

# My Boy Jack powerfully portrayed by East Side Players

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East York Mirror by Angeline Mair

There is a delicate balance between believing in something strongly and being willing to die for that belief.

In wartime, that belief is put to the test for those who enlist to fight. Their belief is challenged by those who don't want them to go and cause heartache for their loved ones if they do not return home.

These scenarios are powerfully portrayed in the East Side Players Canadian premiere of *My Boy Jack*, a play by David Haig that tells the true story of what happens when the Kipling family is torn apart after their son goes missing during the First World War.

From the beginning, emotions are high and the sides are clear: Mom, Carrie (Kelly Morrison) and sister Elsie (Hannah Drew) don't want their son and brother, Jack (Joshua Mott), to enlist. Dad, famous author Rudyard Kipling (Daryn DeWalt), is a staunch supporter of the war and nothing would make him more proud than his son fighting for his country.

Despite having severe myopia and technically not being allowed to enlist, Kipling uses his influence to get Jack in as a lieutenant. As young as he is, Jack is excited to leave the family fold and the giant shadow cast by his father's fame.

Bateman's, the Kipling's secluded estate near Sussex, England where the majority of the play takes place, is creatively turned into the trenches soon after Jack leaves, bringing the audience into the throes of battle along with Jack and three members of the Irish Guards, McHugh (Rein Kartna) Doyle (Chris Quirke) and Bowe (Randy Pryce).

It's a long, loud and moving scene where the glory of battle shows the reality of how horrific it really is. The men are scared, anxious and praying to live another day. Eventually, Jack gives the order for the men to move forward and he's never seen again.

Anguish, divide, and obsession transpire next for the Kipling's family as they continually interview soldiers, including Irish Guard Bowe, to try and piece together what happened to Jack.

Pryce's performance as the emotionally wounded and traumatized soldier, Bowe, is incredibly realistic, moving and powerful. You could hear a pin drop as he describes the last time he saw Jack. It's so riveting you can actually "see" what he is saying.

That being said, everyone brings their own version of remarkable to the stage.

Morrison is moving and believable as the heartbroken, but determined, mother. Drew is amazing as the remaining Kipling child, and gives a strong performance as the one who tells it like it is.

Mott as the boy at the centre of it all, Jack, shows the perfect balance of innocence and determination, and DeWalt gives a powerful performance as a man unravelling.

From strong and certain to broken and wavering, his portrayal of Kipling and his journey is well-portrayed.

Some of the best scenes in this show are Kipling family scenes, especially those between Elsie and Jack, who are obviously close, as adults and as children. One scene that takes the audience back to their father reading to the young Jack and Elsie (Jack Pryce, Bridget Morrison) is particularly touching.

Original music composed by Jeff Vidov is heard throughout the show. It's hauntingly beautiful and adds to the sombre and raw mood of the story.

This show tells a sad and heavy story so it may not be everyone's type of play. However, if you want to see a unique piece of theatre that portrays a realistic story and has incredible performances, this show won't disappoint.

My Boy Jack runs until Nov. 10, at the Papermill Theatre at Todmorden Mills, 67 Pottery Rd. Tickets are \$22. Call 416-425-0917 or visit [www.eastsideplayers.ca](http://www.eastsideplayers.ca)