

Anna Wostenberg
Broadway
Dr. Sullivan
27 October 2015

Sylvia

Matthew Broderick steals the show in Broadway's *Sylvia*, without a doubt. His middle-aged charm had me captivated from the very first moment he set foot on stage. I've always perceived him as a gentle, soft-spoken kind of man, but *Sylvia* allowed him to break out of this shell for me. He asserted his love for his dog while maintaining the calm collectedness I've always known. A rather absurd play, *Sylvia* leaves audiences reeling with laughter, perhaps because we all secretly know someone as obsessed with their canine as Greg. Or perhaps because we are the obsessed one. But no matter because this silly play is definitely worth seeing.

One can't think too deeply about the world in which *Sylvia* takes place, because it can get a little bit creepy. I had to remind myself to suspend a little bit of reality. While I consider myself to be rather fixated with the feelings and emotions of animals everywhere, I had a bit of an issue with just how close Sylvia and Greg were. It seemed a bit too close to bestiality for my taste; I had a hard time differentiating Annaleigh Ashford from Sylvia. I thought she was a bit too romantically involved with Greg for a dog. I know dogs are possessive of their humans, but Sylvia seemed to be so on a completely different level, a more amorous level. It felt like a love triangle between Greg, Sylvia, and Kate, but one of them is a dog. I had a difficult time coping with this during the first half of the play. And perhaps this was the intent of A.R. Gurney, to make us feel uncomfortable. In which case, he absolutely succeeded.

But for some reason, during the second half, I became much more engaged and enjoyed the dialogue immensely. I laughed out loud when Sylvia quite explicitly yells at an unseen cat, calling it a "fucker" and a "piece of shit". This perfectly captured the voice of a dog and its opinion regarding felines. And Ashford's bark sounded eerily accurate to that of a real dog, too. That was just great! I was finally able to just sit back and appreciate Sylvia for what it is, which I still haven't quite figured out, but that's okay because I really enjoyed it.

Ashford was very well cast for this part; it's as if the role were written for her. She had the perfect attitude for it and was so willing to put it all out there for the audience to see. I mean, she violently shoves her head into the crotch of a man playing the role of a woman. On several occasions. This alone was funny enough to elicit a laugh out of Broderick, which in itself entertained me to no end. I always find it funny when an actor breaks character. I die every time Bill Hader would break character on Saturday Night Live when he played Stefon, so it did not bother me in the slightest to see Matthew Broderick's own entertainment shine through. But Ashford takes on a hugely physical role and succeeds in portraying a dog, once you get past the fact that she's a human. Her mannerisms are spot-on: her head tilts, the way she kicks her leg when her belly is scratched, and the way she gazes lovingly up at her owner, waiting for dinner, to name a few. But Ashford wasn't the only actor who stole the show.

Matthew Broderick was awesome, as expected. He is by no means the most incredible actor ever, but he has a certain charisma and charm about him that I think reminds me of my dad. He is laid back and levelheaded, consistent. He is

human. I appreciated when he messed up his line, saying, "You should beuter Nowser," instead of, "You should neuter Bowser." It made me, and much of the audience, laugh out loud, but it also shows how unpredictable the theatre is. Stuff happens sometimes, and you just have to go with the flow. I think he played it off well, too. He sort of chuckled at himself and corrected the line. What was even funnier, though, was the way that Robert Sella allowed the moment to draw out, creating even more laughter from the audience. I was almost hoping for an ad-libbed joke or something to acknowledge it. But it was such a real mistake, so genuine. I mix up my consonants all the time in my day-to-day life. Matthew Broderick isn't perfect! There. It's out in the open. It was refreshing to see that side of him after having seen such perfect deliveries in all his films, where there is time to reshoot a scene should he make that mistake.

Sylvia will probably not be a Tony award winning play, this is true. But it was absolutely worth seeing! It was vulgar, contrary to what many people apparently expected it to be and it was a unique topic to write a play about. A mother in front of me kept trying to cover her young daughter's ears as soon as a swear word was uttered and I could feel her discomfort throughout the whole play. So don't bring your wee ones. But it was a great escape from the troubles of real life and I laughed nearly the entire time. So take a night off from the stress of life and go laugh with Matthew Broderick.