



Reviews

Pretty Woman Ltd. in a container at Halmtorvet

By Monna Dithmer

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Handheld Cinderella theatre and a challenging media stunt when the drama about *Pretty Woman* unfolds both on Halmtorvet and in the media. Thanks to all those who wanted to participate. Politicians, media people and professionals from the ranks of the prostitutes and the theatre have, with enthusiastic advance announcements, contributed to a terrific piece of media theatre, just because a prostitute was going to act in a performance.

At the centre of this is the container that stands here on Halmtorvet, glowing with coloured lights, as the scene of what is for some shamelessly offensive, for others socially enlightening or artistically ground-breaking. Every evening, a team of theatre people – including director Tue Biering and dramaturge Jeppe Kristensen – bring in a prostitute from the street to act in a remake of the all-time emotional drama, *Pretty Woman* from 1990.

Is this “social pornography”, as SF’s (Socialistisk Folkeparti (The Socialist People’s Party) culture spokesperson Pernille Frahm and our own Per Theil (Politiken) call it, abuse of women who do not understand what they are agreeing to participate in? Or is it rather “reverse discrimination”, as *Berlingske* wrote in an editorial, to victimise the prostitutes who voluntarily participate? In any case, there was not much victim about the opening night’s version of Julia Roberts, and it was hard to believe that she was served lines and arrangements via a headset on the spot.

With disarming naturalness, no-nonsense charm and a twinkle in her eye, Swedish Anna confidently took the stage in the salmon-pink hotel interior, shielded from the audience by a large glass pane. About 50 of us sat there and watched the scene from a voyeur-like, intimate distance. On an exotic social safari with a purchased body at our mercy as prey? No, rather on an entertaining collision course with a piece of reality theatre.

As the whole thing is simultaneously recorded live, as if it were a film shooting, and shown on small screens above the stage, the performance becomes an exploratory play with the theatre medium. Different forms of fiction – the film, the theatre, the video recording – collide with an authentic, socially exposed body at the centre, giving it all substance. Layer upon layer of staging, pointing to whether Anna is not already, in her daily life, staged as a ‘street hooker’? It is fun to be served the familiar *Pretty Woman* escapades in a live, raw re-enactment, from the bubble bath scene to a Cinderella makeover where shopping creates transformation, not least when the evening’s Julia Roberts in a black cocktail dress has jewels put around her neck by her prince.

Richard Gere looks handsome and slightly awkward in the guise of Anders Mossling in a black suit, as he fearlessly sets off on his bicycle to track down his discovery on Hollywood or Istedgade Boulevard. *Pretty Woman A/S* (Pretty Woman Ltd.) is handheld theatre with low key acting and the spotlight on a piece of neglected reality. We are a long way from overdone acting or polished psychodrama, where tonight’s guest star might more easily have been out of place. So there is no need to worry, as the critics of the performance have suggested, about the misuse of state funding or the degeneration of the art of acting. On the contrary, it is a sharpening of the theatre as an art form, an examination of its effects when the performance in line with a lot of other theatre – as well as visual arts and film – confronts reality.

As our everyday life is increasingly experienced as staged, it is obvious that the borderline between theatre and reality has become a red-hot zone. Of course, it would not have had the same effect if the performance had advertised Sofie Gråbøl or Trine Dyrholm. When the artificiality of theatre meets an authentic body, something special happens. Now, in this case it is a particular socially vulnerable body, but it is not just any random, on-the-ropes drug prostitute who has been brought in. These are women with a surplus of strength that the theatre people have found through outreach work. Eight prostitutes are supposedly taking turns at the job – unless, as a further media stunt, it turns out that they are not prostitutes at all, but just ordinary extras, as in the infamous Dutch realityTV donor-show, where the lucky winner of a new kidney turned out to be just an actor.

Without lapsing into pure ‘Pretty Woman’-romanticism, where the theatre has to go out and save reality, it is nevertheless the essence of the film’s transformation to show that pretty woman is given the chance to become something other than a street prostitute. In fact, here in the container, we experience that the guest star of the evening, instead of just being exhibited to be stared at on Istedgade and otherwise totally repressed from the public sphere, is given the opportunity to take action and become a person in front of the audience. The whole media drama surrounding the performance clearly shows – apart from the fact that sex sells – that we can accept a lot in the theatre, but the limit is apparently the prostitutes. Well done, Tue Biering & co. for using *Pretty Woman Ltd.* to show what society apparently does not want to look at, and for allowing the drama to unfold both on stage and in the media.

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Pretty Woman Ltd.:

Text: Jeppe Kristensen.

Staging: Tue Biering.

Scenography: Christian Friedländer.