

Theatre Review

WIT will push your fluids



Sue Hansen-Styles, who went bald for the role of cancer patient Vivian Bearing, carried her head gracefully (Photo: WhyNotTheatre)

First off, if you haven't been to the Bådteatret yet, be aware that it's not called Båd because of the nice unpronounceable 'soft d' ring to it, so don't go looking for a house called boat like I did.

Once inside this charming little seafaring device, its nature is unmistakable: the elements have no respect for the high arts, and you can hear the boat move occasionally like a fat man in an old bed rolling over in his sleep. But with more charm.

I can imagine no better setting for 'WIT'. There's no need to over-flex my metaphorical muscles to see the similarities between the cold (literally, so leave your coats on) insides of this metallic structure and the dehumanising surroundings of the hospital wing in which Vivian Bearing, a literature professor in the final stage of cancer who is the protagonist of this play, witnesses her life come to an entirely nonfictional end.

While at the same time the intimacy of a theatre on a small boat makes it impossible to avoid the uneasy confrontation with a strong and lonely woman essentially crumbling to pieces, both physically and mentally, in the course of the play, right in front of your eyes.

Bearing is not a very sentimental woman, the occasional bunny story aside. She is tough, so tough that she keeps pushing the fluid and survives eight of the strongest chemotherapy cycles – a delightfully publishable result for Dr Kelekian, though never really meant to cure her.

When the end finally comes, we feel her pain and loneliness and the injustice that here is a medical establishment that serves itself more than its patients. Bearing hasn't been begging for our pity and so we respect her enough to have sympathy instead.

Margaret Edson's play 'WIT' can start to seem somewhat over-indulgent at times, especially if you are not yourself a John Donne scholar. But frankly, Sue Hansen-Styles has a directness and forcefulness about her that is simply spell-binding.

In the end, her spirited performance, backed solidly by the supporting cast, enables us to be moved by an entirely predictable ending.

WIT

4/6

a play by Margaret Edson

Directed by Peter Dupont Weiss

With Sue Hansen-Styles, Andrew Jeffers, Bennet Thorpe, Miriam Yeager and Eira Pryce

Every day except Sunday, until March 16, 2014

Bådteatret, Nyhavn 16, Cph K