



'ORPHANS' (left to right) Tom Sturridge, Alec Baldwin & Ben Foster in *Orphans*. Photo: Joan Marcus



Theater Review

Orphans is an intense, dark drama

ORPHANS

Written by Lyle Kessler

Directed by Daniel Sullivan

Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre

236 West 45th Street

(212-239-6200), www.OrphansOnBroadway.com

By David NouNou

Extremely similar to Harold Pinter's 1961 *The Caretaker*, concerning two brothers and an outsider, it even has its main character named Harold (Alec Baldwin) as the interloper. However, there is one main difference. *The Caretaker* was pretentious, lugubrious, and boring, while *Orphans* is simple, easygoing, and intriguing. Furthermore, it draws you into the characters' lives. After all, it is all about these three different men.

The brothers in this case are Trent, the thug and protector (Ben Foster); and Phillip, the damaged and simpleminded (Tom Sturridge). They have been orphans since childhood; their father deserted them and their mother died, so Trent has always had to provide for Phillip and made sure he was safe from harm and intruders. Phillip is a virtual prisoner in his ramshackle house and knows nothing of the outside world. His means of knowing comes from the TV set and looking outside the window of his house until brother comes home; in most cases, after some petty thievery to provide for their survival.

On one of his late-night outings, Trent brings home the outsider, the drunken Harold, ties him up, and holds him for ransom. Who is Harold? Harold is obviously a man of means and tells us that he was an orphan. He is an enigma. What he does, and who he is, is the mystery here. From the moment Harold enters the scene, nothing remains the same. Love, trust, and abandonment become major issues now, and to quote the brilliant line from *All About Eve*, "Fasten your seat belts, it's going to be a bumpy night."

Orphans was originally done Off-Broadway in 1983. It was in the style of plays by Harold Pinter (*The Caretaker*), Joe Orton (*What the Butler Saw*), and John Guare (*The House of Blue Leaves*), in which flawed characters were placed in odd circumstances, with something nefarious lurking underneath. What gives *Orphans* an edge over the others is that all the characters here are likeable, and this is no small feat. Formidably directed by Daniel Sullivan, he has a keen eye for the play and the cast.

Harold was originally portrayed by "Frasier's" John Mahoney. Now it has Alec Baldwin. Need one say more? As Harold, he is dynamic. Mr. Baldwin is a presence to be dealt with; a true dynamo. As a stage actor, he is mellowing with age and becomes better with each appearance.

As the brothers, Treat and Phillip, Ben Foster and Tom Sturridge, respectively, are both making remarkable Broadway debuts. They hold their own against the mighty Baldwin. Watching their transformations and role reversals is most interesting. *Orphans* is most enjoyable due to its simplicity in writing and complexity in its characters.

Edited by Scott Harrah

Published April 26, 2013

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