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Review- Ivor Gurney, A Voice Apart- Fringe Club



22-5-15

By: [Lynn Gong](#)

Ivor Gurney is an English poet-composer who fought in World War I. After being wounded and gassed, he was sent to Stone House Mental Hospital in 1922 and struggled with post-war trauma in the last 15 years of his life in psychiatric hospitals. His fame only came posthumously. In Penguin Classics' 2012 *Three Poets of the First World War*, he is featured along with Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg. In 2014, Tim Kendall filmed a documentary on him titled *Ivor Gurney, the Poet Who Loved the War* for BBC4.

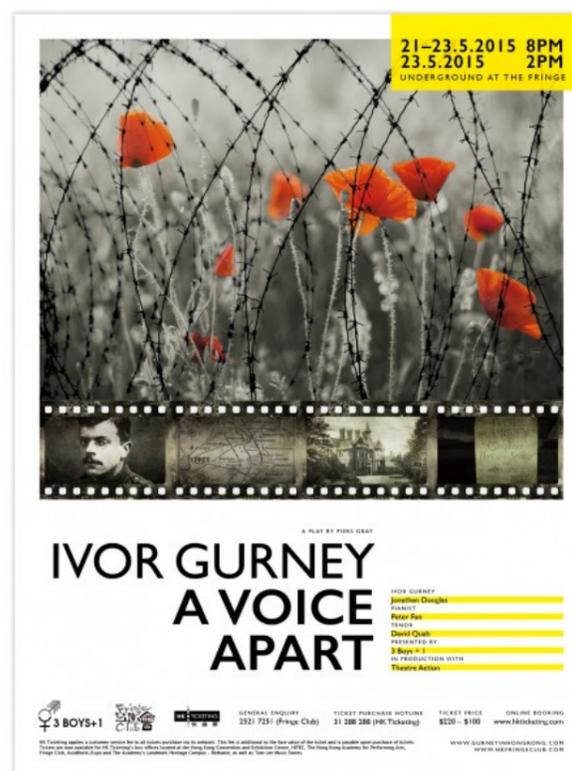
Two decades ago, Jonathan Douglas played Ivor Gurney for the first time. Originally directed by the playwright, Piers Gray, the show debuted in Hong Kong and was later presented in Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Now directed by David Booth and Michael Ingham, the play is being re-run as a solemn commemoration of soldiers who went through wars and inspiring, creative figures like Ivor Gurney who are inflicted by a poetic, troubled soul.

With no unnecessary tricks, *Ivor Gurney- A Voice Apart* was executed with perfect simplicity and intensity.

The set design by Karina Zabihi was very good. On the left of the stage, a 1900s mental asylum is beautifully recreated with plenty of details. Jonathan Douglas, as Ivor Gurney transformed this tidy, little space into his intricate interior. The tenor, David Quah and pianist, Peter Fan, took the right side of the stage. As the lighting alternated between the protagonist and the music duo; the monologue and music complemented one another.

For me, there was something comforting about hearing Ivor Gurney's music with his words. It transcended the confining physical and mental space. It struck the beautiful balance between order and creativity. A balance that was most dearly sought after by the unstable genius.

Jonathan Douglas's second-time rendition is according to him more "refined" and portrays the "guilt" more than pure "mania" of Gurney. Indeed, his performance was very impressive in depicting some of the heart wrenching scenes. With no background music, the dramatic effects were achieved solely by Jonathan's flexible physical body and subtle facial expressions. I was sometimes sitting there; eyes wide open and feeling extremely sad when Jonathan was desperately eating something in a most uncomfortable position, or when he was re-enacting shooting wartime machine guns and pondering over his ambiguous identity



as “a maker” of beauty and killing.

Surprisingly, there was also a tinge of humor in the production, especially when Jonathan was playing different accents and social roles in his monologue. Overall, the language of the script combines audio effects with poetic images. Overall, it became inseparable from Jonathan’s performance.

I think people who are familiar with WWI, Great War Poets, and classical music can read a lot into the story and musical performance. However, even for a complete outsider, the play is still very accessible. With Jonathan Douglas's engaging performance and the pianist's and singer's music, you can easily feel Gurney's love for his birthplace Gloucester; and his agonies from war experiences, among other true human feelings.

Ivor Gurney- A Voice Apart is playing through May 23rd. For more information, [click here](#).

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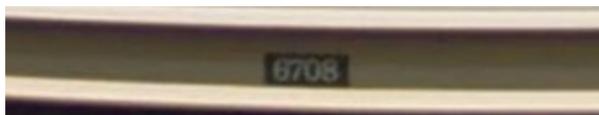
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