

FIRST FINBOROUGH THEATRE PRODUCTION TO BE SHOWN ONLINE FOR FREE

Bréon Rydell in association with the Finborough Theatre presents

The world premiere production

IT IS EASY TO BE DEAD

by Neil McPherson.

Based on the poetry, letters and brief life of Charles Hamilton Sorley.

Music and Songs by Gertrud Emily Borngräber, Rupert Brooke, William Denis Browne, George Butterworth, Dòmhnall Ruadh Chorùna, André Devaere, George Dyson, Ernest Bristow Farrar, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Ivor Gurney, A. E. Housman, John Ireland, Donnchadh Maclain, John Masefield, Rudi Stephan and Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Directed by Max Key. Designed by Phil Lindley. Lighting and Video Design by Rob Mills.

Costume Design by Charlotte Espiner. Sound Design by Nathan Hamilton. Music Direction by Elizabeth Rossiter.

Produced by Bréon Rydell. Associate Producer – Amanda Castro.

Cast: Hugh Benson. Alexander Knox. Jenny Lee. Tom Marshall. Elizabeth Rossiter.

Following its critically acclaimed sell-out run at the Finborough Theatre in 2016 where it was nominated for seven OffWestEnd Awards including Best New Play, and its Olivier nominated run at the Trafalgar Studios, and a Scottish tour, the world premiere production of *It Is Easy To Be Dead* becomes the first Finborough Theatre production to be made available for free viewing online through the Society of London Theatre's Official London Theatre YouTube channel.

The link is available [here](#).

The video is free to view, and will be available until **Tuesday, 7 July 2020**.

When twenty year old Charles Sorley is killed in action during the First World War, his devastated parents are left with only his letters and poems to remember him by. Using his extraordinary writings, together with music and songs of the period, *It Is Easy To Be Dead* is a tender portrait of a brief life filled with promise, cut short by the futility of war.

Charles Sorley was a witty, intelligent and spirited young man from Aberdeen, with a talent for poetry and dreams of escaping his privileged background. Studying in Germany in 1914 – where he was briefly imprisoned as an enemy alien – his life, like those of millions of other young men and their families, was ripped apart by the start of the First World War.

Inspired by his experiences in Germany and of the horror and pity of war, he created some of the most profound and moving war poetry ever written, directly inspiring the grim disillusionment of later poets such as Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon.

It Is Easy To Be Dead features live music and songs from some of the greatest composers of the period including George Butterworth, Dòmhnall Ruadh Chorùna, Ivor Gurney, John Ireland, Rudi Stephan and Ralph Vaughan Williams.

The cast includes **Jenny Lee** (West End, Royal Court Theatre, The Young Vic, Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh), **Tom Marshall** (National Theatre, West End, Royal Court Theatre, nominated for an OffWestEnd Award for Best Male Performance in a Supporting Role for *It Is Easy To Be Dead*) and two new discoveries – actor **Alexander Knox** as Charles Sorley, nominated for an OffWestEnd Award for Best Male Performance for *It Is Easy To Be Dead*; acclaimed young tenor **Hugh Benson**; and prize-winning pianist **Elizabeth Rossiter**.

118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED Telephone 020 7244 7439

e-mail admin@finboroughtheatre.co.uk www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk Artistic Director Neil McPherson

The Finborough Theatre is managed by The Steam Industry. Registered in England and Wales as a company limited by guarantee, no. 3448268. Registered Charity no. 1071304. Registered address: 118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED. A member of the Independent Theatre Council.

PRESS INFORMATION

Poets on Charles Sorley

"Potentially the greatest poet lost to us in that war...had Sorley lived, he might have become our greatest dramatist since Shakespeare." – John Masefield.

"One of the three poets of importance killed during the war [alongside Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg]." – Robert Graves.

"Probably the most clear-sighted English poet killed in the war." – Robert Nichols.

