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## Entertainment :: Theatre

### Orphans

by Daniel Scheffler

EDGE Contributor

Sunday Apr 28, 2013

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What promised to be the hit of the season turned out to be an insular and unrelieved bomb that just could not detonate as Lyle Kessler's **"Orphans"** continues its run on Broadway. With big names, attracting equally big crowds, such as Alec Baldwin and Ben Forster, the play had high hopes of dazzling the discerning New Yorkers, but it was the out of towners that gave them their standing ovation.

The play started with what could have seemed as excellent media banter but became a sour turn when Shia LaBeouf opted to leave the cast due to creative differences. He was the first choice for the role of older brother Treat but soon was replaced by "Breaking Bad's" Ben Forster in his Broadway debut. Gossip magazines and Twitter quickly jumped on the opportunity to expose the "truth" about the dispute and implicated the actors and even director Daniel Sullivan. This sense is felt during the production as it cannot escape a sense of scandal.

"Orphans" premiered in 1983 at the Matrix Theatre in Los Angeles and starred Joe Pantoliano, Lane Smith and Paul Leiber. Two years later Gary Sinise directed the play in Chicago, at the Steppenwolf Theatre, with John Mahoney, Terry Kinney and Kevin Anderson. The play propelled Kessler to major success (both post-London and New York runs) and attracted fans such as big-admirers Lou Reed and Tom Waits. In 2005 Al Pacino, Jesse Eisenberg and Shawn Hatoss reprised the play. With three decades of success, the New York audiences' expectations were definitely tangible in the seats this week. But the sparks were not truly flying.

The story, which feels inconsequential and seemingly without a point, follows two orphaned brothers, Treat (Ben Forster) and Phillip (Tom Sturridge), who live in a dive in Northern Philadelphia. Left by their philandering dad and passed away mother, the two try to create a life for themselves on the



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Alec Baldwin as Harold in 'Orphans' (Source:Joan Marcus)

complete wrong side of the tracks -- to some success.

Treat, a violent and uncomfortable man, leaves their hovel every day to provide for his younger sibling by thieving from downtown innocents. Phillip, on the other hand, stays home dreaming and thinking about other worlds.

Phillip, a slower and gentler soul, has been so protected by his paternal brother that his ability to connect to the world has completely eluded him. Illiterate and afraid of pollen and outside air, Phillip spends his days inside a closet or admiring a red high heel that may have belonged to the mother he never knew.

**A confusion in accents and a slight "30 Rock" persona coming to the fore crippled Alec Baldwin as he attempted to take the stage by proverbial storm.**



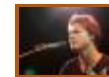
Enter Chicago hustler, Harold (Alec Baldwin) who, in a drunken stupor, gets semi-kidnapped by Treat. Baldwin's entrance gave audiences another reason to cheer as he entered the stage with his usual swagger. But confusion in accents and a slight "30 Rock" persona coming to the fore crippled Baldwin as he attempted to take the stage by proverbial storm.

But Harold, the cunning businessman that he is, unfazed by kidnap-bindings, releases himself and pulls a gun on Treat. In a funny standoff, the actors reverse roles (almost "Freaky Friday" style) as the captor becomes the captive and vice versa. Harold's desire to turn Treat into his henchman feels trite and confusing in the script, as his "reason to act" was just not clear enough.

Convincing Treat to be his protector and "little bitch" is where the second act kicks off. Treat's new



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By Daniel Scheffler | Apr 25

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By Jake Mulligan | Apr 26

Michael Bay brings together a team of scumbag personal trainers to kidnap one of their clients, kill him and steal his fortune. Unfortunately for them, he survives.



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lifestyle, dressed in a three-piece suit, shiny shoes, and a salary, suits him gleefully. Phillip, yet unable to tie his shoelaces, gets "encouragement" from Harold and even sports a pair of heinous yellow loafers given to him by this new paternal figure.

Phillip, with all his crazy, allows himself to grow through this experience and chooses to trust someone else besides his brother. When Harold takes Phillip outside and he doesn't die, Harold becomes his confidant and best friend forever. The play explores this relationship with tenderness but Baldwin over-shines as Sturridge stutters, mumbles and battles a deep-seated mental condition of which he is so happily unaware.

Baldwin falls apart, pulls himself together and then falls apart again as his character, an orphan too, gets maimed while his henchman is lacking on security as he should have been. Meanwhile, Treat's love for his new rich life takes him shopping thereby missing the incident wherein Harold is attacked.

As Harold disappears, it is Treat who realizes how much he has wished for a father figure and how much this "encouragement" was all he actually craved in his life. With Ben Forster giving his emotional outcry one last time, the curtain falls.

In moments of reality and then magical realism, the play ventures through but cannot release itself from its inexplicable plot. Perhaps the end result became less of a focus than having Alec Baldwin on stage after all.

*"Orphans" runs through June 30 at the Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre, 236 West 45th Street, Manhattan. For tickets or information, call 212-239-6200 or go to [orphansonbroadway.com](http://orphansonbroadway.com)*

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Daniel Scheffler is a writer who spends his time in New York, Cape Town and India. Follow him on Twitter @danielscheffler

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