



Tom Lawler

PRIVATE PEACEFUL

Original Story by Michael Morpurgo

Performed by Shane O'Regan

Adapted and Directed by Simon Reade

Sound Design Jason Barnes

Lighting Design/Production Manager Anshuman Bhatia

Movement Direction Sue Mythen

Dialect Coach Gavin O'Donoghue

Production Associate Carly Levine

Tour Production Manager Eric Norbury

Producers Pemberley Productions (Andrew D. Hamingson & Tim Smith)
and Verdant Productions (Donal Shiels)

PROGRAM

There will not be an intermission.

Thursday, October 11 @ 7:30 PM

Friday, October 12 @ 7:30 PM

Saturday, October 13 @ 2 PM

Saturday, October 13 @ 7:30 PM

Harold Prince Theatre

PROGRAM NOTES

FINDING PRIVATE PEACEFUL

By Michael Morpurgo

I was born in 1943, near London. I played in bombsites, listened to the stories told around the kitchen table, stories of war that saddened all the faces around me. My Uncle Pieter lived only in the photo on the mantelpiece. He had been killed in the RAF in 1941. But for me he lived on, ever young in the photograph, as I grew up, as I grew old.

So I have been drawn instinctively, I think, in many of my stories, to the subject of war, the enduring of it, the pity of it, and above all, the suffering of survivors. Some thirty years ago, after meeting an old soldier from my village who had been to the First World War in the Devon Yeomanry in the Cavalry, I wrote *War Horse*, a vision of that dreadful war seen through the eyes of a horse.

Then, almost 10 years ago, on a visit to Ypres to talk about writing about war for young people at a conference, I visited the 'In Flanders Field' Museum.

Talking to Piet Chielens, its director, I was reminded that over 300 British soldiers had been executed during the First World War for cowardice or desertion, two of them for simply falling asleep at their posts. I read their stories, their trials (some lasted less than 20 minutes – 20 minutes for a man's life). They knew then about shell-shock – many officers were treated in psychiatric hospitals for it, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon amongst them. They knew even as they sentenced these men (they called them 'worthless' men), that most of them were traumatized by the terrors they had endured, by the prolonged and dreadful brutality of trench warfare.

In all, over 3,000 were condemned to death, and 300 of them were chosen to be shot. I visited the execution sites, the cells in Poperinghe, I read the telegram sent home to a mother informing her that her son had been shot at dawn for cowardice. I knew recent governments had considered and rejected the granting of pardons for these men, had refused to acknowledge the appalling injustice visited upon them.

Standing in a war cemetery in the rain five miles outside Ypres, I came upon the gravestone of Private Peaceful. I had found my name, my unknown soldier. I had found my story, a story I knew I had to tell and that should be told.

The question then was how it should be told. I decided to put myself at the center of the story, to become the condemned man waiting only for dawn and death. A glance at my watch recently returned from the menders who had declared it was made in 1915, gave me the idea that the chapter breaks should happen only when the soldier glances down at his watch which he dreads to do, and tries not to do.

My soldier would reflect on his life, live it again through the night so that the night would be long, as long as his life. He does not want to sleep his last night away, nor waste it in dreams. Above all he wants to feel alive. Each chapter begins in the barn in Belgium, but his thoughts soon take him back to Devon, to the fields and streams and lanes of Iddesleigh, his home and his village.

Memories of his childhood come back to him, of family. Of the first day at school, of the first stirrings of love, a father's death, a night's poaching, then of the first news of approaching war and the recruiting sergeant in the town square at Hatherleigh. So to the

trenches and to the events that have led him to the last night of his life. And all the while the watch he does not want to look at is ticking his life away.

ADAPTING PRIVATE PEACEFUL

Director's Note by Simon Reade

Michael Morpurgo published his First World War story, *Private Peaceful*, in 2003. I came to adapt it for the theatre almost immediately, in spring 2004, and have frequently returned to it: in theatre; as a radio play; as a feature film, directed by Pat O'Conner starring Jack O'Connell. Rehearsing it now in Dublin for this new production with the young live-wire actor Shane O'Regan, has reminded me just how urgent and political and thrilling a story it is – with the extra frisson of it playing in a country with mixed feelings about a century-ago participation in a Colonialists' war on the Continent and far away in the Middle East.

