THEATER

'Art' shows beauty lies in eye of beholder

"Art" continues through Sunday, Jan. 30 at the Fisher Theatre, 3011 W. Grand Blvd. at Second, Detroit. Curtain 8 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 2 p.m. Saturday-Sunday, and 7 p.m. Sunday. No performances on Mondays. Tickets $25-$47.50, available at the box office, and all Ticketmaster outlets. Charge by phone at (248) 645-6666 or call (313) 872-1000 for information.

BY JON KATZ
SPECIAL WRITER

■ Directed by Matthew Warchus with sophisticated lighting by Hugh Vanstone and jazzy musical transitions by Gary Yershon, "Art" is a 90-minute montage of masculine emotions and motives.

Are you the type of person who would buy something because it's in vogue, even at a cost as ridiculous as the item itself? Are you someone who would tell that person what you really think of it? Or are you the peacemaker, always in the middle?

If you fit in there somewhere, you're likely to like "Art." The one-act intermission-less comedy/ drama has been translated into some 30 languages and honored around the world. Winner of the 1998 Tony Award for Best Play, "Art" is not about art at all, but about the art of friendship. And like most friendships, it's not always a pretty picture.

For three middle-aged American men living in Paris, their 15-year camaraderie is put to the test when recently divorced dermatologist Serge (Cotter Smith) buys a 4x5 foot white canvas with barely perceptible white lines and nothing else. Oh yes — he paid 200,000 francs ($40,000) for it.

His older friend Marc (Judd "Taxi" Hirsch) takes one look and calls it something we can't print but can't help agreeing with either. In comes meek, chunky Yvan (Jack Willis) to mediate, but in doing so causes the emerging rift to grow even wider.

Yvan accepts the avant-garde work "as long as it's not doing harm to anyone else." "It's harming ME!" replies Marc, and indeed it is, as it threatens to come between them as surely as Yoko broke up the Beatles.

Marc's jealousy towards the canvas by fictional artist Antrios is as curious as Serge's obsession with it, and maybe more understandable. "It's not just an Antrios," Serge boasts, "it's a 70s Antrios." "Are you having it framed?" Marc asks innocently. "No," Serge explains as if teaching a foreign language, "you mustn't interrupt it."

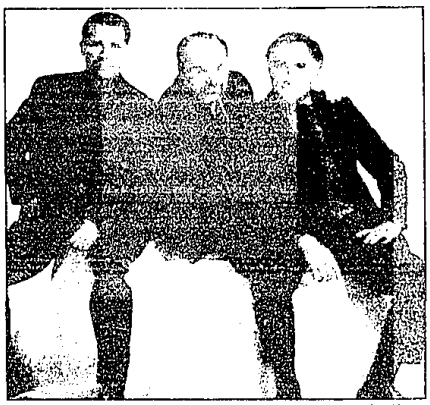
French author/ actress Yasmina Reza gets inside these guys and turns them inside out. They are, then, her own pieces of art to admire or scorn but not ignore.

So what is "Art," comedy or drama? Fortunately and very creatively, it's both. Willis (currently appearing on screen in "The Talented Mr. Ripley") gets a gem of a monologue, ranting about his impending wedding and the in-laws and the invitations and why-me-I-hate-my-new-job-I-hate-my-life. It's a hoot.

Hirsch is as welcome as a favorite uncle, and from him even the swearing is almost G-rated. His Marc is a pompous horse's behind, but as a friend, is he worth losing over this piece of — art?

Cotter Smith (TV's "Equal Justice") blends perfectly with Hirsch and Willis; when he picks up the painting and stalks out of the room, it's like he's defending his child from the school bullies.

Directed by Matthew Warchus with sophisticated lighting by Hugh Vanstone and jazzy musical transitions by Gary Yershon, "Art" is a 90-minute montage of masculine emotions and motives. For most, it will be like looking at a painting. For some, it will be more like a mirror. It seems that like beauty, "Art" is also in the eye of the beholder.



JOAN MARCUS

On stage: *Cotter Smith (left to right), Jack Willis and Judd Hirsch star in "Art."*

Dodworth Saxhorn Band sounds like summertime

BACKSTAGE PASS

ANN DELISI

Okay, it's late January. We've finally accepted the fact that there is going to be a winter, even though your neighbor just stopped mowing his lawn two weeks ago.

So, you know the drill. There's a ground hog named Phil. There are boat shows and garden shows, suggestions that you'll simply collapse without a tropical getaway and dozens of other reminders that most of us do not like this season.

Who am I to buck the tide? The winter blues are no match for the Dodworth Saxhorn Band, which produces a sound synonymous with summer. When filmmaker Ken Burns was selecting music for his PBS series, "Baseball," he turned to the Dodworth Saxhorn Band to supply three of the nine innings. There is something about 19th century brass band music that celebrates America, our past, and summer.

The Michigan-based band has also performed at the White House for an "Afternoon of Baseball" event, The Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island, and The Calumet Theatre. On the next edition of Detroit Public TV's BACKSTAGE PASS, airing at 7:30 p.m. Sunday, Jan.23, the band performs a rousing tribute to Claudio Grafulla, a master composer of this distinctive music who preceded John Philip Sousa.

