



Blackeyed Theatre presents

Blackeyed Theatre

Blackeyed Theatre, in association with South Hill Park Arts Centre and The Courtyard Centre for the Arts presents

**Joan Littlewood's
Musical Entertainment**

OH WHAT A LOVELY WAR

by Theatre Workshop, Charles Cilton, Gerry Raffles and Members of the Original Cast

**“Magnificent...Extraordinary...
As haunting as it is harrowing...
Astonishing power...Catch it if you can”**
The Stage

AUTUMN 2011 UK TOUR

Media Pack

www.blackeyedtheatre.co.uk



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Creatives and Cast

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Joan Littlewood's Musical Entertainment

Oh What A Lovely War

By Theatre Workshop, Charles Cilton, Gerry Raffles and members of the original cast

Artistic Team

Director and Producer	Adrian McDougall
Musical Director	Ellie Verkerk
Choreographer	Gillian Albone
Orchestration	Tom Neill
Designer	Victoria Spearing
Costume Design	Fiona Davis and Pamela Wiggin
Lighting Designer	Oliver Welsh
Education Advisor	Jo Wright
Producer	Blackeyed Theatre, in association with South Hill Park Arts Centre, Bracknell, The Courtyard centre for the Arts, Hereford, and Greenwich Theatre

Cast

Robert Harding
Ben Harrison
Joseph Mann
Paul Morse
Tom Neill



Tour Dates

Autumn 2011

6 - 10 September: Greenwich Theatre - 7.30pm (+2.30pm Thu & Sat)	020 8858 7755
13 September: Corn Exchange, Newbury - 2.30pm & 7.45pm	01635 522733
14 - 15 September: Civic Theatre, Chelmsford - 7.45pm	01245 606505
16 - 17 September: Courtyard Theatre, Hereford - 7.30pm	01423 340555
19 - 20 September: Gordon Craig Theatre, Stevenage - 7.30pm	01438 363200
21 - 24 September: Wilde Theatre, Bracknell - 7.45pm (+2pm Thu & Sat)	01344 484123
26 September: Farnham Maltings - 8pm	01252 745444
27 - 28 September: Brewhouse, Taunton - 7.45pm	01823 283244
30 September: Berry Theatre, Hedge End - 2pm & 7.30pm	01489 799499
3 October: Bedford School Theatre - 7.30pm	01234 269519
5 October: Venue Cymru, Llandudno - 7.30pm	01492 872000
6 - 8 October: Spa Centre, Leamington Spa - 7.30pm (+2.30pm Sat)	01926 334418
11 - 15 October: Connaught Theatre, Worthing - 7.30pm (+2pm Wed & 2.30pm Sat)	01903 206206
17 - 19 October: Devonshire Park, Eastbourne - 7.45pm (+2.30pm Wed)	01323 412000
21 October: Adam Smith Theatre, Kirkcaldy - 7.30pm	01592 583302
22 October: macrobert, Stirling - 7.30pm	01786 466666
23 October: Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh - 2.30pm	0131 665 2240
24 October: Burnley Mechanics - 7.30pm	01282 664400
28 - 29 October: Kenton Theatre, Henley-on-Thames - 8pm	01491 575698
1 - 2 November: Stantonbury Theatre, Milton Keynes - 7.30pm	01908 324422
4 - 5 November: The Leatherhead Theatre - 7.30pm	01372 365141
8 - 12 November: Uppingham Theatre, Uppingham - 7.30pm (+3pm Wed)	01572 820820
15 - 19 November: Arena Theatre, Wolverhampton - 7.30pm (8pm Fri) (+2.30pm Wed & Thu)	01902 321321
21 - 23 November: Mumford Theatre, Cambridge - 7.30pm	0845 196 2320
24 November: Theatre Royal, Margate - 7.30pm	01227 787787
25 November: New Theatre Royal, Portsmouth - 7.30pm	023 9264 9000
26 November: The Hawth, Crawley - 7.45pm	01293 553636



Press Release

Blackeyed Theatre, in association with South Hill Park, The Courtyard Centre for the Arts and Greenwich Theatre, presents

Joan Littlewood's

Oh What A Lovely War

By Theatre Workshop, Charles Cilton, Gerry Raffles and members of the original cast

Director **Adrian McDougall** Musical Director **Ellie Verkerk** Choreographer **Gillian Albone**
Cast **Lee Drage, Robert Harding, Ben Harrison, Paul Morse, Tom Neill**

Monday 6 June 2011 – In Autumn 2011, Berkshire-based Blackeyed Theatre Company revives its successful 2008 production of Joan Littlewood's musical entertainment, ***Oh What A Lovely War***. The all-male version of this classic show tours to theatres across England, Wales and Scotland from 6 September until 26 November.

Oh What A Lovely War remains a classic of the modern theatre and a powerful reminder of the atrocities of a war that cost twenty million lives. Told through the songs and documents of the period, it is a satirical attack on the military incompetence and inconceivable disregard for human life the First World War has come to represent and a chilling reminder of man's inhumanity to man.

Satirical, funny and deeply moving, ***Oh What a Lovely War*** has a style all of its own, combining live music, dance, songs and sketches to create a picture of life for those on the front line and those behind it. Created and first performed by Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop in 1963, it received the acclaim of London audiences and critics, and won the Grand Prix of the Theatre des Nations festival in Paris the same year. In 1969, a film version was made which extended the play's popular success.

Blackeyed Theatre's production features a highly talented all-male cast, fabulous design, live music and multi-media effects. **SUGGESTION: Add quote from an actor about your venue (see pages 11 - 13).**

Tickets for ***Oh What A Lovely War*** are priced at **£XX (£xx Concs)** and can be purchased at the Box Office on **ADD NUMBER** or online at **ADD WEBSITE**.

