

PROSCENIUM



18 - 21 March 2026

The Height of the Storm

Florian Zeller

**HARROW
CHORAL
SOCIETY**

Dvořák : Stabat Mater

Conductor : Jennifer Sterling

Byron Ensemble

Soprano : Milly Forrest

Mezzo soprano : Suzie Purkis

Tenor : Jonathan Cooke

Baritone : Ross Cumming

Tickets £25

under 18s £2

online: www.harrowchoral.org.uk

email: boxoffice@harrowchoral.org.uk

tel: 07794 253463

Saturday 28th March 2026

5.30 pm

St Alban's Church

North Harrow

HA2 7PF

GOING STRAIGHT

by
Richard Harris



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Please note: In context with the characters, there is very strong language used in this play.

PROSCENIUM

The Height of the Storm

Florian Zeller

Translated by Christopher Hampton

Wednesday 18 to Saturday 21 March 2026
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

Cast

André	Mark Sutherland
Anne	Geraldine Lynch
Madeleine	Shirley Wootten
Élise	Caroline MacGinnis
A Woman.....	Izzie Cartwright
A Man.....	Dan Weiss

Creative Team

Director	Lynette Alston
Assistant Director	Crystal Anthony
Stage Manager	Hannah Lester
Set Design and Build	Richard Kessel
Stage Properties	Linda Hampson
Lighting Design / Operation.....	Helene Smith
Sound Operation	Paul Davis
Poster and Programme Design	Charles Anthony
Programme Compilation	Mark Sutherland

A country house, not far from Paris

The play has four acts. There will be one interval of fifteen minutes
between Act 2 and Act 3

Act 1: Saturday Morning

Act 2: Saturday Afternoon

Act 3: Sunday Morning

Epilogue: Later

With thanks to East Lane Theatre, Ian King, Keith Cochrane,
Anne Gerrard and Paul Davis

*Programme sources include 2023 programme by Barn Theatre Welwyn
Garden City, and UK premiere programme, 2018.*

Director's Note

I came across this play by accident, having never read or seen any of Florian Zeller's other work. I was moved by the intensity of the emotional journey I felt whilst reading it, and the beautiful complexity of the shifting realities, the non-linear storyline, the fragments and, as André says, the 'soap bubbles' of memory, that so perfectly express how grief, memory and love intersect.

My advice to anyone who encounters this play is to allow yourself to go with the flow and experience the emotional journey. There is no 'right' answer to unravel the storyline, or to pin down who exists and who is perception or memory. Characters are both fixed in reality and obliquely representational. The ambiguousness of the narrative is what allows us to experience the range of emotions that Madeleine and André are feeling throughout their later life. And that's the beauty of this play. It does what the best kind of theatre can do – it reveals different things to different people, it makes us feel and it makes us reflect.

It has been a wonderful experience exploring the play with this talented cast and crew – thank you for joining us on tonight's journey.

Lynette Alston

Florian Zeller

Florian Zeller is widely regarded in both France and Britain as the most talented new playwright to have emerged in the 21st century. Born in Paris in 1979, he first came to fame in France at the age of 22 with a highly praised novel, *Artificial Snow*. His third novel, *The Fascination of Evil*, was nominated for the Prix Goncourt. He soon began to write both film scripts and plays, which were very successful in France.

The first of his plays to be performed in London was *The Father*, written entirely from the point of view of a man living with dementia. A highly acclaimed run in London in 2014 was followed by equal success in New York. It was then adapted into a film starring Sir Anthony Hopkins, who won an Oscar as best actor. There are several echoes of *The Father* in the script of *The Height of the Storm*.

Since 2014 all of Zeller's later plays have been performed in Britain and America: they include *The Mother*, *The Son*, *Truth*, *The Lie*, *The Height of the Storm* and *The Forest*. Zeller's plays have now been performed in 49 countries. From the start Zeller's English translator has been Christopher Hampton, a playwright in his own right, whose best-known play is *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*.

Interview with Florian Zeller

RF: What's the origin of *The Height of the Storm*?