Playwright **Neil McPherson** is Artistic Director of the Finborough Theatre, twice winning the OffWestEnd Award for Best Artistic Director, as well as the Critics Circle Award for Services to Theatre. His award-winning first play *I Wish to Die Singing – Voices From The Armenian Genocide*, commemorating the centenary of the Armenian Genocide, was presented at the Finborough Theatre in 2015, and an excerpt was also performed concurrently in Los Angeles. Both *I Wish to Die Singing* and *It Is Easy To Be Dead* are published by Oberon Books.

Director **Max Key** trained on the National Theatre Directors' Course and works in theatre, film and opera. Theatre includes the sell-out world premiere of *Year 10* (Finborough Theatre) which won the *Time Out* Critics' Choice Award and transferred to BAC, prior to a European tour. He *Up the Royal Borough* and *Lullaby Burn* (Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith), *Mariana Pineda*, *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Rape of Lucretia* (Arcola Theatre), *Vote By Ballot* and *NT Connections* (National Theatre), *Macbeth* (Indian Tour) and *Wilde Tales* (Southwark Playhouse). He was Associate Director for Peter Gill on *As Good A Time As Any* (The Print Room) and on *The Voyage Inheritance* (National Theatre). Assistant Direction includes assisting Tim Albery on *The Flying Dutchman* (Royal Opera House, Covent Garden), Sean Holmes on *Treasure Island* (Theatre Royal Haymarket), Tony Harrison on *Fram* (National Theatre) and Francesca Zambello on *La Bohème* (Royal Albert Hall). Film includes *Preservation* starring Saskia Reeves for Palm Springs International Film Festival and BAFTA. Max has taught and directed extensively at leading London drama schools including LAMDA and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

Producer **Bréon Rydell** co-produced the musical *The Roar of the Greasepaint - The Smell of the Crowd* and the original production of *It Is Easy To Be Dead* at the Finborough Theatre. He is also a film-maker, writer and composer. Recent productions have included a memorial tribute to the late actor, Bille Brown, at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Brisbane; a short film *Jazz and George* for Phoenix Flight Films, Australia; and *Free to Cry*, a short film based on his own poem which was selected to close the official ceremony of World Holocaust Day at the Museum of Tolerance, Moscow in 2015. He is also currently working with Tony-nominated composer, Alex Baranowski, and the first song and video from their collaboration, *I Gave You Everything*, was performed by Tamsin Carroll, and recorded at Air Studios with the London Metropolitan Orchestra. Forthcoming projects include a new play for music theatre, *Butterfly Jaws – A Dark Fairytale*, and a series of short films for the Francis Bacon Foundation. www.breonrydell.com

Press acclaim for the Finborough Theatre production of *It Is Easy To Be Dead*

★★★★★ *The Guardian*
★★★★★ *BritishTheatre.com*
★★★★★ *Broadway World*
★★★★★ *London Pub Theatres*
★★★★★ *The Upcoming*
★★★★★ *Carn's Theatre Passion*
★★★★★ and Pick of The Week, *The Sunday Times*
★★★★★ *The Times*
★★★★★ *The Herald*
★★★★★ *Time Out*
★★★★★ *WhatsOnStage*
★★★★★ *The Jewish Chronicle*
★★★★★ *Musical Theatre Review*
★★★★★ *Reviewsgate*
★★★★★ *LondonTheatre*
★★★★★ *LiveTheatre*

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PRESS INFORMATION

★★★★ *Ginger Wig and Strolling Man*

★★★★ *TheSpyintheStalls*

Nominated for an Olivier Award

Outstanding Achievement in an Affiliate Theatre

Nominated for a MyTheatreAward

Best Original Work

Nominated for 7 OffWestEnd Awards

Best Male Performance

Best Male Performance in a Supporting Role

Best New Play

Best Director

Best Lighting Designer

Best Sound Designer

Best Set Designer

Nominated for four Broadway World UK Awards

Best Actor in a New Production of a Musical

Best Direction of a New Production of a Play

Best New London Fringe Production

Best New Play

"A century on, it's easy to tell ourselves that we've heard enough from the trenches. This artful evening reminds us that there is always more to learn, to be appalled by and, yes, dazzled by too." Dominic Maxwell, *The Times*

