

**BLAKEYED**  
THEATRE



**EDUCATION PACK**

# BLAKEYED THEATRE

## Welcome

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This education pack has been produced for Blackeyed Theatre's production of *Oh What A Lovely War*, to support teachers and students with their study of the play and provide insight and resources designed to support the study of Drama and Theatre Studies. The content is suitable for both GCSE and A-Level students who wish for a deeper insight into the performance or the play itself.

Some of the content is designed to support drama students in their evaluation of what they see on stage and to spark imagination when it comes to their own creative devising ideas.

The pack was put together by the education department at Hereford Centre for the Arts and subsequently reformatted and extended by Blackeyed Theatre.

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# BLACKEYED THEATRE

## Blackeyed Theatre

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Blackeyed Theatre is one of the UK's leading mid-scale touring theatre companies. Since 2004 we have been creating exciting opportunities for artists and audiences by producing theatre that's audacious, accessible and memorable. Blackeyed Theatre has two principal objectives through the work it produces; to provide audiences and artists with fresh, challenging work; and to make that work sustainable by reaching as wide and diverse an audience as possible. Over the past few years, Blackeyed Theatre has balanced these artistic and business objectives by creating new, exciting versions of established classics in unique ways and by identifying relevance with today's audiences.

Recent examples of this include the 2015 production of *The Great Gatsby*, whose cast of seven doubled up as a 1920s jazz band, and the 2012 production of Brecht's *Mother Courage And her Children*, set in a post-apocalyptic world, designed to establish relevance with 21st century world events.

Recent new commissions include *The Valley of Fear*, *Jane Eyre*, *The Sign Of Four* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde* (all by Nick Lane), *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* (both by John Ginman), as well as *The Great Gatsby* (by Stephen Sharkey), which was published by Methuen.

In 2014, Blackeyed's production of *Not About Heroes* by Stephen MacDonald toured to 45 UK theatres. Combining newly commissioned music and projection, this was a highly theatrical, multi-sensory production of an established classic.

Other touring productions include *Teechers* (John Godber), *The Trial* (Steven Berkoff), *Oh What A Lovely War* (Theatre Workshop), *Alfie* (Bill Naughton), *The Cherry Orchard* (Anton Chekhov), *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (Bertolt Brecht), 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, and in 2011 it launched its first new writing scheme, Pulse, with the intention to provide a new writer with the opportunity to see their work produced professionally on stage. The winning play, *The Beekeeper*, was performed initially at South Hill Park in Bracknell before transferring to Waterloo East Theatre in London for a three week run, where it received three Off West End Theatre Award nominations.

We strive to make our work sustainable by producing theatre that audiences want to see in ways that challenge their expectations, by bringing together artists with a genuine passion for the work they produce, and through an appreciation that titles of work with a wide appeal can still be performed in ways that push artistic boundaries. In short, it's about following audiences but also leading them, being affordable and responsive to demand while innovating and challenging expectations.



## Joan Littlewood

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Full Name - Joan Maud Littlewood

Born - London, 5 October 1914 Died - London, 20 September 2002

Joan Littlewood was born in Stockwell, London, to a poor family, the daughter of a young Cockney servant girl, and was raised mostly by her grandparents. Her grandmother Caroline (“Mumski” to Littlewood) worked in the kitchens of a Threadneedle Street pub. The family home in the Stockwell Road had a constant stream of lodgers whose left-behind books kindled Joan’s passion for literature and knowledge.

She trained as an actress at RADA but left after an unhappy start and moved to Manchester in 1934 where she met folk singer Jimmie Miller who was later known as Ewan MacColl. After joining his troupe, Theatre of Action, Littlewood and Miller married. After a brief move to London, they returned to Manchester and set up Theatre Union in 1936.

MI5 placed the couple under surveillance early in 1939, with Littlewood described in the files as “highly intellectual and a keen communist”. Their home in Hyde, Cheshire was regularly watched - “A number of young men who have the appearance of communist Jews are known to visit Oak Cottage. It is thought they come from Manchester”, MI5 was warned in April 1939.

In 1940, Lancashire’s chief constable told MI5 that Last Edition, a play performed by Theatre Union, amounted to “thinly-veiled communist propaganda” portraying “the workers’ struggles in Britain, Spain and the empire”.

The following year, 1941, the BBC banned Littlewood from broadcasting - “Clearly I could not allow people like this to have the use of the microphone or be prominently identified with the BBC” the corporation’s then regional director for the north, John Coatman, wrote.

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The BBC lifted the ban two years later when MI5 said Littlewood had broken off her association with the Communist party. However, MI5 kept her under surveillance until the 1950s.

In 1945, after the end of World War II, Littlewood, her husband, and other Theatre Union members formed Theatre Workshop, touring for the next 8 years.

In 1953, Theatre Workshop took up residence at the Theatre Royal in Stratford, east London, where it gained international fame, performing plays across Europe and in the Soviet Union. One of Littlewood's most famous productions was the British première of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1955), which she directed and also starred in the lead role. Her production of *Fings Ain't Wot They Used T'Be*, a musical about the London underworld, became a hit and ran from 1959 to 1962, transferring to the West End.

When Gerry Raffles joined the troupe, MacColl and Littlewood divorced, though they still worked together for many years and Littlewood was godmother to MacColl's two children. Littlewood and Raffles were life partners until his death in 1975.

The works for which she is now best remembered are probably Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* (1958), which gained great critical acclaim, and the satirical musical *Oh, What a Lovely War!* (1963), her stage adaptation of a work for radio by Charles Cilton - a radical combination of slapstick humour and serious satire. Both were subsequently made into films. Theatre Workshop also championed the work of Irish playwright Brendan Behan, and Littlewood is often rumoured to have a significant role in his work.

After Raffles's death in 1975, Littlewood left Theatre Workshop and stopped directing. After a time of drifting she settled in France and became the companion of Baron Philippe de Rothschild, the vintner and poet, and wrote his memoirs, *Milady Vine*.

In 1984, *Milady Vine*, described as “the autobiography of Philippe de Rothschild, by Joan Littlewood” was published and in 1986 came *Joan's Book*, subtitled “Joan Littlewood's Peculiar History as she tells it”. She ended her own story with Raffles's death. Many of his letters to her are included, one of which she held especially dear and which catches the essence of Theatre Workshop's credo:

*You are right to tell us never to lose humanity. Audiences respond to a love of life. If there is none, I for one want no part in it. Our work has such a short life. A painting lasts until the canvas rots; ours fades the moment it is accomplished.*

Joan Littlewood died, in 2002, of natural causes at the age of 87 in the London flat of Peter Rankin, her UK base for the previous 23 years.



