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Theater And Social Justice

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## Mustard Seed's 'All Is Calm' Returns, Giving Voice To Unsung Heroes Of World War I

By [NANCY FOWLER](#) (/PEOPLE/NANCY-FOWLER)

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*From "Come On and Join" to "Aulde Lang Syne," hear how the music moves the story of the Christmas Truce forward in Nancy Fowler's radio story about "All Is Calm."*

When you think of World War I heroes, you likely picture generals and fighter pilots. But a playwright who penned Mustard Seed Theatre's upcoming production wanted to salute a group of men in the trenches.

On Friday, Mustard Seed begins re-staging Peter Rothstein's "[All Is Calm: The Christmas Truce of 1914](#)."



<http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/kwmu/files/201411/MustardSeedAllIsCalm47E.jpg>

A scene from "All Is Calm"  
Credit Mustard Seed Theatre

<http://www.mustardseedtheatre.com/index.php/productions/2014-2015/all-is-calm>) which [won five local Theater Circle Awards for last year's performances](#).

<http://news.stpublicradio.org/post/mustard-seed-actors-studio-sweep-stl-theater-circle-awards-many-are-winners>)

It's the story of how American and French troops forged a Christmas Eve peace with the Germans in a neutral area called "No Man's Land."

"All these men, whose names never appeared in history books, were heroes, in my opinion, and they deserve their place in history," Rothstein said.

Though the night and into Christmas Day, the enemies of yesterday sang and played

soccer, and even buried their dead, together. The camaraderie fell apart only after they were ordered to resume fighting.



(<http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/kwmu/files/201411/TruceMemorabilia-Msullivan.JPG>)

Actual memorabilia from the 1914 Christmas Truce, from In Flanders Field Museum, Ypres, Belgium  
Credit Michael Sullivan

“The power of this story is that the men in the lowest of the ranks took peace into their own hands,” Rothstein said. “It’s much more often courageous to create peace than to create war.”

The story underscores the ability of just one person to make a difference. In his research, Rothstein found a German soldier began the songfest, originating as a musical taunt from the trenches. The Allied troops followed suit and soon they were all celebrating Christmas Eve.

It’s a tale with lessons for today,

according to Rothstein.

“As citizens in 2014, it’s very easy to see ourselves powerless in the face of local conflict but there are human beings making decisions on all fronts,” Rothstein said.

### A Bond Cemented by Music

It’s unusual, now and historically, for enemies to collaborate.

But it’s common knowledge that soldiers fighting for the same side often feel like family. For Vietnam War veteran Charles Smith of University City, that extends to those who’ve served in all wars.

“There’s a special bond I feel toward my brothers and sisters who are veterans. We truly do try to take care of each other,” Smith said.

Just by playing soldiers, the “All Is Calm” actors also formed a kind of brotherhood. All 10 of them re-upped for the 2014 productions.

“I didn’t imagine we’d be able to get the entire cast back so that’s pretty amazing,” artistic director Deanna Jent said.

Antonio Rodriguez returned from St. Louis from Chicago to do the show.

“When I found out this was happening, I was like, ‘I have to come back,’”

Rodriguez said. “There aren’t that many a capella shows out there so being able to perform without accompaniment is really special.”

“All Is Calm” was supposed to be a swan song for actor Christopher Hickey.

“I was getting ready to leave acting when I did this last year and it was probably the



(<http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/kwmu/files/201411/CharlesSmith2.jpg>)

Specialist Charles Smith (center, with yellow envelope) during his 1970-1971 Vietnam tour  
Credit Charles Smith

best experience to end things on," Hickey said. "When they talked about this remount, I thought it would be really great to experience it again."

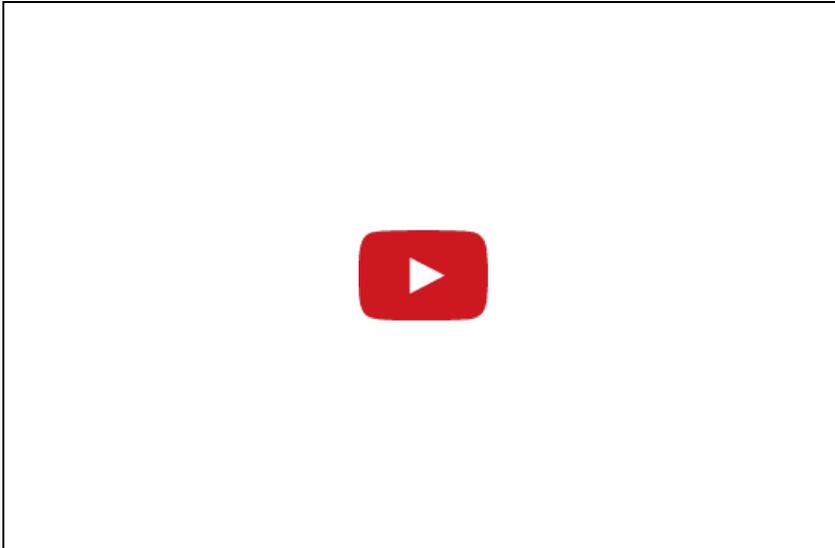
The group is a great fit, J. Samuel Davis agreed.

"We all like each other and get along well and we sound great together," Davis said.

Kind of like a regiment?

"Well, they all came together on the battlefield and we all came together and learned these parts and these roles," Davis said.

*The cast of "All Is Calm" sings "I Want to Go Home" in last year's presentation.*



## THE BASICS

### 'All Is Calm: The Christmas Truce of 1914'

**Where:** Fontbonne University Theatre, 6800 Wydown Blvd., 63105

**When:** Opens 8 p.m. Friday, Nov. 14; runs Thursday-Sunday through Dec. 14

**How much:** \$30; \$25 students, seniors

**Information/Tickets:** [Mustard Seed website](#)

(<http://www.mustardseedtheatre.com/index.php/productions/2014-2015/all-is-calm>)

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