

WAR HORSE

On the second of March 2014 I went to see a live screening of *War Horse* in my local theatre in Chipping Norton.

You may think that watching it on screen is nowhere near as good as seeing it for real which is probably true, but in fact you can see the performance from all angles, which gives the audience many perspectives.

STORY SUMMARY

War Horse is about a fifteen year-old boy called Albert, who is sent out with his father (Freddie) to buy a cow at the market. But his father ends up competing with his wealthy brother to buy a riding horse. In a drunken rage Freddie wins the stallion with the money his wife gave him for the cow. When arriving at the farm Albert calls the stallion Joey and from then on the two were inseparable until... Albert's father heard the army were buying horses and dragged Joey to the market square and later receives one hundred pounds for what the officer called "a splendid horse."

The officer looks after Joey well and takes him to France but is killed in an attack on the German lines. Joey is then given to another soldier. This soldier rides Joey in a heroic but disastrous charge into the enemy trenches. Joey leaps over the enemy barbed wire but many other horses and soldiers are killed. Joey is surrounded by German soldiers and his rider is forced to surrender. Joey is then put to work for the German army first pulling ambulance carts and then guns.

A couple of years after Joey was sold to the army, Albert, still officially too young to sign up, joins the army hoping to be reunited once more with Joey – taking with him the drawing he received in the post that had been drawn by the officer before he died.

The story ends with Joey being given back to Albert by a French farmer who has bought him in memory of his dead granddaughter who had at one time helped to look after Joey. This story contains love, loss, hope, sadness and happiness.

PUPPETS

When I think about the wooden horses (puppets) my mind explodes because they were just so fantastic and elegant. I especially loved the way they just glided across the stage. I am going to start by saying how amazingly life-like the horses were and with the help of the puppeteers



(wearing burgundy bowler hats) those horses might as well have been real. I know when people try to make a puppet performance they try their best to hide the puppeteers but in the show when Joey is just a little baby horse the puppeteers are standing alongside him. When Joey is an older horse, two of the puppeteers work him from inside, while another stands alongside operating the head in the most life-like way.

COSTUMES

The army costumes worn by the actors playing the soldiers were the same in every detail as those worn by the soldiers during the war. Soldiers in WWI wore khaki jackets, khaki trousers and flat-topped hats.



SET DESIGN

Every little detail of the production had been thought of with great care and attention. The set was minimal, with a large strip of heavy, ragged paper hanging from above being used to as a projection screen for showing each scene from the fields of England to the shelling of the battlefields. It worked well showing Joey galloping on the horizon at home in England and to project the flashes of light as shells exploded over the darkened stage in French fields.

I think this huge piece of paper was to represent the paper on which the drawing of Joey was drawn that Albert tore out the officer's sketch book. He took this drawing to the battle fields to show people the horse he was looking for, so we saw this piece of paper a lot during the play.

EXTRA INFORMATION

It was very interesting to see after the show the film about how *War Horse* was made into a stage production, and to see the puppets being designed and made. We also heard the writer, Michael Morpurgo, talk about his book and the producer talk about how it came to be made into a stage show.

If I were allowed to give a mark out of ten I would give the *War Horse* productions nine out of ten for the amazing acting, great solo singing and the simple but brilliant set design. I would give the puppets, puppet-makers and puppeteers ten out of ten as what they did to create life-like horses was incredible.

HUW DICKINSON

WOAPA STUDENT