

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## Animal Farm

Book by George Orwell, adapted by Guy Masterson

Theatre Tours International

Wilton's Music Hall, London

23–27 January 2024

George Orwell had personal experience in Spain of the lethal nature of the Russian Stalinist regime. It is recorded in *Homage to Catalonia*, one of his finest books. Not content to leave the matter there, he later wrote the satire *Animal Farm* about the revolution in Russia in 1917 and its degeneration into the horrors of Stalin.

On Burn's Night in Edinburgh in 1995, Guy Masterson first publicly performed his one-person stage adaptation of the novel. It has since toured the world, at times being modified to accommodate more than one actor.

Guy is no longer doing cartwheels around the stage in this production at Wilton's Music Hall, but this impressive piece of storytelling still has a remarkable energy.

Wearing grey overalls, he arrives to the stage which is empty but for a single wooden trunk. The only other prop is the bowler hat, which will later emerge to depict the pig's adoption of the old master's privileged lifestyle.

The storyteller takes us through the animal revolution that drives out the alcoholic human farmer Jones, the name of the farm being changed to Animal Farm and the gradual corruption of their achievements by most of the pigs helped by vicious dogs.

Our moral centre of events is spoken by Boxer, the hard-working horse, and Clover, the gentle mare. Among the other characters to appear are Mollie, the vain pony, and the seemingly mindless sheep who are forever repeating the words given to them by one of the pigs. Guy Masterson evokes their irritating mass conformity by flapping his hands on either side of his head as he repeats their slogans.

As narrator, Guy speaks in his own voice, which is then modified along with how he holds himself to represent the various characters. The lighting will change at times, occasionally throwing monstrous shadows onto the back wall.

In the second half, we are reminded by voice-over clips of other leaders who have deceived us or have promised better times that never came. We hear Johnson, Sunak, May, Liz Truss and Thatcher.

And in case we are under the impression that it's only Tory politicians that lie to us, we are reminded of a certain Labour politician by the news that the farm needs to deal with a neighbouring farm because it has "weapons of mass castration."

Even if you are not drawn to political satire, it is an entertaining show by a very able performer that is fun to watch.

**Reviewer:** [Keith Mckenna](#)