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Life & Art, AIDS & Death, Family & Sex Converge in Intense "Love of Brothers"

By Bruce-Michael Gelbert, Editor.

"The Love of Brothers" is not the name of a new gay porn film, making erotic hay out of the idea of incest. It is, rather, a new play, by Mario Golden, running at Theater for the New City through March 29, set in San Francisco, and exploring how two gay Mexican-American siblings, the Polancos, deal with AIDS, death, illness, and abuse, past and present; and life, love, art, sex, and fantasy. "Love of Brothers," directed by Andreas Robertz, is marked by overwhelming, almost unbearable intensity, is wrenching and vivid in its realism-and sizzles with erotic heat. The play opened on March 5 and I caught up with it halfway through its run, on the 19th.

Sergio, the younger brother, age 37 and portrayed by playwright and AIDS services worker Golden, is a writer who is not writing, a bundle of energy and social butterfly, and a not very dedicated student. Rogelio, his older brother, played by Mauricio Leyton, is a painter who has stopped painting and, his mind fraying from cryptococcal meningitis, has stopped taking his AIDS medications in anticipation of death.

Unable to bear the thought of losing Rogelio, Sergio begins to write to appease and please his brother and gets Rogelio to resume painting as a life-affirming pursuit. Sergio's writing is about the brothers and their dead parents and becomes a vehicle for both siblings to express their mutual sexual attraction and to deal with memories difficult to disinter and face squarely. What begins as Sergio's instrument of seduction takes unexpected, sometimes dangerous turns, as illness increasingly invades Rogelio's senses and the brothers reverse roles.

The realism that pervades both performance and production makes "Love of Brothers" that much more gripping. Golden and Leyton give seamless, thoroughly persuasive accounts of their roles, as guided by Robertz and assistant Oscar Limón, and make it impossible to turn away, even when the scenario turns searing. Apartment setting and clothes by Yanko Bakulic, augmented by evocative paintings by Juan Ramírez, enhance the verismo.

Try getting through "Love of Brothers" without shedding some tears and without parsing its meaning for hours afterwards, but definitely go to see it sometime during the two weekends of the run that remain. Performances are Thursday to Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 3 p.m. through the end of the month. For information on tickets, priced at \$15, call the box office at 212/254-1109 or visit www.theaterforthenewcity.net. Theater for the New City is located at 155 First Avenue, between Ninth and Tenth Streets, in the East Village.

EXOLimited.com

“The Love of Brothers” By Lina Sarrapochiello

NEW YORK -- "The Love of Brothers", a ninety minute stage play written by Mexican-American playwright, Mario Golden and directed by Andreas Robertz, is a look into the lives of two gay brothers living in present day San Francisco. Rogelio, portrayed by Mauricio Leyton, is the older of the two brothers. He is a serious, successful painter infected with HIV, who has lost hope and faith in having a content life. Sergio, portrayed by the writer, Mario Golden, is the flamboyant younger brother, who is trying to find himself by studying to become a writer. He lives the life of a seemingly care-free party animal who depends on his older brother for, pretty much, everything. The two brothers clash because of their great differences. During the course of the play, however, we find that things aren't exactly as they seem. And, that the two brothers, although outwardly opposite, share a deep bond from childhood that haunts them to this day.

This play is a story of loyalty, betrayal, family, and love. And, although it depicts many issues that concern the gay community, it contains subject matter that affects people from all walks of life, such as suicide, incest, sexual assault, and child abuse.

The script is witty and poignant, with various fun-filled moments as well as disturbing realities. The set design, by Yanko Bakulic is interesting and practical, including paintings by Juan Ramirez that depict the pain and confusion of the characters, and comprising several spaces that help to give the play exciting movements and moments. The direction is varied and realistic, giving the actors usage of the entire space as well as the freedom to express themselves fully. Robertz does a great job of treating the script sensitively, including, especially, the sex scene, which could have been very uncomfortable, but was handled carefully, using silhouetted lighting effects, and giving distance between the audience and the actors on the stage. And, most of all, the acting was superb.

Mario Golden is the perfect party boy, giving the play the comic moments that are needed to contrast the deeply emotional subject matter, and depicting the vulnerable brother with a sensitive and youthful innocence. Mauricio Leyton plays the part of the brooding older brother with great power and conviction, and portrays the chaotic ups and downs of an AIDS victim flawlessly. Their chemistry is intriguing, if at times awkward because of the brotherly relationship. But they play very well together, giving the characters and the relationship believability and depth.

"The Love of Brothers" is a complete package that should not be missed by mature audiences. It is a necessary story to explore what is often overlooked, especially among

Latinos, but affects many families. And, although the subject matter may be difficult to face for many, its harsh realities must be acknowledged.

The play opened on March 5th and runs for two more weeks at Theater for the New City. For more information call (212) 254-1109 or go on line to www.theaterforthenewcity.net.

Offoffonline.com

Night, Brother, by Doug Strassler

The Love of Brothers plays host to a slew of harrowing subjects in its depiction of complicated fraternity: AIDS, abuse, incest. But perhaps the most jarring thing about this important show is just how many people seem to be missing out on it.

Brothers, directed by Andreas Robertz and written by Mario Golden, plays the downstairs theatre of the Theater for the New City, a venue known for championing challenging original works. In that respect, this two-character piece is well-suited for TNC. So why was the house not completely full at the performance I attended?

I imagine one major reason is the show's dark subject matter. Rogelio (Mauricio Leyton) and Sergio (Golden) are brothers bonded by the obstacles which they have overcome. Both brothers are gay and share an apartment in San Francisco, but they were born in Mexico City to privileged parents who have since passed away. All was not well, however. Sergio, an aspiring writer, suffered abuse as a child.

