

British Theatre Guide

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You Can See the Hills

Matthew Dunster

A Royal Exchange Theatre production

Claire Studio, Young Vic

(2008)

Adam Ashton is a bit of a lad. He is magically brought to life by William Ash, the star of TV's *Burn It* and *Clocking Off*, whose energy throughout a 2½ hour (including interval) monologue is amazing.

Matthew Dunster is another rare talent, proving that in addition to his abilities as an actor and director (which he does here too), he writes evocatively and with great wit.

You Can See The Hills is at least semi-autobiographical and follows Adam through his teenage years in Oldham, Dunster's home town. Ash tells his story sitting throughout in what looks like a photographer's studio.

Apart from family, the main constant in the handsome youngster's life is sex. He relates his conquests and failures in the kind of graphic detail more familiar in pornography than the subsidised theatre but retains a sense of humour even *in extremis* and there are some hilarious failures.

There is far more to this finely written play than coarse but extremely funny comedy. Adam and his family and friends have to put up with compassionate murders, underage pregnancies, drug issues and bereavements in a working class community that is impressively, if a little schematically, brought to the stage. This makes our narrator into something of a modern everyman.

The balance is maintained magnificently, as humorous tales seamlessly change with a minor lighting adjustment to emotive high drama. Ash, whose timing is immaculate, proves adept as a charmer, a joker and a boy who doesn't always understand himself let alone those around him.

You Can See The Hills is packed with moments of dramatic brilliance, perhaps the very best, when a hot hotpot sends the youngster into the kind of blind, inexplicable rage that will be surely familiar to everyone in the theatre.

The writing is of the highest quality, sometimes poetic and beautifully conveying this journey from wild childhood to something like wisdom, the knocks as important in Adam's development as the joys.

By the end, the boy has matured into a fine man and there is little doubt that any one of the dozen girls that he has known (think biblically) would be proud to have him as their beau.

At some point, Matthew Dunster will probably have to choose a single direction for his career and, assuming that this portrait of his younger self is no flash in the pan, he might just hit the greatest heights as a writer, especially if he can find talent like William Ash to convey his words on stage. The enthralled and highly responsive audience would certainly think so.

Philip also [reviewed](#) this production when it transferred to the larger Maria Studio in 2009

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)