Poet who got a glimpse of hell

He's the poet whom everyone seems to remember from their school days. Now the life of Wilfred Owen is to be celebrated in a new musical which comes to Oswestry Civic Arts Centre. JOHN ANSON spoke to the man behind the project.

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle? Only the monstrous anger of the gun. Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle Can patter out their hasty orisons.

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HE opening lines from the poem Anthem For Doomed Youth are instantly familiar to generations of English Literature students. Now Liverpool musician Dean Johnson has enlisted celebrity backing for the world's first musical drama about the iconic First World War poet.

Dean is best known for taking some previously unknown lyrics by George Harrison about his fellow Beatle John Lennon and turning them into a song, Silence (Is Its Own Reply).

“The story of that song went everywhere and suddenly, after 25 years as a musician I was discovered by Wilfrid Waller,” said Dean. “The council bought me the rights and a year later we played the show in Liverpool.

“He said Wilfred Owen was his hero and he was delighted to be the narrator on the album we have recorded of the show.”

Adding to the high-profile involvement is John Gorman, best known as a member of The Scaffold, who has directed the live show.

“The essence of the show is the journey of a rather fey lad from the Wirral who became a killing machine before becoming hugely aware of the carnage he was caught up in,” said Dean. “Owen won a Military Cross after capturing an enemy machine gun post, so he really experienced life on the front line. And I think that’s why his poems are still so menacing today. They are so real, so emotive.”

Although the production is only starting in small venues, Dean is hopeful it may end up in London’s West End.

“2014 will be the 100th anniversary of the start of the war,” he said. “The interest already being generated with the show is immense so we shall have to see.”

Musical enlists help from stars to tell story of celebrated World War One writer

MOTHER’S DAY

Mother’s Day is approaching fast. If you’re one of the many people who celebrate the day with a hurriedly-purchased bunch of petrol station flowers, why not do something special this year to show you care? These websites could help:

prezzybox.com/mothers-day-gifts

Buy something thoughtful for once. This website has loads of ideas for presents your mum will love. Mugs, books, personalised champagne, even a chocolate-covered pizza. This site has got it all.

utterlyrecipes.com

Let’s face it, your mum has been cooking for you for years, while your culinary endeavours have extended no further than pies and cheesy bears on toast. So it’s time to learn to cook a lovely Mother’s Day lunch and this is the site to help you along. Choose a recipe, practise it and then let your mum put her feet up for once.

craftideas.info

Feeling creative? Then put in a special effort and make your mum a present this year. There’s a huge number of options, including patchwork quilts and crochet bags. It’s the ultimate way to express your feelings.

nationaltrust.org.uk

Don’t just sit around the house all day — take your mum for a day out. There are loads of places to choose from in Lancashire, including several National Trust locations. Nearby, there’s the fascinating Gawthorpe Hall, or if you fancy going further afield why not take a trip to the beautiful coastline of Silverdale and Arnside?

On the couch

MATTHEW METCALFE Age: 29

TV TREAT: Top Gear, I like Jezza’s attitude to life

FAVOURITE TELLY SCOUFF: Minstrails

TV DISH: Julia Roberts

PET HATE: Big Brother

RIB TICKLER: Mrs Brown’s Boys

WINNER: Soccer AM/Top Gear

JON BROWNE Age: 44

TV TREAT: Monty Python’s Flying Circus (below)

FAVOURITE TELLY SCOUFF: Popcorn with salt and butter

TV DISH: Feanne Cotton

PET HATE: Cooking Shows

RIB TICKLER: Clips of people falling off bikes and the like

WEEKEND WINNER: left, ‘Harry Hill’s TV Burp

PHIL WHITEHEAD Age: 38

TV TREAT: Mock The Week

FAVOURITE TELLY SCOUFF: My body is a temple so telly scoffs are out, unless there are Pringles

TV DISH: Laura Hamilton used to make kids TV watchable!

PET HATE: The endless drone of “talent” shows. Please Britain, stop voting for these people — it only encourages them

RIB TICKLER: Russell Howard’s Good News

WEEKEND WINNER: TV Burp

MIKE INGHAM Age: 47

TV TREAT: Mrs Brown’s Boys

FAVOURITE TELLY SCOUFF: My tea, with a bottle of lager

TV DISH: Kim Kardashian

PET HATE: X Factor

RIB TICKLER: Mrs Brown’s Boys

WEEKEND WINNER: Soccer AM

TV REVIEW: DIXY FRIED CHICKEN

Dawn Street, Blackburn

“WHY do you always review kebab shops,” moaned one colleague. “No-one eats kebabs any more. Do something different.”

So, with those words ringing in my ears as I left Telegraph Towers after a late shift, I headed into Blackburn’s less-than-busy neon mecca of Darwin Street in search of some supper. I fancied a kebab but, taking the sternly-delivered advice, I instead opted for a spot of chicken and chips from the Dizzy Fried Chicken.

The shop, which had a strap of beige parcel tape across a crack in the glass door, was empty but it took a few moments for the member of staff to put his mobile down to acknowledge me.

When I was finally attended to I decided to opt for a £3.99 box of fried chicken and fries.

Some 15 minutes after ordering the fries were ready and the chicken pieces were taken out of the heater and thrown into the box. Red salt was applied before I had chance to say yay or nay but I was offered a free tin of pop.

The fries were good, nice and crisp and red hot, but the chicken was not as good as I would have hoped.

The coating was soggy and the meat was tough and full of bones.

Not the best and I won’t be rushing through that cracked door again in a hurry.

So, sorry colleague, it’s back to the kebabs for me.

MATT DONLAN