

Presented by Bluefruit Theatre

Reviewed 9 November 2013

The programme notes for Bluefruit Theatre's latest production, **Orphans**, includes two quotes from its author, Dennis Kelly, that explain the premise of the show perfectly: "*a play should be like a person; funny, kind and capable of incredible cruelty...*" and "*(the title **Orphans**) refers to a sense of us feeling orphaned within society. We feel a little bit like we've been abandoned by the people who're supposed to look after us.*"

This is not a comfortable play by any means, but, like a very good book that one just can't put down, one can't help but watch this story unfold. Liam (Sam Calleja) and his sister, Helen (Anna Cheney), were orphaned at an early age when their parents were burnt to death in a fire, leaving them at the mercy of a system that wanted to separate them. Helen was always Liam's protector so it only seems natural for him to appear at her marital home one evening covered in blood, thus disrupting the pleasant evening meal of her and her husband, Danny (Charles Mayer).

The script is a touch long, but this production impresses in so many ways, not the least of which is how astute producer, director and designer Shona Benson and her cast have been in unearthing every piece of sub-text and laying it open to examination from the audience.

Benson's set is a pristine room raised slightly above junk and debris such as old PC monitors, tires and rubbish, setting Helen and Danny safe above a society that is reeking with violence. The audience get a clear picture of the couple's domestic bliss on entering the auditorium to take their seats, but Benson soon turns everything on its ear. Her direction is well paced and moved, and shows a clear understanding of human emotions and the script. The one distraction is her use of 'interludes' to delineate the passing of time which tend to be over dramatic and extremely esoteric.

Cheney, Mayer and Calleja are superb. ...These actors are all so beautifully skilled in their art that one almost forgets one is in a theatrical environment. Cheney delivers brilliantly; Mayer proves that understatement and preciseness are the keys to fine acting; while Calleja is consummate in his portrayal of neuroses gone wild.

**Orphans** is only Bluefruit Theatre's second production and they have set the bar very high for themselves and others who may appear at The Bakehouse. This reviewer eagerly awaits many, many more Bluefruit Theatre shows.

Reviewed by Brian Godfrey