

# THEATRE – Orphans – Bakehouse Theatre – Til 23 November – 4K

Theatre  
by Peter



**By Peter Maddern**

A young couple, Helen (Anna Cheney) and Danny (Charles Mayer) prepare to sit down for dinner in their modest but neat apartment when a blood spattered youth, Liam (Sam Calleja), appears unannounced at the door. It is her brother full of a tale of the wanton, senseless beating of a street kid who he says he has then tended to. From there *Orphans* develops a confronting and at times harrowing investigation of the morality – noble and erratic – of those who have been bonded tightly by the adversity of their shared upbringing, as orphans, and those like Danny who have had a more blessed childhood.

Nowhere is this focus more fraught than over the merits of another's well-being. The orphans have been raised, though not obviously with parental intent – around survival and manipulation; a selfish disposition that colours their view of all others. Danny sees another human being as one we should also care about should we be called upon or placed in circumstances where we may do something useful in their aid.

In the end self-interest and the sad realisation that sometimes you just can't change or allow oneself to be caught up in the pathologies of others wins out but getting there is a tense business.



Fresh from Adam Carter's polished performance in *East of Berlin*, Adelaide theatre goers have another chance to see an outstanding young actor in Sam Calleja in full flight. His mastery of the Liam persona – loving and frightening, unhinged but controlling but ultimately either oblivious or unpossessed of ways to handle his deepest flaws – is stunning.

Nowhere was this more evident than when late in the piece Danny and Helen's six year old son, Shane, appears at the door to the living room having been awoken by the kerfuffle ensuing. One just felt an immediate shiver of deep apprehension for his safety that emotively portrayed how far from the preferably idyllic years of childhood as an orphan Liam (at least) had strayed.

Anna Cheney's performance as the conflicted but also psychologically damaged wife, mother and sister is also of the highest calibre. As Helen, Cheney skilfully manages the degradation of the emotional control she has assiduously developed over the years as the big choices in her life loom.

Shona Benson's set is curious with the stage proper surrounded by smashed up TVs, discarded shoes and all other detritus of the unruly and unsafe world that exists just outside the white and tidy but not perfect apartment they enjoy. The battle that then ensues is about preserving their oasis of humanity.

Benson's direction is also excellent, extracting fine performances from all her cast.

This production has been coordinated with Time for Kids, a local charity that supports vulnerable children. Reflecting on their work with that of the characters in *Orphans* makes for a confronting chance for introspection about how we, in our nice worlds, would deal with the circumstances raised in the play.

This is excellent theatre and Calleja's performance alone warrants making a bee-line to the Bakehouse during this productions' season.

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