

Surrender Your Heart and Mind to Theatre at the Coral Gables Arts Cinema

by Sarah L. Mason

On May 10, I had the privilege of watching a National Theatre of London production of the 1982 children's book *War Horse*, by Michael Morpurgo, joining the ranks of the five million people worldwide who have been touched by the heart-wrenching and heart-warming story of a boy and his horse. But this was unlike any other viewing experience I had ever had, not only because I hadn't seen the beautiful story before, but because the actors were in London's West End while I was in the Coral Gables Art Cinema, and the play was a fresh production performed just two weeks prior.

War Horse is about a 16-year-old boy named Albert whose heavy-drinker father clumsily buys a foal at an auction. Albert's mother is livid, but Albert is captivated by the beast. His mother charges him with caring for the horse, which he names Joey. The two cultivate a sweet and trusting friendship, giving the audience members (myself included) a good reason to have tears in their eyes before the real trouble even begins.

One of the most enchanting aspects of the production is Joey himself, an intricately designed life-sized puppet handled by three professional puppeteers from Cape Town, South Africa's Handspring Puppet Company. Even though the audience can see the human puppeteers manipulating the puppet throughout the show, Joey's movements are lifelike, giving the horse the opportunity to be expressive in a way I'd never imagined a puppet could be.

The love between Albert and Joey is palpable almost immediately, making the weight of Albert's father's later decision to sell the exquisite chestnut stallion to the military a heartbreaking blow. The audience watches as a sullen Albert tries to get on with life without his best friend and Joey is led into a war his 16-year-old master is too young to participate in. However, Albert eventually decides to defy his parents and the military's age restriction, and goes to war to find his horse. The story then follows Albert's dangerous mission to bring Joey back home.

I found myself completely engulfed by the three-hour play almost immediately, being completely taken with the acting and puppetry. To call them "convincing" would be an understatement, and to say they're "talented" doesn't even begin to describe it. The effects of the story resonated with me and pulse through my veins even as I sit here, days later, to write about it and share it with you.

This particular event was produced by National Theatre Live, a program that aims "to broadcast the best of British theatre live from the London stage to cinemas across the UK and

around the world.” The story of *War Horse* took place in 1914, making 2014 an appropriate year to broadcast it to a broader audience than it has even known. The Coral Gables Art Cinema partnered with National Theatre Live to bring the story of *War Horse* all the way from London to us right here in Coral Gables, and the Cinema has a line-up of more stellar theatre to grab our hearts and minds in the coming weeks.

In addition to National Theatre Live’s upcoming screening of *King Lear*, Coral Gables Art Cinema regularly plays critically acclaimed artistic films like John Turturro’s *Fading Gigolo* (playing now through the end of May) and *Chinese Puzzle* starring Audrey Tautou (starting May 30). They also host events for learning more about films and the worlds they inhabit, such as a screening of the Japanese animated film *Ponyo* accompanied by a talk from a marine biologist from the University of Miami. That event is a part of the Cinema’s *Science on the Screen* series, an educational program that pairs films with speakers who are experts in the fields of the films’ subject matter.

The Coral Gables Art Cinema is a friendly and inviting venue with attentive staff members. It has an old school aesthetic while utilizing state-of-the-art equipment for a top notch viewing experience, whether you’re there to see a stage production on the screen or to watch a movie and learn about its world. For more information about the venue or viewing times, visit their website at gablescinema.com