

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

CURTAIN-RAISER

Nicholas Hytner's theatrical golden age.

BY JOHN LAHR



If you stand on London's Waterloo Bridge, overlooking the Thames as it carries the dust of the ages toward the sea, you will find yourself in one of the most strategic spots in Great Britain. To the east, behind the refulgent dome of St. Paul's Cathedral, is the City, one of the banking capitals of Europe; to the west are the Houses of Parliament; to the south, at the apex of this triangle of British power, is the Royal National Theatre, where the worlds of spirit, money, and politics come together in play. These days, the Church is embattled, the City is in disrepute, and Parliament is floundering, but the National, under the canny stewardship of Nicholas Hytner, is on a roll

unmatched in its nearly fifty-year history.

In his twenty-three-year association with the National, the past nine of them as artistic director, Hytner has been responsible for staging some of the theatre's most popular and memorable shows: Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Carousel"; the two-part adaptation of Philip Pullman's "His Dark Materials"; Martin McDonagh's "The Cripple of Inishmaan"; Alan Bennett's "The Madness of George the Third" and "The History Boys"; and, most recently, "One Man, Two Guvnors," Richard Bean's adaptation of Carlo Goldoni's 1743 commedia-dell'arte classic "The Servant of Two Masters" (which opens at New York's Music Box on April 18th and

is running concurrently in London's West End). "War Horse," the international blockbuster, which began at the National, was also developed on Hytner's watch.

His directorial talent has brought renewed lustre to the National; his skills as an impresario have also generated a robust balance sheet. (Last year, the theatre, which is open for business fifty-two weeks a year, took in an income of more than seventy million pounds, almost half of which came from box-office receipts.) Once upon a time, the National, which is spread over five acres, with three stages—the Olivier, the Lyttelton, and the Cottesloe—was considered "the home counties' theatre"; now, thanks in part to National Theatre Live—a program that Hytner developed in 2009 to broadcast the National's performances via satellite to cinemas around the world—the joke no longer applies. In 2011, the National's productions were seen by more than a million and a half people in twenty-two countries and broadcast in venues as far-flung as Bulgaria and Tasmania. Helen Mirren, who starred in Hytner's 2009 staging of Racine's "Phèdre," which was N.T. Live's debut, told me, "He will be remembered as overseeing an incredible golden era in British theatre."

In Britain, the theatre has traditionally been where the public goes to think about its past and debate its future. The formation of the National Theatre, at the Old Vic, near the South Bank, in 1963, institutionalized the symbolic importance of drama by giving it both a building and state funding. (The National's subsidy this year is more than seventeen million pounds.) Laurence Olivier, a statue of whom faces the current buildings, which were designed by Denys Lasdun and Peter Softley and opened for business in the mid-seventies, was the first artistic director. Hytner is the fifth. (The others were Peter Hall, Richard Eyre, and Trevor Nunn.) Presiding over a vast range of writing, performing, designing, musical, and directorial talent, Hytner is a kind of commander-in-chief of British culture. "The job is about projecting confidence about the British theatre," he told me.

Hytner was recruited for the National by Richard Eyre, whose attention he'd caught with productions at Manchester's Royal Exchange, the English National Opera, and the Royal Shakespeare Company. "He has a face like a mime—Barrault

Hytner at the National Theatre, in London. Photograph by Gareth McConnell.

from 'Les Enfants du Paradis'—oval face, arching eyebrows, animated, almost *over-activated*," Eyre wrote in his diary in 1987, after the two first met for lunch. "Flights of ideas and gossip, riffs of enthusiasm, indignation, then repose; latent violence, subverted by a childlike smile. He's prodigiously talented, has a great facility for staging and a great appetite for work." Two years later, Eyre brought Hytner into the fold as an associate director. When Eyre retired, in 1997, Hytner knew the workings of the organization well, but he resisted Eyre's pressure to apply for the job. "I wasn't ready for it," Hytner told me last February, when we met in his small fourth-floor office at the National, overlooking a string of barges moored in the murky Thames. "I really didn't see how to do it differently from the way Richard had done it."

