

War Horse Lighting Question

Drama

Overview/First paragraph

War Horse first performed on 17th October 2007, on the Olivier Stage at the National Theatre, and I saw a live recording of this production. It is a creative adaptation from the children's novel of the same name by Michael Morpurgo, and the script was written by Nick Stafford. It was directed by Marianne Elliot and Tom Morris. *War Horse* follows the story of Albert Narracott and his horse Joey, from their childhood in Devon to their separation during WW1 and their eventual reunion. Although the play is not epic theatre, it is an epic story, spanning six years, from 1912 to 1918, and it uses some epic theatre techniques, such as breaking the action with song and having an episodic structure.

Lighting

Paule Constable designed *War Horse's* lighting, and she had to work carefully around the set design to ensure that the lighting could create the location and enhance the mood and atmosphere. The set's major feature is a large cyclorama, which is upstage, and covers the entire stage width and half its height (the top half). With normal lighting rigs, it would cast a shadow onto the stage, so Constable positioned the lights really high and really low, avoiding any shadow. This means that upstage is constantly in darkness, which was used as a feature of the design, allowing the large cast, of approximately 25 actors, to enter and exit with minimal fuss. Constable also had to take the constant projections onto the cyclorama into account, as they add another light source that contends with the lighting design. The Olivier Stage itself also posed a significant challenge as it is massive and creating an intimate stage space on it is difficult, so Constable angled some of the lights shallowly, which makes the actors look more 3D and closer to the audience. Many of these lighting rigs are visible from the auditorium – another epic theatre technique.

Ploughing Scene (Details on Teams)



The Tank Scene (see over for bullet points)



The End (Details on Teams)

Relate
to key
scenes

★ QUESTION ★

Describe how lighting was used to create mood and/or atmosphere in the production. Analyse and evaluate how successful the lighting was in helping to create mood and/or atmosphere for the audience. You could make reference to: • colour and intensity • angle and focus • any special effects • a scene or section and/or the production as a whole

Scene 27 – Tank Scene

- Cyclorama changes – has been plain grey-brown, but now black lines, shard-like, shoot down it, some thick, some thin, with flecks around them, representing shells
- Inspired by Vorticism, a movement founded in 1914 intent on portraying the dynamism of the modern world through abstract art. Fits into the time period and highlights the designer’s cultural research
- Tank begins to enter USC
- Can’t really see it, as practically all of the stage is lit with low intensity now
- Can only see the pin-spot headlights of the tank, blinding audience
- Strange and disorientating
- Two spotlights come up – blue-white light, illuminate tank
- Tank puppet
- Skeleton of tank, made of struts of light wood.
- Matte grey colour
- First see the huge caterpillar tracks, looming out of the smoke.
- It’s much bigger than Joey is – shows how war is changing. It’s a vast killing machine that Joey can’t compete with. Shocking.
- Scale model of the British Mark V tank (a popular, easily recognisable WW1 tank design.) British at front of military tech, and the Allies built 1000s of tanks during WW1, compared to the 18 that the Germans built
- Then see the rest – very stark and malevolent. It rears up like the horses do, but stays still – the machinery is not alive. Suspended discordant movement
- Joey rears up too, but the tank stays reared longer – it will always outmatch him.
- Joey runs – terrified of it. Colours really stand out – contrast between chestnut horse and grey tank. Joey exits SL
- Tank moves very jerkily, not fluidly like the horses. The backlights shine through the struts of the tank – long shadows, almost strobe effect, eerie and ominous
- Tank exits USL, lights dim

More examples on Teams!