

THE SUSSEX NEWSPAPER



Review – The Four Men – Connaught Theatre, Worthing

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BY PAUL LUCAS-SCOTT ON OCTOBER 6, 2017 [THEATRE](#)

The Four Men: A Farrago



Hilaire Belloc

In-House production company Conn Artists are starting their tour of *The Four Men* at their home theatre and, as one might expect, presenting a Sussex tale, to a Sussex audience, in a Sussex theatre ensures them of the warmest of receptions on their opening night.

Hilaire Belloc, the well known writer and journalist, grew up in Slindon in West Sussex and his book, *The Four Men: A Farrago* – published in 1911, tells the story of his walking journey across Sussex from Robertsbridge in the East via various public houses, through Heathfield, Uckfield, Ardingly, Ashurst and Amberley to South Harting in the West.

The stage adaptation, by Ann Felay, of *The Four Men* features four main characters, Myself, Grizzlebeard, the Poet and the Sailor, each an aspect of Belloc's personality,

as they journey over five days, sharing a range of anecdotes, folk songs and reflections of their Edwardian lives.

Myself is played by Ross Muir and it is he who takes on most of the narration throughout the piece. His performance is wonderfully crafted and Belloc's deep love of the Sussex countryside comes shining through every time he speaks.

As well as describing, beautifully, the amazing land around him, Myself also tells tales of famous Sussex people and events including the story of Mad Jack Fuller, a noted drunk who in 1810 was involved in an incident with the Speaker in Parliament and the tale of St Dunstan who, as the story goes, once pulled the devil by the nose with red-hot tongs.

Myself is joined on his five day cross-county journey by representations of the three ages of man. The Poet represents youth, the Sailor middle age and old age is represented by Grizzlebeard. All three actors show a deep love for their characters, and really "live the part" as they travel from pub to pub across the county.

Jake Snowden is the Poet. Poor, and somewhat lacking in inspiration, he is often the target for the humour in the piece although his singing voice, and ability to play the Ukelele, soon make up for the character's inability to complete a verse.

As the Sailor, Lee Payne is a huge character. Crude and lewd at times, especially when relieving himself in the River Adur – to top it up!, he is the source of a lot of the fun, and most of the drinking songs, that appear throughout the piece.

David Stephens is both subdued and philosophical as old timer, Grizzlebeard. His performance is much more poignant as he approaches the end of his life and looks back at times past and loves lost. Looking every inch the Edwardian gentleman, he works well as the patriarch of the group.

Special mention has to go to the fifth member of the cast, Karim Bedda, who plays everyone else in the piece including Mad Jack Fuller, at least five pub landlords, a grumpy hunchback, a number of Sailor's female companions and even the Devil. He is also responsible for rearranging the furniture for each "pub" that the group choose to visit and for the positioning of the vast number of props used in the production. He works tirelessly throughout the show and manages to breathe life into each and every character he plays.

Overall this piece is all about the dialogue. The description of the scenery along the way, while simplistic in tone, does have the desired effect on the audience, who are all very familiar with the towns that are mentioned and the notable points that are featured. It has both local charm and an historical basis and, for all its simplicity, the tale is told very well.

Four Stars