Hytner had earned his fortune directing "Miss Saigon"—Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil's loose retelling of "Madame Butterfly," in which a U.S. marine deserts a Vietnamese woman and their son during the fall of Saigon. (The show ran for a decade on both sides of the Atlantic.) And he was able to indulge in the freelance director's "life of glorious promiscuity," as Eyre called it. He made Hollywood movies, including "The Crucible" (1996) and "The Object of My Affection" (1998), though he now claims to be proud only of his film adaptation of Alan Bennett's "The Madness of George the Third" (1994). "I don't instinctively think through the camera," Hytner said. He flirted with opera, but, despite some success, he felt that his work became too "timid" and was an "aesthetic mistake." He told me, "My premises were wrong. I tried to find the kind of circumstances where I could achieve in the rehearsal room an illusion of spontaneity—a form of spontaneity which is not useful and not expressive to opera singers trying to get on with the business of delivering an opera." By the time the National job came up again, in 2001, Hytner had "been around the block," as Eyre put it, and the artistic directorship of the National offered him a unique opportunity to become his own producer: if he wanted to stage a show, he had only himself to ask.

Hytner's big idea from the outset was to democratize the National. At his first press conference, he made, by his own admission, a rookie mistake. "I am not

against older folk coming here and having a good time," he said, "but the age of the audience will come down when we reflect something other than the homogeneous concerns of a white, middle-aged, middle-class audience." Hytner told me, "It was very callow . . . a ridiculous thing to say. I've learned that there are scores of audiences." Nonetheless, in his first season, determined "to charge less for a more demanding repertoire," Hytner jump-started the slumping box office at the Olivier Theatre—the National's largest stage—by selling two-thirds of the seats at ten pounds and the rest at twenty-five. (Traveler agreed to underwrite the scheme.) At a stroke, the National opened its doors to a whole new public.

Eyre had capitalized on American talent, mounting an early production of Tony Kushner's "Angels in America" and the première of Wallace Shawn's "The Designated Mourner," as well as important revivals of Tennessee Williams's great plays. Hytner made a counterintuitive shift away from the classic (and profitable) Broadway musicals, which he felt "had all been done" and were "in danger of defining this place." ("Guys and Dolls," "A Little Night Music," "South Pacific," and his own staging of "Carousel" had been huge hits.) Instead, he debuted Richard Thomas and Stewart Lee's campy and controversial 2003 musical "Jerry Springer: The Opera," and threw the stage doors open to a new, "scrappy, pugnacious, energetic, and ambitious" generation of British playwrights, directors, and performance groups. Since Hytner took over, more than thirty new writers (Lee Hall, Mike Bartlett, Lucy Prebble, Conor McPherson, and Enda Walsh among them) have seen their works performed at the National. In his first season, he premiered Kwame Kwei-Armah's "Elmina's Kitchen," a play about drugs and crime in London's West Indian community, which won its author the Evening Standard Award for Most Promising Playwright. Hytner was "slightly sticking his fingers up to the demographic that actually comes to the National," Kwei-Armah, who has now had three plays produced at the National, told me.

On a bright morning in February, Hytner sat down with Simon Russell Beale, one of the nation's great Shakespearean actors, and the designer Tim Hatley to discuss the 2013 season and

how he planned to approach “Timon of Athens”—the story of a wealthy Athenian who gives away all his money and is then refused help by his former “friends.” Retreating to the wilderness, Timon discovers hidden treasure, but instead of returning to Athens to rebuild his life there he hangs himself.

