

THE STAGE

The Four Men review at the Connaught Theatre, Worthing – ‘evocative eulogy to Sussex’



Jake Snowdon, Ross Muir, David Stephens and Lee Payne in The Four Men at the Connaught Theatre. Photo: Sam Pharoah

by [Bella Todd](#) - Oct 6, 2017

It may be an elegiac period piece about the dwindling of country ways and the autumn of life. But this new touring production from Worthing company Conn Artists has made regional theatre feel in ruder health overnight.

Produced in association with Worthing’s Connaught Theatre and the South Downs National Park, *The Four Men* is an adaptation of an out-of-print book by the Edwardian poet Hilaire Belloc. Better known for his *Cautionary Tales*, in October 1902 Belloc set out to walk the length of Sussex from East to West, heading for Harting and the woods of his childhood. The result was *The Four Men*, a leafy travelogue, inn-interrupted odyssey, and poignant allegory of the ages of man.

The Sussex drinking songs translate perfectly to the stage in local writer Ann Feloy’s unhurried adaptation. So does the easeful comic dialogue between the four characters: *Myself*, played with subtle charm by Rainbow Shakespeare’s Ross Muir, is joined on his secular pilgrimage by a young poet, a cynical sailor, and a rich old man. Honorary fifth bod Karim Bedda helps enact the pub scenes and curious vignettes from South Downs folklore.

But *The Four Men*’s specific allure is in staging an aspect of life that rarely gets a theatrical look-in. Leaning on a sty and sipping at their hip flasks, at times the four men simply stand and savour the view. There’s a rare message here about taking joy in our landscape, as *Myself* comes to realise how he might, after all, outflank death.

Verdict

Regional touring theatre hits a purposeful stride with this evocative eulogy to Sussex

