

# 'Blood Brothers' Has Power to Grasp Hearts: Cheer and Tear Story

by MIKE RUSSELL

Petula Clark, David Cassidy and Tif Luckenbill revealed the class division of Liverpool, England in the 1950s as they starred in Willy Russell's dramatic musical "Blood Brothers." The national touring company show opened at Costa Mesa's Performing Arts Center Tuesday, Feb. 7.

Clark, who is now 60, was last heard from in the U.S. in the '60s when she was knocking the pop music lovers dead with million sellers like "Downtown," "Don't Sleep in the Subway" and a bushel of others that would end up selling in excess of 30 million records all over the world. It was Clark who made the dramatic "Blood Brothers" story of class distinction between poverty and wealth seem real. As the story

unfolds, Mrs. Johnstone (Clark) has seven children already when she becomes pregnant again (dash it all!) by her man, per chance husband, who flatteringly has always told her she reminds him of Marilyn Monroe, which is the title of the opening song. She soon has twins, Mickey (David Cassidy) and Eddie (Tif Luckenbill).

Her man is overwhelmed and decides to leave Mrs. Johnstone for another lady who "looks a little like Marilyn Monroe." Mrs. Johnstone, already overloaded with kids, finds it a necessity to give one of her newborn twins away. It turns out she gives Eddie to Mrs. Lyons (Priscilla Quinby), who is unable to bear children at all. Mickey grows up in poverty and learns everything that is unwise and streetwise. Through some twist of fate, Mickey meets

Eddie and decides he likes him as much as a blood brother (which he really is). From the startling start, which is a double death scene, to the end of the three-hour show, there is a narrator who acts as a guide for us all. He is the talented Mark McGrath, who is the only cast member who speaks with an American accent. The rest of the cast speaks Liverpoolesse (luckily, no supertitles are needed).

Russell, who grew up in the poverty

of Liverpool himself, decided early on that that wasn't what he aspired to do with his life. So he quit school at 15 to become a hairdresser and later returned to school and became a teacher. While studying to become a teacher, he wrote his first play and so it went. Ah, not as easy as all that, but he did attain his goal of being a playwright. As it turned out later, he wrote the films "Educating Rita" and "Shirley Valentine" that have made their mark on the silver screen

here in America in the past several years. An enterprising producer asked, "What else can you do?" But Russell had already written "Blood Brothers" and it was fatefully chosen to open in London's theater district in the early '80s. So, as it sometimes occurs, Russell's drama/

musical has opened on Broadway and is even touring the U.S, starring Clark and Cassidy and others who make it a sound-good, look-good show piece with a message. (The message is don't shoot your brother) Russell proved he had the ability to

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