

Performance Review: New play worthy of 'Black Mirror' and world domination

★★★★★★



The bohemian, the buff, the ball-breaker and the bully (photo: Aleksandar S. Mastilo)

February 17th, 2019 5:31 pm | by Ben Hamilton

In the likely event you 'mai read' only one sentence of this review, it will probably be the first, so let's cut to the chase: 'Mairead' was the best English-language theatre production I've seen in Copenhagen – and I've seen a fair few.

Like 'Black Mirror' at its best

I've always been a firm believer that theatre groups should be producing more original work – and in Copenhagen-based Serbian playwright Tanja Mastilo, Why Not Theatre Company has discovered a gem.

Her third play for the group, 'Mairead', made its worldwide debut at Teatret Ved Sorte Hest on Friday, and if there's any justice in this shallow, clickbait-seeking, nepotistic world we live in, it will soon be performed to audiences in Chicago, New York, London and Edinburgh.

But until then, we've got it all to ourselves – and I urge you to go, as it is as brilliantly perplexing as any episode of 'Black Mirror'.

Visually stunning

One day, Mastilo will confirm what came first: the intriguing and topical story-line, or the simple but unbelievably effective set.

I am warming to the idea that she had a vision of four actors sharing the stage in an original fashion, and that the plot followed later, but given the background of director Nina Larissa Bassett, she probably played a large role in getting it just right. And it is perfect.

True, there are nods to 'Saw' and Samuel Beckett's 'Endgame', and once the story-line develops, undoubted parallels to Agatha Christie's 'And then there were None', but this is an original premise that will keep you gripped to your seat as it unravels.

Intriguing set-up

To a backdrop of ominous growling in a setting resembling the bowels of the Matrix, a superb ensemble cast splutter into speech to breathe life into Mastilo's expertly-drawn, wholly believable characters.

Two men and two women awake from their sleep to make sense of their situation: where are they, who else is here and why are they being held?

Initially the rigid four-cell structure suggests there will be no physical interaction, but the second-act staging ingeniously enables the characters to dig into their back-stories and each others' backs to illuminate their predicament.

Ace in the pack

Why Not Theatre pulled an ace out of the pack when it cast Kerry Norton-Griffith in the lead role – just last week Mastilo confessed to CPH POST that the London-based actress understands the role better than she does.

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She is charismatic and captivating in what is a challenging role – the aforementioned flashbacks charting a decade of her life would make most method actors run a mile, but she knocks them out of the park.

Nathan Meister (the bully), Kevin Kiernan-Molloy (the buff) and Sue Hansen Styles (the bohemian) all lend strong support, but critiquing their performances would necessitate too much plot revelation, and this is a play you want to see with limited knowledge of its story-line.

Take a seat and 'wake up' with no knowledge of the situation – just like the actors. Don't, I implore you, read any of the Danish reviews out there, unless you want the whole plot recounted.

Destined to be a classic

But it won't spoil your fun to learn this is a play about love and relationships in the modern world that we can all relate to and enjoy.

Personally, I would have resisted mentioning the likes of Tinder and Facebook and kept the social media references generic – in a few years time, it might sound dated.

Because while it's only had two performances, I don't think it's too premature to envisage this play being performed for decades to come.

Mairead

Ongoing, ends March 9

Mon-Fri 20:00, Sat 17:00; Teatret Ved Sorte Hest, Vesterbrogade 150, Cph V
135kr, teaterbilletter.dk; whynottheatre.dk