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THEATER REVIEW | 'BURY THE DEAD'

An Antiwar Revival



Carol Rosegg

Jake Hart and Donna Lynne Champlin in a scene from the revival of "Bury the Dead" at the Connelly Theater.

By WILBORN HAMPTON
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As Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman observed, war is hell. No matter what the justification, it ends in young men and women dying before their time. Irwin Shaw's "Bury the Dead" was written between the two world wars, and he used the horrors of the first to warn against the loss any future conflict might bring. Joe Calacro's peculiar yet impassioned revival for the Transport Group Theater Company turns its attention to modern-day Iraq.

Shaw wrote "Bury the Dead" in 1936, and it is obviously more informed by the circumstances, as well as by the language, of World War I than by the following conflict. The surreal plot concerns six American soldiers who have been killed in a battle but whose ghosts are resisting burial. The Army turns to the women in their lives — wives, girlfriends, mothers — to persuade the men to be interred.

Before Pearl Harbor there was widespread opposition to United States involvement in World War II, mainly because so many young lives had been lost in the previous one.

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Shaw's ghosts are elegiac in explaining their reasons for not being buried.

"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," one says. Another says he shouldn't die fighting "someone else's war," an echo of America First rallies.

But World War II was not like its predecessor, and Shaw fought in the war against Hitler. It is not like Iraq, either, and Mr. Calarco's effort to link them is forced and unconvincing. The Transport Group staging begins with a woman identified only as Our Host preparing a middle school auditorium for a reading of Shaw's drama by local townfolk.

That character, written by Mr. Calarco and acted as a bubbly PTA mom by Donna Lynne Champlin — she even passes out cookies — prattles on at some length about a recent trip she made to Washington and even shows slides of the various war memorials in the nation's capital.

The reading of Shaw's play, she explains, is her own little homage to the fallen in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the actual scenes from "Bury the Dead," Ms. Champlin becomes a sort of Everywoman, playing all the women in the dead soliders' lives and displaying an impressive range of characters. The six actors in the roles of the ghost soldiers have mixed success. Jake Hart and Mandell Butler deliver credible performances, but some others tend toward the highly emotive.

BURY THE DEAD

Connelly Theater

220 East Fourth Street,

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Through Nov. 23

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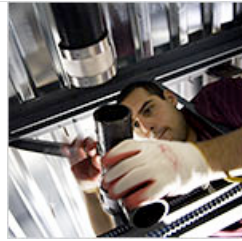
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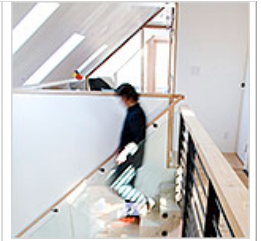
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