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# BWW Review: National Theatre of Ghana's 10 BLOCKS ON THE CAMINO REAL a Fitting, Earthy Tribute to Tennessee Williams

by Andrew White (/author/Andrew-White) Sep. 29, 2017

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One of the joys of being on the theatre scene here in the Washington, D.C. area is that it attracts artists from all over the world -to perform, to educate, and to hold workshops. Thanks to the hard work of Georgetown University's Laboratory for Global Performance & Politics, we were honored this week to host the National Theatre of Ghana, which paid homage to Tennessee Williams (/people/Tennessee-Williams/) in a lively production of his one-act play, *10 Blocks on the Camino Real*.

In keeping with their love of open-air, marketplace theatre the company embraced a variety of outdoor spaces (I saw them on the west lawn at the National Building Museum), creating a vibrant atmosphere well before the first actor took the stage.

Music is at the heart of the National Theatre's work; as the audience assembled for the performance the company gathered around the intensely talented drummer Godwin Awador, sang and danced. The actors mingled with the audience, sat among us, and established an easy rapport that set the tone for the whole evening. The stage area was festooned with life-size, marquee-like posters of the characters, which (as a practical matter) would eliminate the need for a theatre programs at a festival, and which gives everyone the show at a glance. With bold colors and bold costume choices, the show is eye-catching before a single word is spoken.

The carnival atmosphere is appropriate, given the seemingly scattershot approach Williams takes with *10 Blocks*. Critics seem as confused today by its variety of characters and its desultory approach to story-telling as they were over 60 years ago when it first premiered. The National Theatre emphasizes the instantly-recognizable urban types that populate Williams' imaginary street scene.

You won't find any references to Lord Byron (/people/Lord-Byron/) or Don Quixote from the original play (both of whom, thanks to the state of our education system, are as obscure to Americans today as they might be to remote Ghanaian townspeople). Instead, we have the playboy Casanova (Emmanuel Gharthey, brilliantly full of bluster and frustration), accompanied by his partner-in-crime Marguerite (the bold Abena Takyi), a couple whose fortunes are in steep decline. Meanwhile in this corner we have the naïve American sailor and prizefighter Kilroy (the charismatic Isaac Fiagbor), and the women who seduce them and drain them dry.

The mother-daughter team of Gypsy (Esther Addo-Scott) and Esmerelda (Joycelyn Denali) are a wicked combination, and both make quick use of the men who come and go. And as the men around them get used up and spat out onto the boulevard, a team of Street Cleaners (decked in bright day-glo vests with the occasional skeleton mask) manages the body count and removes the evidence. The cut-throat life of the streets, mirroring Williams' cut-throat vision of the world itself, is brilliantly brought to life here. Director David Kaplan (/people/David-Kaplan/) has the dream job of directing talented artists, and he gives them every opportunity to share themselves with us.

Presiding over the decline and fall of the men is the Proprietor, Gutman, given a smooth turn here by Mawuli Semevo. Placing himself on a pedestal (literally) he seems to be conducting the dirty business of drinking, whoring and fortune-telling. Somebody has to be above the fray, and Semevo manages this role with aplomb.

In some cases, foreign companies are invited to more formal settings like the Kennedy Center to display their talents - a nice gesture, but one which can force a company to compromise their vision of a popular theatre that reaches out to all the community. Georgetown's Theatre Lab is to be commended for giving audiences a more faithful glimpse of great artists in action, in environments that they know and can exploit to their fullest potential.

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Production Photo, Isaac Fiagbor as Kilroy and Joycelyn Denali as Esmerelda. Photo courtesy of Teresa Castracane (/people/Teresa-Castracane/) Photography.

**Running time: 75 minutes with no intermission.**

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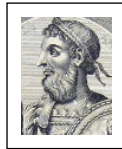
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Andrew White (/author/Andrew-White)

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