

# Dark times for theatres under EU bulb rules

Jack Malvern

Theatre lamps are going out all over Europe and we shall not see them lit again if Britain passes new EU environmental legislation, the head of the National Theatre has said.

Rufus Norris, its artistic director said that restrictions on traditional and LED lightbulbs due to be enforced by 2020 would make all theatres' lighting equipment redundant. He estimated that the cost to British theatres of replacing it would be £1.25 billion.

He is supporting a campaign to halt the Ecodesign Working Plan, which the EU is scheduled to enact in October, before the official date of Brexit on March 29, next year. Even if Britain were able to opt out of the ban, which prohibits the manufacture of bulbs that generate less than 85 lumens of light for each watt of energy consumed, it is likely that manufacturers would not find it economical to make bulbs only for British theatres.

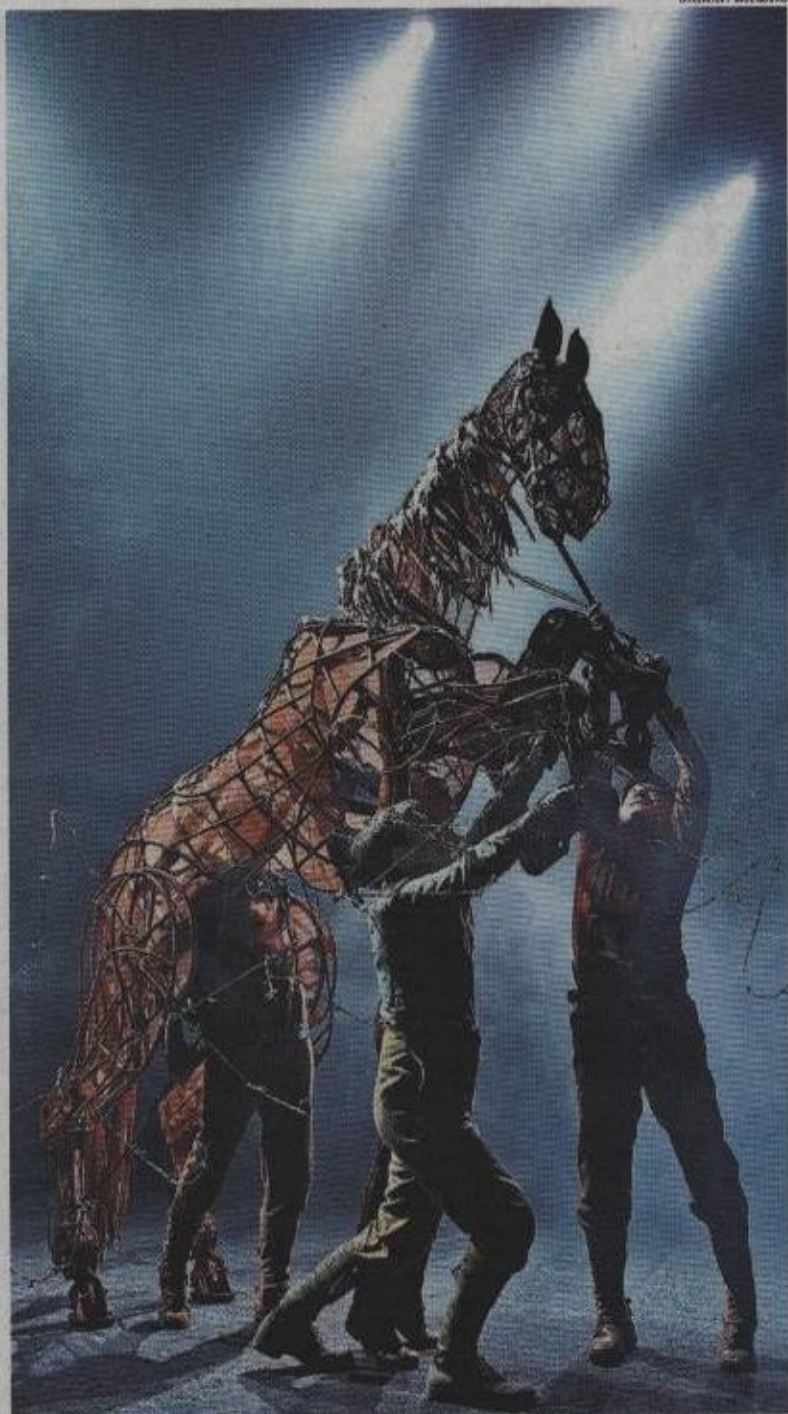
Norris said that the "legislation as proposed at the moment would affect everything" that his theatre did, including its productions of *War Horse* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, which rely on inventive lighting effects. The theatre's production of *Frankenstein* created its atmosphere with 3,500 hanging bulbs and its adaptation of the film *Network* relied on a scene being lit so that all colour was washed out. "Really the issue is much bigger than that because even the LED

lights that we're replacing our stock with would also be non-compliant. So by 2020 you can't then buy new stock. We would have a certain amount in the cupboard that would keep us going for some time, but when you run out of that, you are left with equipment that's just scrap."

He said that smaller theatres would be in a worse situation because they would be unable to afford new equipment. "It's back to candles," he said. "It's really drastic."

Current regulations include an exemption for theatres but the draft legislation does not. A campaign by the Association of Lighting Designers against the new regulations has received support from performers including Jude Law and Derren Brown and Sir David Hare, the playwright. Sir Cameron Mackintosh, whose company Delfont Mackintosh controls nine theatres in the West End, said: "This is a serious matter for everyone in the industry as it will affect audiences and practitioners. A solution must be found, as the financial contribution of the arts to the European economy is enormous."

Paule Constable, a winner of five Olivier awards for her lighting designs on productions including *War Horse*, said that the law would mean that *The Phantom of the Opera*, *The Book of Mormon*, *The Lion King* and *Hamilton* would all "either have to close or be presented in a hugely compromised manner". She wrote in *The Stage*: "What does 'compromised' mean in this context? Maybe



**War Horse and The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, left, rely on lighting that the National Theatre would not be able to afford under new rules**

not quite the feel of the lighting in an office or a warehouse, but pretty close. The subtlety, detail, life, vibrancy and precise control would be gone."

Mr Norris said that the new regulations looked like an oversight and there was nothing on the market for theatres

that would reach the new standard. "You can understand why this legislation has come about," he added. "In every area of life we need to be driving forward with [energy reduction]. But this oversight is going to have a huge knock-on effect."