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## Productions

With Theatre Union:

Lope de Vega's Fuente Ovejuna

English premieres of Clifford Odets' Waiting For Lefty and Jaroslav Hasek's Good Soldier Schweyk

New work such as Miller's Last Edition

With Theatre Workshop:

Uranium 235 (1952)

Twelfth Night (1953)

Hindle Wakes (1953)

Juno and the Paycock (1953) The Alchemist (1953) Richard II (1954)

The Traveller (1954 Edinburgh Festival)

Brecht's Edward II for the 1955 Devon Festival

Mother Courage and her Children (1955)

Jonson's Volpone at Paris International Festival of Theatre in 1955 Arden of Faversham (1955)

Brendan Behan's The Quare Fellow (1956)

Shelagh Delany's A Taste of Honey (1958)

Behan's The Hostage (1958)

Frank Norman's Fings Ain't Wot They Used T'be (1959)

Wolf Mankowitz's Make Me An Offer (1959)

Stephen Lewis' Sparrers Can't Sing (1960)

Oh, What a Lovely War! (1963, transferring to Wyndham's, 1963 and Broadhurst, NY, 1964)

Twang! (Shaftesbury, 1965)

Hostage (1973)

John Wells / Carl Davis' The Projector (1970)



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## History & Synopsis

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### 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.

### Theatre Workshop

Theatre Workshop was a theatre group noted for their director, Joan Littlewood. Many actors of the 1950s and 1960s received their training and first exposure with the company and many of its productions were transferred to the West End. The Theatre Workshop Company 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.

### 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.

## Retelling the First World War in Post-War Britain

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Dan Todman

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### Suitable read and task for teachers and A level Students

But why make a musical about war? Surely there are more cheerful topics? Actually times of war have produced some of the best and most powerful art – take a look at the poetry of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen for example. Whilst being treated for shellshock, Owen and Sassoon became friends. Whilst discussing poetry Owen said he could never imagine writing poetry about the war because it was so ugly. Sassoon replied that this was exactly why he should write about it; that we should use the best skills we have to write the truth about what we witness.

**Task : Read this article and discuss why theatre is or is not a powerful medium for work with a message. Does *Oh What a Lovely War* achieve its aims?**

The main focus of my research is the ways in which the First World War was mythologised in Britain in the eighty years after its end, with its focus concentrated on the interactions between family and national myths of war. In recent years, British military historians have pointed out the difference between modern popular beliefs about the war and the ways it was constructed, experienced and fought at the time. I have taken part in this - what is now too well developed to be called a 'revisionist' – interpretation, but my main concern has been to find out how this gap in perceptions developed.

I'd like to discuss these different strands in relation to a specific example: the 'musical entertainment' *Oh What a Lovely War*, first performed by the radical company Theatre Workshop in 1963. *Oh What a Lovely War* is based around the songs which were sung by ordinary British soldiers during the war – often bowdlerised versions of popular classics, filled with parody and self-mocking humour. These songs quickly became a site both of identity and, in latter years, of memory. *Oh What a Lovely War* combines these songs with scenes from the trenches and the home front, all played out – in the play's central conceit – by a band of travelling clowns. The play immediately enjoyed great success on the London stage, and subsequently became a favourite of repertory theatre and amateur dramatic societies. It reached extremely large audiences through widespread media coverage and local productions. Even more important in extending *Oh What a Lovely War*'s overall reach was the film version, released in 1969, which will be known to some of you. Starring many of the leading lights of Britain's acting profession in the late 1960s, this film was not only a critical and audience success at the moment of its first release, but – largely because of the eminence of its cast – became a staple of public holiday television scheduling in subsequent years. Purely in terms of audience figures, *Oh What a Lovely War* is arguably one of the most influential texts in forming modern British attitudes to the war.

Certainly the 'musical entertainment' has been blamed by modern military historians for falsifying popular perceptions of the First World War. They would argue that, if Britons now think of the war in terms of mud, blood, futility and asinine generals, it is not because that accurately represents what happened, but because in the intervening years a false version of the war has become culturally dominant. Alex Danchev, and more vehemently Brian Bond, have both argued that the 1960s was a key moment in that transformation (1). In that decade, they have suggested, new myths of the war

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were created to fit the rapidly changing social and political context. The war was used by those on the radical left to present ways of understanding the nuclear arms race, the war in Vietnam and the conflict between old and young, or

between social conservatism and liberalisation (2). Here, it is claimed, *Oh What a Lovely War* was a crucial text: creating powerful images of the betrayal of soldiers by their stupid, uncaring generals which have become embedded in British popular culture.

I have argued elsewhere that although this explanation has some useful components, it is simplistic in its treatment of the decade in general and of audience reactions in particular (3). What I will suggest here is that by examining the production and reception of the different versions of *Oh What a Lovely War* we gain an insight into how wide a variety of factors shaped this popular text. These included, but went far beyond, the political and social context of its creation. By studying this range of factors we achieve a better understanding of the complex ways in which the memory and mythology of the First World War were re-written in the 1960s to meet a range of personal, political, representational and financial needs. We also come closer to understanding the ambiguous place that the First World War continues to hold in British popular culture.

The first version of what eventually became *Oh What a Lovely War* arose out of the family experience of a BBC radio producer called Charles Chilton. His father had been killed in action just after his son was born, in early 1918. Chilton's mother died shortly afterwards. He was brought up by his grandmother in circumstances of extreme poverty. Although his father was lionised, nobody knew anything of what he had done in the war or how he had died.

Chilton attended Armistice Day parades in the 1920s and laid a wreath at the Cenotaph wearing his father's medals. After leaving school, he got a job working at the BBC in 1932. One of his tasks was to make deliveries to the 'Addressing Department', from where the listings magazine *Radio Times* was sent out to subscribers. This department was staffed by facially disfigured veterans, men who could not work with others because of the disturbing nature of their wounds. Chilton fetched them lunch. Both Chilton and these broken faced men shared a conviction that they were being looked after because the Director-General of the BBC, Sir John Reith, was himself a facially scarred veteran, determined to look after his own. Whether or not this was actually Reith's intention is not important here: what matters is that Chilton grew up in a culture where the shared traumas resulting from conflict had formed powerful emotional bonds. (4)

Fascinated by his experience, in 1961 Chilton wrote and produced a radio programme for the BBC Home Service called *The Long Long Trail*. It contrasted the songs of soldiers on the Western Front with those sung at home. The primary emphasis of *The Long Long Trail* was on the valour, humour and endurance of the ordinary soldier: 'In spite of mud, blood, hell and high water they smiled – and carried on.' (6) The programme attracted a large audience and a very favourable response from listeners. It was rebroadcast twice the following year.

One member of that large audience was the theatrical producer Gerry Raffles, consort of Joan Littlewood, one of the founders of the East London-based Theatre Workshop group. They took up the concept created by Chilton, and with his help and that of the Labour MP and editor of *Tribune*, Raymond Fletcher, transformed the radio play into the stage production of *Oh What a Lovely War*. It was first performed at the Theatre Royal, Stratford, on 19 March 1963.

