



EQUINE EXCELLENCE: A scene from the powerful, first-class U.K. drama *War Horse* at the Vivian Beaumont. Photo: Paul Kolnik

Theater Review

War Horse: WWI drama is season's must-see



WAR HORSE

Based on the novel by Michael Morpurgo

Adapted by Nick Stafford

Directed by Marianne Elliott & Tom Morris

The Vivian Beaumont Theater

150 W. 65th Street

(212-239-6200), www.lct.org

By David NouNou

Grand scale, epic, and unforgettable would be three words that best describe the British drama *War Horse*, which just made its American debut. Starting out on a small scale on a farm in Devon, England in August of 1912 and gradually building scene after scene to the horrors of World War I, this is one theatrical venture that stays with you long after you leave the theater. It is daunting in its scope and haunting by virtue of its theatricality.

First presented at the National Theatre of Great Britain and based on the 1982 children's novel by Michael Morpurgo and adapted by Nick Stafford, this play is by no means a children's story. On the contrary, all the themes are adult-related and, at times, heart wrenching. It depicts the emotionally charged tale of a foal purchased out of spite for 39 guineas and two years later sold out of greed to the British cavalry as a stallion to serve during World War I for 100 pounds.

As the boy who becomes the foal's trainer and guardian, Albert Narracott, (Seth Numrich), Mr. Numrich possesses the right innocence that is required from the onset. This communication and the undying bond that forms between boy and horse is palpable. The love and the joy they share, and the promise made that they would never be separated, transcends itself across the stage to make the audience feel the beauty and essence of it. The horse is named Joey, a name that even the horse likes, for this animal is amazing. He comes to life and grows to become a beautiful

stallion before our very eyes. Although the horse is operated by three men; two on the inside and one as a handler, this horse is really a puppet but so marvelously lifelike, possessing every twitch, flick, and neigh stance and movement that any real animal might have.

The father breaks his word to Albert through greed by selling Joey and, thus, the odyssey into World War I begins. Albert joins the British army at the age of only 16 just to be able to find Joey. In the army, Joey gets to meet a fellow stallion by the name of Tophorn and, in turn, they form their own bond. Tophorn is another remarkable horse, and the vision of the two of them alone together onstage bonding is breathtaking.

There are many topics covered here: be it war is hell, men's evil doings, and the hope for salvation. In addition, the story covers the torture of the horses through man's own doing, using barbed wires to ensnare and torment the animals and lose their functionality; heroism, befriending the enemy, and unkept promises also play a big part. However, amongst all the evil and war, fundamentally love, trust, bond and innocence are even stronger virtues that one hopes the world would strive for.

Although there are plenty of fine performances taking place (and exhausting ones, I might add), there are three that stand out. Mr. Numrich, as the young boy, possesses the innocence that is required in the beginning, and he eventually turns into a man in search of his horse. The role of his mother, Rose, is played admirably by Alyssa Bresnahan. The German officer Hauptmann Friedrich Muller (Peter Hermann), shows the compassion and love he develops for the two horses and their safety, and the promise he makes to them of no harm befalling them even at the sake of deserting his post. However, Joey and Tophorn and their operators give the truly stellar performances of the show; they are simply astonishing.

Special mention has to be made of Rae Smith's sets, costumes, and drawings. The drawings capture all the horrors that go on in the battles. The fluidity in Marianne Elliott and Tom Morris' direction is visible, thus creating a nonstop moving tableau. A first-class production is being presented by Lincoln Center, and it is, without question, the must-see event of the spring 2011 Broadway season.

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Editor's Note: www.StageZine.com, celebrating our 1-Year Anniversary on the Internet. We want to express our gratitude to all the theater PR professionals, industry organizations, and, most of all, our readers, followers and fans for their continued support and kind words throughout the past year, helping make www.StageZine.com a success.

Broadway Listings

NouNou On Broadway

Broadway Capsule Reviews by David NouNou

ORIGINAL DRAMAS



'HORSE' WITH A HEART: Seth Numrich in *War Horse*. Photo: Paul Kolnik



WAR HORSE

Spectacular is the word to describe Lincoln Center's production of *War Horse*. It traces the journey of a boy and the horse his father bought from the age of a foal and sold as a stallion to the British cavalry to serve in World War I, and is a story of epic proportions. Essentially it is about the love, trust, and the bond that is formed between them. Their gut-wrenching separation and loss and eventually the odyssey of searching for each other is not a mere boy-meets-boy and boy-loses-horse tale; it is the story of hope, survival, and salvation that is at the core of this saga.

Beautifully mounted with sets, costumes and drawings that depict the horrors of war, all designed by Rae Smith, and the seamless direction by Marianne Elliott and Tom Morris, keep the action moving at a nonstop pace. Seth Numrich as the boy gives a very good performance, but the best and most poignant performances of the evening come from Joey and the numerous men who operate him. *War Horse* is the must-see event of the spring 2011 Broadway season.

VIVIAN BEAUMONT THEATER, 150 West 65th Street, (212-239-6200).

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