

## War Horse Sound Question

## Drama

### Overview/First paragraph

*War Horse* first performed on 17<sup>th</sup> 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.

Christopher Shutt designed the sound for *War Horse*, and Adrian Sutton composed the orchestral music. A sound designer's job is to enhance the mood and atmosphere of the production, while assisting the lighting and set designers to communicate location and time to the audience. *War Horse* is a piece of total theatre, meaning that all theatrical elements collaborate within it, so sound design helps tell the story as much as any other design element. Shutt uses diegetic sounds to help create location and non-diegetic sounds to create or change mood and atmosphere, with a mix of live and recorded sounds. Recorded sounds pan around the auditorium through speakers, while live sounds are created onstage by actors using small microphones. *War Horse* also has specially composed folk music, created by John Tamms, which is performed live onstage by two musicians with a fiddle and an accordion, in another epic theatre trait. This often underscores the action, highlighting the mood and atmosphere.

### Ploughing Scene (See over for detail)



### The Tank Scene (Details on Teams)



### The End (Details on Teams)

Relate  
to key  
scenes

★ QUESTION ★

Describe how sound was used to create mood and/or atmosphere in the production. Analyse and evaluate how successful the sound was in helping to create mood and/or atmosphere for the audience.

## Scene 6 (Ploughing scene)

- Set in 'field at dawn', according to stage directions, uses recorded diegetic birdsong. Enhances idyllic atmosphere
- Lots of diegetic horse noises – live, made by puppeteer who controls Joey's head. Makes Joey seem alive, helps timing (if it was recorded it wouldn't seem so spontaneous).
- As Albert teaches Joey to plough, musicians sing folksong 'Brisk Young Ploughboy'
- Fairly loud, cheerful melody, darker lyrics ('they sent him to the pressgang') – foreshadows war and breaking of perfect life in Devon. Shows passage of time.
- Folksongs used for Devon, as they enrich the traditional atmosphere.
- Stops abruptly as Joey falls to his knees – surprises audience, and they feel worried for Joey
- Amplified diegetic noise of horse hooves as Joey begins to plough – live, his feet are miked. Increases tension, really hear the struggle
- As he gets into ploughing, another folksong begins – 'Rolling Home'.
- Loud and rousing, strong beat – creates excited atmosphere.
- Begins just musicians, then chorus joins in, and there is recorded music as well to amplify sound. This crescendo increases the victorious mood.
- Stops when Joey finishes – actors cheer etc.
- In midst of celebrations, sudden diegetic peal of church bells – actors fall silent.
- Signifies the beginning of war.
- Sounds distant and ominous. Sudden change of mood to sombre and worried.
- Audience feels emotional, many get goosebumps because it's poignant and honest. Very effective.