For more information on ***Oh What A Lovely War*** visit www.blackeyedtheatre.co.uk. Blackeyed Theatre, based in Berkshire, is a nationally-renowned producer of high-quality theatre. ***"Blackeyed Theatre, one of the most audacious, innovative companies working in contemporary British theatre"*** The Stage

Ends

For further info, to arrange interviews or arrange Press Tickets please contact
ADD DETAILS



Oh What A Lovely War

Its Beginnings

The title 'Oh What A Lovely War' is derived from the music hall song 'Oh! It's a Lovely War', which is one of the major numbers in the production. Charles Chilton, producer of the film, created a radio musical of World War I songs called *The Long Long Trail* (1962), named for the popular music hall song, 'There's a long, long trail a winding'. The piece was a radio documentary that used facts and statistics, juxtaposed with songs of the time, as an ironic critique of the reality of the war.

The Stage Musical

'Oh What A Lovely War' evolved as a devised stage production through the work of Joan Littlewood and the members of the original cast at the Theatre Royal Stratford East in 1963 as a production by her Theatre Workshop. The play was based on 'The Donkeys' by historian Alan Clark, with some scenes adapted from 'The Good Soldier' Švejk by Czech humorist Jaroslav Hašek. The play was an ensemble production with no stars as such, but featured members of the company, such as Brian Murphy, Victor Spinetti and Glynn Edwards playing multiple roles. The play opened at the Theatre Royal on 19 March 1963, and the production transferred intact to Wyndham's Theatre in June, the same year. This satire on World War I (and by extension against war in general) was a surprise hit, and the stage musical was adapted by the BBC for radio more than once. The stage show is traditionally performed in Pierrot costumes, and features such World War I-era songs as *Pack up Your Troubles* and *Keep the Home Fires Burning*. Harsh images of war and shocking statistics are projected onto the backdrop, providing a stark contrast with the comedy of the action taking place before it.

The Film

In 1969 Richard Attenborough transformed it into a film. His star-studded cast included Dirk Bogarde, John Gielgud, John Mills, Kenneth More, Laurence Olivier, Jack Hawkins, Corin Redgrave, Michael Redgrave, Vanessa Redgrave, Ralph Richardson, Maggie Smith, Ian Holm, Malcolm McFee, Jean-Pierre Cassel, Nanette Newman, Edward Fox, Susannah York, John Clements, Phyllis Calvert and Maurice Roëves. The 1969 film transferred the *mise-en-scène* completely into the cinematic domain, with elaborate sequences shot at West Pier, Brighton, elsewhere in Brighton and on the South Downs, interspersed with motifs from the stage production. These included the 'cricket' scoreboards showing the number of dead, but Attenborough did not use the pierrot costumes. However, as many critics noted, including Pauline Kael, the treatment diminished the effect of the numbers of deaths, which appear only fleetingly. Nonetheless Attenborough's final sequence, ending in a crane shot of hundreds of war graves, each individually hammered into the South Downs chalk for the shot, is regarded as one of the most memorable of the film.



Joan Littlewood

Born in 1914, and briefly a member of the Communist party, Joan Littlewood became involved in Theatre of Action in 1934, a collection of groups whose aim were to challenge political views. She was known as the "Vulgar woman of the People" and known to swear, shout and laugh all in one rehearsal.

Littlewood enjoyed using song, narration, projection, factual content, audience interaction, clowning and improvisation, and this is almost all found in *Oh What a Lovely War*, first staged in Stratford East Theatre in 1963. Many aspects of performance that we often see in contemporary theatre today are founded in her style. It was her aim to bring theatre to the people, and so the company, Theatre Workshop, toured as much as they could, performing in a variety of venues. She also proved serious issues concerning society could be dealt with in popular forms: one of Theatre Workshop's earliest hits was Ewan MacColl's *Uranium 235*, which explained the process of nuclear fission. She destroyed the "fourth wall" that disconnects actors from the audience, and so made theatre a new experience for everyone each time, especially by asking the actors to improvise during a performance; it was not vital to stick with the script.

Inspired by Mayerhold and Piscator, her work was to radical during the time of the war time panic, that she was banned by the BBC in 1941, which also happened to Michael Redgrave, one of the most popular actors at that time, and kept under surveillance by MI5. However this only provided her with recognition and a reputation that ensured people would watch out for her next work in the future. This unswerving determination and radical behaviour is present in surviving members of her Stratford East company including Barbara Windsor, and once told Michael Caine to "P*** off to the West End!"

Radical and outspoken, she was feared by the authorities and snubbed by the Arts Council. Yet it was also the BBC that later decided Joan Littlewood wasn't so bad after all and proceeded to bring to radio for the first time her most celebrated creation, *Oh What a Lovely War*.

Oh What A Lovely War came about after a conventional play about World War One was dramatically altered in 1963, when Littlewood decided that "war is for clowns". With her incomprehensible sergeant-major's drill and Frenchmen walking into battle "baa-ing like lambs to the slaughter", Littlewood combined slapstick humour with serious satire to set a new style in improvised theatre.

Joan Littlewood remains a leading light in British theatre, not just for her pioneering vision and enduring style but because she flew in the face of everything that was – and still is – elitist and nepotistic about the theatre industry. This very individual self-creation had dragged herself from the poverty of South London to RADA on a scholarship, only to leave early, walk to Manchester and enter repertory theatre there. Neither of her parents could read or write and she was a self-professed "vulgar woman of the people".