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The final form of this production was Littlewood's idea: a show put on by a band of pierrots, with the stylisations of the music hall added to Chilton's more realistic script. In the transformation from radio to stage, the play became more ardent in its expression of radical left wing views, with the importation of scenes designed to stress the callous incompetence of the High Command and the ruling classes. The result was also affected by Littlewood's own directorial style. Although ultimately extremely autocratic, this attempted to involve the actors more fully in the play by encouraging a collective development of the script through research and improvisation by the whole cast. To this end the actors read a number of autobiographical and historical works about the war. The process of improvisation and alteration was far from complete when the play appeared before the public: indeed, a key part of Littlewood's directorial model was that the play would change over time as it was performed. (7)

For both Littlewood and Fletcher there were striking political and contemporary reasons for presenting their material as they did. Littlewood was keen to recast history from the perspective of the common man:

*The story of us – the victims, the people, the underprivileged – has not been told before. We've heard the poets speak – and we admire them – and we've had Journey's End, and we know about the sacrifice of the people who supported the system. But what about our fathers, who went as their dupes? I know I have been accused by some critics of having an anti-officer bias. But the officers have had their day. They've had their theatre. They've had their poetry. They've had their culture long enough. (8)*

Her intention was to make this representation of the war dramatic and didactic from an extremely left-wing perspective. For this reason she rejected scripts which offered a purely realistic depiction of life in the trenches. Littlewood and her cast were also, at this stage, eager to avoid what they saw as Chilton's overly sentimental approach. Littlewood, in her own memoirs, wrote of the songs which formed the core of the play: 'Those songs took me back to childhood – red, white and blue bunting, photos of dead soldiers in silver frames, medals in a forgotten drawer, and that look as family and friends sang the songs of eventide – God, how I loathed those songs.' (9) Introducing a new edition of the playscript published in 2000, both Littlewood and Victor Spinetti, a member of the original cast. They stressed that the cast of *Oh What a Lovely War* aimed for a more 'authentic' approach. (10) Littlewood made her actors play against any sentimental feelings, telling them: 'Stop falling in love with it; it's not a sentimental subject. And don't ever mention a poppy in a corner of a foreign field, where there's likely to be some poor bugger screaming to death.' (11)

The result of these efforts was an original production which offered a black and white picture. Officers at all levels are stupid, callous cowards, while their men are sardonic heroes. The debunking of officers' culture is cruel, historic and funny. Travelling to a meeting with their allies, Lieutenant General Henry Wilson asks his superior, Field Marshal Sir John French, whether he should organise an interpreter. 'Don't be ridiculous,' is French's response, 'the essential problem at the moment is that we must have the utmost secrecy.' French's successor, Sir Douglas Haig, prays to God for victory 'before the Americans arrive'. (12)

Littlewood, Raffles and Fletcher were also concerned with the spectre of a war which had not yet occurred. They wanted to teach the audience about the dangers of nuclear holocaust. The power of modern weapons made military incompetence even more dangerous than before. As Littlewood put

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it: 'the whole business – the accidents, the chaos, the small minority who were really for it – seems to be more like what we are trying to avoid now than the last war...' (13)

It is clear that some audience members shared Littlewood's suspicion of the establishment and the military and accepted what they were shown as the 'truth' about the First World War. For example, one reacted to the play's use of statistics – flashed on a digital display board at the back of the stage – by declaring his deep emotion at: '... the fact, never so clearly stated, that ten million men had died in unimaginable squalor for Kitchener's pointing finger, for a few yards of worthless mud, for patriotic lies, for the vanity of bad commanders'. (15)

This was, however, by no means the only reaction. Two things stand out from contemporary reviews of *Oh What a Lovely War*. First, very few reviewers perceived the play as an objective representation of historical truth. This was not an unsophisticated audience: they came expecting performances that were left-wing, experimental and controversial. It is worth bearing in mind that, despite Theatre Workshop's aim of bringing theatre to the working class, much of its audience at Stratford consisted of regular theatregoers who were willing to travel out from the West End. "Everything spoken during this evening either happened or was said, sung or written during 1914-18", many in the audience were critical of what they were watching on historical grounds. The Guardian's reviewer noted that *Oh What a Lovely War* was 'as unfair as any powerful cartoon'. (16) The Times criticised the play for portraying:

*The familiar view of the 1914-18 war as a criminally wasteful adventure in which the stoic courage of the common soldiers was equalled only by the sanctimonious incompetence of their commanders and the blind jingoism of the civilians. This approach is hardly likely to send audiences storming out of the theatre: the war is a sitting target for anyone who wants to deliver a bludgeoning social criticism without giving offence. (17)*

Many in the audience might have considered themselves well informed about the war. *Oh What a Lovely War* was not produced in a cultural vacuum. Most adult Britons in 1963 had either lived through it or grown up, like Chilton and Littlewood, in an inter-war Britain in which it was a cultural constant. With an estimated two million veterans of the war still alive in 1961, the First World War had yet to disappear over the boundary of lived experience.

The second feature that stands out about critical reaction to *Oh What a Lovely War* that, no matter what their attitude to its politics, audience members approved wholeheartedly of its songs. The tunes and words themselves were less important than the emotions they inspired. An older reviewer suggested that:

*For those who fought in that war and were lucky enough to survive it, this show conjures up memories that are not all painful. To hear the songs we sang – even though the younger generation doesn't know how to sing them – is to catch again a whiff of that wry, disillusioned, humorous resignation with which our armies faced trench life. (18)*

As the Sunday Times put it: 'this immensely brisk charade gives nostalgia a top-dressing of belated anti-establishment respectability.' (19) At least some of the audience interpreted the play in a way which was essentially nostalgic. There is even some anecdotal evidence that, following the play's transfer to the West End, groups of old comrades visited it together as an informal regimental

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reunion. (20) Perhaps this should not surprise us. During the war, knowledge of these songs had been a crucial part of soldiers' entertainment and identity.

*We did not realise until last night that the songs we sang in the army were bits of history. In them is embodied the comic fatalism which carried us through four years in hell. How easily we slipped back into it! ... It seemed to me that we had caught the only decent thing in the war – the spirit of comradeship. We had come to the hall as individuals: we were now once more an army marching in our imagination to the old music. (22)*

How exactly the creators of *Oh What a Lovely War* reacted to the wave of nostalgia they had unleashed is unclear. Their protestations about avoiding sentimentality notwithstanding, it seems that they altered the play to endorse precisely this reaction. In his history of Theatre Workshop Howard Goorney writes:

*When I saw it in Stratford Victor Spinetti made the closing speech, which went something like 'The war game is being played all over the world, by all ages, there's a pack for all the family. It's been going on a long time and it's still going on. Goodnight.' This cynical speech, which followed the charge of the French soldiers, was quite frightening and left you crying your heart out. When I saw it again, in the West End, I was shocked by the change of ending. After Victor's speech the whole cast came on singing 'Oh What a Lovely War' followed by a reprise of the songs. All frightfully happy and guaranteed to send the audience home happy. I think it was George Sewell who said 'The Management didn't take to a down ending'. As far as I knew, Joan and Gerry were the Management. (23)*

