

## A soldier's play premieres on-screen



Derek Van Oss

Former Austinite Ben McKenzie reprises his stage performance in 'Johnny Got His Gun' in the one-man film that premieres tonight at the Paramount Theatre.

Sixty-nine years after it was first published, "Johnny Got His Gun" by Dalton Trumbo still serves as a harrowing reminder of the human cost of war.

Now it's coming to the big screen with Austin native Ben McKenzie, who re-creates a one-man stage adaptation that opened Off-Broadway in 1982 and was written by Bradley Rand.

The one-man movie has its world premiere at 7 tonight at the Paramount, with McKenzie in attendance.

As his latest role shows, McKenzie, who first gained national attention as the moody hunk on television's "The O.C.," is crafting an interesting career, focusing on independent movie projects and serious acting rather than cultivating a star image that attracts the tabloids.

He played the husband of Oscar nominee Amy Adams in the big-hearted 2005 movie "Junebug." Now he's playing a soldier who loses his arms and legs as well as his eyes, ears, nose and mouth after being hit by a shell on the last day of World War I.

Director Rowan Joseph originally planned to release a film version of the 1982 stage production starring Jeff Daniels, for which Daniels earned an Obie, in advance of the presidential elections. But when he and producing partner Shane Partlow viewed the footage at the Lincoln Center Library, they found that the first 20 minutes had been lost during a transfer from VHS to digital

format.

So they decided to re-create the stage production with McKenzie and open it gradually in major cities across the U.S. Austin is first.

As soldier Joe Bonham, McKenzie has just a chair and a bench for props and an incredibly demanding role. He must show how someone comes to realize that his mind is fully functioning although his body is little more than a limbless hunk of flesh.

**He keeps track of time by counting how often a nurse bathes him. And he establishes communications by tapping out Morse code with his head on a pillow.**

It's a brave choice for the 30-year-old McKenzie.

Trumbo, a well-known anti-war activist, was one of the most controversial American writers of the 1940s. In 1950, he spent 11 months in prison after being convicted of contempt of Congress for refusing to testify against fellow Hollywood workers. He ended up being the most famous victim of the notorious blacklist.

Tonight's premiere will be a fundraiser for The Mark Cuban Foundation's Fallen Patriot Fund, a nonprofit group that helps families of U.S. soldiers killed or seriously injured in Iraq and Afghanistan. Tickets are available at GetTix.net for \$15.50. Paramount Theatre, 713 Congress Ave.

— Charles Ealy