In 1998, the only caveat Littlewood imposed on a young company's revival of *Oh What a Lovely War*, was that it wasn't staged at the National, that "elitist and middle class anathema".



Theatre Workshop

It was with Theatre Workshop that many actors of the 1950s and 1960s received their training and first exposure. The theatre group began as a touring company founded in the North of England in 1945. Joan Littlewood pioneered an ensemble approach, with her husband Ewan MacColl, seeking to involve cast and audience in drama as a living event. Previously, Littlewood had worked with MacColl in developing radio plays for the BBC that had taken script and cast from local workers. They had met and married in 1934, while working with the Theatre of Action. Both MI5 and the Special Branch maintained a watch on the couple, as Communists; this had precluded Littlewood working for the BBC as a children's programme presenter, and had also caused some of MacColl's work to be banned from broadcast. In the late 1930s they formed another troupe – the Theatre Union. This dissolved in 1940. With the ending of World War II in 1945 many of the members of Theatre Union met up and formed Theatre Workshop.



Cast Biographies

Robert Harding

Robert graduated from the Academy of Live and Recorded Arts (ALRA) in 2008 where his most notable credits include Vershinin in 'Three Sisters' and Richard of Gloucester in 'Richard III'. Since graduating Robert has been busy building his CV with a variety of credits. Work has included a five-month tour of Italy as Benjamin in 'Animal Farm' and Alexi in the acclaimed Chernobyl-based play 'The Common Good' which premiered at the Roundhouse, Camden before transferring to the Arcola Theatre in November 2009. Since turning professional, Robert has also appeared in the short films 'Alone Together' for Scarecrow Productions and in 'Goltho' where he played the demented Reverend Luke.

In 2010, he took the lead role in a commercial campaign for Suzuki Holland and appeared as Lanyon/Utterson in 'The Scandalous Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde' at the Union Theatre, Southwark. Most recently, he has toured the south east of England as Torvald in 'A Doll's House'.

A keen musician, Robert plays trumpet, basic rhythm guitar and sings with the all-male group 'Eschoir'.



Ben Harrison

This will be Ben's forth tour with Blackeyed Theatre, having previously toured of Oh! What A Lovely War, The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, and most recently Alfie.

Ben grew up in Cardiff, regularly attending the Sherman Youth Theatre, and performing regularly in school and summer school productions. This was highlighted when he played Benvolio in Sharman MacDonald's After Juliet at the National Theatre, when his school won the National Connections competition.

Graduating in Drama in 2004 from Exeter University, Ben made his acting debut in The Selfish Giant (Sherman Theatre Company); Since that time he has worked on many shows with various companies including: Pandora's Box (Mac Productions); The Tiler of Gloucester (Fairgame); Shadow Play (Travelling Light Theatre Co.); Aladdin, The Wok n Woll Panto (Stafford Gatehouse), The Mowgli Stories and James and The Giant Peach (Illyria Outdoor Theatre Company) and We're Going on a Bear Hunt! (Kenny Wax Productions)

Primarily, Ben is an actor and musician, playing guitar, drums, piano, accordion and percussion and he is currently fronting the band Keeping Jess Company. He has recorded with various bands and projects including playing with The Lasting Days and singing on the We're Going on a Bear Hunt soundtrack CD. Ben has also made his debut as a writer. His play for children Finding Alice (performed by a single leaf theatre co.) received great reviews at Edinburgh Festival in 2008, and has just completed it's second tour. Ben also composed the music for the production.



Joseph Mann

Joseph grew up in Chester, performing with many local music and theatre groups, before training as an actor musician at Rose Bruford College, graduating in 2010.

Theatre credits include: Giovanni in The White Devil (The Rose Theatre), Jack Hunter in The Rose Tattoo (The Rose Theatre), Morales in Carmen (Leicester Square Theatre), Ron Strong's Magical Gymnasium (Bexley TIE Tour), Herod in Jesus Christ Superstar (Theater Clwyd). He has also performed and musically directed with Pants On Fire Theatre in their multi-award-winning production of Ovid's Metamorphoses, winning both the Carol Tambour Best of Edinburgh Award and the WhatsOnStage Editor's Choice Award.

He is delighted to be joining Blackeyed's production and would like to dedicate his performance to his family for their endless support.





Paul Morse

Paul trained as an actor at Drama Studio London after gaining a degree in Drama and Theatre Studies from the University of Surrey.

Theatre credits include the preview of the new musical Alvaro's Balcony featuring Susannah York (Her Majesty's Theatre, London), A Midsummer Night's Dream playing Demetrius & Snout (UK Tour), the UK National Tour of Oh! What A Lovely War (Inc Theatre Royal Portsmouth, Buxton Opera House & Grand Theatre Lancaster), Macbeth playing Malcolm (Swan Theatre Worcester, Theatre Colwyn, Germany & Switzerland Tour), We Did Them Our Way (10th Anniversary gala performance of the Courtyard Theatre Hereford), Twelfth Night playing Sir Andrew Aguecheek (Hazlitt Theatre, Kent open-air), the Feydeau Farce Better Late playing the role of Lucien (Grange Court Theatre, London), Kenneth Halliwell in the musical The Boys In The Front Room based on the lives of Joe Orton and his partner and killer Kenneth (Gatehouse Theatre, London), The Clock Strikes Ten playing Bernard Jeffreys (Grange Court Theatre, London), King Neptune in The Little Mermaid (Playhouse Theatre Weston-super-mare & Palace Theatre Southend), The School for Scandal playing Sir Benjamin Backbite & Charles Surface (Cambridge open-air), Still Life and Shadow Play from Noel Coward's Tonight at 8.30 (Leatherhead Theatre).

