

Private Peaceful | Promise Adelaide

VALERIE LILLINGTON
07 APRIL 2018



80 minutes long, one man on stage and a rapt audience. His name is *Thomas, Tommo*, and he's about to die. That's no giveaway because he tells us that early on in this return season of the play, ***Private Peaceful***, starring **Ben Francis** and sensitively directed by **Rob Croser**. Light and sound are spot on by **Stephen Dean**.

The very good programme gives us a background to this play, based on the book by **Michael Morpurgo** and adapted for the stage by **Simon Reade**. In World War One, 306 British and Commonwealth soldiers were executed by order of courts martial for 'offences', including desertion, cowardice, striking an officer, disobedience, falling asleep

on duty or casting away arms. Thus it is that *Tommo* spends his last night in a cell awaiting the dawn and death.

Tommo is a country lad who, like so many others, at nearly 16, lies about his age to join up with his brother *Charlie* and, in those hours before he faces the firing squad, he talks about his life. **Ben** takes on myriad characters who have shaped him and does it extremely well. He is his dad, his mum, *Charlie*, his other brother *Big Joey*, *Molly*, the girl he loves, the bullying school master, a Sergeant Major, the old woman who taunts him to take the King's shilling, *Sgt. Horrible Hanley* and those who called him "a worthless man". This lad, before the war, had gone no further than his local school and a neighbouring town and it is a glorious adventure to get into before it's all over and if *Charlie's* going so is he. Reality has *Tommo* remembering its horrors – the rats, the lice, the rain, the stink, the mud – he used to like mud squelching between his toes – the dead and, in a gut wrenching couple of minutes he remembers the noise. The memory of two whole days of non-stop shelling has him curled up in a foetal position screaming, "Make it stop! Please make it stop!" Not to God. God's gone. *Tommo* is gassed, buried alive, exhausted, terrified and, by the time he finds himself in this condemned man's cell, he is 17.

Ben Francis is an extraordinary young man. He has packed so much into his life already and when he first did this show, he was 17, like *Tommo*. Now at 18, he is for the theatre-goer, one of life's treasures and we are so fortunate that he is here in Adelaide. Don't miss this show.

Ben Francis is going far so take the opportunity to see him now. Like last night's audience, you too will be on your feet in homage to a great performance.

Promise Adelaide presents

Private Peaceful

by *Simon Reade*

Director Rob Croser

Venue: Bakehouse Theatre | 255 Angus Street, Adelaide

Dates: 4 – 14 April 2018

Tickets: \$15 – \$28

Bookings: www.bakehousetheatre.com