Note that I am not suggesting that *Oh What a Lovely War* encapsulated many modern beliefs about the First World War. For younger audience members, seeing the play was a formative event in their attitudes towards the war. But whilst the emotional connection to the war and its aftermath remained, audience reactions were complex. Indeed, the only way to explain the play's success – and hence its ability to influence subsequent generations – is to acknowledge the nostalgia which suffused its first performances. As time went on, of course, what had become an iconic representation of the First World War in its own right became subject to its own process of myth-making. When, in 1998, the play was revived for a national tour – for the first time in thirty five years – it sparked of a new wave of nostalgia, not for the comradeship of the trenches but for a mythical hedonistic, radical 1960s. 'I well recall', wrote the Financial Times critic, 'the impact simply of hearing about this show during my 1960s childhood.' (27) The Guardian critic, Michael Billington, confessed that: 'Oh What a Lovely War itself has also become part of theatrical legend: for someone of my generation, present experience is overlaid by past memories.' (28)

To conclude, then, it is overly reductive to view *Oh What a Lovely War* simply in terms of the reaction by a radicalised 1960s audience to a specific set of cultural, social and political circumstances. Rather, we can see five distinct manipulations of a well established 'site of memory': soldiers' songs of the First World War. First, Charles Chilton made use of them for a reason that was personal rather more than political – a rediscovery of, and tribute to, his dead father. Second, Littlewood, her associates and cast used Chilton's radio play to make explicit political points in a satire which was in some ways shaped by the medium of radical theatre. The form and meaning they intended, however, was subverted by some members of the audience in 1963. In a third manipulation, they rejected political caricatures, and celebrated instead their own emotional

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connection to the songs at the play's heart. The power of this audience reaction seems to have been strong enough to affect the play's final form.

It was precisely these sorts of multiple re-writings of memory that made the 1960s so important to the continuing 'memory' of the First World War in Britain. They encoded the antiestablishment and anti-war feelings which had been present since before the Second World War, but had become more dominant in its aftermath.

## Notes

1. B. Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front* (Cambridge, 2002), 65.
2. E. MacCallum-Stewart, 'The First World War and Popular Literature', PhD (Sussex) 2005, makes the point that this represented a shift from 'myth' to 'parable'.
3. D. Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London, 2005, forthcoming).
4. Details of Charles Chilton's life from interviews with him by Alex Danchev, 8 August 1988 and by Dan Todman, 14 May 2000.
5. *Oh What a Lovely War* Programme, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (LHCMA), LH 13/61
6. C. Chilton, *The Long Long Trail As Broadcast Script*, 27 December 1961, BBC Written Archives Centre Caversham, 22.
7. A. Danchev, 'Bunking and Debunking: The Controversies of the 1960s' in B. Bond, ed, *The First World War and British Military History* (Oxford, 1991), 282.
8. Unsigned article, 'Joan Littlewood', *Tribune*, 19 April 1963, 9.
9. J. Littlewood, *Joan's Book* (London, 1994), 676.
10. Theatre Workshop, *Oh What a Lovely War* (London, 2000), ix, 89.
11. H. Neill, 'When Did You Last See Your Father Cry?' *Times*, 18 March 1998, 41.
12. Theatre Workshop, *Oh What a Lovely War*, 35, 77
13. 'Joan Littlewood', *Tribune*, 9.
14. *Oh What a Lovely War* Programme. This theme of the failure of deterrence was attractive to AJP Taylor, who dedicated his *Illustrated History of the First World War*, which came out in 1963 and has the same underlying theme, to Littlewood.
15. P. Lewis, 'I'm with you Mr Levin ... raving!' *Daily Mail*, 21 June 1963, LHCMA LH 13/61.
16. P. Hope Wallace, 'Review', *Guardian*, 21 June 1963, LHCMA LH 13/61.
17. Unsigned and untitled review, *Times*, 21 March 1963, LHCMA LH 13/61.
18. R. Hastings, 'Sketches Aid 1914-18 War Songs', *Daily Telegraph*, 20 March 1963, LHCMA LH 13/61.
19. J. Lambert, untitled article, *Sunday Times*, 23 June 1963, LHCMA LH 13/61.
20. My thanks to Professor Alex Danchev for this point.
21. A. Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919-1946* (Oxford, 1994), 80-86
22. Quoted in Gregory, *Silence of Memory*, 82.
23. H. Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story* (London, 1981), 127-29.
24. D. Pryce-Jones, 'Theatre Review', *Spectator*, 2 July 1964, LHCMA LH 13/61.
25. A. Dougan, *The Actor' Director: Richard Attenborough Behind the Camera* (Edinburgh, 1994), 17.
26. D. Malcom, 'Fun and War Games', *Guardian*, 9 June 1969, LHCMA LH 13/61.
27. A. Macaulay, 'How to survive in the post-war era', *Financial Times Arts*, 25 August 1998, 9.
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29. R. Morrison, 'Marriage of daring and imagination', *Times*, 26 May 1998, 18.

# BLAKEYED THEATRE

## Joan Littlewood Could Never Be Silenced

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The irony of the BBC's wartime gag on the great free-thinking theatre director is that it just serves to remind us of her importance.

I suppose we shouldn't be surprised to learn that the great director, Joan Littlewood, was once banned by the BBC and kept under surveillance by MI5.

It was all part of a mood of wartime panic, of which she was not the only victim. In 1941, the year that Joan was banned from the airwaves, a similar fate greeted Michael Redgrave who was then one of the most popular actors in Britain. He was a signatory to the People's Convention that called for "a people's war" and "a people's peace". Although neither a pacifist nor a communist, Redgrave found himself ostracised by the BBC and his film-career jeopardised. Even in the post-war era, a Christmas tree was still placed against the names of BBC employees regarded as politically suspect.

Revelation of the ban on Joan Littlewood may, however, have one beneficial side-effect. It reminds a whole generation of who she was and why she was so important. Her spirit still haunts the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, which was taken over by her company, Theatre Workshop, in 1953.

But just as important is the fact that many things we take for granted in modern theatre stemmed from her pioneering vision. She believed in taking theatre to the people and toured everywhere from village halls to Butlin's Holiday Camps. She also proved serious issues 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. And she broke down the fourth wall that divides actors from audiences, by making theatre a communal experience.

I guess few people under 40 would ever have seen one of her productions. Yet, although the work of genius directors is inevitably writ on sand, Joan's influence is still palpable. It is there in surviving members of her Stratford East company including Barbara Windsor, Miriam Karlin, Murray Melvin, Victor Spinetti and Brian Murphy. It also survives through her successor, Philip Hedley, who carries on the heroic battle against petty-minded Arts Council bureaucracy.

