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## Bury the Dead

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The



Transport Group presents a revival of this play, written by Irwin Shaw in 1936. This description is provided by the company: "*Bury the Dead* takes place during 'the second year of the war that is to begin tomorrow night'. While a military burial detail goes about its sad duties, the dead soldiers shockingly begin to rise up, pleading not to be buried. Word of their insurrection spreads rapidly: the dead will not yield so easily. In a series of touching scenes the dead men talk with their loved ones of the days of living, now lost forever."

*Pictured: Jeremy Beck, Jake Hart, Matt Sincell, Fred Berman, and Jeff Pucillo in a scene from Bury the Dead (photo © Carol Rosegg)*

### nytheatre.com review

**Ivanna Cullinan** · November 7, 2008

While this extraordinary production does its best to shoot itself in the foot during its first 25 minutes (and comes perilously close to succeeding), **The Transport Group's *Bury the Dead* is an ultimately wonderful show** that manages to make up handsomely for its extraordinarily irritating start.

As with his production *R&J*, director Joe Calarco has taken the text and set it within a framework, in this instance a "town hall meeting" led by Our Host (Donna Lynne

### VENUE

**Connelly Theatre**

### OPENED

November 9, 2008

### CLOSES

November 23, 2008

### PERFORMANCES

Mon, Thu - Sat at 8pm;  
Sat at 2pm;  
Sun at 3pm

### RUNNING TIME

1 hour, 40 minutes  
No intermission

### TICKETS

\$38  
212-352-3101

**[Order tickets online](#)**

### CAST

Jeremy Beck, Fred Berman, Mandell Butler, Donna Lynne Champlin, Jake Hart, Jeff Pucillo, Matt Sincell

### AUTHOR

Irwin Shaw

### DIRECTOR

Joe Calarco

### SETS

Sandra Goldmark

### LIGHTING

R. Lee Kennedy

### COSTUMES

Kathryn Rohe

### SOUND

**Michael Rasbury**

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Champlin). Our Host is the music teacher at the school in which the play is set. She has managed to organize the evening and natters on for a considerable time while setting up the space. She covers the school's student president election, her conversion to becoming a fan of George Stephanopoulos, a recent trip to Washington, D.C., and how the roll call of fallen soldiers' names on *This Week with George Stephanopoulos* moves her profoundly before getting to her point. Our Host finally lets us know that, on the advice of the losing sixth grade candidate for student body president, we have been called here to read Irwin Shaw's *Bury the Dead* with various "ordinary folks" volunteering to read parts.


**PRODUCTION  
COMPANY**  
The Transport Group

Now consider this: depending on the characterization of Our Host, either we have a well-intentioned nut who is probably wasting our time while inadvertently building a case to limit arts funding in schools, or a person who, however unconcerned she may be with seeming foolish, sees an opportunity prompted by one of her students whom she truly believes in to try and grapple with the most distressing element of war—that young lives end unmercifully before they should on the battlefield. Aggravatingly, this lengthy device manages to nearly sabotage all connection to or interest in the play, as Our Host is condescendingly portrayed as an extremely silly, very dismissible woman. None of the men called on to read are presented with such a shallow level of characterization. For a show that will evolve to have some of the most astonishing and deeply effective acting I have been treated to, it is a distressing start. The Town Hall segment requires and deserves far less time than it is given, and as the main characterization is so very condescending, it serves only to annoy and encourage suspicion of the show's intentions. Yet as production gathers itself together and grapples with the actual text of *Bury the Dead*, there is a gratifying increase in intelligence and use of talent that is well able to negotiate the high drama of a young writer's anti-war passions.

The play purports to be set "in the second year of a war that starts tomorrow night" and tells the tale of the aftermath of a battle in which certain dead soldiers refuse to lay down and be buried. It is sternly symbolic text that could be stultifying and deadly theatre, but here Calarco's considerable talents begin to work and sharply delineate the moments. Having whittled the number of actors from 32 down to seven, he clearly conveys the story through a series of gorgeously done scenes that move quickly and coherently. A solid, wonderful cast delivers fine performances, there is a commitment to the play and its words that demands involvement from the audience, and at last the play becomes deeply theatrical and compelling.

The piece culminates with a somewhat surreal series of conversations juxtaposed to subtly allow different levels of perception. A conversation between a dead soldier and his living wife is resonant with the vibrations of their ongoing marriage, conveys the unanswerable nature of regret, and has an ongoing, living sensibility that smartly sidesteps any sentimental sense of "oh if only they could have talked, then it would have been all right"—because it wouldn't have been and that is not the point anyway. *Bury the Dead* puts the living element of its dead

up without excuse or apology. There might not be any answers, but the soldiers are heard and they can not be ignored. In a time of two wars whose dead have been largely ignored, it is a simple and profound thing to do.



The Connolly is a marvelous, unexpected space (it's within a lower East Side school) and I have never seen it so well-utilized in the staging of this production. Kudos also to the extremely clever design team of Sandra Goldmark, R. Lee Kennedy, Kathryn Rohe, and Michael Rasbury; they take the facility from raw and simple at its most ordinary existence to a mythic, profound space that supports the play wonderfully.

Make time to see *Bury the Dead* and bear with the beginning, it will make itself well worth your time.

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