

# Dayton City Paper<sup>®</sup>

News Weekly



## *The Man and The Madame*

**DAYTON OPERA'S MADAME BUTTERFLY**

By Eric Street // pg 22



**THEATRE 17**

*Menopause: The Musical* celebrates survivors



**BEATS 20**

Hawthorne Heights plays hometown gig



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# Calm before the storm

Dayton Theatre Guild performs  
*All is Calm, The Christmas Truce of 1914*

By Don Hurst

**All is Calm**, *The Christmas Truce of 1914*, written by Peter Rothstein with musical arrangements by Erick Lichte and Timothy C. Takach, is about a remarkable Christmas Eve set in the middle of World War I, and offers a haunting alternative to traditional holiday productions.

The musical opens in the least likely of places to find goodwill, peace and joy: the bloody trenches of war torn Europe. By the winter of 1914, the fighting between the Germans and the French and British alliance had ground into a stalemate in France's Aisne valley. An impenetrable barrier of defensive positions stretched from North Sea to the Swiss frontier.

Neither side could gain an advantage. With nowhere to go, the troops settled into the reality of trench life. Soldiers huddled for warmth in the frigid holes that served as their homes. Men slept in the frozen dirt. Lungs burned from open latrines. Rats stole stale rations.

Just yards away men suffering the same misery huddled in their trenches, both sides ready to kill each other. In between these dug out lines lay a no-man's land, pock marked with artillery rounds and littered with the dead.

During this holiday a soldier looked forward to bouts of terror punctuated by intense boredom. Trench warfare was a special kind of hell on earth. Instead of Christmas carols one would listen to the hacking coughs of the sick and the moans of the injured. In the morning, while his family members would exchange gifts, the soldier expected to kill or die.

This was Christmas Eve in 1914 on the Western Front of World War I.

Then, in defiance of the brutal conditions, a German soldier sang "Stille Nacht" and wished his enemies a Merry Christmas. Other Germans began decorating the surrounding trees and their trenches with candles, not caring that they exposed themselves to sniper fire. Soon French and British troops joined in the singing.

The music gave the men courage to emerge from their protective trenches. Contrary to their orders to kill one another, both sides stepped into the no-man's land. Territory where blood and pain purchased every step, now the soldiers offered for free. On this evening, no shots broke the stillness of the night. No screams pierced the air.

Instead, these men met to exchange presents of candy, cigarettes and alcohol. They allowed each other to bury their dead. For one night they weren't Germans. They weren't British. They weren't French. They were just men searching for sanity, all the while knowing that the following day they may kill one another.

That night they had peace.

Beginning Nov. 20, Dayton Theatre Guild's production of *All is Calm* will tell this remarkable true story through the letters, journals and songs of the men who lived it. While a musical involving trench warfare might not be the typical holiday fare, Kathy Mola, the director, says, "[All is Calm] combines all the facets that make a beautiful and meaningful holiday show. A true story that should touch everyone."

The power of the show relies on the talented cast: Gage Emerson, Michael Favors, David Gaylor, David Hallowsen, Chuck Larkowski, Dave Nickel, Chris Petree, Jeff Sams, David Short, K.L. Storer and Mike Taint. The men perform several different roles, reciting letters written by the soldiers and singing the carols that joined these warring groups together. David McKibben, the music director, leads the cast through 28 a cappella songs and six-part harmonies to bring the emotions of this extraordinary evening to life.

The unadorned set maintains the focus on the power of the singing and the actors. The simple crates used in the staging call to mind the improvised furniture soldiers created. Sandbags and boxes of supplies kept troops from having to wallow in the mud that collected in the bottom of the trenches.

The uniformity of the set and the costumes emphasizes the common humanity of these men who faced each other in combat. When all the differences between them were stripped away the miracle of a spontaneous peace could occur. Unfortunately the truce did not last forever nor was it observed by the majority of the units. The peace that ordinary soldiers forged ended when senior officers drove them back to the trenches. The fighting endured another four years. Four years of grueling combat, machine guns and poison gas. The worst of humanity.

But for one night, soldiers showed what we could become. If peace could last for one day, why not a week, why not a month, why not a year, why not longer? The truce, Kathy Mola says, "gives a true sense of what the holidays are supposed to be about. If these men could do it, so can we. I believe that even though it takes place in a war setting, the message is a hopeful and uplifting one."



The cast of *All is Calm* performs Nov. 20-Dec. 6 at The Dayton Theatre Guild; photo: Debra Kent

The Dayton Theatre Guild presents *All is Calm* Nov. 20-Dec. 6 at the Dayton Theatre Guild at 430 Wayne Ave in Dayton. Tickets are \$20 adults, \$18 seniors and \$13 students. For show times and tickets, please visit [daytontheatreguild.org](http://daytontheatreguild.org) call 937.278.5993.



Don Hurst is a combat vet and a former police officer. He now lives in Dayton where he writes novels and plays. Reach him at [DonHurst@DaytonCityPaper.com](mailto:DonHurst@DaytonCityPaper.com).

**"[The truce] gives a true sense of what the holidays are supposed to be about. If these men could do it, so can we."**

— Kathy Mola, director



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# On Stage

Just right to find real holiday mood

ON STAGE  
WITH JACQUI THEOBALD

## Dayton Theatre Guild—*All is Calm: The Christmas Truce of 1914*—Nov. 20-Dec. 6

One-hundred and one years ago, an extraordinary moment occurred when enemies came together and real peace on earth came to a battlefield. Ninety-nine years later, it became a musical homage, a bit of theatre magic, crafted by Peter Rothstein, Erick Lichte and Timothy C. Takach. On Nov. 20 through Dec. 6 for three weekends it will be re-created at the Theatre Guild.

