

The Brothers Size Reviewed

By [Steven Leigh Morris](#)



Matthew Hancock, left, and Gilbert Glenn Brown in *The Brothers Size*
PHOTO BY ED KRIEGER

Tarell Alvin McCraney's tender, poetical drama *The Brothers Size* (Fountain Theatre) and Billy Van Zandt & Jane Milmore's meta-theatrical farce *Drop Dead!* (presented by Theatre 68, at North Hollywood's NoHo Arts Center) share one salient commonality: Each production has moments when the actors recite stage directions about their own characters.

The Brothers Size will be one of the season's memorable productions.

There's precedent for the device, from Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood* — an ensemble-performed portrait of a quaint Welsh village — to any number of literary adaptations staged by the likes of Seattle's Book-It Repertory Company, where the company's hallmark is putting books onstage in a style of presentation that has characters reciting not only their own dialogue but also the author's narration surrounding it.

There's something more jocular than intrusive about the device. You'd think it would snap the flow of emotions drawn from text and subtext that actors work so hard to generate, like the splash from a pebble thrown into a swift-moving stream. But it doesn't.

Such narrative interruptions are an integral part of playwright McCraney's style: It shows up in *The Brothers Size* in much the same way it did in his *In the Red and Brown Water*, presented by the same theater in 2012. Both were directed by Shirley Jo Finney and choreographed by Ameenah Kaplan with seamless physicality and

dramatic urgency. Both plays study African-Americans in Louisiana and take 90 minutes to two hours to set up one excruciating decision that cuts to the core of the deciding character's humanity.

The Brothers Size homes in on a pair of brothers: Ogun (Gilbert Glenn Brown) owns an auto shop and is caring for his younger, parolee brother, Oshoosi (Matthew Hancock). Through the intervention of Oshoosi's jailhouse friend Elegba (Theo Perkins), Oshoosi finds himself a fugitive, sorely testing the love and loyalty between the siblings.

Yet the story is far greater than its plot. It lies in the characters' gorgeous drift into song, and into segments of Kaplan's intoxicating choreography and, finally, into those wry moments when stage directions are narrated. Example: Ogun rages when he tells Oshoosi something, but Ogun has the coda, "smiling." We don't see him smile at all. He looks royally pissed off, and the line gets a laugh. Yet somewhere perhaps, on some strata of Ogun's soul that's covered with muscle and tendons, he's smiling. It's something for us to imagine, or at least to consider.

The muscular ensemble doesn't let up for a moment. This is sure to be one of the season's memorable productions.

There are some very funny moments of timeless physical comedy, such as how the show's leading man (the excellent Bill Doherty Jr.) gets his nose broken, and in the playwright's "My life is over" opening-night speech.

The show mostly satirizes a former, expunged era. Still, when the forgetful elder actress's directions, read into headphones she's wearing, get "accidentally" broadcast for the audience to hear, or when another character, subbing on opening night, forgets his lines, pulls out a paper and reads out loud, "Exit upstage right," we're back in that intriguing land where first person meets third.

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