



Traumatic childhood memories haunt a trio of 40something male siblings on a fateful Christmas Eve in *Brothers Play*, Matthew Doherty's darkly comedic walloper now getting a spectacularly acted, directed, and designed World Premiere production at Legacy LA.



Eldest bro Jude (Jeffrey Nordling) thinks and talks as if he were on a nonstop recon mission, barking orders to his younger brothers like soldiers under his command. ("Here's what we're gonna do. We're gonna compliment mom on the ham, we're gonna choke down the ice cream cake, and then we're gonna go to the Boats to play Caribbean Stud like we always do, end of story.")



Middle sib Francis (Rob Nagle) has fallen head over heels (albeit delusionally) in love with Raven, a stripper from Belarus who, wonder of wonders, has actually agreed to go on a date with him provided it takes place at a bank with burly club bouncer Gregor tagging along as her "chaperone," and that's just the start of Francis's money troubles.



Youngest brother Thomas (Jamie Wollrab), a recovering alcoholic who's just been bailed out of jail by Jude for having attempted to burn down a church, has suddenly developed a stutter and begun having seizures that might possibly be memory-generated panic attacks.

Fourth wall-breaking monologs provide early clues to the brothers' shared childhood traumas.

Jude: “I get nervous around kids... You know. They’re touchy. And they’re always so free. With their bodies. The way they just... trust... I almost got married once, a while back. But she wanted kids.... Yeah. I try to keep my life pretty... empty.”



Francis: “On the nights when... you know, the – he came over, they had to lock Suey up in the crawl space, put a chair in front of the door he’d bark so loud. Yeah. Dog knew. Knew right away.”

Thomas: “Any time someone touches me here, or here, I get, uh... I have what you call a strong fight or flight tendency. The mark. The feeling that you are defective. Broken. So, something happened. That much I know.”



Add to this the fact that none of the brothers has fathered even a single child and it’s pretty clear that this childlessness isn’t just a matter of chance.

Though there have been numerous stage and screen depictions of the same trigger warning-worthy topic, what sets *Brothers Play* apart from its predecessors is the fact that it is first and foremost a comedy, one that might even be called screwball. (Doherty himself describes it as a “rip-roaring comedy.”)



Existing in a world somewhere reality and dreams, *Brothers Play* does require an audience’s utmost attention in order to determine what has brought its three protagonists to where they are in their lives, but it is well worth the effort.

Not only does Doherty’s play score comedic points for its writer and its phenomenal leads, it gives Nordling, Nagle, and Wollrab abundant dramatic meat to chew on, fine-tuned to razor-sharp perfection by director James Eckhouse, all of which adds up to three of the most original, indelible star turns you’ll see all year.



Production design-wise, *Brothers Play* benefits enormously from a venue that provides almost as much playing area as it would have at the Geffen or the Taper, but in a 99-seat theater.

Justin Huen has designed an impressively expansive set (the peak-roofed framework of the brothers' childhood home, a tall, Christmas ornament-adorned evergreen, and an antique armoire that doubles as a screen for Veronica Mullins Bowers's colorful, evocative projections), and Huen's lighting design is both striking and mood-enhancing.

Add to this Bowers' dramatic sound design, Mylette Nora's just-right costumes, and Steve Rankin's believably rough-and-tumble fight choreography, and you have a production that looks and sounds as good as anything L.A. intimate theater has to offer.

Brothers Play is produced by Doherty, Cara Christian, Eckhouse, Devon Esrick, Emree Franklin, Matthew Goodman, Debbie Hoy, Jeff Kemperman, Sara Newman, and Ann Villella.

Kimberly Sanchez Garrido is production stage manager. Sara Newman is assistant director and assistant stage manager. Huen is technical director. Dana Swartz is assistant lighting designer, set designer, and technical director. Aaron Lyons understudies the roles of Jude and Francis. Ken Werther is publicist.

Plenty of plays have been written about siblings, and more than a few have revolved around childhood trauma, but not many have done so as compellingly and originally as Matthew Doherty's *Brothers Play*. It's every bit as harrowing as it is hilarious.

Legacy LA, 1350 San Pablo Street, Los Angeles. Through February 5. Mondays, Fridays, and Saturdays at 8:00. Sundays at 3:00.

www.brothersplay23.com

–Steven Stanley
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Photos: Jeff Lorch



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