

British Theatre Guide

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A Gallant Life

Written and directed by Kate Stephenson

Not Cricket Productions

theSpace on North Bridge

3–18 August 2018



Musicals can be hit and miss, particularly when the subject is a life story but the music isn't directly driving the plot onwards. Luckily, *A Gallant Life* manages to whip up a delightful period atmosphere that carries it through and keeps the audience in a state of cheery satisfaction throughout.

Although the play is ostensibly about Muriel Thompson, the decorated ambulance driver, suffragist and sometime racing driver, the play is largely about the battlefield work of the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry, as well as giving a flavour of the events there. While Hannah Forsyth does fine work as Thompson, she's only part of the story.

The majority of the story takes place in France and Belgium after Thompson has joined the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry as an ambulance driver. She and the rest of the FANYs (and yes, the play wisely takes the obvious joke head on to defuse the potential of it being sniggered at later) spearhead a pioneer medical service until finally the British Army recognises them as part of the war effort.

There's a jolliness to proceedings that belies the grimness of the events, only really paying direct notice to it once explicitly as a wounded Tommy sings a song about being sent home as Forsyth looks on, tearstruck and weary with the weight of all the war about her.

A Gallant Life is a strange beast; it's touching and effective in the way it portrays the personalities, from Thompson's ever raring to go cheerfulness to the more acerbic Betty Hutchinson and the young and occasionally irritating Enid, the latter pair played by Kosi Carter and Jessy Roberts respectively, amongst other roles they take. Tom Barry performs the parts of the various men who appear and shows a good command of French when playing a bilingual Belgian officer.

The music and song is also thoroughly entertaining and the enjoyableness of the parts rather makes you wish that the whole managed to be a more complete and focused story, as the opening feels a little disparate and the end comes rather abruptly just when you feel that you'd be happy to watch another hour of this story.

Reviewer: [Graeme Strachan](#)