Lean, soft-spoken, and unassuming, Hytner has the crisp mien of a banker. He rose to greet his colleagues as they entered, then settled back in his chair. A neatly printed copy of his “Timon” adaptation was in his lap. The play, one of the least popular of Shakespeare’s dramas, was, he said, a fable, “in tone and structure unlike anything else by Shakespeare.” He explained, “The objective of doing the play is to find a context where there’s genuine emotional life in Timon,” who is usually thought to be cold and cynical. “It’s a savage play, but I think we can get everybody with him, despite the fact that he’s plainly a fool in that first half. There is an emotional void there, which he can fill only by buying people’s friendships. I think it’s good to start from there, rather than from something more venal or corrupt. You can empathize with a fool who can only imagine human relations in terms of what he is able materially to give. And he’s involved in a world which is completely, bizarrely, startlingly like the world we live in.”

“The bonus-driven culture,” Russell Beale, slumped on the sofa, said.

“The culture where nobody is worth anything, except in terms of what they are able to display,” Hytner said. “The unforgiving world of the super-rich. I think the big point is that you can get an audience to follow him through, if, when he turns against that world, he is expressing on our behalf a kind of existential dismay at the world we know we’re part of.”

“I’m sure there’s a part of Timon that knows he can’t buy love,” Russell Beale said. “So that when they finally say, ‘No, we’re not gonna help you out,’ it’s an of-course moment. All the cynics in Shakespeare do that. They all have a high expectation of what the world should be like. A Romantic expectation, which is then broken.”

“Well, that’s Hamlet, isn’t it?” Hytner said. “It’s ‘Timon of Athens.’ Of course, it’s Athens. But in some way it’s an abstraction of the super-rich corner of every city. It plays upon all the contemporary inti-

mations of apocalypse. There is some sense that the whole thing can be brought crashing down.”

Hytner handed Russell Beale and Hatley his revised script of the play. In order to up the emotional ante, Timon’s loyal servant, Flavius, had been turned into a woman, Flavia. Otherwise, Hytner explained, “my strategy has been to take stuff away, rather than add. This character Alcibiades—who is, they reckon, written almost entirely by Middleton—has a long scene in the first half, a completely incomprehensible scene. It makes no dramatic sense whatsoever. So that went. I’ve added probably a total of twelve lines in three places, three insertions of about four lines each, where the rich people and the senators all worry about—this is all from ‘Coriolanus’—what’s going on in the streets. What I’m wanting to do is create from the very beginning the sense that the place is a tinderbox; the street is full of people who are on the point of eruption.”

Turning to ideas about the set, Russell Beale said of the wilderness, “I imagined a sort of endless expanse of something. I wasn’t sure whether it was water. It felt very sort of flat and barren and stark. That’s what came into my head. Exposed. Naked, almost.”

“I love this idea of cleansing,” Hatley noted.

Speaking of the city scenes, Hytner said, “I think it should be like London, Athens, or New York, where it’s breathtaking but around the corner, one block away, there’s people on the streets. I’d love to do that.” He added, of the play, “It doesn’t vibrate in its text. It starts to vibrate only when Timon gets angry, in the second half. That’s when you hear Shakespeare. So I think one of the things we’ve got to do is give it some visual music.”

Perhaps the best of many examples of Hytner’s visual music was his majestic, radical staging of “Carousel,” which premiered at the National in 1992 and, in 1994, transferred to New York, where it won five Tony Awards. The production, which Eyre remembers as “pure bravura,” examined the dark, subterranean sexuality that is traditionally kept in the background of American versions. Instead of opening the show with the famous dance prelude at the fairground, Hytner brought the curtain up on the claustrophobic, shadowy New England textile mill where Julie Jordan

and her friend Carrie Pipperidge work. The sumptuous sweetness of Richard Rodgers’s “Carousel Waltz,” playing softly, underscored the frustration and constriction of the factory girls. A luminous clock face appeared on the scrim, and when the clock struck six and the girls were released into the spring twilight the exhilaration of their temporary freedom coalesced gorgeously with Rodgers’s sweeping melody. It was an extraordinary theatrical moment, which Hytner then topped by having the carousel materialize gradually, while carnival life swarmed around a revolving stage. As the set designer, Bob Crowley, recalled, “Bit by bit, one by one, these little horses are being wheeled in on their own plinths, going up and down, then suddenly all the horses are there. This umbrella hit the ground and opened up.” By the time Billy Bigelow brazenly scooped Julie up onto a wooden horse, with the carousel’s neon canopy fanning out above them like the petals of a flower, Hytner had set the stage for passion.