Radio play credits include Harry and Ted in Vegas and Film credits include the lead role in The Temp and Narcissus.

Not wanting to miss out on the fun of Pantomime Paul has been playing Dame and Ugly Sister for the last 8 years. He was resident Dame at the Victoria Theatre Halifax for 2 years playing Dame Dolly Mixture in Snow White & Widow Twankey in Aladdin. Paul has also played Ugly Sister in Cinderella at the Pavilion Theatre Worthing, Thameside Theatre Grays, Pomegranate Theatre, Chesterfield and Leatherhead Theatre. Last year Paul played Widow Twankey in Aladdin at the Pomegranate Theatre, Chesterfield and this Christmas Paul will be back in Chesterfield playing Nurse Glucose in Robin Hood and The Babes in the Wood. For more information visit www.paulmorseactor.com



Tom Neill

Tom grew up in Wokingham, Berkshire and spent his early years performing with community drama and music groups. He studied Music with Theatre Studies at Huddersfield University.

He is delighted to have the opportunity to work on this important post-war drama, re-joining the cast following Blackeyed's production in 2008. His other acting credits include Trofimov in The Cherry Orchard, Givola in The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, Raymond in Blue Remembered Hills (all Blackeyed Theatre), Don't Look Back (dreamthinkspeak), 1000 Revolutions Per Moment (Periplum), Kaspar in Kaspar (Atom Theatre), Mason in Journey's End (J.D. Productions), White Rabbit in Finding Alice (A Single Leaf), Stephano in The Tempest, Montmorency in Three Men In A Boat, Mole in The Adventures of Mr. Toad (all South Hill Park), Theatre In Education tours with Bitesize Theatre Company and pantomimes for various companies.

His media work includes Lenny Denton in The Bill (ITV1), Nelson's Trafalgar (BBC), various characters in Zooglebust (Channel 4), voiceovers for the Whatadoddle Puppet Company and XBOX game Windhaven: Spirit of Flight (Bitphase Entertainment).

Tom also works as a theatre director, composer and script writer. For more details please visit www.tomneill.co.uk





Creative Biographies

Adrian McDougall – Director and Producer

Adrian is the founder of Blackeyed Theatre and a professional actor, director and producer.

As an actor he has worked with Oddsocks Productions, Premier Stage Productions, The Broadway Barking, South Hill Park Arts Centre, Freeflow Productions, The Phoenix Theatre Company, as well as Blackeyed Theatre.

As a director, credits include Masquerade (World Premiere - ICAB), Closer (Mirror Mirror Theatre), House & Garden and Brassed Off (South Hill Park), The Long Lost Legend of Robin Hood, Alfie and the 2008 production of Oh What A Lovely War (Blackeyed Theatre).

As a producer, touring productions include Effie's Burning, The Caretaker, Misery, Art, The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, Oedipus, Oh What A Lovely War and The Cherry Orchard, Peter Pan, Alfie, Beauty and the Beast, The Caucasian Chalk Circle (Blackeyed Theatre), The Madness of George III (Blackeyed Theatre with Original Theatre Company and Icarus Theatre Collective), Dead Funny, Shirley Valentine, Popcorn and Closer (Mirror Mirror Theatre Company).

Adrian graduated from Southampton University in Modern Languages in 1997 before working in PR and marketing (including a post at The Anvil in Basingstoke) for a number of years, then becoming a professional actor in 2000. As well as running Blackeyed Theatre, he is a founding director of CentreStage Partnership, a leading learning and development consultancy.

Ellie Verkerk – Musical Director

Ellie graduated from the Royal College of Music as a pianist and brass player in 2001. Specialising in accompanist, she played for many of her RCM colleagues for their final recitals, competitions and master classes. She also specialised in orchestration and arrangement, and has led musical workshops with members of the London Philharmonic Orchestra. She was a member of the National Musicians Symphony Orchestra, and accepted her first job as Musical Director when she was 17. She was invited to become the MD for Surrey County Youth Theatre in 2003, where she stayed until 2007. In 2009 she started working at the Guildford School of Acting, and became the MD for Interval Productions (www.intervalproductions.com) and for Procyon Productions (www.procyonproductions.com). In the past, she has played as the solo pianist for a production of The Last Five Years (March 2009) and Company (2009). Other favourite productions include Moby Dick The Musical, and The Life (GSA), Archy and Mehitabel (SCYT), Once Upon A Mattress (SCYT), performances in the theatre tent at Guilfest (2009), a William Finn review (2009), and Honk! (2009). In 2010, Ellie musically directed Blackeyed Theatre's production of Beauty and the Beast.

Ellie has completed her British Sign Language Level 1 course, and is currently having vocal lessons and studying jazz trumpet with Pip Eastop, who was formerly her horn teacher at RCM. Her website can be found at www.ellieverkerk.com.

Victoria Spearing – Set Designer

Victoria became a freelance theatre designer after graduating from Bretton Hall in 2001. She has worked with Blackeyed Theatre on The Caucasian Chalk Circle, The Madness of George III, Oedipus, Oh What A Lovely War, Alfie, The Cherry Orchard, The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, The Caretaker, Blue Remembered Hills, Misery, The Long Lost Legend of Robin Hood and Art. Other set designs include Summer Holiday, The Wizard of Oz, Around the World in 80 Days, Norfolk's Rose, Whistle Down the Wind and The BFG. In addition she has designed the sets for the last nine pantomimes at South Hill Park and recently for the Broadway Theatre in Barking. She also runs art and theatre workshops for children and adults, and has made props for most of the major London museums.



