

OH! WHAT A LOVELY WAR

Burnside Players

Burnside Ballroom

Until April 16

Review by Andy Ahrens

Oh! What a lovely war - or was it? Burnside Players tackle the question in this honest retelling of World War One in a comic, insightful and often moving production.

The show is essentially a musical-revue of memorable tunes and war-songs, woven together by a patchwork of scenes. Music, song, drama and dance combine to depict various aspects of The Great War, from politics and miscommunication through to gas and the trenches.

Director Thorin Cupit has stamped passionate authority on the sensitive subject matter and makes this production both a tribute and a reminder. He expertly balances light-hearted comradeship with the devastating loss of human life.

He is supported by a stellar cast who show equal enthusiasm as they march their way through the timeline of World War One.

Brendan Clare, Lochy Cupit, Rhodri Henry-Edwards, Bonnie-Fay Madigan, Ben Po'ona, Peter Smith and Rachel Spargo provide many of the highlights. But all seventeen accent-wielding cast members deserve equal credit for this mass-ensemble production.

Scenes include a well executed discussion by the profit-makers of war, a comic look at bayonet mounting, an entertaining war-time church service and the highlight of the evening, Christmas in the trenches. In this historic account, a band of Germans initiate the singing of Silent Night which leads to the swapping of gifts from one enemy line to another.

It's not all slick and precision. Some parts of the show lose a degree of intensity. The facilities in the Burnside Ballroom are partially responsible for this. The venue has limited lighting and awful acoustics, making it difficult to hear some lines. The slide projection, displaying wartime photographs and statistics, suffers from the spread of too much light, diminishing its visual impact.

Director, Cupit, deliberately uses the staging conditions to present this show in Brecht style. Costumes and props are appropriately representative, leaving the audience to imagine the reality of it all. It is when the scenes win the imagination of reality that they hit home with the realities of war.

Under much of the action is a well controlled band. Musical Direction by Kate Pope and choreography by Tracey Nunn both aid in this innovative production.

'Oh! What a Lovely War' is a timeless piece of work. Be sure to bring the Tim-Tams and port for the cabaret style seating.