

## Five-Minute Interview

Nick Newman: Internship Movement Practitioner

I started training as an actor seriously about seven years ago although I have no classical training whatsoever and about two years ago I wanted to move in a different capacity into the industry for when I wasn't getting acting roles and my acting teacher recommended that I may want to move into movement or voice. I'd always been interested in the more physical aspects of acting as most of my other jobs had been manual labouring and I'd done lots of sports, so I ended up auditioning for the Guildhall School of Music and Drama - not thinking I'd get in because I'm unqualified and I was accepted without needing a degree: apparently it was my personal statement that got me in.

My role in *War Horse* is an Internship Movement Practitioner. While I'm here I am an extra set of eyes for the Puppeteering Director and the Assistant Puppeteering Director, I observe the rehearsals and basically keep an eye on the actors as they're working with the puppets, I'm also able to pick up on aspects that others may not be focused on at that particular moment in the scene.

For me a Movement Director's job is to focus on things such as whether there's a sense of the ground underneath the horse, if the scene is midday and it's sunny, do we see that in the actors' body, do we see that in the space. The actors and puppeteers have so much to concentrate on within the scene that sometimes they may skip over some of the givens or the logic of that scene.

If we use *War Horse* as an example, some of the actors are playing farmers from a Devonshire farm pre World War One and we're using actors in 2013 in a time rife with consumerism and processed food so when I look at the actors, how does the actor reveal the hands of a farmer? Do I have a sense of that earth in their body? Bodies were completely different then from malnutrition and manual work. How does an actor bring that essence of rural England to the character? You're looking at the actor's relationship with the body in space and to the given scene. The actor has to create that imaginary space for themselves and let that affect their body; they have to create a weight in the arms, a weight in the legs. How do you find that essence of the body in the space and the relationship of a character to work, to the land, the plough, the farm?

Basic rule for any actor to look after themselves is 'soft knees' - use your legs for everything, keep your pelvis underneath; I

work with their alignment - specifically for that person relating to that task. For example one of the puppeteers has a tendency to lift his left hip higher to compensate for the workload of carrying the puppet and I'm working with him to try and reduce the possibility of a serious lower back injury occurring over time - how he can work more economically over time. When I'm watching them, I don't want to see them becoming casual with their bodies in the space.

It's a really hard task acting and especially in this play because there's so much to think about - I mean everything in this play is puppeteered: The actor brings the door to life when they carry it on stage - it's not just a prop - it becomes a live object and that's an interesting dynamic - when is something in this play a prop, when is it a puppet? The actor has to use their whole body to fly in the door and not just relate to it as a stagehand might do moving on a piece of furniture. When Toby did the original movement on *War Horse* he came in to build the actors' relationship to the horse - how the actors make it a real horse too - he wasn't looking at a set pattern of movements - he directed the actor's movement in relationship to the story taking place on stage.

The way Toby has movement directed the piece specifically is with an essence of air - the whole movement of the play is based on Lecoq's Element work: This is where you work with the classical elements; air, water, fire and earth - they're the main elements for the body that bring us back unconsciously to nature. You'll see in the earlier half of the play where the poles become the market square, as the poles travel through the scenes there's an element of air to the poles that carries us through time - it's not just moving a pole as a static item - there's always a continuing fluidity to it.

Anybody who's interested in working in movement - there's not a lot of work out there but if you're interested then the only advice I have is there's some academic courses out there but what was great about the course that I did at Guildhall is that you train alongside the actors - you're in the room doing the exercises with them and that's a good perspective to have.

