

THEATRE

ETCETERA

Amazing Maisie pulls off a transcendent teenage tale

I AND YOU

HAMPSTEAD THEATRE

★★★★☆

Maisie Williams (AKA Arya Stark in Game of Thrones) and Zach Wyatt make superb stage debuts in Edward Hall's production of American playwright Lauren Gunderson's work.

Caroline, trapped at home due to an unspecified genetic illness, is surprised by schoolmate Anthony, who wants to partner on a project about poet Walt Whitman.

Gunderson's almost real-time 90-minute piece initially suffers from excess repetition – Anthony reaches out, Caroline attacks, Anthony retreats – plus obvious technology commentary and that hoary trope of someone in a clear two-hander threatening to leave.

However, it builds to moments of surprising transcendence,

Marianka Swain enjoys the Game of Thrones star's stage debut as a fiery teen discovering her identity and place in the world through poetry

while staying in a teen register: their solemnity, hypersensitivity, and sense of wonder.

The pair endearingly connect through poetry and music, with that dawning thrill of discovering their own experience articulated by art.

A fiery Williams skilfully reveals the different layers of Caroline – her prickly defences, unnaturally heightened awareness of how she's seen by others, poignantly naïve vision of



Maisie Williams as Caroline in I and You at Hampstead Theatre

picture: MANUEL HARLAN

an adult future, and that fumbling transition from goofy child to emerging woman.

Wyatt's Anthony, too, is in that limbo: an overgrown kid who moves with Tigger-ish speed and talks eagerly about his dad, but who is also coming to understand his impact on the world, and the complexity of adult relationships.

Both let us glimpse who these two were, and could be, individually and together.

This exploration of identity is furthered by their study of shifting pronouns in Whitman, and in Michael Pavelka's wonderful collage-like design of Caroline's bedroom – disparate elements combining to make up a

person.

A climactic twist lands with major impact, while also feeling retrospectively satisfying.

Let's hope this divergence in Hampstead Theatre's programming brings in a younger crowd; this is definitely a piece that would honour their engagement.

Theatre Review

THE WILD DUCK

ALMEIDA THEATRE

★★★★☆

There are reasons why this play might be the most personal of all of Henrik Ibsen's works, and Robert Icke's re-write of *The Wild Duck* explains it in no uncertain terms. A sumptuous dinner party sets the scene for the return of prodigal son Gregory Woods (Kevin Harvey) following a self-imposed exile. His father, Charles (Nicholas Day), has a long history of infidelities against Gregory's late mother which has tarnished the son's view of his father.

Even as an adult, the father deems that he looks upon him through his mother's eyes.

Meanwhile, Gregory's old childhood friend Francis Ekdal (Nicholas Farrell) is married to Gina (Lyndsey Marshal) a former maid of the Woods family.

The Ekdals have a 12-year old daughter, Hedwig (Grace Doherty) and live in hardship with Francis's father in an old multi-storey townhouse. They seem happy in spite of their difficulties.

Nicholas Farrell and Clara Read in *The Wild Duck* at The Almeida

picture: MANUEL HARLAN

Unbeknownst to Francis, however, Charles Woods is providing the financial succour that is helping to

keep them afloat. Gregory's return prompts revelations that trigger irrevocable fissures, instilled by his

firm belief that the truth should prevail over lies. In a unique approach, Icke has his

cast repeatedly breaking the fourth wall.

Actors pause mid-scene to provide context and exposition for what is happening at any given moment. This workshop-style contextualisation is a high stakes gamble. Particularly so in the first half, which drags.

Swaths of empty seats after the interval indicated that it was too much for some. Those who remained, however, were treated to a riveting finish.

The sort of dramatic fusillade that comes from the most satisfying of theatrical outings.

Every time we regale something from the past, we inch away from the truth. The present and its unrelenting narrative is the only real truth that has we have.

A 56-year old Ibsen may well have been reflecting upon his own marital misdeeds when he wrote *The Wild Duck*, but under Icke's intriguing direction there is plenty to resonate with the rest of us. Ibsen's masterly skill is evident in this production in the end, even if it drags its feet in a cumbersome fashion pre-interval.

Greg Wetherall