

# Blood Brothers

A play by Willy Russell  
Performed in May 1997 at the Faringdon Corn Exchange

## Cracking drama as new talent blossoms

THEATRE-in-the-round is not everyone's cup of tea. But if it works, this most intimate form of drama leaves a lasting impression on the close-witnessing audience.

*Blood Brothers*, by the dependable Willy Russell, is a strong example of the genre. But it also needs a strong cast, and a director of very good heart. In the case of Faringdon Dramatic Society, it was favoured with both.

Proving that the Society can keep the new talent coming, to blend with the older hands, this production introduced Paul Garratt, as the brother who grows up on a council estate, and Karen Whiffen - in her first-ever major acting part - as the girl who marries him, but who could just as easily have ended up in the other brother's more privileged class.

Paul and his opposite number Simon Wisbey, playing the other twin, gave us real, live characters whose potent mixture of naivety and emotion made for cracking drama. Like the 'boys', Karen managed the switch from adolescence to grown-up angst very convincingly. She has a light touch which I think will give her the opportunity of auditioning for a wide range of parts in the Society's future programme.

The interplay between these three was anchored expertly and with total assurance by Jo Webster as the harassed but good-natured mother who gave away one of her twin babies. She may have been only a foot or two away from her surrounding audience, and a very familiar local actress - but that was Mrs Johnson, mother of Mickey, out there - never a doubt of it ... And all of them deserve full marks for keeping up the Liverpool accents which kept this tale firmly in context.

The other 'mother', of rather less sympathetic character, was played by Carole Tappenden with just the right degree of haughtiness in the first instance, deteriorating to bitterness and finally a kind of madness, as she is tortured devilishly for her foolishness in trying to buy motherhood - as predicted sepulchrally by the narrator (Carolyn Taylor).

Taking time off from stage managing, Peter Webster played the milkman-turned-doctor, and Alistair Warner the policeman. It was tightly directed by Kate Lord, who can be well satisfied with her success - as can the lighting team, who faced a particularly difficult challenge.

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