

Simple story of 'Orphans' evades explanation

Area theatre patrons with a taste for the unconventional will want to catch "Orphans," a play by Lyle Kessler, which opens tonight at 8 p.m. in the Robinson Theatre.

According to a notation by the author at the end of the script, "Orphans" is a work open to various interpretations. This claim was proved to be true by New York theatre critics in 1985 when they gave "Orphans" favorable reviews without professing to understand it. But even if the East Coast intellectuals thought the meaning of "Orphans" was difficult to grasp, the story is a remarkably simple one.

Preview by
David Bates

"Orphans" opens with an image of a boy named Phillip quietly blowing bubbles while seated in the window sill of a run-down North Philadelphia apartment building. Phillip is soon joined by his older brother, Treat, who financially supports the two by mugging people during the day.

Critics have noted the similarity between Kessler's leading players and the rival brothers from Sam Shepard's "True West." As one might guess, Treat and Phillip are orphans, and their lives are far from ideal. But the arrival of a third and older orphan quickly indicates that things are about to change.

The plot of the story concerns the relationship between the two brothers and Harold, a white-collar criminal kidnapped by Treat. While Treat has hopes of acquiring a sizable sum of ransom money for Harold's return, his victim has other plans. Harold manages to escape his bonds, but instead of fleeing, remains with the two brothers to make them an offer they can't refuse.

Director Grant McKernie, head of the University's speech department, defines "Orphans" as "a contemporary tragedy" in that the characters do not achieve their goals by the story's end. Whether Treat, Phillip, and Harold do achieve their goals is something the viewer will ultimately decide for himself or herself after seeing it.

"I believe it conveys a message that many of us are very cynical," said McKernie during an interview. "I think the play's message in part is that people need to trust each other, give encouragement to each other, and that violence is not a way of life. I think it's a message



Photo by Christopher Chabaudie

Harold (Robert Barton) struggles against his captors, the brothers, Philip (Sean Morgan, left) and Treat (Enrique Arias, right), in "Orphans," the University Theatre's first production of the year.

that audiences need to hear."

Another important aspect in "Orphans" mentioned by McKernie is the issue of male-bonding. How men relate to each other on an emotional level is often a sensitive topic, according to McKernie, and one which the story gives a good deal of attention to.

McKernie first saw "Orphans" when it played in London with Albert Finney as Harold. "What struck me was the three wonderful acting opportunities for males," he said. "It's rare to have a show with that kind of balance. I felt it was important that we offer that kind of opportunity to our students."

University Theatre's production of "Orphans"

stars Robert Barton, who is an associate professor in theatre arts and speech, as Harold. Sophomore Sean Morgan plays Phillip, and senior Enrique Arias plays the older brother Treat. Both Morgan and Arias are theatre arts majors.

"Orphans" will play at the Robinson Theatre tonight, Friday and Saturday, and also Oct. 22-24. All performances begin at 8:00 p.m. with the exception of the Saturday matinee, which starts at 2:30 p.m. Tickets can be reserved by calling the Robinson Theatre Box Office at 686-4191. Tickets are \$5.50 for general admission, \$4.50 for students and seniors, and \$3.50 for University students.

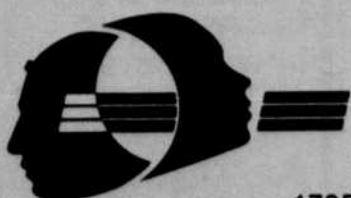
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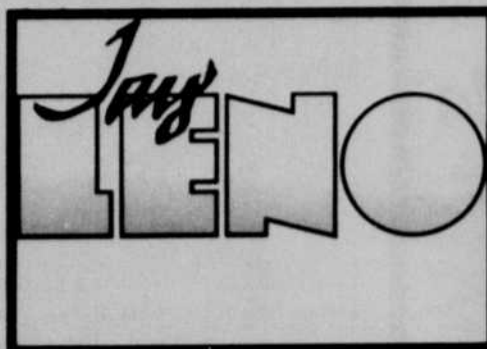
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