

James right on the mark in challenging role

BY JOE COUTURE, LEADER-POST OCTOBER 12, 2012

BILLY BISHOP GOES TO WAR

Globe Theatre Main Stage Until Oct. 28

The Globe Theatre successfully brings to life a Canadian classic this month with Billy Bishop Goes to War.

The musical play - written in the 1970s by John Gray and Eric Peterson, who is now best known for his Corner Gas role - is well polished and very engaging on the Globe's stage.

Starring in the story of Canada's top First World War flying ace, Jacob James makes his Globe debut as the show's title character. The accomplished actor gives a strong performance in the challenging role, drawing the audience into the tale of Canadian history and heroism that he is recounting.

James displays a lot of versatility and talent, portraying numerous other characters in addition to Billy Bishop, and moving seamlessly and impressively between each.

He is joined on stage by Regina product Zachary Flis - who was also musical director for A Closer Walk With Patsy Cline at the Globe in September, and who takes on the role of the piano player in Billy Bishop Goes to War. Flis demonstrates stunning skill with the instrument, and strong singing, joining with James vocally at numerous points in song and with certain lines throughout the show.

The sheer volume of material that the two performers are able to present on stage over two hours is spectacular by itself. And the delivery on Wednesday's preview night certainly evidenced many hours of work spent in learning the script and songs.

James - a seven-season veteran of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival - while new to the Globe, isn't new to the play, having performed Billy Bishop Goes to War during his four seasons at Thousand Islands Playhouse in Gananoque, Ont.

His connection with and understanding of the part is clearly evident and makes him an excellent choice for the role on the Globe's stage.

The artistic team for the Globe's production, led by director Max Reimer, has done a fantastic job of creating an enveloping experience for the audience.

The set and properties (by designer Scott Penner and intern Shelby Lyn Lowe) are minimal, as is usual for the Globe, but do a lot to enable a strong telling of the story. The costumes, by Emma Williams, are similarly straightforward, but certainly add to the high-quality production.

The lighting (by designer Robert Thomson) was particularly impressive, with numerous creative

applications employed to develop the environment for the story.

Dianne Woodrow is the stage manager for the smooth and overall well put-together show, and Monika Dembowy is the apprentice stage manager.

The audience for Wednesday's preview night seemed to greatly enjoy the opening show and becoming immersed in the history and vivid personal depictions of war. They leaped to their feet for a standing ovation as the lights dimmed at the end and the applause was well deserved.

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