Fiona Davis – Costume Designer

Fiona graduated from De Montfort University with a BA Honours degree in Design Crafts. Initially her experience began with working as a production tutor for Pegasus Theatre in Oxford. Whilst there she designed costumes and sets for a number of independent projects. Incredibly passionate about theatrical costume, Fiona then embarked on a professional career as a freelance costume designer from 2004.

She has costumed Cinderella, Henry V, Aladdin, Oliver!, Beauty and the Beast, Talking Heads, The Tempest, Peter Pan and The Importance of Being Oscar (all for South Hill Park), The Resistible Rise Of Arturo Ui, Oedipus, the Caucasian Chalk Circle and Oh What A Lovely War (all for Blackeyed Theatre), Buccaneer for Ocean Theatre, R&J for Original theatre, Vincent In Brixton, Othello and Journey's End for Original and Icarus theatre, and M*ss*ing for Talawa Theatre Company. She has had exhibitions of her work in Banbury, Oxfordshire and two exhibitions as part of the New Designers Show in Islington, London. Fiona continues to relish the challenge working with directors, set designers and performers to capture their vision and is delighted to be working with Blackeyed theatre again.

Oliver Welsh – Lighting Designer

Oliver formerly worked at the hire company Whitelight, then the New Victoria Theatre in Woking, subsequently moving on to the position of Deputy Chief Electrician at Southampton's Mayflower Theatre in 2005. He is now a freelance lighting designer / technician based in Berkshire.

Recent work includes Deputy Electrician for Matthew Bourne's Edward Scissorhands (international tour), Chief Electrician for They Never Gave (Bill Kenwright - UK tour), Lighting Programmer for the 2009 production of Hello Dolly! at Regents Park Open Air Theatre, production and event electrics for Golf Live 2010, Capital FM's Help a London Child 2009 Christmas Auction, Taste London Festival 2010, City of London Festival 2010, the Bloodstock/ Slammin' Vinyl Festivals in Derbyshire and various corporate conference events.

Recent lighting design work includes Beauty and the Beast, The Caucasian Chalk Circle (Blackeyed Theatre) African Sanctus 2010 at Canterbury Cathedral (This World Productions), Othello and Hamlet (Icarus Theatre Collective - UK tours), Carousel (Crowthorne Musical Players), the 2010 Oxford Castle Summer music season, the main stage for Big Day Out 2007 - 2009 (South Hill Park / Sandhurst Carnival). Oliver also regularly designs for Thames Valley based Park Opera, Opera at Bearwood and other local community groups.

Jo Wright – Education Advisor

Jo has been interested in the theatre since the age of seven when she was cast as The Bird Woman in a school production of Mary Poppins – and has been up to her neck in it ever since, working in design, production and even occasionally on stage. Completing her formal training at the University of Leeds in 2005, Jo has a BA Honours Degree in English Literature and Theatre Studies. She has since worked for York Theatre Royal, The Shakespeare Schools Festival and The Dukes Theatre and Cinema, Lancaster as an Education Practitioner, as well as freelancing as a dramaturg and producer. Until recently Jo headed up the Creative Learning programme at South Hill Park Arts Centre in Berkshire, running a diverse range of projects and training schemes, as well as working with visiting artists and practitioners. She now works for Guildford's new entertainment venue, G Live. This is her fourth collaboration with Blackeyed Theatre.



Blackeyed Theatre

Blackeyed Theatre Company was established in 2004 to create exciting opportunities for artists and audiences alike, and to offer challenging, high quality theatre to the mid-scale touring circuit. The company specialises in reviving modern classics and staging established titles in innovative ways, using small ensembles of actor/musicians to create theatre that is audacious, fresh and far bigger than the sum of its parts. Since 2004 Blackeyed Theatre has embarked on national tours of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (Bertolt Brecht), *Alfie* (Bill Naughton), *The Cherry Orchard* (Anton Chekhov), *Oh What a Lovely War* (Joan Littlewood), the world premiere of *Oedipus* (Steven Berkoff) and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (Bertolt Brecht).

In 2009, Blackeyed Theatre became an associate company of South Hill Park Arts Centre. In 2008, the company produced its first Christmas show, *A Christmas Carol*, a year later *Peter Pan* and in 2010 *Beauty and the Beast*.

Blackeyed Theatre is totally self-sufficient and receives no funding, creating innovative, challenging theatre that's also commercially viable. It achieves this by producing work that audiences want to see but in ways that challenge their expectations, by bringing together artists with a genuine passion for the work they produce, and through an appreciation that works of art with a mass appeal do not have to be presented in a dumbed-down way. By offering a theatrical experience that's both artistically excellent and affordable, audiences and theatres are far more sustainable in the long term. And responding to demand ensures that more people see innovative theatre.

Blackeyed Theatre has a growing national reputation for creating dynamic theatre using live music and great performances to tell stories with honesty and passion.

Company press quotes:

"One of the most innovative, audacious companies working in contemporary English theatre"

The Stage

"One of the best performances ever seen in this theatre"

Hexham Courant (*Alfie*)

"Any assumption that Oh! What a Lovely War is a period piece is shot to shrapnel. Forty years on, we need Littlewood's vision more than ever. Blackeyed Theatre restore it to us with astonishing power. Catch it if you can."

The Stage (*Oh What A Lovely War*)

"Quite why Steven Berkoff's version of Oedipus has not been performed since it was first published in 2000 is maybe that it was just waiting for Blackeyed Theatre to do it full justice. It has been worth the wait"

The Stage (*Oedipus*)



Local Press Angles

Robert Harding

Do you have any links with the venues you are visiting on the tour (performed there, lived in the area/went to school etc)?

