

Steen Blendstrup POV. International * * * * *

ART – the art of being friends

Three old friends. Mark is the alpha male, whose wild temperament has fascinated the others. Serge is one of his closest mates, who once looked up to Mark, but is now finding his own path, even though Mark's approval is still important to him. Then there is Yvan who's role is referee and clown in the group.

The Price of friendship

Serge has found a new interest in art. He genuinely means it, when he begins to talk about *"deconstruction"*. He has invested in an expensive painting... very expensive. Marc laughs and says: *"You paid 100.000€ for this shit"?*

Intermittently the characters step into a spotlight to explain their thoughts. To Serge the problem isn't, that Mark doesn't like the painting, or that he doesn't understand modern art. The hurtful thing is his condescending attitude. So Serge is offended, whilst Mark thinks that Serge has lost his sense of humour.

As always when the groups' strongest personalities clash, they turn against Yvan. Some might call him indecisive, weak and a coward. He just doesn't like conflict. Hence the conflict ensues, because both friends want him on their side. They want to fight but he wants harmony.

Role models

ART is played in English – translated from French – and the characters seem very English. Or French. Both societies have, compared to Denmark, more defined class distinctions.

Mark and Serge both exude high middleclass tendencies and good schooling, whilst Yvan is from the "textile industry" and sells office supplies in a company owned by his fiancé's uncle. Two successful men and one failure, though when the balance of the friendship is at a tipping point, he very much counts.

Are we to laugh at Serge's pretentious art snobbery and the white canvas, which contains various shades of white? Are we to laugh at Mark's dominant male elephant who tries to control his nervous temperament with homeopathic medicine, recommended by his girlfriend?

Or are we to laugh at the eternally henpecked Yvan, whose imminent marriage looks like a catastrophe in slow motion, because there too he is caught between strong-willed women, who are in a conflict regarding the layout of the wedding invitation?

The surrogate family

Peter Vinding, Benjamin Stender and Rasmus Emil Mortensen have all trained abroad and speak English without a trace of an accent. They are all wildly talented at forming their characters with

manners, intonation, gesticulations – and a genuine psychology. Their timings are precise (credit due to the director, Ian Burns).

As a comedy ART delivers. It is très amusant. Whilst 15 years of friendship is being split into atoms, the three men throw themselves into fights and insults, which hit the bullseye.

But ART is much more than comedy. The fun is found despite the cultural differences, the characters are all very recognisable. The playwright, Yasmina Reza sees that the group of friends – the closest friends, mates/soulmates – are a surrogate family. In this the fractured friendships become recognisable to us all.

ART stays with you and poses questions that spark healthy conversations post-show. What do your own friendships look like, what role do you play in yours?

Men and men between

Initially I thought that the hierarchy between Mark, Serge and Yvan was just typical to the male group – the safe haven, where men find solace from ex-wives, girlfriends, fiancés ... women in general.

But, my plus one ensured me, that women can also easily relate to the different characters, through the good and the bad.

Maybe it just the way we human beings, as social creatures are prepared to sacrifice and compromise a bit of ourselves, because we enjoy being with one another? Maybe it is in that sacrifice that we find our humanity?

As a solid comedy ART gets four stars, but because the piece pierces deeper, which enriches on top of the liberating laughter, I'll give an extra star for the experience as a whole which then sums up a five-star night out.

And what a joy it is, that Copenhagen has the room for such different and proficient English theatre companies. *Thumbs up.*

Art by Yasmina Reza, translated by Christopher Hampton.

Krudttønden, Seridslevvej 2, 2100 Kbh Ø
till March 23rd.

Mon – Fri: 8pm / Sats: 5pm

Tickets: 40.00 – 165.00 (Group reductions)

Teaterbilletter.dk 7020 2096