But, above all, it survives in the work that appears on British stages. Not just in the occasional revival of the Littlewood landmark, *Oh! What a Lovely War*, but in the work of a company like Kneehigh. I haven't endorsed everything Emma Rice's company has done but there are moments in its current *Brief Encounter*, with its fluid mix of song, dance and drama that breathtakingly echo Joan's magical flair.

I never met Joan Littlewood but I adored her work. What I loved was its physical beauty, its mixture of discipline and freedom and its belief in theatre's capacity to enhance life. At a time when people bang on about the supposed leftish dominance of theatre, Joan's work is a reminder that all the great advances have sprung from a generous liberality of spirit.

And if she was briefly a member of the Communist party, so what? She was the least ideologically pure of directors in that her work was driven by a detestation of imposed authority and a passionate faith in people. How mean-minded and futile those attempts to monitor and ban her now seem! The ultimate irony is that, by being reminded of them, we are driven to recall a great artist who left her unmistakable imprint on modern British theatre.

By Michael Billington (From The Guardian)

# BLACKEYED THEATRE

## Performance Elements

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Littlewood required some essential elements to the performance of “Oh What a Lovely War”. Littlewood wanted the play to be performed very specifically. These are a few essentials she requested...

### Staging

Screen that can be flown in and out, behind the acting area, on which slides or photographs taken during the war were projected to counterpoint the words of the songs.



Newspanel that is carried across the stage, on which the names of the battles appeared, followed by the number of those killed and wounded and the number of yards gained or lost.



Furniture ONLY four truncated cones or chairs used as seats! And that's it!!!



# BLAKEYED THEATRE

## Acting

No 'Put on' accents. If you can't use somebody else's easily, use your own but take care. Don't try too hard to produce a French accent just focus on the words you are saying!

***Good moaning...  
I am the bringer of bad  
toadings.***



Cut the Emotion. Don't get emotionally involved, the play is designed to be fun and performed to entertain the audience not make them all cry and fill the auditorium with tears!!!



Ad Lib. Improvise on stage!!! You don't have to stick to the script. Make it fun for you and the audience. BUT DON'T USE THE SAME AD LIB TWICE! Throw it out and come up with a new one. However good they are, there are plenty more where they came from.



# BLACKEYED THEATRE

Don't slow down. Keep the pace in the piece, quick changes of scene and costume. Lots of moving and lively action.

Find the action in all the words.  
"Need the vitality of Street theatre ...some of our actors must be able to dance, sing, play a musical instrument and act!"



## Figures of the First World War

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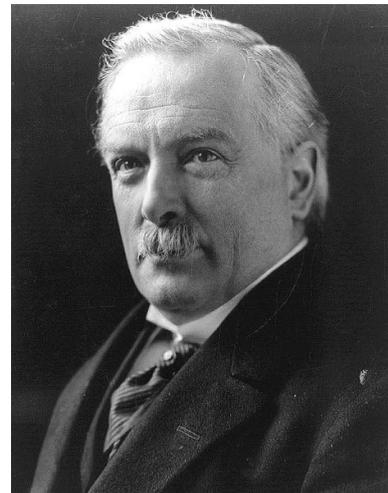
Below are the major players, generals and leaders, of 'The Great War'. Actors will often research characters before playing them, in order to understand their motivation and circumstances. Why not get your students to take on the role of a character and argue their position. What were their reasons for going to war?

**Task :** Create a scene in which two of these political leaders meet. Use the information you are given and feel free to quote the Characters.

### David Lloyd George –Political Leader of Britain

"Don't be afraid to take a big step if one is indicated; you can't cross a chasm in two small jumps."

- 1863 - 1945
- Lloyd George was Chancellor of the Exchequer when WWI started
- He was appointed Minister of Munitions in 1915
- He was then appointed Minister of War in 1916
- In December of 1916, he became Prime Minister
- During the war, he unified the Allied army with the commander French Marshal Ferdinand Foch



### Field Marshall Douglas Haig – Military Leader of Britain

"We were unprepared for war, or at any rate for a war of such magnitude." "When armies of millions are engaged, with the resources of great Empires behind them, it will inevitably be long."

- 1861-1928
- He is considered to be the most controversial war leader
- He became Commander in chief of the BEF (British Expeditionary force) in 1915
- Haig Led forces into battle at Mons and Ypres and at Verdun and the Somme
- In 1918 Haig led allies to a victory on the Western front



# BL@CKEYED T H E A T R E

## **Kaiser Wilhelm II – Political Leader of Germany**

"Gentlemen, you will regret this."

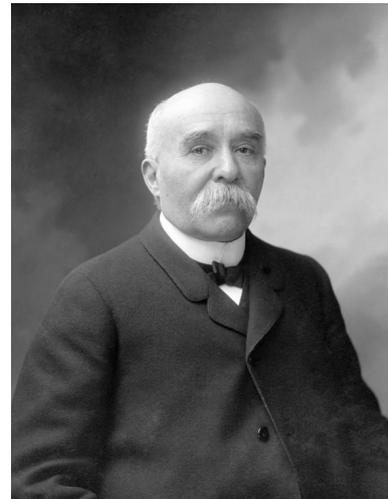
- 1859-1941
- Wilhelm was the 9th King of Prussia and the 3rd Emperor of Germany
- He led Germany into the World War I
- Believed it was very important to have a large army, so he began to form his army before the war even began
- His biggest mistake was undoubtedly in 1890, before the war began, when he broke an alliance with Russia. This caused Russia to ally with France and Britain, which made Germany lose the war
- During November of 1918, Germany was suffering from food shortages and Germany was going to lose the war, so Wilhelm fled to the Netherlands until he died in 1941



## **Georges Clemenceau- Political Leader of France**

"America is the only nation in history which miraculously has gone directly from barbarism to degeneration without the usual interval of civilization."

- 1841-1929
- When he was growing up, he admired people who fought for freedom and social justice
- He became minister of war when France declared war on Germany in 1914
- He really wanted the French people to support the war and he held rallies to do this
- He became known as the "Tiger of France" because of his determination to defeat Germany in the war
- He was part of the Treaty of Versailles after the war was over - This treaty made Germany pay for all of the damage caused in France, and it took a large toll on the German economy

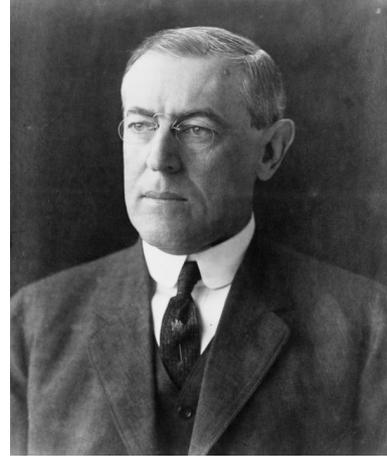


# BLAKEYED THEATRE

## Woodrow Wilson- Political Leader of America

"The world must be made safe for democracy."

