

# Boy soldiers of the First World War remembered at the Edinburgh Fringe

> Michael Morpurgo's **Private Peaceful** – theSpace @ Niddry Street 9.55am 14-19 August 2017; 4.35pm 21-26 August 2017 (70m)

> George Butterworth's **Songs From A Shropshire Lad** – theSpace @ Niddry Street 6pm 21-26 August 2017 (25m)

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Two special shows are being staged at this year's Edinburgh Fringe to remember and pay tribute to the thousands of teenage boys who fought and died in the First World War 100 years ago.

The first is a powerful one-man version of Michael Morpurgo's **Private Peaceful** – the novel that did so much to raise awareness of the fate of the young British soldiers shot at dawn by their own comrades for supposed cowardice or desertion.

The play will appear alongside concert performances of George Butterworth's **Songs From A Shropshire Lad** – settings from the book of poems by A.E. Housman that many young soldiers carried with them in the trenches. Butterworth himself was killed in the Battle of the Somme – his death a huge loss to British music.

Musical themes from Butterworth's songs are used in the Fringe production of **Private Peaceful**, where George Stagnell plays 17-year-old Tommo Peaceful – and all the people he's known – as he relives his life in his last hours before dawn. It's a tour de force of a performance that holds audiences transfixed for 70 minutes that fly by – just as Tommo feels time passing too quickly.

George Butterworth's **Songs From A Shropshire Lad** reflect the themes of love and loss, the fleetingness of life and the folly of war that made Housman's poems so popular with

young people 100 years ago. They're the same themes that have made **Private Peaceful** connect so powerfully with young readers today.

The songs will be performed by baritone Sam Hird – an 18-year-old who combines great acting and interpretive skills with a magnificent singing voice that belies his youth – and pianist and composer Sam Johnson, who arranged and plays the music for Pick Me Up Theatre's production of **Private Peaceful**. Both shows are at theSpace venue on Niddry Street, just off the Royal Mile.

It's an opportunity to witness two astonishing works that capture the mood and nature of a young generation whose hopes and lives were destroyed by war.

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### **Notes to Editors:**

#### **Contact:**

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#### **Background:**

You can find background feature material, details on performers and other media resources here: [www.pickmeuptheatre.com/fringe](http://www.pickmeuptheatre.com/fringe)

Resources include material for potential features on: the 250,000 [under-age teenage soldiers](#) who went off to the Western Front; Michael Morpurgo and his [inspiration for Private Peaceful](#); the themes that link the two pieces; George Butterworth and the tragedy of his [loss to British music](#) and the appeal of [A.E.Housman's A Shropshire Lad](#) to young people during the First World War.

The production of **Private Peaceful** is by York-based company Pick Me Up Theatre. In previews in York, George Stagnell earned a five-star review from the arts editor of the York Press, who described it as a “remarkable performance” by one of the best young talents he'd seen in three decades of reviewing.

#### **Performances:**

**Private Peaceful** 14-19 August 9.55am, 21-26 August 4.35pm (70mins)  
**Songs From A Shropshire Lad** 21-26 August 6pm (25mins)

#### **Venue:**

Upper Theatre, theSpace@NiddryStreet EH1 1TH – Venue 9, just off the Royal Mile