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Theater Review/by Kitty Montgomery

ART, by Yasmina Reza

Playing someplace between the Three Tenors' elegance and the Three Stooges' slapstick, three guys who just about run showbiz around the region got together in the funniest, most touching performance of Yasmina Reza's "Art", ever. The characters of Marc (Lou Trapani) Serge (James Prendergast) and Yvan (Wallace Norman) met again to bicker over a snow white painting.

Nicola Sheara, Artistic Director of TheaterSounds, which presents staged readings in the area, featuring the great and the famous - Sir Ian Holm played the devil incarnate in a reading of Shaw's Don Juan in Hell a season ago - directed the triumvirate in a full-blown production.

Full-blown is an overstatement, considering Andy Weintraub's minimally effective set. The main object, a veritable diva of props, is the great white scape by the mythical, allegedly famous painter Andros, which dermatologist and connoisseur Serge has purchased for the fabulous sum of 200 grand. The acquisition, which sets him apart from his less affluent intimates, becomes an "Emperor's New Clothes" sort of test, that strips the bonds of their friendship of all veneer.

Marc is the rude boy who sneers the truth, as the audience might see it. The painting is a hoax, sheer "merde." Rude boy is Marc's role in life, and heretofore Serge has admired him for his iconoclast stance. Now he is hurt. Ever anxious to avoid strife, although somehow he has affianced himself to a hive of female malcontents, the gentle, accommodating Yvan insists he is "moved" by the painting.

In a final scene that fragments into several, when the men meet for a conciliatory evening

out and all their repressed agonies and injuries erupt like the furies of hell, one wielding a felt tipped pen, the actors elevate this play from comic absurd to poignant drama. Surpassing the cowardly lion of Oz, the gibbering Yvan finds both courage and dignity. - Norman's transition is hilarious and cuts the heart. Trapani's brash boy flashes a tender side, and Prendergast's man drops vanity to reveal vulnerability.

When they exit, ensemble, for a delayed dinner, we are not left with a superior sneer at the pathetic codependency of man. Instead, we are elevated by exposure to the genuine tenderness and affection these friends share, renewed and deepened in the course of conflict that no longer seems ridiculous.. Herein lies the art of "Art", no more a witty whitescape of the absurd, as this subtle, brilliant trio of tragicomic actors paints it.

An original music score by jazz pianist/composer Francesca Tanksley haunts meetings over the big white object.