I've performed at The Mumford, Cambridge before (A Doll's House), I have relatives in Milton Keynes and my girlfriend's parents live in Eastbourne

How do you approach the role?

This show is a little different as there's a lot of different roles to play, but usually I ask myself some basic questions and then find the answers in the script, such as 'What do I say about other characters', 'What do other characters say about me' etc. I find this a good starting point in getting to know the character before going on to do some more detailed work.

Have you ever acted in a touring show before? If so what's your most memorable?

This will be my third touring production, the first being a five month tour of Italy performing 'Animal Farm'. That tour was my first professional acting job and certainly the most memorable as we performed to over 150,000 people while getting to explore a new country at the same time.

What would be your ideal role?

I would love to play Iago in 'Othello'. Either that or Doctor Who...I don't mind which!

What made you want to be an actor and what drives you to continue to do it?

Like most people I started performing in school plays/amateur productions and immediately enjoyed performing. I had a really good drama teacher who gave me the advice that has guided me to where I am today, and while he gave me the encouragement that I was good enough to be an actor, he also warned me of the struggles and trials of being an actor professionally. Despite all of that, I count myself lucky that I have a chance to earn a living doing what I love, and that's what drives me on.

What's the best and worst thing about touring with a show?

The best thing is getting to visit lots of different places that you haven't been to before, and performing at different venues. The worst thing is being deprived of home comforts for a while...but it's worth it.

How do you find the style of Joan Littlewood compared with other plays you've been in?

There's a lot more freedom in performance compared to other plays where you have to stick to the script religiously. Littlewood's style encourages you to find the creativity to bring a scene to life, and that could be done in several ways.

What's the most interesting aspect of performing in Oh What a Lovely War.

Before becoming an actor I did a history degree and it's really fulfilling to bring a pivotal period in time to life on the stage, in a way that you may not have expected it to be portrayed. It's certainly different from learning it from a textbook, but I think the play really hits home with how mad and absurd that war was.

What is your next project you are involved in?

As I write this in June 2011, I honestly don't know what I'll be doing next, but I'm sure I'll find out as we go out on the road.

Ben Harrison

Do you have any links with the venues you are visiting on the tour (performed there, lived in the area/went to school etc)?

Performed at Worthing, Bracknell, Hereford, Wolverhampton, Milton Keynes, Henley, Cambridge, Portsmouth with previous Blackeyed tours.

How do you approach the role?

Understanding the role through the text, and the interpretations of it is my first step, followed by a little research to help me understand the character's background. Then it is about exploring the character in relation to other characters in rehearsal, and finding out what drives a character. In a show like Oh!



What A Lovely War, with so much changing of roles, each character needs to be distinct, and so it is useful to have quick reference points to remember when changing between characters. The costume makes a big difference to how you feel in the role, and can change the way you walk, hold yourself, and can make you feel differently about a character. Sometimes an accent is the key, or maybe a facial expression or gesture, that is repeated. It is important to play with the role at the very beginning and not close yourself off to other ways of playing it.

Have you ever acted in a touring show before? If so what's your most memorable?

I have toured extensively and I'd say my most memorable was Blackeyed Theatre's production of The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui. I learnt a lot from working with the other actors, and it felt like a dangerous production. The set that we built each day was quite large, and it was hard work, but it was also the first larger scale production I had toured with. Also touring with outdoor theatre was very memorable because of all the fantastic National Trust venues we went to, and The Minack Theatre which has to be my favourite theatre experience, performing with your back to the sea, in blistering sun or very cold rain and in one of the most beautiful settings in the UK.

What would be your ideal role?

Right now I would really like to play Rosencrantz or Guildenstern in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, by Tom Stoppard. One day (when I've aged a few more years!) I'd love to play Willy Loman, in Death of a Salesman, by Arthur Miller.

What made you want to be an actor and what drives you to continue to do it?

My experiences with acting as a child and teenager definitely shaped my future career choice, but I'd say that it is my passion for live performance and the changing shape of theatre that drives me now. There is always something new to do even on a re-run of a show like this one, and each show brings research and new skills. If you can get the work, the acting profession is an incredibly enjoyable one.

What's the best and worst thing about touring with a show?

The best thing about touring is the new places, and the camaraderie between the people you work with, travel with, live with and spend your free time with. It is also the worst thing ;)

Touring life is hard, especially touring one show after another and it is hard to keep your feet on the ground, but there are other people around you in the same situation and that makes things better. You have to eat out a lot, and often finish very late at night, so the late night takeaway is always tempting! How do you find the style of Joan Littlewood compared with other plays you've been in?

I think Joan Littlewood's style in Oh! What A Lovely War, is very attractive to the audience, drawing them in, and then pulling them closer to the reality of war. I have not experienced much of her other works, and in performance it is as much Blackeyed Theatre's style as it is Joan Littlewood. I certainly enjoyed working on her script, and would like to do more.

What's the most interesting aspect of performing in Oh What a Lovely War.

The difference between the generations watching the show, and their reactions to it, is quite phenomenal. In our own way, many of us have differing experiences and relationships to war. Some have fought in wars, others have lost family in them, some look at war and it's history, others see the wars that are still stirring in far off places and closer to home. Whether we are talking of the Somme or the one man killed in the riots in Bristol over a Tesco shop being opened. Conflict is forever rearing its ugly head, and exists in so many forms, and all over the world. Oh What A Lovely War can highlight such conflicts and brings different things to different members of the audience. It is also a great start to researching the history of the first world war conflict.

What is your next project you are involved in?

You tell me! I may be back in We're Going On A Bear Hunt for Christmas in Exeter followed by a stint in Hong Kong and Singapore but I'm not sure yet. Otherwise, I play with my band and gig, and audition for other shows.