- 1856-1924
- Wilson wanted to keep the U.S.A. neutral when the war started
- He tried to get both sides to sit down and talk out their differences, but they refused
- Even when a German torpedo sank a passenger ship and killed 128 Americans, Wilson still wanted to stay neutral
- It was not until the Germans began to shoot at US ships in February of 1917, that Wilson asked for a declaration of war
- When the US went into the war, it created patriotism all across the US



## Archduke Ferdinand- Political Leader of Austria-Hungary

"What is the good of your speeches? I come to Sarajevo on a visit, and I get bombs thrown at me. It is outrageous."

"Sophie dear, Sophie dear, don't die! Stay alive for our children."

- 1863-1914
- The Archduke of Austria-Hungary
- His assassination set off diplomatic measures, which started the war
- Killed on June 28 1914 in Sarajevo
- He was shot by Gavrilo Princip, a Serbian nationalist
- When he died, Austria made a declaration of war against Serbia
- Russia, ally of Serbia, mobilized the armed forces against Austria-Hungary
- Then Germany, ally of Austria-Hungary, declared war on Russia



# BLAKEYED THEATRE

## World War One Song Lyrics

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A musical about war? To keep spirits up in the trenches AND on the home front, dozens of ditties were written about our Tommies and our Tars! Can you spot any of these tunes in the show? Which songs would have been sung at home and which abroad?

### **Keep the Home Fires Burning**

They were summoned from the hillside  
They were called in from the glen,  
And the country found them ready  
At the stirring call for men.  
Let no tears add to their hardships  
As the soldiers pass along,  
And although your heart is breaking  
Make it sing this cheery song:  
Keep the Home Fires Burning,  
While your hearts are yearning,  
Though your lads are far away  
They dream of home.  
There's a silver lining  
Through the dark clouds shining,  
Turn the dark cloud inside out  
'Til the boys come home.  
Overseas there came a pleading,  
"Help a nation in distress."  
And we gave our glorious ladies  
Honour bade us do no less,  
For no gallant son of freedom  
To a tyrant's yoke should bend,  
And a noble heart must answer  
To the sacred call of "Friend."  
Keep the Home Fires Burning,  
While your hearts are yearning,  
Though your lads are far away  
They dream of home.  
There's a silver lining  
Through the dark clouds shining,  
Turn the dark cloud inside out  
'Til the boys come home.

### **Oh! It's a Lovely War!**

Oh, oh, oh it's a lovely war.  
Who wouldn't be a soldier, eh? Oh it's a shame to take the pay.  
As soon as reveille has gone we feel just as heavy as lead,  
but we never get up till the sergeant brings our breakfast up to bed.  
Oh, oh, oh, it's a lovely war.  
What do we want with eggs and ham when we've got plum and apple jam?

# BLAKEYED THEATRE

Form fours. Right turn. How shall we spend the money we earn?  
Oh, oh, oh it's a lovely war.  
When does a soldier grumble? When does he make a fuss?  
No one is more contented in all the world than us.  
Oh it's a cushy life, boys, really we love it so:  
Once a fellow was sent on leave and simply refused to go.  
Come to the cookhouse door, boys, sniff the lovely stew.  
Who is it says the colonel gets better grub than you?  
Any complaints this morning? Do we complain? Not we.  
What's the matter with lumps of onion floating around the tea?

## **Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag**

Private Perks is a funny little codger  
With a smile, a funny smile.  
Five feet none, He's an artful little dodger,  
With a smile, a funny smile.  
Flush or broke, he'll have his little joke,  
He can't be suppressed.  
All the other fellows have to grin,  
When he gets this off his chest, Hi!  
Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag,  
And smile, smile, smile!  
While you've a Lucifer to light your fag,  
Smile, Boys, that's the style.  
What's the use of worrying?  
It never was worthwhile.  
So, pack up your troubles in your old kit bag,  
And smile, smile, smile!

# BLAKEYED THEATRE

## History of the Pierrot

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Pierrot is a stock character of mime and Commedia dell'Arte, a French variant of the Italian Pedrolino. His character is that of the sad clown.

Commedia dell'Arte is a type of improvised theatre that flourished in northern Italy and elsewhere in Europe from the sixteenth century forward.

Joan Littlewood employed the use of the Pierrot costume as a method of illustrating how the soldiers were the butt of the joke in war. Much like the soldiers, the Pierrot is tricked into believing in war in the play.

Also, by decking her men and women in Pierrot and Pierrette outfits, she puts Commedia dell'Arte garb on the Brechtian notion that in the 20th century the individual is no longer a meaningful entity.

“The Pierrot costumes, with tin helmets for ordinary soldiers and belts for generals, focussed on the wider thematic significance of the scenes beyond the characters”. The costumes made us think the play was from a common man’s perspective.

“He is usually depicted wearing a loose, white tunic. The noticeable feature of Pierrot's behaviour is his naïvity, he is seen as a fool, always the butt of pranks, yet nonetheless trusting”

**Task: Joan Littlewood used Pierrot. What would you use? Discuss...**

**What costume would you use to make the soldiers look the same, and why?**

- School student
- Blond Bombshell
- Clown
- Boiler suits
- Chavs



## **Interview with Director Nicky Allpress**

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**You've chosen a circus as a setting for your production of *Oh What A Lovely War*. How did you come to that decision and what do you hope audience get from it?**

It seemed natural to me. That war as a concept is a circus of a kind, not only the 'Great War', but every war since. Not only does the original material lend itself perfectly to a troop of entertainers of every discipline and talent, from the Ringmaster to the clowns, it's also the perfect backdrop in terms of design and aesthetic. Worn out tent filled with the ammunition to put on the show your company have been rehearsed to perform, travelling away from home and singing songs and performing tricks to boost morale.

**What do you think our relationship is with a piece like *Oh What A Lovely War* in 2023, and how has that informed your approach to directing it?**

There are so many moments in so many scenes that resonate as if they had been written by a satirist in 2023. The same heroes and villains are pulling the same tricks, from the politicians and the arms profiteers to the effect media propaganda has on the man on the street. It's witty and wild ride, with as many contemporary gags as there are nostalgic songs. It's rich material that conjures so many parallels with the ongoing tragedies of war torn countries today.

**How does performing the play with a cast of 6 (as opposed to the prescribed 15 plus band) impact audience experience in your view?**

I think it brings the audience closer. The theatrical act of quick changes, swapping voices and accents as actors move from one character or instrument to the next, breaks the stiff formal boundary that traditional plays can create. We know it's illusion, and from the very moment the audience walk in, they're faced with a troop of 6 very playful performers warming up and unpacking their props. There's no grand barrier between them and us - we're all in it together.

**What do you want audiences to come away from the show with?**

I hope first and foremost they will feel entertained, but I hope they'll also feel deeply moved from laughter to tears. There's no preaching, just a group of light-hearted circus cabaret acts showing us how ridiculous humans are to fight, when we could be united in dancing and singing.