“Nick’s wonderfully objective about sexual attraction,” the playwright Richard Bean told me. “He’s interested in it whether it’s man-woman, man-man, woman-woman. He just understands it.” (Hytner’s 2000 production of Tennessee Williams’s “Orpheus Descending,” with Helen Mirren and Stuart Townsend, remains one of the best and steamiest examinations of desire I’ve ever seen.) Hytner appreciates the poetry of slapstick, as well as sensuality. A scene in “One Man, Two Guvnors,” in which an octogenarian waiter teeters at the top of a staircase and then plummets down it, got the longest sustained laugh I’ve heard in forty years of theatre-going.

As flamboyant as Hytner’s stagings often are, the man himself can be so self-effacing that he almost disappears. “He’s not a person who drives into a room and takes over,” Mirren said. “At his own parties, it’s quite hard to find him.” His friends and colleagues all speak of his unnerving habit of lapsing into silence, “of not returning the ball,” as Eyre described this “conversational tic.” His small talk is “not reliable,” according to Nick Starr, the National’s executive director. Once, Starr said, Hytner was sitting in his office, “and we lapsed into silence for probably quite some time. The playwright David Edgar walked past, then came back and put his



head in the door: 'What's happened?' 'Nothing.' The two of you were just sitting there in complete silence. It looked as if something awful had happened.'

Before Hytner assumed command at the National, in 2003, he was introduced to the company by its departing sachem, Trevor Nunn. Frances de la Tour, one of the repertory's stars, raised her hand. "As an actress in the company, I just want to welcome Nicholas Hytner. I'm sorry I don't know who you are, but welcome," she said, thus beginning an enduring friendship. Hytner, who is gay and single, now refers to de la Tour as his wife. (When he was knighted, in 2010, de la Tour told him, "I refuse to be called Lady Hytner." He said, "No, no, you will always have the honor of being Mrs. Hytner.")

Hytner's tendency to disappear has its origins in his childhood, when he spent much of his time alone in his third-floor bedroom, in Didsbury, a suburban enclave of Manchester, hiding from the "domestic psychodrama" of his parents' marriage. His father, Benet, was a bookish, Cambridge-educated barrister; his mother, Joyce, who was awarded an O.B.E. for her fund-raising services to the arts in 2004, was eighteen when she mar-

ried, twenty when Hytner was born, and "restless and frustrated, understandably." To young Hytner, the turmoil of his parents' marriage "made no sense," he said. He added, "Not because it was particularly out of the ordinary—cast of three, ran almost as long as 'Cats'—but because it was barely acknowledged. On the contrary, we were a model of contentment and stability." (His parents divorced in 1980, and remarried in 2003.)

Hytner retreated from what he calls "the unpredictable, uncontrollable world" of his home life to a realm of his own invention. He covered the walls of his room with images of Shakespearean characters, ordered through the *Times*, and, in a toy theatre, ran a rotating repertory, in which Victorian pantomime alternated with a miniature version of Olivier's "Hamlet," performed by tiny cutouts of Olivier, Jean Simmons, and Stanley Holloway. "I remember very vividly fantasizing about having a troupe of flesh-and-blood Lilliputian actors," he said. "So I probably stumbled onto the idea of directing plays, even running a theatre, earlier than I like to think. It occurs to me that forty-odd years ago I was pushing Olivier around a toy theatre on a wire, and now I have his job."

