

ORPHANS (Dir Peter Mullan) Downtown Pictures

Orphans is a terrible vision of the underbelly of Glasgow. A family's raw emotions are unleashed by the death of their mother.

When Michael (Douglas Henshall) is stabbed, his brother John (Stephen McCole) goes in search of the culprits with a gun, the day before their mother's funeral. In the meantime, the amoral Michael, almost bleeding to death, avoids hospital in an attempt to make money by passing it off as an industrial injury. Their dutiful elder brother, Thomas (Gary Lewis), stays in the church with his mother's coffin.

Director Peter Mullan has affinities with the Ken Loach school of gritty British realism. Scenes are shot in pubs, urinals and fairgrounds, and the speech is threateningly expletive-laden. But his film goes beyond the visually drab realism of Loach, attaining the sense of heightened realism of Mike Leigh's great film, *Naked*.

The emotional intensity never flags. Hostility, bitterness and utter lack of human warmth are everywhere, in one of



Playing 'happy' families can be emotionally draining.

the bleakest, most ambitious and emotionally draining British films in years. **David Smith**