FZ: I don't know. I wrote it two years ago. I recall that I saw a woman talking to her father, who made no response to her. Why was he looking through the window at the garden? I didn't know at all. I ended up asking myself whether he was really there, or whether he was a ghost she would have difficulty letting go of. This was just a theory. To understand it I had to hear them speak, then write the piece. That's often how I write. To begin with very few things. At the start I ignore what is going to happen. I have to hear the characters speak, as though the piece exists before it is written: as though it has to be dug up without being damaged. There is however a point of attachment to reality: on my wedding day I saw through the hotel window a very old couple crossing the road. Each seemed to support the other: it was a very concrete feeling. They were physically attached to each other, as if they were only one body, inseparable and terribly fragile. Individuality seemed dissolved in a mixture of tenderness, solidarity and humility. I remembered this image while writing. And then also a newspaper report: the suicide of an octogenarian couple at the Lutetia. But I didn't know I would mention all of this. I only follow characters who have things to say. I listen to them, creating strategies that provide space for them to speak.

RF: Are you ever surprised by your characters?

FZ: Always! I write as if I were the first spectator of this imaginary representation. All I know about them is what appears in the dialogue. When that device is in place, it writes itself. But it is hard work to achieve... often, it does not work. If they have nothing to say, there is no play. On the other hand, if the mystery is intense enough, I let them speak and the play is written. But

let's be honest: there is a moment when I regain control. The characters no longer have a say when it comes to elaborating the construction of the piece. A writer is a somewhat manipulative conductor: I lay traps for the audience as well as for the characters...

RF: Here is a new “game of truth”, if that’s how we define your theatrical universe: which, from piece to piece, hides the crumbling reality from the eyes of the spectator, by combining deceptive appearances...

FZ: The play forces different scenarios, several hypotheses, to cohabit without separating them. In the same scene, there is in turn a version where the man would have died being the only one not to realise it, another where the mother would have left, a third where they would still be together but diminished by the problems related to old age, and joined by their daughters who have come to manage this situation... All the possibilities that the imagination conceives in the face of this great terror that is the end of life: they combine. We are in several places at the same time. A sentence, a situation suddenly contradicts what we thought we had grasped, demonstrating that the truth is precarious and ephemeral. So the viewer is constantly led to reinvent the possibility of the presented and deconstructed version. Nothing is acquired. The challenge of the staging is to make it clear at each moment which scenario we are playing. The spectator is therefore invited to follow a dreamlike walk in the multiple possibilities of this end of life. As in a labyrinth: the thread is never broken even if it does, to say the least, meander.

RF: The text is imbued with a poetic gravity. André, on the threshold of death, seeks once more the “meaning” of life.

FZ: André is a writer who has spent his life reciting poems to himself. Poetry was also part of the love ritual for him. His memory is now fragmented and the fragments that remain no longer mean much. Life can be interrupted at any time, but he is at an age where that is more and more likely. The title, borrowed from Char*, poetically invites us to stand in this place where we hear the bird sing before it flies away.

* The French title of the play is *Avant de s'envoler* (*Before flying away*) taken from the poem by René Char that is quoted near the end of the play.

Rodolphe Fouan, from the original French play edition (published in 2016)

Zeller on Theatre

“What captivates me about theatre is the way it sidesteps rationality. People come into a room to have a story told to them. Sometimes they are upset by what happens to a character. They know, really, that what they’re seeing isn’t real and yet still they cry. It’s very strange if you think about it...We know that this actor who is about to die will get up at the end of the show and continue his life as normal. All the beauty of the theatre lies in that “as if”. It restores that wide-eyed and wondrous spirit of childhood...I try to construct little labyrinths in which the audience member tries to find where they are. You hunt down the truth but as soon as you think you’re able to grab hold of it, it takes on another form and slips through your fingers.”

