

Review: The Four Men, Connaught Theatre, Worthing, October 5



Barrie Jerram

Although born in France, Hilaire Belloc was truly a Sussex man. Coming to England as a young child he was brought up in Slindon, eventually moving to Shipley. It was his great love for the county, its people, customs, traditions and songs that caused him to write *The Four Men* – a great hymn of praise to the Sussex countryside in Edwardian England.

It tells of an imaginary journey made by Belloc from east to west - Robertsbridge to Harting. The journey is made with three companions, Grizzlebeard, Sailor and Poet who are aspects of Belloc himself. Along the way they talk, tell of Sussex myths and legends, sing local songs, visit inns and sink vast quantities of ale.

Ann Feloy has made a marvellous job of adapting the book for the stage, filleting it down to its essentials whilst director, Nick Young, and his creative team successfully give the text life. But of course it is down to the actors to turn the written characters to flesh and blood which they do without question.

As Belloc, or Myself as he names himself, Ross Muir could not be bettered. He gives a marathon performance that segues effortlessly from narrator to character. David Stephens makes a truly venerable Grizzlebeard, full of the wisdom of old age whilst Jake Snowdon fully captures Poet's romanticism and youthful ignorance.

Much to the audience's delight was Lee Payne's coarse and belligerent Sailor who comes near to stealing the show with his comic talent and lusty singing. Sharing the comedic spotlight, Karim Bedda is called upon to play all the other parts. He highlights as Mad Jack Fuller of Brightling, the Devil and various ladies.

The show is full of music, songs and witty in-jokes with Burgess Hill and Haywards Heath being a couple of the targets.