

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW MYERS.



A HORSE'S TALE

AUSTRALIA'S OWN WAR HORSE STORY HAS COME TO LIGHT, THANKS TO AN INNOVATIVE AND THOUGHT-PROVOKING NEW PRODUCTION.

AMONG THE forgotten heroes of World War I were the 136,000 military horses sent to the European battlefields alongside the thousands of Australian and New Zealand soldiers. As men perished, so did their horses. In fact, of those war horses, only one returned to Australia. His name was Sandy and his story has come to light in the new play *As Told By The Boys Who Fed Me Apples*.

Written by Rosemary Johns, inspiration for the play came after she attended a production of *War Horse*, where she discovered Sandy's story in the program.

AS TOLD BY THE BOYS WHO FED ME APPLES
(ABOVE) MIKLOS GERELY AS SANDY ANDRÉ JEWSON
(RIGHT) IN THE HUMAN ROLES.

"In writing this play, I wanted the audience to walk away knowing Sandy's story and the story of the forgotten men who served with him," says Rosemary.

"In my research, I spoke to The Friends Of Sandy society and the Australian Light Horse, where some members had parents who fought in the war. Their memories were so vivid I felt that the story was a breath away. This play is an alternate view of the war, because as it recedes we forget the reality of it. I wanted audiences to experience the humanity and compassion of the bond between horse and man – even in the brutality of war."

The two-man play takes us through three sequences, the first being Sandy and owner Major-General Sir William Throsby Bridges at Gallipoli. The next includes a veterinarian on the Western Front then, finally, we see the return home with groom Archibald Thomas Jordan, where Sandy's life draws to an emotional conclusion.

Taking on the multiple roles of military men is André Jewson (*The Lion King*), who not only morphs convincingly from one character to the next, but also helps capture the loving bond between soldiers and the docile Sandy.

"I enjoyed the rigour required to get the, often, complicated language and imagery under my skin," says André. "Our director, Greg Carroll was very interested in strengthening the relationships between my characters and the horse, so we worked that in in a few different ways. The connection between man and horse is very clear in the writing so it was about honouring that, while also allowing ourselves to play together as actors and letting the complicity between us blossom."

Sandy is played by European mime artist Miklos Gerey, who artfully manages to encapsulate all the gentility and strength of the spirit of a horse along with the fear experienced by war horses.

"I watched horses to find out how I could show their most important physical qualities," says Gerey. "I realised I had a deficiency in my legs but a surplus in my arms, so I played only the front part of the horse, hiding my arms altogether. Horses express emotion using their front legs and by turning their head, so I used that. Another important aspect is their eyes, which are big and mirror-like. I don't think they express emotions through their eyes, but I do think they are mirroring human emotions, so I used my eyes and facial expressions to mirror and amplify André's feelings."

Surprisingly, the play includes anthropomorphic moments when Sandy takes on human characteristics. In one clever scene, Sandy and his groom fantasise about going to the movies – special mention should be made here of lighting designer Shane Grant's flickering cinematic treatment.

Having played to full houses at Melbourne's LaMama Theatre, *As Told By The Boys Who Fed Me Apples* is expected to tour in the next twelve months. Heartwarming and at times heart wrenching, this theatrical experience brings a new perspective to the Gallipoli narrative. Many lost heroes fly under the radar; thankfully Sandy now gets his day in the sun.