

REVIEWS FOR “ANTHEM FOR A DOOMED YOUTH”



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THE title of this show gives all the warning you need about the true nature of this one-hour delivery of stories and poems from the trenches of the First World War.

“This is not a barrel of laughs,” actor/presenter Guy Masterson says of his one-man show.

What he does provide is a wild and poignant traverse through the verse of noted war poets, including Wilfrid Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, and the retelling of first-person accounts of the men on all sides of the battle.

The vivid words of poet and soldier alike recreate the contemplation before battle, the ragged thoughts of reasonable men overwhelmed as death shreds all before them, and the sometimes psychotic will to survive by any means as soldiers hurtle towards enemy trenches.

And everywhere lie the broken, smashed bodies of comrades and enemies.

More gentle moments come and go — there is even a little ironic comedy — but Masterson achieves his aim of revealing the power of these writings and experiences without ever glorifying the nature of war. Kat

InDaily Adelaide 20/02/18

The poetry and stories of World War I are brought vividly to life in Guy Masterson’s solo Fringe show 'Anthem for a Doomed Youth' at the Bakehouse Theatre.

Guy Masterson is now a Fringe regular whom some festival-goers may have seen in his brilliant one-man show ‘Animal Farm’ a few years ago. He returns this year with a very different program of poetry and stories from World War I to commemorate the centenary of the final year of that enormous conflict.

Masterson is dressed in black, alone on a bare stage throughout. He acts out sections of stories but there is little of the frenetic racing across the stage that we have seen from him in past productions. This is all about the artists and their work.

He researched more than 1000 poems when constructing ‘Anthem for a Doomed Youth’. There is work by Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Rupert Brooke, Isaac Rosenberg and Erich Maria Remarque, as one would expect. But also there are little known poets Paul Granier and Tom Kettle; and scraps from other writers who are virtually anonymous by virtue of their bodies having been blown unrecognisable.

One poem is about the monotony of cracking lice one by one, by hand. Another has the soldier talking to a rat which has jumped over his hand; it’s a promiscuous rat, this – one which will be gnashing at corpses on the German side before long. And Granier’s ‘The Andante’, in particular, contains glorious subtle imagery.

There are stories that link the works. I never knew that Remarque’s sister was beheaded by the Nazis in 1943 in revenge for her brother’s pacifist work, and his left-wing leanings no doubt. The bill for the execution was sent to his surviving sister.

Many of the works emphasise the dehumanising effect of war, reducing men to “the indifference of wild creatures”. But there is also a lengthy enactment of an amusing conversation between a Fritz and a Tommy during the famous Christmas Day truce between the two sides – soldiers with machine guns separated by only forty metres of No Man’s Land.

Masterson is a terrific performer. This show confirms how poetry comes alive when it is performed, and how a judicious and sparse use of linking material can shed further light on the works, without detracting from the genius on show.

Clothesline Adelaide 22/02/18

Guy Masterson steps out onto the stage and introduces this production, staged to commemorate the centenary of the final year of the Great War. ANTHEM FOR A DOOMED YOUTH is the first of four plays in the 2018 Lest We Forget series. There's no set, no adornments at all apart from some sparse lighting and sound effects; just Masterson, dressed fittingly in black.

He advises that works by the 'superstars' of the genre, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, will feature heavily, but Masterson also promises to bring us pieces from both sides of no man's land. What follows is a rather brilliant selection of poems and stories that takes the listener from the visceral reality of bodies and lives blown apart, to the more frivolous notions one might experience in the middle of the madness of war – works such as Alfred Lichtenstein's "Prayer Before Battle".

Masterson provides a little background for each piece; something that adds to the humanity of the texts. It is sometimes difficult to marry the beauty of the sentiments articulated with the absolute horror of war.

He reads the only thing he could find regarding the much-mythologised "1914 Christmas Truce", before presenting his own short piece on the same topic; a light-hearted Anglo-German conversation across the trenches. Excerpts from "All Quiet On The Western Front" are dramatic, especially when placed alongside the unnerving yet gentle beauty of Albert-Paul Granier's "The Andante".

The performance concludes with Masterson reciting Wilfred Owen's stirring "Dulce Et Decorum Est", setting the ultimate futility of war in sharp relief.

Guy Masterson is a sublimely skilled performer and his heartfelt execution of these works is a testament to his talents, as well as to those of the authors. This is a most poignant and potent production. Lest We Forget. (David Robinson - 22/02/18)

Broadwayworld 22/02/18

"Anthem for a Doomed Youth" is one of four productions this Fringe in the #LestWeForget series that focuses on the First World War, a selection of performances brought here from the UK by Guy Masterson. His Theatre Tours International and Adelaide Centre for International Theatre have brought us many excellent productions over the years, and this is no exception.

This production features Masterson, himself, in a spoken word performance drawing on a wide range of poetry and prose from some of the greatest writers of the time. This performance takes its title from that of the poem by Wilfred Owen, whose moving poetry features several times in this performance.

Interpreting great literature is nothing new to Masterson, who has previously brought us his one-man performances of "Under Milk Wood", "Fern Hill and other Dylan Thomas" and "Animal Farm".

WWI, before the second one came along, was referred to as 'The Great War', and 'The War to end all Wars' which, in hindsight, was a naïvely optimistic claim. The horrors of that war, though, certainly would have suggested that nobody would ever want to repeat it. The facts and figures are all readily available; how many died, were maimed and injured in each battle on both sides. We know of mustard gas warfare and, perhaps, some of you, like me, have had the opportunity to try on a WWI gas mask and wondered how much use they really were.

This production, though, does not rely on recounting those sweeping statistics, nor does it glorify war. These poems and stories are by, and about individuals and their intimate experiences. This brings home the reality of that conflict far more than numbers on a page. Lice, rats, gas attacks, mortars, rifles, and more are no longer concepts but become realities in the wonderful writings of the war poets, brought to life in the present by a master storyteller.

Not all of the works are from an English perspective. Erich Maria Remarque's, "All Quiet on the Western Front" (Im Westen nichts Neues), is about German soldiers on the front line. He fought briefly on the Western Front before suffering shrapnel wounds. Masterson also tells, in a piece of his own writing, of The Christmas Truce, of 1914, a spontaneous cease-fire when troops from both sides came out into No-Man's Land to celebrate the day. He imagines a humorous interchange between an English soldier and a German soldier, calling to one another from their trenches before emerging to meet face to face. A little humour here and there is welcome to break the bleakness, the intensity, of the major part of the performance.

Well-known poets, such as Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sassoon, and Isaac Rosenberg, lesser-known writers, such as Paul Granier and Tom Kettle, and even some long forgotten and overlooked authors were selected by Masterson from over a thousand poems that he read in his researching to put this production together.

It is Masterson, though, who lifts these from the written word into powerful recitations, living histories as seen through the eyes of those who were there, who suffered and died among their comrades, and now live again through these superb recitations. A little information that he provides about each of the writers adds to the works. Throughout the performance, Masterson stands alone in a pool of light, centre stage, with only a few sound effects and a number of subtle lighting changes around him for each poem, putting all of the emphasis on the texts and his voice. In this, he excels, infusing each item with great power and poignancy, moving the listeners with the verisimilitude of his embodiments of the numerous writers as he becomes their speakers.

This wonderful production should be high on your list of 'must see' Fringe performances, but you will need to hurry as the season is limited and the Bakehouse in an intimate venue. Don't delay.

(Barry Lenny - Broadwayworld.com - 22/02/18)