

## Tragic drama set to music is Cleveland crowd-pleaser

• David Cassidy, Petula Clark lead a strong cast of 16 at Palace Theatre

BY RUSS MUSARRA

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The audience knows from the opening scene that *Blood Brothers* has a tragic ending. The question in everyone's mind is what brought twins Mickey and Eddie to their fatal date with destiny.

Playwright Willy Russell gave the principal job of answering that question to two people — the narrator, sort of a singing Rod Serling, who observes the action and occasionally interacts with the players, and Mrs. Johnstone, who alternately shares the narration and plays out her role of a mother who gave away one of her twins rather than run the risk of losing both of them.

Russell wrote *Blood Brothers* without music for the Merseyside Young Peoples' Theatre Co. in Liverpool, England, in 1981, then spent the next year adding his own music and lyrics to create a full-scale musical drama that is still playing in London's West End.

The opening-night audience loved *Blood Brothers* Tuesday at the Palace Theatre in Cleveland's Playhouse Square. Their enthusiasm was not misplaced.

Petula Clark, as Mrs. Johnstone, shows that a voice, like fine wine, can indeed improve with age. This 1960s pop-music sensation sounds better in the '90s — and her star shone brightly for good reason back then.

She is onstage virtually without interruption for perhaps a third of the first act, singing and speaking of Mrs. Johnstone's impoverished life in Liverpool, many pregnancies and failed marriage, all leading to the mo-

ment she decides to give her infant son Eddie to her wealthy but childless employer, Mrs. Lyons.

David Cassidy delivers a solid performance as Mickey, the twin Mrs. Johnstone keeps, the central figure in the drama.

Cassidy shows that he can act, playing Mickey as a 7-year-old ragamuffin without resorting to cute stereotypes and growing before everyone's eyes into a tongue-tied adolescent and finally, a desperate young adult made old before his time by conditions around him.

His singing opportunities are few, but he uses them well, especially in *Long, Long Sunday Afternoon*, a bluesy tune he performs near the end of the first act.

Cassidy and Clark head a strong cast of 16.

Tif Luckenbill is convincing without being foppish as Eddie, the twin from the right side of the tracks, who becomes Mickey's best friend and blood brother at age 7.

Priscilla Quinby, who may be remembered by Akron-area audiences from her role as Julie in the 1993 and 1987 Carousel Dinner Theatre productions of *Show Boat*, is in good voice as Mrs. Lyons, the mother who raised Eddie.

Three others who must be mentioned are Yvette Lawrence as Linda, the childhood playmate who is loved by both twins; John Kozeluh as Sammy, the twins' older brother; and Henry Hud-

### Details

**Play:** *Blood Brothers*

**Where:** Palace Theater, 1615 Euclid Ave., Cleveland

**When:** 7:30 p.m. today, 2:30 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday-Sunday

**Onstage:** David Cassidy (in all but the Sunday evening performance) and Petula Clark head a cast of 16

**Offstage:** Willy Russell, book, music and lyrics; Bill Kenwright and Bob Tomson, directors; Andy Walmsley, set and costume design; Joe Atkins, lighting design; Paul Astbury, sound design; Ron Edwards, musical direction

**Cost:** \$23.50-\$42.50

**Information:** (800) 766-6048

son, as the business-driven Mr. Lyons.

*Blood Brothers* begins and ends with the narrator, a role capably spoken and beautifully sung by Mark McGrath, whose looks and stage presence are reminiscent of David Bowie. McGrath's duets with Clark, *My Child* and *Living on the Never Never*, were among the show's musical high points.

The show continues through Sunday, with Cassidy in all but the Sunday evening performance. □