. Sound Design by Seam Ormsby and Callie Woods music complete this excellent production.

"Orphans" is certainly not a comfortable night's entertainment but well worth the experience.