



# WAR HORSE IN CONCERT

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2024  
3:00 PM

**CENTURY II CONCERT HALL**

**Daniel Hege**

*Music Director & Conductor*

**Dr. Julie Longhofer**

*Director*

**Wichita Repertory Theater  
(ICTRep)**

**Butler Community College  
Concert Choir**

**PROGRAM NOTES**

# WAR HORSE IN CONCERT

Based on the original story by Michael Morpurgo

Music Composed by Adrian Sutton

## Director's Notes

By Dr. Julie Longhofer

*This is the North American Premiere of this production.*

Almost 50 years ago, English writer Michael Morpurgo and his wife Clare moved to a small village in Devon, in the southwest of England, where they started an educational charity called "Farms for City Children." Morpurgo tells the story of how he chatted with a local man in a pub one day, a man who had been in the First World War and was now in his eighties.

Here was no poet, no historian, but someone who had been there, told it straight. He took me on a journey back in time to the trenches, told me how it was to live through it, his hopes and fears. I discovered through him two other octogenarians who had been there too, one of them 'with horses', in the cavalry. (Sutton & Tams, 2017)

Inspired by the real experiences of these men (Albert Weeks, Wilfred Ellis, and Captain Budgett), Morpurgo penned a simple and moving book for children ages 10 and up, which was published in 1982.

WAR HORSE is a story of friendship, loyalty and great empathy, set against the background of a devastating war. Born in an ordinary country village, a beloved farm horse named Joey is sold to the cavalry; we follow Joey to the Great War, where he is loved by English cavalrymen, captured by German soldiers and makes his home for a while on a French farm. Because the narrative is told from the perspective of an innocent creature, the humans caught up in this war are seen from a neutral perspective – there is no governmental posturing in the novel. Those who care for Joey include a boy who grows to be a man, a kind English cavalry officer, a young trooper who is inexperienced on horseback, an older German infantryman who misses his family, and a French girl who has lost her health and most of her hope.

The origin of WAR HORSE IN CONCERT begins with Adrian Sutton's music, commissioned by the National Theater of Great Britain for a 2007 stage play (which also featured the unique large-scale puppetry work of Handspring Puppet Company of South Africa.) Adrian Sutton has described his own compositional language as "essentially tonal, but with the harmony tending to derive from chromatic contrapuntal lines rather than block chords. I'm told I have quite an 'English' sound" (Wilson, 2024). If you are unfamiliar with WAR HORSE as a stage play, I encourage you to start your exploration at [www.warhorseonstage.com](http://www.warhorseonstage.com) and [nationaltheatre.org.uk/war-horse](http://nationaltheatre.org.uk/war-horse) because the theatrical event which is WAR HORSE is unforgettable. (The music for Steven Spielberg's 2011 film is also lovely, written by longtime Spielberg collaborator John Williams.)

Wichita Repertory Theater's Managing Director Stan Longhofer, a long-time fan of the War Horse stage play, heard of the WAR HORSE IN CONCERT project several years ago and approached then Executive Director Don Reinhold to gauge his interest in producing the concert here in Wichita. With enthusiastic interest from the Wichita Symphony Board in mounting a North American Premiere of the piece, we have cooperated with **esk. film**, an independent film producing company that operates from Edinburgh to make projection features which accompany live orchestral performance. We are grateful to showcase the filmed artwork of Rae Smith, the Tony- and Olivier-award-winning illustrator and theatrical designer as we bring Joey's story to life. Special thanks to Samuel Weatherstone and Laurence Aston for helping to make everything happen, and for their gracious willingness to allow us creative innovations with additional narrators, as well as costumes and staging. Thanks also to Matt Udland and the Butler Community College choir and Wichita talent Ben Juhnke for his splendid theatrical lighting.

*Dr. Julie Longhofer, Artistic Director, ICTRep*

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## The Music of WAR HORSE

The following commentary by composer Adrian Sutton is reprinted with permission from the highly recommended 2017 BMG release of WAR HORSE: THE STORY IN CONCERT, recorded after the highly celebrated 2016 concert at the Royal Albert Hall with live narrators Michael Morpurgo and actress Joanna Lumley.

