

DOG BLESS ALL THE KINGS AND QUEENS AND ALL THE INBETWEENS

FRANCESCA RAYNER



← KING SIZE, ENC. SÓNIA BAPTISTA, TEATRO NACIONAL D. MARIA II, TEATRO MUNICIPAL DE MATOSINHOS
CONSTANTINO NERY/DDD – FESTIVAL DIAS DA DANÇA, FESTIVAL LINHAS DE FUGA, 2025 (SÓNIA BAPTISTA,
JOANA LEVI, MARIA ABRANTES, CRISTA ALFAIATE), [F] JOSÉ OCTÁVIO PEIXOTO/DIAS DA DANÇA



KING SIZE

CRIAÇÃO E DIREÇÃO: Sónia Baptista
INTERPRETAÇÃO: Ana Libório, Crista Alfaiate, Joana Levi, Maria Abrantes,
Sónia Baptista **ESPAÇO CÉNICO:** Raquel Melgue
DESENHO DE LUZ: Daniel Worm d’Assumpção **SOM:** Margarida Magalhães
DESENHOS: Bárbara Assis Pacheco **VÍDEO:** Ana Libório, Raquel Meige
APOIO À DRAMATURGIA: Mariana Ricardo
APOIO AO DESENHO DE LUZ: Pedro Nabais
APOIO À CRIAÇÃO: Francesca Rayner, Marcus Massalami, Maribel Mendes
Sobreira, Paloma Calle, Vânia Doutel Vaz **TRADUÇÃO:** Joana Frazão
LEGENDAGEM: Joana Frazão, Sónia Antunes
DIREÇÃO DE PRODUÇÃO: Maria João Garcia
PRODUÇÃO EXECUTIVA: Margot Silva **COMUNICAÇÃO:** Helena César
COPRODUÇÃO: Teatro Nacional D. Maria II, Teatro Municipal de Matosinhos
Constantino Nery/DDD – Festival Dias da Dança, Festival Linhas de Fuga
LOCAL E DATA DE ESTREIA: Jardins do Bombarda, Lisboa, 6 de junho de 2025

FRANCESCA RAYNER
CEHUM – CENTRO DE ESTUDOS HUMANÍSTICOS DA UNIVERSIDADE DO MINHO

SINAIS DE CENA
SÉRIE III NÚMERO 5
JUNHO DE 2026

← KING SIZE, ENC. SÓNIA BAPTISTA, TEATRO NACIONAL D. MARIA II, TEATRO MUNICIPAL DE MATOSINHOS
CONSTANTINO NERY/DDD – FESTIVAL DIAS DA DANÇA, FESTIVAL LINHAS DE FUGA, 2025 (SÓNIA BAPTISTA,
CRISTA ALFAIATE, JOANA LEVI, MARIA ABRANTES), [F] FILIPE FERREIRA

Some performance events are difficult to put into words, either because they are ahead of critical language or, as in this case, because the atmosphere of the performance means that you had to have been present to fully grasp what took place. Such is the case with Sónia Baptista's *King Size* which, on the night I saw it, created such a special bond between performers and spectators that both seemed to be working together in an energetic loop to heighten the performance. This means that it is almost impossible to describe the performance without including audience reaction to it. It's quite rare to hear a theatre audience laughing out loud and I can only imagine how this overwhelmingly positive response impacted the four performers. For the audience, it was the pleasure of recognizing the tropes of masculinity parodied onstage and seeing them made ridiculous. For the performers, maybe a sense that their work was resonating in ways they had hoped but that could only be tested in front of a live audience.

The title of this review is a line taken from *King size* and gives a sense of what it was about. On the one hand, it challenged binaries of all kinds, particularly gender binaries, in order to celebrate the diversity of gender positionings. It validated those who do their gender differently, whether offstage in daily life as trans women or butch lesbians or both on and offstage as drag performers. It paid tribute in particular to the parodies of masculinity by drag kings who are less well-known and less visible than their drag queen sisters. While there are many performances in different media where men parody femininity, performances where women parody masculinity are less common. For this reason, perhaps, the audience was so responsive. On the other hand, the reversal of the word 'God' to 'Dog' indicates the performance's homage to the gender queer poodle rockers of the 1980's with their long hair and elaborate costumes and make up who were a consistent influence on the performance, but also

the sustained critique of the role of organized religion in creating and maintaining repressive gender binaries. The centrality of the Bible as an arbiter of absolute truth was deconstructed as subject to multiple interpretations and the performance ended with a shower of stars falling onto a toy poodle as an offstage voice talked about wanting to construct a religion of their own.

If all this sounds important but possibly heavy going, it was far from it. Right from the text that begins the performance, a sort of Book of Genesis for the reversal of God to Dog, the prevailing mode of the performance was parody and the audience spent as much time laughing as reflecting critically, the men as well as the women. Parody is particularly effective in challenging gender norms and the kind of toxic masculinity that appears, unfortunately, to be on the increase, because these norms themselves are essentially absurd and ridiculous. More realistic or naturalistic approaches would give the norms an appearance of reality and stability they don't possess and would be counterproductive as a resource for performance because of this. *King size's* parody of restrictive gender codes made the absurdity of normative constructions of masculinity absolutely clear through a series of interlinked sketches given coherence through the performance conceit of a boot camp around masculinity. Make up sessions designed to create perfect images of femininity formed an aural backdrop to the performers adding beards and moustaches to their performances of masculinity. Interviews with men about their ideal woman were repurposed through lip sync. Stuffing a turkey became... (well, take a guess!). Each of the four performers created an individual male persona using physicality, text and voice, mixing entertainment and critique. As a group, they formed an artistic and political ensemble that represented in practice the type of joyful communality in difference the performance aimed to celebrate.

King size is the final part of a trilogy around questions of gender and sexuality which began with a performance around the menopause (*Sweat, sweat, sweat*, 2023) and took in a performance about the stereotypes around queer female sexuality (*Dykes on ice*, 2024). *King size* shares with its predecessors the use of parody to deconstruct stereotypes that harm and kill through dehumanization and ignorance. Yet *King size* revealed a more developed sense of stagecraft than its predecessors. It created different scenic environments within the stage space, used stage objects effectively and sparingly, and treated costume and make up as layered rather than one-dimensional practices. Although the text was built around Sónia Baptista's trademark love of the possibilities of language to parody outworn conventions, there was less text in this performance and the points the performance wanted to make were conveyed through a variety of different performance texts; some physical, some visual, some vocal. This performance deserves to be seen more widely because of the topicality of its concerns and its skilled performances but also, as the delighted audience made clear throughout the performance, because it's just so much fun. It's worth waiting for the end for a truly memorable lip sync of some classic poodle rock.

