

## Five Minute Interview

*Karen Henthorn: Rose Narracott*

*Steve Hillman: Ted Narracott*

### **KAREN HENTHORN:**

I went to Drama School when I was 18-21 and I worked in theatres for about six years all over the country and then I really wanted to do some TV but my CV was very theatre heavy so my agent told me I needed to make myself available so I made myself unemployed and then went for the odd job – two lines here, three lines there and I built up my television CV that way. I loved television and so since then most of my work has been in TV rather than theatre through choice.

The last theatre I did was a fringe piece in Manchester – it was after I'd finished Coronation St and I wanted to dip my toe into fringe theatre: I hated every second of it – it was a two hander and I was so uncomfortable being onstage, I was just too self conscious. I enjoyed the experience of being directed and I loved that the audience was so close but being onstage I just didn't enjoy at all. When I auditioned for *War Horse* I was very anxious about it – it was just too big, the venues were too big, it's the National Theatre and it's a massively successful production - I was a little bit disappointed when I got a recall because I really didn't think I'd get it, but of course now I'm so thrilled that I made the right decision.

I think there was 99 people at the first day of rehearsals meet and greet, the majority of people there weren't cast – you realised the enormity of the project. It felt like my first job, that feeling of anticipation and excitement and fear - my heart sang and I never thought I'd feel that way coming back to theatre – the smell of it, the energy of it, the newness of it - it was all to be discovered, altogether. Even though we know that *War Horse* has history, we're a brand new cast and this is a different adaptation than what's been on before.

The rehearsal process that we've had has been like being back at Drama School. We've had singing lessons, a fight coordinator, an armourer who has shown us how to use the rifles and pistols safely, we've been to the Horses' Trust – to watch horses, see how they move, how they communicate, how they sense things, to touch a real horse and to be aware of how you're touching the horse.

Even though we don't use the puppets, we also had a couple of puppetry workshops. We used this thick brown paper and in groups of three we were all working together to make these paper stick men. It's fantastic that we've all had the chance to appreciate what the puppeteers have got to do. The focus of the

puppets – the breathing – the detail – the slightest gesture spoke volumes – it was incredible. It's the fifth week now and we've become one big family; when you have those shared experiences when you're working together, it brings you much closer.

In theatre you have a different relationship with the audience – TV is about the detail of a blink or an intake of breath - that detail won't carry on the stages of the size we're working on. Eye's down, eyes up can speak volumes on a close-up on television. I like stillness on television but sometimes from the back row in a theatre that can feel a bit flat because you might not be able to see the detail of that stillness. When you're projecting – you lose the detail in your voice. It's difficult to find an emotional connection to the character when you're focused on the volume.

In this celebrity society where fame seems easily attainable, the question for young people is – do you want to be famous or do you want to be an artist? If you want to be an artist – get some training or do your training on the job – it's not easy – its hard work, its long hours - if your heart is in it then it's a joy to do. There's a lot of sacrifices – I can't afford to do a lot of things - I'm always overdrawn and I'm relatively well established but they don't feel like sacrifices because I'm enjoying what I'm doing. My advice would be to just get up and do it - find a space where you can be yourselves and have a laugh, where there's no agenda, you're not going to get shouted at for making too much noise – that's a good experience for any young person – whether they go into acting or not!

### **STEVE HILLMAN:**

I finished Drama School at 23 – I did a lot more TV to begin with and I was desperate to get into theatre but somehow it seemed like a closed clique that I just couldn't break into. When I started, I couldn't get an agent for love nor money so I used to write my own letters to Granada TV, I used to write every month for about a year and a half and I got offered small walk-on parts. I used to make up my CV, give my characters names so it looked like they had lines, very naughty but I felt it was what I had to do and it seemed to work. I went on to do a lot of TV and worked with some notable names. I also worked in the probation system for a while teaching student probation officers role playing as ex convicts. That was good grounding to be a real actor – you're meeting real people all the time and finding extraordinary stories.



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I like theatre more than I do television, I like that four-week process of rehearsals and then suddenly one day the character clicks and then after that it becomes like a coat hanger that you can take off the hook and put the coat on of that character and then really start to explore more – I enjoy that laboratory process.

There's no comparison between theatre and TV acting – it's very technical – you're the last piece that they need – it's about the lighting, the tape measure – you can cock-up – you don't panic so much – when live theatre comes along you want to get it right.

The first day of rehearsals was awesome – we're used to small rooms and when I walked in it was like an aeroplane hangar. Most actors are insecure to be truthful, I felt like I shouldn't be here – I felt like I was going to wake up but I haven't done yet. The first three days we didn't touch the script at all, we did a lot of different exercises to build us together as a group.

I refused to see the production in London because I want to find the character for myself – I don't want to see another Ted – I am Ted in my eyes.

If you're interested in getting into acting, say yes to everything – you never know what you might learn from it - if your friend's making a film – have a go, you'll learn the discipline through doing it. It's the hard work that gets you noticed, going that extra mile – if you put in the graft you'll get rewarded. I was unemployed for the last fourteen months which was a horrible horrible time but it was so nice to be able to sign off and come down to London – my motto is 'Keep the Faith'.