*Copies of the 2017 WAR HORSE: THE STORY IN CONCERT 3-disc CD are available for purchase in the lobby today.*

THE GENIUS of Michael Morpurgo's story is that it uses a horse – a neutral character with no comprehension of the world of human strife – to reveal the equivalence of human suffering on both sides of a national conflict. In the early days of the stage show's development, a topic of discussion between me, Tom Morris (co-director) and John Tams (songmaker) was how this might be expressed musically, in terms of style of reference. It might be a quintessentially English story, but if a war touches all sides, then shouldn't German musical language and references of the time post-Mahler, say, or German folk-song – feature prominently too?

Even as we pondered that question, it was apparent that the raw material for the War Horse score should derive from two elements: **a folk music language** and **a broader cinematic sound, rooted in the orchestral literature of the early twentieth century**, to help support the story and staging at key points. The first element became admirably fulfilled in the form of John Tams' beautiful folk song adaptations: *Only Remembered*, *Rolling Home*, *The Scarlet and The Blue*, *Stand To*, *The Year Turns Round Again* and *Devonshire Carol*. They encapsulate so neatly the situations and sentiments of the characters at the appropriate points in the story that it's hard to imagine what else might have stood in their place. **In making the orchestral arrangements of these songs for the show, I discovered an added bonus: a rich seam of motivic inspiration for the rest of the orchestral score.**

In tackling that second element, I broadened the focus somewhat **beyond national musical identities to try and find a deeper musical response to what war – any war – does to destroy lives.** So, although this story has a First World War setting, I found myself channeling quite a few influences of European symphonic works of Second World War origin which, perhaps with the memory of the Great War still all-too fresh, seem to show a heavier heart. Two examples come to mind: in both **Vaughan Williams' Fifth Symphony** and in **Honegger's Third**, one can hear a particularly wistful weariness of the toil and drudgery of conflict and a desperate yearning for peace. I often sensed the spirit of these works nearby when working on the score, beginning with the first musical cue to be written: *Devon at Peace*.

This opens with the **trumpet motif** identifying **Joey**, Albert's horse, and leads us into a landscape of fields, gently rolling hills, and undisturbed rural life. A **clarinet** introduces us to a short instrumental exploration of '*Only Remembered*' – the hymn that has become the stage show's anthem. What follows is a journey that traces the transformation of the lives of the characters, horses, men, women and children who had no premonition of the experiences war was to put them through. **A transformation from that ordered, predictable, almost somnolent life to one churned-up and spit out on the battlefields by tanks and machine guns.** I tried to follow this arc wherever I could in the thematic development. The song '*The Scarlet and The Blue*,' for example, symbolises the

# The Music of WAR HORSE

*continued*

light-hearted, optimistic and frankly naïve celebration on the imminence of war, they are drawn into the excitement of it all. However, the musical motif of “then hurrah for The Scarlet and The Blue” **later becomes an ominous rattling motor rhythm for the Second Charge, and eventually rings utterly hollow in a grotesque distortion of the theme in The Tank.** The orchestral style itself develops over the course of the story too; we begin in Devon with a rich pastoral sound redolent perhaps of Vaughan Williams, but at the opposite pole of The Tank, the sound has become fractured into **brutal, mechanistic Stravinskyian rhythm** and nothing else.

The score for War Horse was a large project that took months to develop – a luxury rarely afforded composers in theatre. But it owes a debt to Tom Morris in particular for his vision of what the music score for the show could be, and to the other members of the creative team whose contributions to the show in their own fields had an important (and no doubt unwitting) collective impact on its musical shape and sound.

As a footnote: the orchestral score for War Horse exists in another form – War Horse Suite. Premiered by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in 2010, it is a concert work running for twenty minutes without a break and attempts to tell the story in abbreviated and purely instrumental musical terms without narration. War Horse – The Story in Concert reverts to a form much closer to the show’s original conception, pairing the music with the text of the story.