## **Adam Haigh – Movement Direction**

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Adam Haigh explores the role of movement and physicality in bringing a performance to life.

Firstly, what is a movement director's role? For me, it's having eyes on the overall physical language of a production, nurturing the company through exercises to embody their roles, making sure anything that moves on stage is clear, and finding ultimate clarity in the storytelling. The human body is a complex instrument of expression on stage and can be used to communicate, portray raw emotion and convey human behaviour in a way that words can't. Progressively, multiple bodies can create skilfully crafted compositions on stage that can not only focus an audience's eye, but can create set, obstacles and build a seamless flow of action. For this piece in particular I made sure I did a lot of research into the period, looking very carefully at military body language, etiquette and the finely choreographed marching routines that help evolve the atmosphere of the story.

Another task for any movement director is to build a seamless flow of action that is skilfully woven through rehearsals to help enhance the emotional shifts in the piece. In *Oh What a Lovely War* we have used many different theatrical tools and conventions in the movement to help flourish and season the storytelling, including Commedia dell' arte, symbolism, different patterns of motion and the power of human gesture. A movement director's role is to help figure out logistics on how furniture and props move, why they move and how it can be done in a creative way. How do we transition from one scene to another seamlessly without pulling focus?

Where do I start before I enter a rehearsal room? Well, I usually start by reading the script and finding clues embedded in it to influence the moving world of the piece. Who are these characters? What is their life experience that will effect their physicality? Where is the conflict? How do they communicate? What are their objectives and how do they try to achieve them physically? Are there physical obstacles? Alongside the director and other creatives, these questions are then explored in the rehearsal room and built up like building blocks to create a cohesive storytelling experience for our audience.

Subconsciously as humans we are always moving. We are breathing, laughing, shaking hands, running for the bus, pointing to the bin, blinking... the list is endless. My job, in a rehearsal process, is to dissect those actions for an actor, analyse them, reshape them, sharpen them, theatricalise them, challenge them, so that every movement seen by an audience member is understandable, thought provoking and relatable.

Adam Haigh

# BLAKEYED THEATRE

## Tom Neill - Orchestration

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Tom Neill offers an insight into his orchestration of the music that's come to represent a lost generation.

The first and certainly fundamental challenge of writing music for a show like *Oh What A Lovely War* is sourcing accurate versions of the songs from which to work. This has become easier over time with the increasing availability of online resources, particularly digitised scores from sources such as the National Library of Australia and historical recordings, then on 'His Master's Voice' Gramophone discs and now on YouTube. Thankfully, only one had to be transcribed from a barely audible scratchy recording - the highly poetic *Adieu La Vie* or *Goodbye Life*.

Then we start to consider audience expectations around the music. Originally composed at a time of romantic prevalence - against the background of Debussy, Brahms and Elgar - they had a lyrical and sometimes orchestral backing, also influenced by the popular forms of the late 1800s, music hall and ragtime. *Row Row Row*, for example, initially written for a theatrical revue of 1912, is used here to evoke the pastoral pre-war *mise-en-scène*.

Since then, interpretations exist for many social purposes, from military parades and acts of remembrance, through to our modern-day Promenade concerts. But the two most significant inspirations for our orchestrations are the soldiers' own reworkings, preserved with context in Max Arthur's accessible volume *When This Bloody War Is Over*, and Richard Attenborough's 1969 film version, with its astonishingly inventive arrangements by Alfred Ralston.

With now over 100 years of musical history in mind, we set to creating versions that fit within our artistic world of the circus. I'm doubly blessed here, both to be writing for such a talented cast of multi-instrumentalists, also with a brilliantly imagined instrumentation, that allows everything from the grandeur of the orchestra to the comedy of the clown, and the simple beauty of folk music. Much credit goes to Ellie Verkerk and the cast for excellently working these arrangements and for collaboratively creating much of the music.

Today, I hope you will hear echoes of the music you remember, feel yourself alongside the soldiers who had nothing but their voices for entertainment and courage, and also enjoy something invigorating in our bespoke renditions.

Tom Neill

## Practical Exercises

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### Suitable for English and History KS2-3. Why don't you?

1. Do what the soldiers did and write alternative, or satirical lyrics for a popular song? Maybe to protest about conditions at school, or a political issue such as 'hug a hoody'?
2. Put a dot on a piece of A4 paper for every 10,000 Soldiers who died in each country. How many dots do you end up with?
3. Make a pack of 'mementoes' that you might have taken with you to the front. Include photographs, letters, and keepsakes.
4. Look at some contemporary poetry, such as Dulce et Decorum est, or Counter-Attack. Oh What a Lovely War uses juxtaposing images to highlight the horror and loss of war. What images could you select to accompany these poems?

### Drama warm up exercises and performance pieces

#### British Bull dogs Unite!!!

First read Act 1 Lines Newspaper "TROOPS FIRE ON DUBLIN..." to M.C "Ssh"

In the opening of Oh What Lovely War there is a war game. For a bit of fun and a physical warm up play British Bull Dogs in your Drama Studio. The M.C. begins and is on it, and the first three he/she tags become Britain, France and Russia. They then form a united team. And are against the others. This is a simple warm up designed to get students having fun and reading sections of the play.

#### Remote war

First read Act 2 Band "Irish Washerwoman" to Sergeant "Its not so bad. After all, I'll escape the whole bloomen war"

After reading the scene, in groups of 3 re-enact the scene. Don't worry about saying the lines right just have fun and improvise. Another team member will have a remote control. They will be able to pause, rewind, forward and play the scene as much as they like. Take 10 minutes to block and improvise it then 5 minutes to work it through with the person controlling the action.

This is designed to get the students working physically with the text and acting. The scene and the remote controller can have fun with the actors and push their physical abilities.

#### Theatre Workshop rehearsal method - Clowning about (Suggested for year 9 +)

Taking the clowning and silliness of the Pierrot characters in "Oh What a Lovely War", apply this to a modern issue. For example, create a scene where the actors are clowns and they joke about. The subject matter however will deal with Eating Disorders, Iraq War, and Stabbings in Britain etc.

Your scene must contain:

- Clown
- Song
- Slow motion
- Statistics

Eg - "U.S. Monthly Spending in Iraq - \$12 billion in 2008", "At least 1.1 million people in the UK are affected by an eating disorder", "In London last year there were 1,200 reported stabbings"

# BLAKEYED THEATRE

## Marketing the Show

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Our Marketing team use a series of carefully planned marketing method to promote Oh What a Lovely War

Here are a few:

- Press releases
- Direct Mail out
- Flyer and poster
- Listings in the adverts of papers
- Radio Interviews
- Competitions in newspapers and magazines
- E Flyer
- Social Media

**TASK: Choosing one of the following Marketing methods, write about “Oh What a Lovely War”**

1 : Press release: A press release is a written communication directed at members of the news media for the purpose of announcing something claimed as having news value. Typically, it is e-mailed to assignment editors at newspapers, magazines, radio stations and television networks.

