

West End musical becomes local hit

By  Eugene Yiga

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Thirty years after *Blood Brothers* made its debut, director David Kramer's adaptation became one of the theatrical highlights of 2013. Kramer first saw the Olivier Award-winning musical in the 1980s and was impressed by its emotional impact.

Kramer first saw the Olivier Award-winning musical in the 1980s and was impressed by its emotional impact. "It struck me that the *Blood Brothers* story would resonate with our audiences if it could be relocated from Liverpool to Cape Town," he said.



Creator Willy Russell, who adapted his plays *Educating Rita* and *Shirley Valentine* into Oscar-nominated films, was thrilled at the idea. "Without David Kramer I would never have done it, but with him and with Pieter Toerien [producer of [Phantom of the Opera](#)], I am delighted to do so," he said.

Overarching themes of privilege and poverty

Loosely based on *The Corsican Brothers* by Alexandre Dumas, *Blood Brothers* tells the story of separated twins who grow up at opposite ends of the socio-economic spectrum. The overarching themes of privilege and poverty are particularly relevant in a country as unequal as ours.

This adaptation is the first in the world and works thanks to the parallels between Liverpool's "slum clearance" scheme and Cape Town's forced removals during apartheid. Digital images are projected onto sliding screens to quickly recreate

several locations around the city, while dialect is a fusion of English and Afrikaans to indicate social class.

Musical supervisor Isobel Alistair and saxophonist Don-veno Prins rearrange the rhythms and instrumentations in a few of the two dozen songs, performed live by a never-seen-but-ever-present six-piece band.



Sensational voice

In the cast of 13, many of whom play multiple parts, Dean Balie and Ephraim Gordon are the twins. Some of their best scenes are as children navigating a new friendship, mildly aware of their differences but blind to the truth that they are the same.

Bianca le Grange, who has released four albums since her breakthrough on Idols in 2002, is outstanding in the role of their mother. Her sensational voice is especially powerful in the final number that brings the production to its emotional close.

Blood Brothers is a perfect fit for Kramer, who already has six musicals of his own. These include collaborations with the late Taliep Petersen on *Ghoema*, *Kat and the Kings*, *Poison*, and *District Six*.

Blood Brothers is at Cape Town's Fugard Theatre until 30 April. Tickets are available from [Computicket](https://www.computicket.co.za) or by calling the Fugard Theatre box office on +27 (0)21 461 4554. Generous discounts are available for Friends of the Fugard, for which you can sign up by calling the box office or by going to www.thefugard.com.

ABOUT EUGENE YIGA

Eugene graduated from the University of Cape Town with distinctions in financial accounting and classical piano. He then spent over two-and-a-half years working in branding and communications at two of South Africa's top market research companies. Eugene also spent over three-and-a-half years at an eLearning start-up, all while building his business as an award-winning writer. Visit www.eugeneyiga.com, follow @eugeneyiga on Twitter, or email hello@eugeneyiga.com to say, um, hello.

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