Hytner is the eldest of four children. "It took me into adulthood to connect properly with my siblings," he told me. "I'd withdrawn that much." But his love of classical music began when he was eight, and, on Sunday evenings, he joined his parents at the Hallé Orchestra subscription series. For his birthday every year, he was taken to Stratford-Upon-Avon, where he saw three plays in a weekend. He played the flute and sang in the Manchester Grammar School Boys Choir, and found a way, through the arts, "to plunge in, to understand what was really going on in the world," though he "tip-toed around the small domestic stuff." (To this day, Hytner does not like to stage plays about family situations; he has never directed Pinter or Chekhov and has mostly stayed away from twentieth-century naturalism. "I don't respond to, and certainly would not like to direct, plays which involve an interior journey only," he told me.)

Hytner had early dreams of becoming an actor, but, after his first term at Cambridge, he had more or less figured out that directing would be his path into theatre. He learned his craft "on the hoof," through apprenticeships at the

English National Opera and at Manchester's Royal Exchange. "If you can't act, and you can't write, it's the next best thing," he said. "It gives you the impression of first-degree creativity." It also gave Hytner an opportunity to explore and to control the dynamics that he had avoided as a child. "What I do now, in part," he told me, "is to help create (if only temporarily) stable families, which can play happily with the most outlandish forms of emotional anarchy, all the too-hot-to-handle stuff. In the rehearsal room and in the theatre, there is nothing but relish for every kind of craziness, every grief, every danger, every cruelty, every joy." In this context, he is unafraid of failure. "I barely ever feel defeated in the theatre," he said. "There is no disaster that doesn't seem survivable. I have almost total faith in the capacity of the group to find a way through."

At the National, Hytner's most conspicuous influence has been, perhaps, on the playwright Alan Bennett, with whom he has collaborated on six plays. In the course of their partnership, Bennett has evolved from a successful sketch writer and performer to one of the country's most popular theatrical storytellers. "Just write it, and I'll make it work," Hytner told Bennett when they began working together, in 1990, on an adaptation of "The Wind in the Willows." And so it has proved. "He's got a magic that can transform things," Bennett told me. "And, if that's not art, I don't know what is."

According to Hytner, the early drafts of a Bennett play have "a huge amount of material looking for a nudge." Bennett has always written piquant dialogue, but he struggles with structure and spectacle. "The plays all require the exercise of stagecraft, which Alan very happily turns over to me, because he claims he has no capacity for it," Hytner said. His nudging has pushed Bennett toward stronger story lines, greater depth, and more scenic surprise to shore up his wry, bitter-sweet voice. "I feel entirely at home with Alan's sensibility and sense of humor," Hytner said. "A lot of the time, he's writing about people who have, if you like, shut themselves in a room. It's how you open the door. He makes theatre out of that effort."

Bennett describes his relationship with Hytner as "schoolmasterly"—"in the sense that I want to please him." He added, "It's

not that I want the play approved. I just want *him* to approve." Bennett usually slips a first draft through Hytner's letter box—he lives a few leafy streets away from Bennett, in Primrose Hill. Hytner returns the script with notes scribbled in the margins, then follows up with more forensic suggestions. "I don't fight," Hytner said of his method. "There's no point getting Alan to do what he doesn't want to or can't do. I've always found a good idea is to speak a little and then beat a retreat. I think a director can completely ruin a new play by pushing too hard for it to be something it's not."

In the case of "One Man, Two Guv'nors," however, Hytner made a hit play by imposing his desires. While looking for a vehicle for the low-comic spark of James Corden, who had acted in "The History Boys" and co-created the popular British TV series "Gavin and Stacey," Hytner thought of Goldoni's "The Servant of Two Masters," in which he had once performed in a school production. Hytner considers re-creations of commedia dell'arte "precious." But, with Corden, he saw a chance to turn Goldoni's free-wheeling style into something contemporary and wild, a comic counterbalance to some of the National's more weighty offerings. "It's what our theatre has always done," he said. "King Lear rubbed shoulders with the clowns here on the South Bank four hundred years ago." To adapt the play, he approached Richard Bean, a former standup comic whose irreverent take on immigration, "England People Very Nice," Hytner had directed in 2009. In Bean's make-over, which the *Guardian* called "one of the funniest productions in the National's history," eighteenth-century Venice became Brighton in 1963, and the set pieces of commedia dell'arte—*lazzi*—became pantomime shtick. The show, which has played to nearly a hundred-per-cent capacity since it opened, in 2011, exudes the noisy vulgarity of a Brighton-pier entertainment.

