



Oh What a Lovely War

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This pioneering work is a theatrical chronicle of the First World War, told through the songs and documents of the period, was created in 1963 by Joan Littlewood's London-based group, Theatre Workshop. It was ground-breaking, not only for its blatant denunciation of the incompetence of political leaders during World War I, but also for its unusual theatrical style and development. Created organically through a process of improvisation which was then scripted, *Oh What A Lovely War* is a colorful and innovative exercise in ensemble theatre and acting.

It recalls the horrors of World War I through the humor and frivolity of a seaside pier show, mixing famous British war songs (often with alternative words) with gags and dances, and sets hilarious clowning against shocking factual documentation of the war's casualties. An exhilarating ensemble piece, Joan Littlewood's theatrical creation is a lesson in Brechtian theatre, in its self-conscious theatricality, and uses humor to present human tragedy.

It received the acclaim of London audiences and critics. It won the Grand Prix of the Théâtre des Nations festival in Paris that year and has gone on to become a classic of the modern theatre. In 1969 a film version was made which extended the play's popular success. This new version of the play, as edited by Joan Littlewood, returns the script to its original version.

Includes a new photo section of the original production, and an Afterword by Victor Spinetti.

Oh What a Lovely War Details

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From Reader Review Oh What a Lovely War for online ebook

Rachel Taylor says

I have seen the play too, which I preferred, I think it was just more moving and created an emotion-intense performance, something I just think the play didn't convey so well.

Hannah says

I studied this play for my drama GCSE, but actually really enjoyed it despite fearing the worst.

It gives a satirical view of the events of WWI and can be very funny at times. These comedic sections, however, are juxtaposed to great effect with the harrowing recollections of the death tolls and life on the battlefield.

I would definitely recommend this to all drama students particularly, but I think it's also a great read for anybody with any interest in history.

Lizzie says

I'm performing some of this in my A Level performing arts. I'm finding it a very fun play to perform and as I love Blackadder, the similarities between the two make it a win win situation!

Helen says

Love the fact that when reading this play a friend was also reading it and they were completely different. A harrowing story of the war and a brave attempt to get the truth to the masses

Salli says

I couldn't put it down once I had started, I could just see it and how painful it would be to watch, a really moving piece of writing I would love to direct

Milka says

Had to read again for uni... I liked this much more the second time around.

Izzi Seale says

Decent play. Hard to tell completely what is happening when reading a play though. Would like to see it live

Ela says

A biting satire chock full of historical references. The frantic delivery adds to the chaotic, sometimes unintelligible mood. While the irony is a little obvious in places, this is still a good read and serves pretty well as a summary of WWI.

(Think Blackadder's explanation of why WW1 started)

Emily says

I saw this at Krannert Center for the Performing Arts in Spring 2015. It was an incredibly powerful depiction of WWI.

Berenice says

Maybe if I see the play perform on stage I'd appreciate it much better...
Too many songs.

Simon Fletcher says

I have always loved reading plays. Their sparceness has always been their power in that as a reader you always have to do more to make the story work. You have to act the play out in your own mind; more so than with a novel.

This though is not the easiest of plays to read as there is so much that is visual, newsreels, slides etc and relies on some knowledge of the songs being sung.

I would recommend this wholeheartedly though especially in this the centenary commemoration of the start of WWI.

Richard says

Apart from the poems of Wilfred Owen et al from the Great War nothing has moved me more than the film and later the play of 'Oh What a Lovely War'.

It was a joy therefore to find this theatre workshop Bloomsbury edition - Original version and edited and introduced by Joan Littlewood. Reading it brought back the productions I have seen and it had me humming

the songs.

No-one can really explain to us who have lived with peace during our lifetimes and we owe it in our act of remembrance to understand as much as we can if we are to engage and never forget.

The lives are spent, many in the prime of their youth, on the battlefields and beyond. A generation lived with its aftermath and for many their involvement was never shared and carried to the grave.

Facts can overwhelm us. The scale of loss and the waste of life drown us in numbers we cannot count.

However, wars have not ceased and the capacity to kill has advanced with time.

In his Afterword, Victor Spinetti writes ".....but I never knew that all the fuses for the shells were made in Britain and that the Germans bought their share from us, during the war."

Futility, Hypocrisy and Rage cannot begin to express one's ability to assimilate such information.

Find your means to remember but if you can catch the play, please go.....

Nick says

A play well written by a troupe about WWI! The characters feel real, and the play is very easy to follow, even though some small parts are written in a foreign language; not more than a few lines here and there.

This play definitely goes from subtle humor to dark quickly, and never comes back up. If you enjoy a good read and a not so happy ending, but well ended play give this one a shot.