My walk to rehearsals each day – from Christchurch Cathedral, along the Liffey and down to Foley Street – has brought home to me, an Englishman, the history and revolutionary anger and excitement of what erupted here 100 years ago. Something similar must have been felt in Russia at the time, too. Daring to hope for radical justice is also *Private Peaceful's* theme.

Morpurgo's story starts in the tiny Devon village of Iddesleigh, not unlike many rural communities woven into the rural fabric of Ireland, I imagine. It ends on the killing fields of Flanders, and we've all been there, as nations, as peoples. It's the universality of the human experience – of growing up, of unrequited love, of dying for a cause that's been shot to pieces by the establishment – which the play enacts. For all people. For all ages.

Private Peaceful speaks directly to the experiences of anybody who has gone from childhood, through adolescence and into young adulthood. All of us. And it speaks loudest to young people who are in the midst of that. In the First World War, young people were the cannon fodder, dying for a cause that they really didn't understand; and if they did, they may well have deplored once they had endured the fighting. That resonates now as we retell the story in the context of Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, where teenagers are dying for the political ends of America, of Britain and the rest of the European Allies, of Assad, of Daesh.

The way I have directed the play and responded to Shane's energy and creative flare, is to embrace the kind of play-acting that you can imagine a child enjoying in their own bedroom: tipping their bed over and saying "this is a trench", or being in a field one moment and then in the middle of a market square the next, simply by articulating it. For adults watching it, it reawakens our childlike imagination, it has a young spirit about it; you get transported on extraordinary journeys with very few tricks, collectively bearing witness as an audience. Morpurgo threw down the gauntlet when the book was published in 2003 by saying that it is surely a mark of a civilized people to admit its wrongdoings of the past, to apologize for murdering its own soldiers who were shot at dawn in the First World War for insubordination, even when they were known to be suffering from Shell-Shock (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). When we came to produce the play for the first time in 2004, that challenge had yet to be picked up, which made me conclude that so-called Great Britain wasn't really a cradle of civilization after all. It took a few more years to civilize Great Britain and for the posthumous pardons to be granted.

I'm not saying Morpurgo's book, or our play, was singlehandedly responsible for the change of heart, for the remorse, for the atonement of the state. But I'm glad we kept banging on about it and didn't retreat when we were told to be 'pragmatic', 'be realistic' or not judge the past by the values of today. Too often we're told by our peers, let alone the powers that

be, that it's not worth upsetting the apple cart. But it is. The plaques and public memorials commemorating the brave women and men of the Easter Rising on my daily walk across Dublin have reminded me of that. And if theatre can be part of a process for radical change, a social revolution for idealistic young people to tip those carts over, then we can all scrump those apples for the greater good...

Although perhaps I shouldn't over-extend the metaphor. Or sound off about politics. I'm a theatre-maker, a dramatist. Let the play speak for itself.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Michael Morpurgo (Author)

Michael Morpurgo is a renowned writer of recent times who has penned award-winning books like *War Horse*, *The Lion Butterfly* and *Private Peaceful*. This prolific writer has inked numerous books which were acclaimed by readers and critics alike. He was an acquaintance of renowned poet Ted Hughes and under his guidance, Morpurgo pursued a career as a writer. These two writers, Hughes and Morpurgo, came up with the idea of the Children's Laureate award and Michael Morpurgo was the third Briton to be awarded with this honor.

Simon Reade (Direction & Adaptation)

Simon Reade's plays for theatre include: *Pride & Prejudice* (Theatre Royal Bath, 2009), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (2003), Ted Hughes's *Tales from Ovid* (with Tim Supple, 1999) and *Epitaph for the Official Secrets Act* (with Paul Greengrass, 2009), all for the Royal Shakespeare Company, where he was Literary Manager and Dramaturg; Geraldine McCaughrean's *Not the End of the World* (2007), Jill Tomlinson's *The Owl Who Was Afraid of the Dark?* (2003) and Philip Pullman's *Aladdin and the Enchanted Lamp* (with Aletta Collins, 2005) all for Bristol Old Vic, where he was Artistic Director; and Philip Pullman's *The Scarecrow and His Servant* (Poonamallee Productions/Southwark Playhouse, 2008). Reade's adaptations include Michael Morpurgo's *Private Peaceful* (2008), *The Mozart Question* (2008) and *Toro! Toro!* (2010) have been seen on tour throughout the UK, Sweden and North America. His books include a history of the international touring company Cheek by Jowl and *Dear Mr. Shakespeare: Letters to a Jobbing Playwright*.