Tom Neill

Do you have any links with the venues you are visiting on the tour (performed there, lived in the area/went to school etc)?

South Hill Park, Bracknell - my hometown & artistic base.
Kenton, Henley - wrote their Christmas show for 2 years.
The Caucasian Chalk Circle has been to some of these venues.



Have previously performed at - Greenwich, Hereford, Bracknell, Henley, Milton Keynes, Wolverhampton, Cambridge, Portsmouth.

How do you approach the role?

In a multi-roleplaying production it's important to highlight the differences between the characters. There are many ways in to a part. I usually find a physicality and let that lead my performance.

Have you ever acted in a touring show before? If so what's your most memorable?

I've done a few tours now. One of my first jobs was taking Shakespeare round secondary schools. I remember one time the teachers locked us in the school hall so the pupils wouldn't attack us as we were setting up.

What made you want to be an actor and what drives you to continue to do it?

I enjoy telling good stories, entertaining people, making them think, and generally contributing to the health and well being of individual and national life.

What's the most interesting aspect of performing in Oh What a Lovely War.

Considering the parental nature of history and the response of modernity.

What is your next project you are involved in?

I'm doing some work as an improvising musician for a charity called InnerSense, who run multi-sensory workshops for people with learning difficulties.

Paul Morse

Do you have any links with the venues you are visiting on the tour (performed there, lived in the area/went to school etc)?

Some of the theatres we toured to with the production in 2008, Wolverhampton, Hereford etc... and it is always nice to re-visit a theatre you have performed in before. In 2005 I was in Panto at the Pavilion Theatre, Worthing in Cinderella and I turned on their Christmas lights that year from the Pier.

How do you approach the role?

Many of the productions I have been in have been comedies or comedy roles so my character is generally very thick, confused, highly strung etc but with that you have always got to find the truth in the role and situation as this is where the comedy for the audience comes from not just the slap stick element. Again with straight roles finding the truth and I find understanding the role you are playing, for example I played a real life killer with this I really had to try and understand why he did what he did and find some form of empathy and understanding for him. Once I've got that part of my character sorted I like to see a journey of the character through the play and then add accents, walks or quirks that are needed or have been written in. Costume is a great help to the physicality and the feel of your character.

Have you ever acted in a touring show before? If so what's your most memorable?

Yes this will be my 7th tour.... 4 of which have been UK National or European tours. They are all memorable for different reasons for example Macbeth was memorable as it was my first European tour and my first straight role, I played Malcolm. Twelfth Night was my first ever open air production with no rain....A Midsummer Night's Dream was my 2nd open air production with lots of rain!!

What would be your ideal role?

I would love to play Algernon in The Importance of being Ernest, I would also like to play Bottom in A Midsummer Night's Dream...I think I'll need to put on some weight! The dream role I think for many male actors is to play King Lear....so I'll have to loose the weight from being a fat Bottom and age by quite a few years!

What made you want to be an actor and what drives you to continue to do it?

I've always wanted to be an actor. I get a real thrill from stepping onto a stage and entertaining an audience for an evening, hearing them laugh or moving them to tears, live performance is a powerful thing for actors and audience members. I really enjoy when I hear from children or first time theatre goers that were in the audience and that they enjoyed themselves and want to go back to the theatre...especially if it's Shakespeare, they realise it really isn't that bad!
The drive for me is that I love my job and when we are acting we are in a very lucky position as it is an over crowded profession, so you need to make the most of every production.



What's the best and worst thing about touring with a show?

The best bit is playing some beautiful theatres and performing on the same stage as some of the greats that have been there in the past and getting to visit different places. The worst part is finding time to wash your clothes and sometimes in a tour you don't get enough time to see the city you are performing in, also you can be away from home for a long time so you miss your own bed and your family and friends.

How do you find the style of Joan Littlewood compared with other plays you've been in?

It's very quick, the amount of roles and short sharp scenes are not like any other play I have been in and I've never performed a piece where we are so open to the audience, in this production we quick change not only our characters but also our costumes in front of the audience. Also the roller coaster of emotions we all go through and we see and hear the audience go through in such a short amount of time, literally one second laughing and tapping along to one of the songs to suddenly total shock, silence and sometimes tears at the images and figures that are projected behind us, i've never been in a production that has so much emotion and power in it conveyed to an audience so quickly and sharply.

What's the most interesting aspect of performing in Oh What a Lovely War.

Playing music from memory! I've never had to do this before and it's a whole new ball game compared to learning lines. From performing this show the First World War has now become real to me and not just something you are taught about in history at school. We do a lot of research during rehearsals and I found out that my great grandfather fought at the Somme and played in the Christmas Day football match against the Germans, a scene that we perform in the show...it always makes me tingle when I think that a member of my family actually did what I am pretending to do. It is also interesting to see how this show affects the audience made up of all ages and for all different reasons. On the last tour I met an elderly lady who found it most upsetting as her father fought in the First War and her husband in the Second, so for her this was all very real, for younger people they have never really realised the extent of what happened and the scale of loss of life...the sad thing is, things haven't changed after all the years since 1918.

What is your next project you are involved in?

After this tour at the end of November I have 1 day off and then i'm in Pantomime at the Pomegranate Theatre, Chesterfield until January 3rd in Robin Hood & the Babes in the Wood.



