

Elsie and Mairi Go to War



Elsie Knocker and Mairi Gooden-Chisholm worked as nurses on the Western Front from 1914-1918. The fact that they were the only women to do so makes theirs a fascinating story and certainly one worthy of dramatisation. So it's a shame that Dauntless, the company behind *Elsie and Mairi Go to War*, has bottled out and produced what is little more than a series of scenes from the book on which the play is based.

Historian Diane Atkinson, author of *Elsie and Mairi Go to War*, plays the narrator of the piece, but Atkinson is no actor and there has been no attempt made to blend her narrated segments into the action. Clare Waugh and Pauline Lockhart, who play Elsie and Mairi respectively, are able performers, but focus is pulled from them to the narrator too frequently for any sense of drama to properly develop. For this show to succeed in a future incarnation, the task of



scene-setting must fall to Elsie and Mairi themselves, or else the narrator's role must be better integrated.

There are some jolly moments in this production: Waugh's performance, in particular, successfully evokes the gloriously gung-ho attitudes of the time. But too much of the dialogue is played for laughs, which undermines

the more tender scenes and serious messages of the play. Both Elsie and Mairi, in fact, are no more than stereotypes, and this, combined with the lack of narrative ark, makes it very difficult to engage with this story, however intriguing it may be. [Jo Caird]

**Dovecot, 4:00pm - 5:00pm,
4-20 Aug, not Sundays, £6.00**