Shane O'Regan (Tommo Peaceful)

Shane O'Regan trained at the Gaiety School of Acting, where in 2013, he received the Gaiety Theatre Bursary. Theatre credits include: *All That We Found Here Home* (New Theatre) (Smock Alley), *The Spinning Heart* (Tour), *Jack and the Beanstalk* (Mill Productions), *Hamlet* (Mill Productions), *The Spinning Heart* (Articulate Anatomy), *Hamlet* (AC Productions), *The Wise Wound* (Smock Alley), *The Boys* (Smock Alley), *Tales from the Woods* (Gumpton T.C.), *King Lear* (Mill Productions), *Spring Awakening* (Ill-Advised Theatre Company), *Trainspotting* (Smock Alley), *Howie The Rookie* (Samuel Beckett Theatre), *Off-Key* (Ill-Advised Theatre Company), *Slender* (Reality: Check Productions), *Line of Decent* (New Theatre), *Romeo & Juliet* (Tour), *Othello* (Tour), *Borstal Boy* (Gaiety Theatre), *Smock!* (Smock Alley), *Dirty Laundry* (Chris Edmund), *The Critic* (Rough Magic), *Macbeth* (Smock Alley), *Hamlet* (Greystones Theatre), *A Midsummers Night's Dream* (Pavilion Theatre) and *The Bee-Loud Glade* (RTE Arena). Film credits include: *Summon Her Children* (Brick By Stone), *The Abandoned House* (Edmund Buckley), *Tinder* (Blueprint Pictures), *Do It Now* (Viko Nicki), *MMA* (Viko Nicki) and *Cura Crises Pregnancy* (Kairos).

Pemberley Productions (Producer)

Pemberley Productions is a company founded and run by Andrew D. Hamingson and Tim Smith. They are dedicated to bringing European drama to North America and North American drama to Europe. Next season, as well as co-producing the U.S. tour of *Private Peaceful*, Pemberley is producing U.S. tours of PW Productions' tour of the National Theatre of Great Britain's *An Inspector Calls*, directed by Stephen Daldry, and the first U.S. tour of the long-running West End production of Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black*, directed by Robin Herford. Previous projects include a U.S. national tour of the Royal Shakespeare Company / Filter Theatre production of *Twelfth Night*, a European tour of The Public Theater's *Apple Family Plays* and an Irish tour of the American Players Theatre's production of James DeVita's *In Acting Shakespeare*. Pemberley also co-produced the U.S. tour of *Ensemble Basiani* from the Republic of Georgia in 2016 and general managed the U.S. tour of Druid Theatre's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. This season, Pemberley Productions is producing the second U.S. national tour of *Sancho* by and with Paterson Joseph, and have general managed the national tour of Theatre De La Ville's *State of Siege* and the NY premiere of *Some Old Black Man* at 59E59 Theatres.

Verdant Productions (Producer)

Formed by Donal Shiels in 2011, Verdant Productions produces and promotes a diverse range of live theatre, music, comedy and events in Ireland and internationally. It has also managed and represented other companies and individual artists. Recent work includes the world premiere of *Copper Face Jacks the Musical* by Paul Howard (The Olympia Theatre); *Trainspotting* by Irvine Welch & Henry Irvine (Olympia Theatre); *The Spinning Heart* by Donal Ryan (Gaiety Theatre); *The Weir* by Conor McPherson (Gaiety Theatre); *The Kings of The Kilburn High Road* by Jimmy Murphy and *Signatories* at Kilmainham Gaol & Olympia Theatre (UCD). Past work includes Brendan Behan's *Borstal Boy* (Gaiety Theatre), the world premiere of *Anglo The Musical* by Paul Howard (Bord Gáis Energy Theatre), *Hamlet* and *King Lear* by William Shakespeare and *Agrippina* by Handel for Irish Opera Collective (Dublin Fringe Festival), *Solpadeine is My Boyfriend* by Stefanie Preissner (Brisbane Powerhouse, Australia), *The Field* by John B Keane with Brian Dennehy, directed by Joe Dowling (Olympia Theatre) and *Private Peaceful* by Michael Morpurgo (Gaiety Theatre and Irish tour).