

Orphans

Hippodrome Theatre

(Not suitable for children or adults offended by strong language.)

All orphans have one great fear: the fear of being alone. Phillip and Treat are no exception. They're two brothers living by themselves in a dingy apartment somewhere in Philadelphia.

Like many orphans, their story is a familiar one. Dad took off a long time ago and Mom died some time later. But, unlike most, Phillip and Treat didn't give in. They stuck together, fighting off — and living off of — the society that had abandoned them.

Treat (Brian Cousins) is the older, semi-street smart brother who makes a living through penny-ante theft. He acts as a father figure for Phillip (T. Scott Cunningham), who's slightly younger and obviously bright.

Frankly, Treat can be brutal, coarse and occasionally violent. Yet, as the play progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that he acts out of fear. Phillip is the only person Treat has left and he can't bear the thought of being abandoned again.

As a result, Treat explodes when he discovers Phillip has been reading the newspaper and underlining words he doesn't understand. Sadly, he even sees education as a way for Phillip to leave him behind.

"Have you been reading again?" he asks threateningly. "Are you looking up those underlined words in a pocket dictionary?"

Treat even goes so far as to

convince Phillip (and possibly even himself) that Phillip is allergic to everything outdoors and if he steps outside, he could die. So, Treat spends his time mugging people in the park while Phillip wanders around the apartment, amusing himself as best he can.

Their days blur into an endless series of tuna fish sandwiches and late-night movies . . . until Harold (Traver Burns) stumbles into their lives. At first, Harold seems like another pigeon for Treat to pluck. They meet at a bar, get drunk and Treat brings him home.

When Treat finds out Harold is carrying a large amount of stocks and bonds, he thinks he's hit the jackpot. He ties Harold up and plans to hold him for ransom.

But Harold, a wealthy if somewhat shady businessman, soon takes the upper hand. Apparently, he has no one else in the world and, being an orphan himself, Harold sees in the two young men a chance to do what no one did for him. He vows to make a difference in their existence.

Until Harold appears, Phillip and Treat have no anchor in their lives. Like them, *Orphans* initially seems listless and without purpose. Then Harold takes charge and the story jumps to fast-forward, bursting with life and laughter.

As Harold, Burns is simply marvelous. He creates a character of understated dignity and power. Whether reasoning quietly with Treat or opening up new vistas of knowledge for Phillip, Burns delivers his wry, frequently eloquent lines with utter aplomb.

Cunningham also is quite appealing as Phillip. And Cousins

WINNER OF 1985 OBIE AWARD

Orphans

DIRECTED by Mary Hausch



JANUARY 9th
thru
FEBRUARY 1st.

plays Treat with such physical force that at times, it seems debatable whether the set will last the entire night.

Director Mary Hausch keeps the action moving at a brisk pace and the numerous bits of business

involving wrestling, tag and physical violence are handled with skill and ease.

Orphans, which was written by Lyle Kessler and won the 1985 Obie award, appeals to our most basic instincts, the desire for com-

panionship and love. It tells us that even under the most difficult circumstances, someone will be there to give us what we need the most: advice, understanding and an encouraging squeeze.

By Michael Giltz