Press Angles

- Oh What A Lovely War is about the futility of war. It is specifically about the First World War, which was meant to be the 'war to end all wars', hence its (ironic) relevance to the world we live in today and the political situation across the Middle East, for example.
- Oh What A Lovely War is usually performed by a cast of fifteen or more plus a live band. Blackeyed Theatre's production employs a cast of just five male actor-musicians, who take all the roles, sing all the songs and play all the music live.
- Blackeyed Theatre's original 2008 production was highly critically acclaimed by audiences and press.
- All cast members, with the exception of Robert Harding, were in the 2008 production.
- Three cast members visited Flanders in May 2011 as research for the production.

Landmarks

- September 2012 marks the tenth anniversary of the death of Joan Littlewood.



Press Quotes

"A splendid revival that does the original production proud"

Brian Murphy, an original member of Theatre Workshop and a cast member of the very first production of *Oh What A Lovely War* in 1963

"Taking on Oh! What a Lovely War with a cast of five is some challenge, but it is what one has come to expect of Blackeyed Theatre, one of the most innovative, audacious companies working in contemporary English theatre."

Under Adrian McDougall's incisive direction, Blackeyed make spectacular nonsense of the concept of limited resources. Such is the energy, versatility and inventiveness of the cast, they are able to recreate so much of the collaborative improvisation which was the hallmark of Littlewood's original sixties production with Theatre Workshop.

Without mics or any pre-recorded soundscape, the cast generate an extraordinary electrical charge. All sentimentality is ruthlessly undercut by the satirical savagery so crucial to Joan Littlewood's vision.

Any assumption that Oh! What a Lovely War is a period piece is shot to shrapnel. Forty years on, we need Littlewood's vision more than ever. Blackeyed Theatre restore it to us with astonishing power. Catch it if you can."

The Stage

"Blackeyed have made this production their. The cast of five, playing multiple roles, put on a bravura performance, full of verve, pace and energy, losing none of the pertinence and freshness of the original."

I did indeed laugh, smile and clap along to those old familiar tunes. As Paul Morse sang 'Goodbyeee' we were all clapping and singing along – it was like being in the music hall itself. But then the singing became almost a plea, his face had dropped, he looked tired, damaged, his breathing heavy, the audience still. It was an incredibly moving moment. This is theatre at its best. I was completely there, in the action, caring deeply for the characters. I wanted to save those boys from their fate.

With intelligent direction from Adrian McDougall and a cracking cast, Blackeyed Theatre breathes new life into this classic. See it while you can."

Ross Gazette

"Such a level of versatility as this was all the more admirable as the pace of the show never flagged once. The crowded house was impressively mixed, with school parties, pensioners and everyone in between. And they loved every moment This was evident from the older members of the audience singing along with the 'community songs' that I recall from a 1950s childhood, and from the youngsters who led the standing ovation at the end."

Lancashire Evening Post



"I was in the audience for that first production of Oh What A Lovely War nearly half a century ago....and I have never forgotten the experience. It was as one critic noted ' the most important theatrical event of the decade'.

The current touring production by Blackeyed Theatre uses just five young male actor/musicians. I did wonder in advance if this was not minimalism taken to absurdity. My misgivings proved entirely unnecessary. The piece was fast, energetic and immaculately choreographed. The director, Adrian McDougall had eschewed the temptation to tinker with the original script and he had followed Joan Littlewood by avoiding all sentimentality, realising that farce must always teeter on the brink of tragedy.

They did recreate for me the rough vulgarity, versatility and irreverence of the original. Joan Littlewood, who always dreaded that her creation would be hijacked by elitist and middle class theatres, would have been delighted by this production.

There was in the Queen's Hall a very direct rapport between cast and audience. I found myself marveling at how close to the spirit of the first production this company had got...And, as in London nearly half a century ago I was moved to tears...and I was not alone in the Queen's Hall. There was before vociferous applause that greatest of all theatrical tributes...an extended moment of total silence.

It was a remarkable evening. Blackeyed Theatre Company are only four years old., but they have behind them a string of well-regarded serious work. They are short on experience but long on talent. I cannot wait for them to bring other work to Hexham next season and thereafter."

Hexham Courant

"For someone who didn't pay a lot of attention in history lessons, this production brilliantly and movingly fills in the gaps.

Hard-hitting yet humorous, comic yet catastrophic, Oh What a Lovely War portrays the brutal reality of the First World War in a way that is totally accessible to every member of the audience, however limited their knowledge of the events it depicts."

Hereford Times

"The actor/musicians of Blackeyed Theatre caught the spirit of the piece perfectly with a pace and polish that at times, I suspect, left the audience a little breathless. The contrast between the stark statistics and images that were back-projected behind the farcical (and frequently pantomime-like) action was both challenging and thought-provoking for its audience, proving that Joan Littlewood's crusade is being continued most successfully by this accomplished troupe"

Henley Standard



“Presented at Wolverhampton's Arena Theatre as part of the Remembrance season, the company's stunning dramatisation of Joan Littlewood's razor-sharp look at the futility of war proved a sell-out on both nights.

A cracking dramatisation, quite unlike anything I've ever seen before, which succeeded whole-heartedly at hammering home the horrors of war.”
Stourbridge News

“Adrian McDougall's production veers the thin line between tragedy and farce with great elegance leaving the audience laughing and singing along but also fully aware of just how important it is to remember those who died for their country between 1914 and 1918.

The camaraderie between the five actors on stage is spectacular to watch as they effortlessly switch between playing numerous instruments, singing, dancing, cross dressing and recounting the tales that show the scale of what happened on the Western Front and back home in Merry England.”
Bracknell News



Press Images and Contact Details

Publicity shots for Oh What A Lovely War are available and can be downloaded from the 'Oh What A lovely War' page at www.blackeyedtheatre.co.uk

Alternatively, contact us and we will email images to you.

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