Visitors to Tiger Stadium in the 1970s were treated to a work of art that deserves a spot in Detroit baseball history. You may recall the metal sculpture of a tiger that resided on Trumbull Avenue during that period, which served as a tribute to the 1968 World Series Champions. It was later displayed at the Detroit Zoo. Until I saw a segment produced by Todd Hastings on BACKSTAGE PASS, I was unaware of the amazing story of Don Thibodeaux, an auto shop owner and boxing trainer who has created stunning representations of sports-related figures out of chrome bumpers and other car parts for the past three decades.

Local treasure

"He's one of our local treasures, a pure Detroit artist who uses Motor City relics to create his sculptures," says Hastings. "Don is an incredible talent who is somewhat unheralded, even though many have marveled at his work, such as the sculpture of Muhammad Ali that is exhibited in the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History."

Now, it finally seems that Don is getting his due. The Johanson Charles Gallery in Detroit is exhibiting a collection of his sculptures, which are also featured on the Jan. 23rd BACKSTAGE PASS.

Where is the tiger now?

"It's in his backyard. I'm sure Don's a bit attached to it because it was his first major piece, and he wants the right situation to come along before he parts with it," says Hastings.

Isn't there a new baseball stadium? Some of our best ideas come when we think spring.

Bands *from page E1*

Barber will lead the Farmington Community Band in its opening "Olympic Fanfare," by John Williams, the theme of the 1984 Olympics. Also on the program is "Flight of Years," a brand new piece by Patrick Burns, and "Salvation is Created," by Tschesnokoff, and the technically challenging "Mannin Veen," a tone poem by British composer Haydn Wood. The title of this work translates to "Dear Isle of Man," the British island in the Irish Sea where Wood spent most of his childhood.

Birmingham Concert Band's program includes "Procession of Nobles" by Rimsky-Korsakov, a medley of swing tunes by Warren Barker, and "Celebration Variations," a piece by James Curnow that the band commission two years ago in celebration of its 20th anniversary. They'll close their program with the "Emblem March" by Karl King.

Together, the bands will play "Festive Overture" by Shostakovich. "It flies, it's very dramatic, it's a barn burner," said Barber. They'll play "Army of the Nile," a British march by Kenneth Alford, and close with "Elsa's Procession to the Cathedral" by Wagner.

Both Barber and Hoemke enjoy working with their bands, which are all volunteer adult musicians. Barber's wife, Fern, band director of Walnut Creek Middle School Band, Walled Lake Schools, is first clarinet.

"We're celebrating our 34th year," said Barber. "Making music is always fun; that's why we do it.

EXHIBITS

ARTIST RECEPTION
A public reception will be held for 1992 Farmington artist-in-residence Evanthia Samra 6:30-7:30 p.m. Monday, Jan. 24, at Farmington Hills City Hall. Her paintings will be on display at Farmington and Farmington Hills City Hall. (248) 473-1856.

ANN ARBOR ART CENTER GALLERY
"Collective Memories," work of artists Linda Soberman and Jennifer Martin through Feb. 19 at 117 W. Liberty, Ann Arbor. (734) 994-8004.

ALFRED BERKOWITZ GALLERY
Through Feb. 14 – Diversity: Focus on India. U of M-Dearborn campus, Mardigian Library, 4901 Evergreen, Dearborn. (313) 593-5058.

CASS CAFE
An exhibition of photography by Millard Berry, Ralph Rinaldi and Bill Waters. 4620 Cass Ave., Detroit. (313) 831-1400.

JEFFREY CLAY GALLERY
The lusters of Paul Katrich. 404 East 4th Street, Royal Oak. (248) 584-2223.

COMMUNITY ARTS GALLERY
Graduate Works In Progress exhibition. 28 5400 Gullen Mall, Wayne State University, Detroit. (313) 577-2423.

JANICE CHARACH EPSTEIN GALLERY
Through Jan. 27 – The Mountain of the Lord: Scale Models of Jerusalem Temples. 6600 West Maple, West Bloomfield. (248) 661-7641.

ELAINE JACOB GALLERY
Through Feb. 4 – Misbehaving! Works from the studio of Sandy Skoglund. 480 W. Hancock, Detroit. (313) 993-7813.

LIVONIA ARTS COMMISSION
Through Jan. 28 – Mixed media of Norma McQueen. Through Jan. 31 – Watercolor portraiture of Toni Stevens. Livonia Civic Center Library, 32777 Five Mile Road, Livonia. (734) 466-2490. In the Livonia City Hall Lobby, Schoolcraft College student artwork through Jan. 31. 33000 Civic Center Drive, Livonia. (734) 466-2540.

PLYMOUTH COMMUNITY ARTS COUNCIL
Through Jan. 26 – "Spirit Earth," recent watercolors of Todd Marsee. 774 N. Sheldon, Plymouth. (734) 416-4ART.

JEAN PAUL BLUSSER GALLERY
Through Jan. 28 – Richard Mock: Mock of the Times. University of Michigan School of Art & Design, 2000 Bonisteel Blvd., Ann Arbor. (734) 764-0397.