"A fitting and poignant tribute." Theo Bosanquet, *Time Out*

"A sharp reminder of the fragility of peace and the terrible consequences of taking that state for granted." Gary Naylor, *Broadway World*

"A poignant moving narrative of one man's war. What Charles Sorley achieved in his short life should remain an inspiration to us all. Not to be missed." *TheSpyintheStalls.com*

"This beautiful tribute to the First World War poet Charles Sorley took me by surprise. After all, I had — I'll confess — never heard of Sorley, a poet celebrated by his peers if not by a huge wider public, who died aged 20 in 1915 in the Battle of Loos. And the prospect of a show made up of his letters and poems, with British and German songs from the period and dramatisations of his stiff Scottish parents' reactions to his death . . . it sounded more National Trust than National Theatre. Yet *It is Easy to be Dead* turns out to be a tender, absorbing, eye-opening account of both an awful conflict and a great lost talent." Dominic Maxwell, *The Times*

"Hugely worthwhile piece, moving yet never mawkish, pertinent for its quiet reminder of the fragility of life, civilisation and peace." Patricia Nicol, *The Sunday Times*

"Charles Sorley is not a First World War poet as familiar as Wilfred Owen or Rupert Brooke, whose works are ingrained on the national consciousness. But on the evidence of Neil McPherson's fascinating dramatisation of his short life, he merits no less attention." Theo Bosanquet, *Time Out*

"A haunting tribute to a remarkable forgotten war poet" Claire Allfree, *The Daily Telegraph*

"Quietly devastating." Dominic Cavendish, *The Daily Telegraph*

"Well crafted, well staged, well acted." Quentin Letts, *The Daily Mail*

"Powerful musical moments." Dominic Maxwell, *The Times*

"Neil McPherson's thoughtful play...conveys both the young man's enthusiastic energy and the intensity of his parents' loss." Patricia Nicol, *The Sunday Times*

"Beautifully written...McPherson's perfectly judged script...The cast are tremendous." Gary Naylor, *Broadway World*

"Alexander Knox is stunning as Sorley, giving him the bonhomie of a young thing, the clear-sightedness of an old soul." Dominic Maxwell, *The Times*

"Alexander Knox's inquisitively engaging Charlie." Patricia Nicol, *The Sunday Times*

"An excellent central performance: Alexander Knox honours Sorley with a deeply sympathetic portrayal, finely balancing passion and poise." Theo Bosanquet, *Time Out*

"In Alexander Knox's likeable, bright-eyed performance you get a palpable, painful inkling of what was lost." Dominic Cavendish, *The Daily Telegraph*

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"Tom Marshall and Jenny Lee as his parents are perfect." *TheSpyintheStalls.com*

"Heartbreaking scenes as his parents, played by Jenny Lee and Tom Marshall." Liz Dyer, *Carn's Theatre Passion*

"Tom Marshall and Jenny Lee make wholly believable parents: he the epitome of the Calvinist tradition, stiff upper lip maintained - until he cracks; she the grieving mother, emotions just about held in check, but unable to cope with the void in her life." Gary Naylor, *Broadway World*

"Hugh Benson sings beautifully." Jessica Handscomb, *A Younger Theatre*

"Hugh Benson, wonderful." Patricia Nicol, *The Sunday Times*

"The music, sung exquisitely by Hugh Benson and accompanied on piano by Elizabeth Rossiter, hauntingly underscores Sorley's conviction in the beauty of German culture." Claire Allfree, *The Daily Telegraph*

"Elizabeth Rossiter's deft music direction, accompanied by Hugh Benson's singing, appropriately combines British and German songs." Theo Bosanquet, *Time Out*

"The director, Max Key, keeps the atmosphere vivid throughout." Dominic Maxwell, *The Times*

Link to press images available [here](#).

For more information, interviews and images, please contact

Livvy Perrett on e-mail press@finboroughtheatre.co.uk or **07889 794858**

Download press releases and images at <http://www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk/press-resources.php>