Rogelio, meanwhile, suffers both emotionally and physically. Not only has he achieved greater success as an artist (he is a well-received painter), but he also feels guilt for not having prevented his younger brother's abuse. More immediately, though, is Rogelio's health. He has AIDS and his body is breaking down as a result of cryptococcal meningitis. He wants to make amends to Sergio for failing to protect him in their youth before he dies.

And so Rogelio announces to Sergio that the end is near. He vows to both stop painting and stop taking his medication, thereby opting to begin the end of his life. This is a devastating declaration, and Leyton delivers it with the appropriate amount of surrender, lacking in self-pity or despair. Golden's viewpoint is that Rogelio is making an important decision, rather than merely giving up.

Sergio's reaction is likely to polarize audience members, though. He goes to great lengths in his desperate attempt to convince his brother to choose life. As *Brothers* continues, Rogelio and Sergio use both art and conversation as a means to excavate the demons of their shared childhood – demons that both pull them together and threaten to tear them apart. To Golden's credit, Sergio's choices seem firmly rooted in character, keeping his plot from feeling merely sensational.

This is not unfamiliar terrain. While the motivating factors are different, Marsha Norman's Pulitzer-winning *'night, Mother* addresses similar themes. Golden's play does not quite hit the same grace notes. *Brothers* is a more protracted play. Some of the dialogue makes scenes feel both redundant and padded. However, Robertz compensates for what the play lacks in poetry with a staging that packs plenty of power.

Both actors deliver fierce, committed performances. Leyton's work is one of carefully

measured dignity and gravitas, while Golden's work is more effusive; he's a little boy lost. As the characters retreat increasingly from society into each other, the play requires both actors to bare their hearts and souls, which they do to impressive effect. I imagine by show's end, the two are exhausted. There is a third, nonhuman character to the show. Yanko Bakulic's set is effective as well. The brothers' nicely decorated apartment ultimately serves as a prison for the two of them, hermetically sealing the two of them from the rest of the world.

Robertz' production is bold and, yes, geared for adult audiences. It isn't a show for everybody. But these *Brothers* deserve full audiences.

Audience feedback

5 stars

Intense and Touching

This play explores themes that are rarely touched upon. The script veers from humorous to very dark, and the actors handle it all with nuance and power. In a relationship that seems unthinkable, they are utterly believable and engrossing, and finally sympathetic. The production is tight: the designs work, the direction is intelligent and there is a crisp build to a very moving climax. See it. Seriously.

Well Played

This play is an intense and exciting breath of fresh air. The relationship the brothers share is unique and challenging, uncomfortable, tough, touching and at times heartbreaking. I saw it on opening night and felt as if I had stepped directly into their home. Go see this play for a chance to experience something unique and real.

Superb acting. Unique story.

This is an original, thought-provoking play that starts out with an almost humorous calm, and progresses to the highest level of emotional intensity. The two actors, Mario Golden and Mauricio Leyton, are wonderful. They have a perfect chemistry for this venue and give it their all. Their performance is honest and real. The play brought tears to my eyes and I would recommend it most highly.

Provocative and Beautiful!

The Love of Brothers is a beautifully staged provocative piece of theater. Deep, intense, and emotionally vibrant, this work of theater will take you through a jungle gym of emotions and sexual intrigue. The play is beautifully staged and the acting is raw yet natural and refined. The story is an honest look at a family's dysfunctional past through a compelling team of brothers who together learn to face their own demons as well as the inherited ones from their past. A unique piece of theater indeed!!

A theatrically moving experience

Don't miss this theatrically moving experience! It is a must see! Actors Mario Golden and Mauricio Leyton, under the carefully crafted direction of Andreas Robertz, walk us through the catwalk of their emotionally charged relationship. They bring to life, through a kaleidoscope of emotions, the underbelly of their translucent and tortured lives, presenting the audience with many highly charged and surprisingly playful moments of relief.

Great work!

I really enjoyed the show. So well staged, well acted. The end was truly touching, and it really highlighted the brothers' aloneness.

Majestically performed

I highly recommend this play. I had the honor of seeing it when it opened and I can tell

you that it's a true piece of theatre, wonderfully directed and majestically performed. All of you who love and have a true passion for the arts will recognize the great craft presented in this piece. I hope you can all see it!

Riveting

I truly enjoyed this play! A fascinating exploration of these brothers. The actors really plumbed the depths; real believability for an extremely dramatic situation. I was riveted.

A pleasure

A real pleasure seeing THE LOVE OF BROTHERS Felt I'd lived with those 2 guys for 90 minutes and my stomach was tied in knots! The directing served the text beautifully (without calling attention to itself).

Quite a show

This play was quite a show. Mario Golden is an intense beguiling presence. And he wrote it all. It reminded me of the story of Menendez brothers several years back in California. That story ended up much worse. They're in prison now, even if their father did abuse them. The acting was good. And the pacing of the play was elegant. The subject matter is very tricky to dramatize. The memories, etc. Although I'm not very involved in theater which is realistic, I respect it. Congratulations.

Fantastic Production

Congratulations on a fantastic production of The Love of Brothers. What an interesting well done piece. The acting was EXCELLENT!!!. The production was perfectly timed just long enough but not too long. I thought the decision not to have an intermission was wise. I would have hated to be distracted and taken out of the moment by having one. The show had it all: Love, tenderness, some comic relief and a knockout ending. Mario Golden is indeed a very talented writer and actor. The production made the long trip from Long Island well worth it. Again thank you for an excellent evening's entertainment.