

# Wiltshire **TIMES**

**Oh What A Lovely War, Arc Theatre, Trowbridge. Until Saturday.**



Narrator Paul West with some of the cast of Oh What a Lovely War

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This is performed as a joint effort by both Trowbridge Players and Trowbridge Amateur Operatic Society (TAOS) to celebrate the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, and they gave a performance to be proud of.

It was played with minimal staging and a film backdrop of black and white pictures of events both at the front and at home, and information on the devastating number of men killed in various battles during this war.

Opening as an end-of-the pier show, with actors dressed in Pierrot costumes, it changed from an entertainment into the story of the war, a simple change of headgear showing who was who.

It showed how people in the 1900s originally thought that fighting for your country was the patriotic thing a chap should do, and moved to the reality of the tragedies it brought.

As the war lengthened opinions changed as casualty notices went up in towns and the numbers on them increased, many from the same families.

General Haig's position was presented as the man who sent men to their death regardless of the huge numbers being killed – his opinion was that they must push on, there were always more to take the place of the dead and wounded. Commanding battles with the highest casualty count of the war he should also be remembered for the Earl Haig Fund, that helps ex-servicemen, it's most common activity being known to most as Poppy Day, poppies being incorporated near the end of the performance.

This may sound a sombre show but there was humour and it was played throughout with the – mostly – jolly songs of that time, even though most had a meaningful undercurrent running through them.

The actors were excellent, some good upper crust British accents among them, and one gentlemen who managed any foreign or regional accent called for.

The singing, as you might expect from TAOS, was as rousing or emotional as the part suggested, and above all the actors looked as if they, as much as the audience, were enjoying the evening.

My only complaint was that on occasions the music and actors overplayed each other and it was difficult to hear what was being said.

I saw this on the first night, which was pretty much flawless, with the second half seeming to flow more naturally and with ease.

If there are tickets left I think you should consider getting some, if for nothing else than not to forget the horrors of the 1914-18 war.

It runs until October 25 and tickets are £10 from 01225 756376.