

9th November 2018 by Tricia Beddow

TRENCH – A North West Theatre Arts Company Production

I'd never heard of [North West Theatre Arts Company](#) until a few weeks ago. Didn't know a theatre even existed this close to home. I decided to see [Trench](#), an original World War 1 musical. Written and directed by Prab Singh, it's based on a story told by Prab's wife's Grandmother and on true accounts in letters and journals. It's a love story and you know from the start how it's going to end. When you go to a theatre, watch a performance and feel like you're the only person in the audience it's not because the performance is good – it's because it's *VERY* good. Trench is *VERY* good. There are several reasons why it makes you feel this way.

The set's not elaborate. It doesn't have to be but it is convincing. We've seen enough WW1 films to know what the trenches looked like, barbed wire and sandbags need no explanation. The production is 'stripped back' to basics and the imagery is enough for you to know that those are guns, tin hats and bandages. What you are left to concentrate on is the performance of the young actors playing the parts of soldiers, wives, girlfriends, children and friends.

You hear their words, listen to beautifully sung lyrics and feel their emotions.

In the back-ground a few realistic sound effects, clever lighting and the odd drift of smoke allows you to 'sense' the horrific reality of the battlefield scenes and the noisy atmosphere of the mill floor back home. The attention to detail is subtle and convincing.

This sensitivity in the production allows the performers to take full control of the stage. They grab your attention from the start and don't let it go again until the finish. The only break from this is the interval when you look around and realise you're not the only person there after all.

I take my chance to read through the programme while the lights are up. There's a piece by Mark Beaumont (Production Designer) about how the army and Manchester Pals were formed, as well as photographs of the cast. I was struck by the fresh young faces and chilled to think that they would be similar in age to the soldiers, wives and girlfriends they were portraying. In WW1 an estimated 250,000 British soldiers were teenagers.

I buy a poppy every year. I've watched the remembrance service and laying of wreaths at the Cenotaph on TV countless times. Don't think I've ever felt, *really* felt what it might have been like. Having no choice but go over the wall when the whistle blew or wait for that telegram or pick up the pieces and get on with life afterwards.

These young people made me cry. I was just glad the lights were back down...and I knew from the start how it was going to end!