Interview with Florian Zeller by Tim Bano in the 2018 UK premiere programme

The Lutetia Hotel

The Lutetia – named after the Roman city that would later become Paris – was founded in 1910 by the Boucicaut family, the visionary founders and owners of Le Bon Marché, the first ever luxury department store in the world. Situated on Paris’s famed Left Bank, it was conceived as a luxurious haven for the elite store’s most distinguished clientele and suppliers by its same architect, Louis-Hippolyte Boileau. Designed by Léon Binet and Paul Belmondo, the hotel’s unique blend of Art Nouveau and Art Deco styles is a beacon of elegance and architectural innovation.

From its earliest days, and linked to its unique Left Bank location, Hôtel Lutetia has been a meeting ground for artists, intellectuals and visionaries. Writers, sculptors, intellectuals and celebrities such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Josephine Baker and more recently Catherine Deneuve, Isabelle Hupert or Hedi Slimane all chose it as their Parisian retreat. James Joyce famously completed Ulysses within its storied walls, and General Charles de Gaulle would have spent his honeymoon in the Suite Amour. The hotel is for all Parisians synonymous with literature, artistry and real sophistication, a beloved symbol of its Left Bank spirit.

Mandarin Oriental Lutetia website, 2026

Dementia and Theatre

Theatre's obligation isn't to explain dementia but to hold the person clearly, even when their story no longer holds together. If we tidy the narrative to make it manageable, we steal the story from the sufferer to comfort the viewer. Pain that is witnessed moves; pain that is dismissed by a script gets stuck. Witness work, not performance, becomes the actor's task when staging dementia. Acting usually demands a clear objective, but dementia unsettles linear dramatic trajectories. The actor must stay present when coherence breaks, without trying to resolve what cannot be resolved.

...Florian Zeller's *The Father*, a play about dementia, places audiences inside perceptual disorientation. Furniture disappears and scenes repeat. The audience thinks: "Wait – didn't we just see this?" That shared confusion creates kinship. We experience, rather than observe.

Yet Zeller's brilliance is also structural: once we decode the staging pattern, we observe disorientation rather than inhabit it. The technique offers empathy but ultimately allows the audience to step back into diagnostic distance. For those living in suspension – waiting, anticipating, never quite arriving – this exit is precisely what theatre must refuse to offer...

...Theatre doesn't need to cast the sufferer, but it must cast the witness – someone to do the labour of recognition when narrative fractures...

As theatremakers staging dementia, our staging should be [like a] handful of dust: a repeated insistence on dignity, however fleeting recognition may be... To witness isn't a single act – it is sustained presence. Our stages must be spaces of witness, not narrative repair. When we stop trying to fix the story, we return ownership to the person living it.

Lita Doolan, The Stage, February 10th 2026

Our Next Production:

Time of My Life

By Alan Ayckbourn

A birthday party of ill-manners, attended by Ayckbourn's superbly awful Stratton family, serves up a night of laughter in this tragi-comic masterpiece.

Time of My Life was first performed at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough, at their famous theatre-in-the-round, on 21 April 1992 and subsequently at the Vaudeville Theatre in London on 3 August 1993.

"A play by an inspired master craftsman and cunning psychologist working at full stretch: harsh and funny, simple and cunning, generous but unforgiving." The Sunday Times

Ticket price includes a programme, available on your way in.

Directed by Richard Kessel
Wednesday 10th to Saturday 13th June 2026 at 7.45 pm
Compass Theatre, Ickenham
Box Office: 01895 250 615

About Proscenium

Proscenium was founded in 1924. Since then, the aim of this experienced group has been to present classic and contemporary plays to as wide an audience as possible. Since 1990, performances have taken place at the Harrow Arts Centre and, more recently, at the Compass Theatre, Ickenham.

The company meets three times a week in Harrow for rehearsals, so that up to four plays are presented in each season. Social, fund-raising activities and play readings take place throughout the year.

Chair : Mike Williams

Contact us at www.proscenium.org.uk

TIME OF MY LIFE

ALAN AYCKBOURN

PROSCENIUM

10 - 13 June 2026

7.45pm, Compass Theatre
Ickenham, UB10 8PD

Tickets: £17, Concessions: £16
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www.proscenium.org.uk

Book tickets: 01895 250615

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