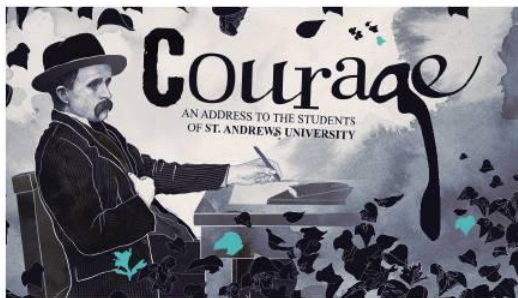


## performing arts



### Last autumn ingénue had the pleasure of seeing Ross Muir in Conn Artists' production of 'Courage' at the Connaught Studio, Worthing.

Adapted by John Pielmeier from the writings of J.M. Barrie, 'Courage' was inspired by an address given by J.M. Barrie to the students of St Andrew's University in Scotland in 1922. It is an intimate look into the life of the celebrated writer. Instructing the students on how to go about living the 'courageous life' Barrie speaks about the heroes that he has known during his lifetime, each an example of courage in the face of adversity. He tells of his youth, of his bed-ridden and emotionally demanding mother, of his career and tragic marriage and of his remarkable friendship with the five Llewelyn Davies boys that would lead to his creation of Pete Pan.

Returning to the format of a one-man play, despite claiming he'd never do another (he wowed audiences in last year's Importance of being Oscar), Muir's performance was a tour de force. Sporting a luxuriant moustache cultivated for the occasion, and with a minimal set and the use of only a couple of props – a walking stick and a pipe, which he lit several times during the performance – Muir quietly commanded our full attention. Drawn in by his engaging delivery of the anecdotal monologue, I felt as though I was indeed among that august company of lads being addressed as they graduated from their hallowed halls of learning.

The language, delivered in – to my ear – an impeccable Scottish accent (despite Muir confiding to me later that accents were not his strong suit), conveyed a nostalgic sense of the time. There was a proper way of doing things and a certain stoicism that is rarely seen now. Muir's performance was one of great light and shade, recounting moments of deep sorrow with a quiet dignity, alongside moments of levity which had the audience chuckling.

After the show a few of us had the opportunity to put some

questions to Muir and director Mitch Jenkins.

When asked "Why this show?" Muir said:

"I recently watched 'Finding Neverland' and got into Barrie again. I read a lot of his stories and plays but they had too many parts for a small company like Conn Artists. Then I discovered this. The whole script is Barrie's own words, taken from letters and stories, as well as from the actual speech upon which this play is based. I read it and it brought a lump to my throat.

"Despite all his success Barrie was incredibly lonely. What I find remarkable is how humble he is."

How does he tackle a one man show?

"I had to be Barrie all the way through. But he's a shy man, standing up giving a talk – it's complicated to get your head around.

"I had to cut it into sections to learn it, then had to figure out how to link the sections together, which Mitch helped with."

He made it look easy. According to Jenkins, "Ross is really clever, a proper old school actor."

I think it must take guts as well as confidence in your material to perform alone on stage, suspending the audience's disbelief for that length of time without the aid of fellow actors. Muir demonstrated those qualities admirably, in short, you could say that he showed great courage...

The next step is to take it out on the road.

### A note about Conn Artists Theatre Company

The name is a playful conceit that refers to "artists of the Connaught Theatre". They are a professional theatre company based in Worthing with the aim of bringing together local artists to collaborate on producing exciting work and make a positive contribution to regional theatre in modern society. They are a not-for-profit arts organisation with the overall aim to produce high quality theatre productions that are vital, inspiring and seek to illuminate as well as entertain for the well-being of the local community and beyond in regional touring. [www.conn-artists.co.uk](http://www.conn-artists.co.uk)

