

## Cast Interview: Curtis Jordan

*Curtis played Tophorn and Joey's Head and the Goose in 2011.*

### **When we see the show, what should we look out for in the puppets or puppeteers?**

The idea is that eventually the puppeteers, who are visible throughout the performance, will become 'invisible' to the audience because they will start to believe that the characters are real. But generally people flit between watching the puppets as real horses and watching the intricate work of the puppeteers. You should be able to see all three people controlling the sections of the horse, working together without communicating verbally. Each performance is an evolving improvisation between all three people as well as any character that is in the scene with the horse. Our challenge is to make the audience believe the horses are thinking and breathing as in life.

### **How do the other actors relate to the puppets?**

We tend to call any actor that plays a scene with one of the horses, the "fourth puppeteer" as it falls to them to help make the audience believe it's a real horse. They will be responsible for making the weight, power and potential danger of the horses seem real. They will also need to help create the relationships and emotional journeys between the two characters. As our horses don't talk or narrate the story, the humans in the show provide a lot of the communication between audience and puppets.

### **Who does what within the horse? How do they work together as a team?**

Each horse has three puppeteers that operate either the Hind legs, the Heart and front legs, or the Head and we refer to each person as Head, Heart or Hind.

The Heart puppeteer is responsible for providing the breath and emotional centre of the puppet, the Hind indicates emotion through the tail and legs and the Head puppeteer provides the thoughts of the puppet. All three need to work together to make sure the animal is always alive and this means leaving space for each other to contribute to the performance. We work in teams so we get to know how each other thinks and we spend a lot of time improvising in the puppet so we learn to anticipate each other's performance.

### **How can we practise puppetry in school?**

One of the hardest things to master is giving life to an inanimate object. You can try practising with any object and seeing if you can make it 'breathe' and look around the room. Then try a couple of objects interacting with each other and create a scene. Then maybe try using a bigger object or puppet made from some brown paper for example that takes three people to manipulate. The task then will be to operate your specific part of the puppet whilst improvising with two other people.

### **How did the actors begin rehearsing? With the puppets in the room from the beginning?**

Every actor in *War Horse* starts learning puppetry as I suggested above, using small objects and bringing them to life. We then progress to larger bunraku-style puppets before then spending most of our time perfecting the technique of the horse puppets. We then spend time improvising as a threesome out of the puppet. We film ourselves and rely on the directors and each other to feedback on the results of our rehearsal. The best thing about this show though is that the performance is never complete. We are always learning how to make the puppets more believable and exciting.

