

## **Selected *War Horse* Press Reviews 2007-11**

*To what extent do you agree with these?*

**RNT Olivier (2007)**

**Philip Fisher: British Theatre Guide**

*"The first half hour drags, as the foal Joey is bought for Albert by his vicious dad (Toby Sedgwick) in a comic auction battle with his hated brother-in-law that prefigures what is about happen to Europe. By the end, you can forgive the excessive sentimentality and lack of depth because *War Horse* is such a magnificent spectacle, featuring truly outstanding puppetry that will help to bring *The Great War* to life for a youthful audience, who these days may not even have been aware of its existence."*

**First Night: National Theatre, London (18/10/2007)**

**Paul Taylor: The Independent**

***Horse's tale provides a thrilling and emotional atmosphere***

*"Morpurgo's novel employs the *Black Beauty* convention: a first person account of his experiences by a horse with a preternatural command of the English language.*

*That's fine as far as it goes but the shared cross-species attributes somewhat blunt one of the book's key points – that war is a man-made atrocity and that the exploitation of the noble, innocent horses should add to our sense of shame.*

*Imparting a superlative sense of emotional depth, the stage version refuses to anthropomorphise the animals. More than life-size and manipulated by a team of puppeteers, each horse is both intensely physical in the quivering life that pulses through its bendy bamboo armature and see-through skin and abstract as though it were the spiritual essence of a horse.*

*Though not assembled through "found" objects, the puppets reminded me rather of Picasso's wicker-basket goat sculptures. There's that same sense of the animal and metaphysical. The whiffling, the rearing and bridling in protest, the pricking ears, the supple eloquence of the telescopic neck: you acknowledge the mysterious otherness of Joey at the same time as identifying with his pain.*

*But the piece is also profoundly cathartic in its moving demonstration that our relationship with animals can be one of the richest of humanising experiences."*



## **Selected *War Horse* Press Reviews 2007-11**

*To what extent do you agree with these?*

**First Night: National Theatre, London (18/10/2007)**

**Michael Billington: *The Guardian***

***Horseplay and visual bravura***

*"The originality of Morpurgo's book lies in the fact that we get a horse's-eye-view of the unfolding action.....Inevitably, in Stafford's play we view the action objectively and become more aware of the story's artful contrivances: it seems excessively fortuitous that Joey, captured by the enemy, falls into the caring hands of a German captain as horse-obsessed as Albert . And when the rescued Joey in 1918 is saved from slaughter only by a jammed pistol it seems providence is working overtime. Elliott and Morris recreate the kaleidoscopic horror of war through bold imagery, including the remorseless advance of a manually-operated tank, and through the line-drawings of Rae Smith projected on to a suspended screen."*

**First Night: National Theatre, London (18/10/2007)**

**Peter Brown: [londontheatre.co.uk](http://londontheatre.co.uk)**

*"Based on the novel by Michael Morpurgo, and adapted by Nick Stafford, 'War Horse' is a collaborative venture between the National and Handspring Puppet Company. Since I've mentioned the word 'puppet', you're probably thinking along the lines of Punch and Judy - those funny, but ugly looking monstrosities made out of papier mache. That's more or less what I was thinking before the show too. But the puppets here are are not much like anything I've ever seen before.*

*At the beginning of the play, Joey is a relatively small puppet, but as time passes and Albert trains the horse, it grows. And how it grows! In a sudden, amazing transformation, young Joey becomes a full-sized adult horse which is again a 'puppet' with two manipulators inside it and another moving the head and providing the sound effects. Adult Joey is not just a 'puppet'. Thanks to the immense skill of the manipulators, Joey and the other 'puppet' horses we see later in the play become living things. And just like the real thing, these horses are never truly 'at rest' - they are in perpetual motion: breathing, adjusting their position, and constantly responding to their environment and the action going on around them. By the end of the show, it's almost impossible not to view Joey and the other horses as being 'real'.*

*There can't be many companies that could even attempt a play of this kind or theatres that could stage work on this epic kind of scale. In a sense, that gives the National an onerous responsibility that I for one don't envy. But the result here is simply stunning and I don't think I've ever witnessed such a terrific reception for a production at the Olivier. All age groups in the audience seemed enchanted and mesmerised by this endearing and imaginative piece, won over by the sheer skill and*

War Horse Learning

War Horse drawings by  
Rae Smith

Resources © National Theatre 2

[warhorseonstage.com](http://warhorseonstage.com)  
[nationaltheatre.org.uk](http://nationaltheatre.org.uk)



## Selected *War Horse* Press Reviews 2007-11

*To what extent do you agree with these?*

*endurance of the manipulators and the overwhelming scale of the play. Two curtain calls could easily have gone on to 20 such was the enthusiasm, particularly from the younger members of the audience.*

*More than 8 million horses died in the Great War – almost as many as the 10 million humans whose lives were lost in the futile stalemate of trench warfare. 'War horse' not only reminds us of the horrors of war, and the ghastly horrors of the First World War in particular, it also highlights our responsibilities towards the other inhabitants of our planet. It's hard not to leave this play without feeling more than a little ashamed."*

**Publication Date: 14/04/2011**

**Ben Brantley: New York Times**

***A Boy and His Steed, Far From Humane Society - Score: 7***

*"It takes a team of strong but sensitive puppeteers to bring Joey, a half-Thoroughbred who is sold into a World War I cavalry regiment, to life-size life. And it is how Joey is summoned into being, along with an assortment of other animals, that gives this production its ineffably theatrical magic...it's Joey and the mighty Topthorn who have the most complete personalities and who keep us watching as the plot plods on."*

**Publication Date: 20/04/2011**

**Michael Feingold: Village Voice**

***War Horse Offers a Different Kind of Hoofing - Score: 4***

*"Lovers of literature and drama, who might be looking for something that goes a little beyond the simple truths stated above, will find that they've come to the wrong shop. I assume that Michael Morpurgo's "young-adult" novel, from which Nick Stafford has carved the script for this elaborate spectacle, allots some time to grounding its events more fully in reality, but it's still essentially not much more than Lassie, Come Home with a horse instead of a dog, and World War I to heighten the tension. Sentimental animal stories tend to run true to form, and this one will surprise nobody: Boy gets horse, boy loses horse, but boy and horse find each other at the end, just in time for the Armistice bells to ring on cue."*

**Publication Date: 14/04/2011**

**Chris Jones: Chicago Tribune**

***Extraordinary puppets make the heart of 'War Horse' beat - Score: 10***

*"As anyone who saw this theatrical piece in London well knows, to experience "War Horse" onstage is to wonder how these puppets manage to etch themselves so deeply into your soul. It's partly the sentiment of the story, for sure... These horses (young Joey's puppet-swapping change to maturity is simply breathtaking) seem to pulse in the very air - breathing, churning and always teaching us, or maybe just reminding us, that the*



## **Selected *War Horse* Press Reviews 2007-11**

*To what extent do you agree with these?*

*world never stands still and that all you can do is find your love and not  
get mowed down by the big guns."*