The so-called "War to End All Wars" (World War I) was being fought on one front along the Belgian border by soldiers in trenches surrounded by mud to the knees, rats, lice and no end in sight. They had insufficient food and rampant illness.

It was a very different kind of war from war as we now know it. Between forces dug into the earth and separated from the enemy by yards, the men were close enough to hear each other. Yet, at night, different troops would sing. Some sang in French, English or German. They sang ethnic favorites and they sang ballads and then they began to sing carols. Different words, same melodies.

It was a competition at first; then they listened to each other and applauded. Playwright Rothstein of Latte Da Theatre, Minneapolis, spent a couple of years researching in English and Belgian libraries and war museums discovering details of humanity and what happened when people connected. He worked with musicians Lichte and Takach of the men's choral group Cantus to shape diaries and letters of the

soldiers and the music they actually sang.

Director Kathy Mola found the play through connections with theatre friends in Spokane, Washington, fell in love with it and connected with the creators in Minneapolis. The Dayton Theatre Guild will have a regional premiere, among the first staged presentations anywhere. Barbara Jorgensen is the producer.

One of those perfect serendipity moments almost took Mola's breath away when she walked into the recent DAI World War I exhibit and saw Jane Alden Stevens' powerful photographs from the era. "Gotta have these," she thought. Communication followed enthusiastically on both sides. Mola's theatrical vision became unique with the inclusion of Stevens' photos, projected.

She and Music Director David McKibben have cast nearly a dozen strong voices and made their own local extraordinary moments, the perfect way to calm the descending holiday madness.

*All is Calm* is a season extra, Nov. 20-Dec. 6 at 430 Wayne Ave. in Dayton. Please call 937.278.5993 or visit [daytontheatreguild.org](http://daytontheatreguild.org) for tickets and times.



Eric Thompson and Abby Kress star in Dare to Defy Productions' *Footloose*, Nov. 27-28 at the Victoria Theatre

## Dare to Defy—*Footloose*—Nov. 27-28

Dayton's emerging nonprofit company is back with another popular musical, *Footloose*, cram-full of energy and dynamic dancing just like the movie. Dare to Defy expands to the Victoria after filling the Mathile for *Godspell* recently.

There's a bit of a plot: Mom and son, Ren, move from the big city to a small farm town. A frustrated preacher has decreed there shall be no dancing by teens. The preacher's kid falls for Ren; her boyfriend says bad things about him. Ren actually wants a dad; the preacher wants a son. Happy ending.

Director is Craig Smith. Music director is Lorri Topping. Choreographer is Jessica Tate Eggleston. They have a challenging task managing a large cast of nearly 40.

Ren is Eric Thompson. Ariel Moore is Abby Kress. Rev. Shaw Moore is David Shough. Vi Moore is Martha Armstrong-Benjamin. There are 17 more named characters and an ensemble of 16 plus.

It's the music and the dancing that won original awards, and Dare to Defy brings a large cast and youthful enthusiasm to the Victoria, Nov. 27 at 8 p.m. and Nov. 28 at 2 and 8 p.m.

For more information, please visit [d2defy.com](http://d2defy.com).

## Dayton Playhouse—Auditions—Nov. 23-24

Open tryouts for the six major roles plus an eight-woman ensemble are set for the mid-sixties musical *The Smell of the Greasepaint*, the *Roar of the Crowd* with book, music and lyrics by Leslie Bricusse and Anthony Newley. Production dates will be Jan. 22 through Feb. 7, 2016. Jim Lockwood is director. Judy Mansky is musical director. Allison Eder is choreographer.

Auditioners should bring sheet music for a "Broadway-type" song that shows ability and vocal range. An accompanist will be

available." Dress for a short dance audition. Brief script readings will be held. Be prepared to list all conflicts between Nov. 23 and Feb. 7.

The plot could parallel some current perspectives: Sir and Cocky play a continuous game that Sir always wins because he changes the rules in his favor. Cocky finally understands.

*The Playhouse* is at 1301 E. Siebenthaler, in Wegerzyn Gardens. Please visit [thedayton-playhouse.com](http://thedayton-playhouse.com) or email [jeckleday@msn.com](mailto:jeckleday@msn.com) for more details of roles and specific vocal requirements.

## Theatre Guild—Auditions—Nov. 23-24

Part murder mystery, part psychological drama with a dash of Alfred Hitchcock, "Night Watch" by Lucille Fletcher auditions are 7 p.m. Nov. 23 and 24, at the Guild. The show will run Jan. 8-24, 2016.

It ran for a few months on Broadway in 1972 but was a better-known film in 1973, starring Elizabeth Taylor. The lead role, Elaine Wheeler gives an actress plenty of opportunities for everything from hand-wringing to, well, plenty of opportunities.

Saul Caplan is director, Debra Kent and Barbara Jorgensen, producers.

For more details on cast requirements please visit [daytontheatreguild.org/auditions](http://daytontheatreguild.org/auditions) or email [debra.kent@daytontheatreguild.org](mailto:debra.kent@daytontheatreguild.org). Dayton Theatre Guild is at 430 Wayne Ave.



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