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By **FRANK SCHECK**

THEATER REVIEW

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Posted: 4:01 am
November 11, 2008

IT'S not surprising that the Transport Group would revive "Bury the Dead." Written in 1936 by



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a 23-year-old Irwin Shaw, this powerful anti-war drama about six dead soldiers who refuse to be buried is all too relevant in a time when the sight of military coffins arriving from the Middle East is considered too upsetting to be televised.



Donna Lynne Champlin and Fred Berman soldier on in "Bury the Dead."

First performed when the country was recovering from the psychological effects of the First World War and before enduring the horrors of the Second, the play boasts a potent theatricality that bears comparisons to "Our Town" in its simple poeticism and "Waiting for Lefty" in its moral outrage.

The soldiers who rise from the graves being dug for them have their reasons for resisting burial:

"There are too many books I haven't read, too many places I haven't seen, too many memories I haven't kept long enough . . . I won't be cheated of them," one says.

"I spent 20 years practicing to be a man, and then they killed me," declares another, while a third points out, "It's not a fair bargain - this exchange of my life for a pin on a general's map."

Asked to help persuade the dead men to accept their fate, their surviving loved ones reunite with them in a series of brief and powerful scenes, the best of which occurs between a mother and the son who was killed in an explosion. Her silent anguish when he finally agrees to let her see his disfigured face is deeply moving.

Unfortunately, the play's power is dissipated by director Joe Calarco's staging, which features a prelude (which he also wrote) framing the proceedings as if they were being presented in a town hall meeting presided over by an annoyingly perky hostess (Donna Lynne Champlin). Granted, the original Broadway production also included a curtain-raiser, but this overly silly setup seriously detracts from the overall dramatic impact of "Bury the Dead," more than seven decades after it was written.

BURY THE DEAD

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