2 : Create a TikTok video designed to get the biggest number of views.

3 : Design an e flyer for the event. (Flyer that is sent via email) You may want to do this free hand or on the computer. Remember to add the logos of the companies involved.

# BLAKEYED THEATRE

## Post-Show Notes

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While watching the show, consider the following:

Acting (characters, relationships, vocal delivery, physical traits, use of space, etc.)

Music (instruments, moods, styles, etc.)

Set and props (time period, location, moods, etc.)

Costume (time period, status, masks, materials, etc.)

What is the play about?

The bit that worked the best for you, and why

A bit that didn't work for you, and why

How would you have done that bit differently?

# BLAKEYED THEATRE

## Cast

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### **Christopher Arkeston**

Christopher trained at Manchester School of Theatre.

His theatre credits include *Only Fools and Horses: The Musical* (Theatre Royal Haymarket), *All Hands on Deck*, *Redcoats*, *Get Well Soon* and *Revolting Women* (Mikron Theatre Company), *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Merry Wives of Windsor* (Cambridge Shakespeare Festival).



### **Tom Crabtree**

Tom is a graduate of Rose Bruford's Actor-Musician course. He is multi-instrumentalist, specialising in Brass as well as being a trained musical theatre performer.

He is a founding member of the production company Off the Cuff Theatre/Film productions, where he fills the role of Director of Music in Performance.

Tom is extremely excited to be working with the amazing cast and crew of *Oh What a Lovely War*.

# BLACKEYED THEATRE



## Harry Curley

Harry is a Rose Bruford College 2022 Graduate.

His theatre credits include *Once* (Barn Theatre), *Summer In The City* (Upstairs at the Gatehouse) and *Caligari* (New Diorama/ Underbelly at Edinburgh Fringe '22).



## Alice E Mayer

Alice is a Welsh Actor Musician who graduated from Rose Bruford College in 2021.

After making her professional stage debut as Elizabeth Lavenza in Blackeyed Theatre's UK tour of *Frankenstein* in 2022, Alice has been a regular voice actor in the award winning Audible series *The Chronicles of Wild Hollow* and has recently been touring Wales as Blodeuwedd in the bilingual *Y Mabinogi*.

Film credits include Grace in *Arcadia* and Noble Girl in *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword*.

A keen writer and multi-instrumentalist, she wrote and directed her first musical whilst training and is currently working on her one woman show *Hourglass*.

# BLAKEYED THEATRE



## Chioma Uma

Shortlisted for the Evening Standard and TikTok Future Theatre Fund, Chioma Uma is a Rose Bruford College graduate with a degree in Actor Musicianship.

Chioma's credits include *Brief Encounter* (New Wolsey and UK tour), *Kiss Me Kate*, *Camelot* and *Othello* (Watermill, Newbury), *Cinderella* *The Rockin' Panto!* (New Wolsey Theatre/ ArtsDepot), *BBC Doctor Who: Time Fracture* (Hartshorn Hook Productions), *Dirty Dancing* (Secret Cinema), *Robin Hood*, *The Panto That Nearly Never Was* (Theatr Clwyd).

Additionally, Chioma has composed and musically directed for theatre in the past, co-commissioned to compose for *This Time* by contemporary circus company, Ockham's Razor.



## Euan Wilson

Euan trained at Rose Bruford.

His theatre credits include *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Vienna English Theatre), *The Great Gatsby* (Immersive London), *Zog* (UK Tour), *Stick Man* (UK Tour, London and Dubai) and *The Theban Motherf\*\*\*er* (Action to the Word).

# BLAKEYED THEATRE

## Artistic Team

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### **Nicky Allpress - Director**

Nicky is a freelance director and dramaturg. She is a member of the Young Vic Creator's Programme and Stage Directors UK.

Her directing credits include *The Shape of Things* (Park Theatre), *Walworth Farce* and *Romeo & Juliet* (Southwark Playhouse), *Crackers* (Polka Theatre), *My Brilliant Friend* (National Theatre as Staff Director assisting Melly Still), *Restless* (Terrifying Women), *Moment of Grace* (Tristan Bates), *PROUD* (New Wimbledon Theatre), *Market Boy* (Union Theatre), *Mosquito* (Seven Dials Theatre), *Invisible Me* (Bloomsbury Festival) and *Maddie* (Arcola Outside). Nicky was also Assistant Director to Jessica Swale on the film *Summerland*.



### **Ellie Verkerk – Musical Director**

Ellie's recent work includes Musical Director for *Burnt City* (Punchdrunk), Assistant Musical Director for *The Color Purple* (UK Tour), Musical Director for *Collabro* and *Six* (West End and UK Tour), lead pianist for Lea Salonga's *Dream Again* Tour at the Royal Albert Hall, and Musical Director for Chesney Hawkes' musical concept recording *The One*.

She has worked with Blackeyed Theatre since 2010 as Musical Director for *Oh What A Lovely War*, *Mother Courage*, *Dracula*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Frankenstein* and *Jane Eyre*.

For more information: [www.ellieverkerk.com](http://www.ellieverkerk.com)

# BLAKEYED THEATRE



## Adam Haigh – Movement Director

Adam's director, choreographer and movement director credits include *The Mikado* (Theatre Royal Bath/UK Tour), *Ruddigore* (Wiltons Music Hall), *Eledeline Lee Collection 2023* (London Fashion Week), *Kiss Me Kate* (Leicester Curve), *Soho Cinders* (Charing Cross Theatre), *Get On The Floor* with *Strictly Come Dancing's* AJ Pritchard (UK Tour), *Christmas Spectacular 2018* with Kerry Ellis, Kimberley Walsh and Anton & Erin (Drury Lane), *South Pacific*, starring Dave Willets (Guernsey), *Transforming Minds* (Park Theatre), *Chess* (Leicester Curve, Broadway World Nomination for Best Choreography), UK Premier of *Brooklyn the Musical* (Greenwich Theatre), *Anything Goes* (The Other Palace), *25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (Nominated for Best Off West End Director 2018) and *Can Can* (Nominated for Best Off West End Choreographer 2018).

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## Tom Neill - Orchestrator

Tom's compositions include two albums of jazz, *The Other Side Of Me* (Alleyne Dance), *The Winter Giant* (Beautiful Creatures and Battle Festival), pro-EU fanfare *The Schuman Declaration*, *Henry V* and *The Tempest* (South Hill Park) and *Three Songs Of Charlotte Mew*. He gigs with various bands, including Windsor's *Jazz Vanguard* and *Tunehead*.

He is proud to have directed two national tours for Blackeyed Theatre, as well as acting in seven of their productions regionally and on tour, also writing and composing two of their literary adaptations; he's pleased to be revisiting his original orchestrations for this anniversary tour.

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# BLACKEYED THEATRE

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