In early March, I went with Hytner to



a rehearsal of "One Man, Two Guv'nors," which was about to begin its second run in the West End. On the way, Hytner moved as he thinks—at speed—brezing out of his office, past his administrative staff at their desks, through a warren of poster-lined hallways, down in an elevator, and into Rehearsal Room 1, where the cast was waiting for him. With his blue jeans and boxy blue checked shirt, Hytner could have been mistaken for a stagehand until he called the actors onto the floor. Then he entered a whole new zone of concentration. First, he set to work fine-tuning the comic delivery of the actor Owain Arthur, a sweet-faced Welshman, who plays a failed skiffle player named Francis. In Act II, Francis sits at a pub, enjoying a cigarette and confiding his feelings to the audience:

So I've eaten. Now, after a lovely big meal there's a couple of things I just can't resist doing. One is having a little smoke—*drags on cigarette. Then he lifts a buttock and farts*—And that's the other. Beautiful. Now, some of you out there, who understand your commedia dell'arte, you hummus eaters, might now be asking yourselves, "If the Harlequin"—that's me—"has now eaten what will be his motivation in the second act?" Has anyone here said that? No. Good. Nice to know we don't have any dicks in tonight.

"You know a little too much at this moment," Hytner cut in. "You've got to play that straighter. I think the relationship you've got to have with the audience all the way through is—they're all like you, all chancers. They're your mates, not your audience."

Arthur made the adjustment, and Hytner stepped away from his chair against the back wall to watch Jodi Prenger, as the cheeky, high-heeled Dolly, encounter Francis and his lecherous glances. "At your service, gorgeous," Francis says to her. Dolly, too, takes the audience into her confidence:

Calling a woman "gorgeous" is patronizing, and Chauvinist, obviously, but since I fancy him rotten, and I haven't had a proper sorting out for a while, I'll forgive him. (*To Francis*) You've got honest eyes.

"Could you make that mean something much more obscene?" Hytner said. Prenger repeated her lines, and his scrutiny was almost palpable. Arms across his chest, he was speaking Dolly's lines to himself. Prenger addressed the audience again:

I've done worse. We've all done worse, haven't we, girls? We've all woken up "the

morning after the night before,” taken one sorry look at the state of the bloke lying next to us, and we’ve all leapt out of bed, sat down and written to our M.P.s demanding that tequila should be a controlled drug.

Hytner interrupted Prenger, then fell silent for about twenty seconds as the actors waited on his words. He seemed to be fast-forwarding, in his mind’s eye, to see how Prenger’s choices would play later in the scene. “I’ll buy that,” he said, finally. “You’ve got to think right through to the end of it. Don’t pause as much as you are after ‘state of the bloke lying next to us.’ Don’t speed it up—just know that where you are heading is right through to the M.P.s.” He added, “You did that beautifully.”

Later, Francis turns to the audience and asks for suggestions of a good place to take a girl on a first date, a trope that leads to audience participation, which, since it’s improvised, can eat up a lot of stage time, an important issue in any Hytner production. “He’s a man who gets bored incredibly quickly,” Bean told me. When skating on thin ice, Hytner’s impulse is always for speed. If the audience’s answers were ordinary, he told Arthur, “my hunch is you should cut your losses. One in four times you get lucky, otherwise just play on. Don’t feel under pressure to milk this one. You can be confident about moving on, confident by being really definite in your response. ‘I’ve got a play to do here.’”

After an hour, Hytner gave a little bow to the cast. “Thank you, everyone,” he said. “I’ll see you all next week. I’m not gonna have much to do.” Then, as quickly and quietly as he’d entered, he was gone.

Back at his office, Hytner reflected on the highlights of his career. Of all his moments in the theatre, the one that still speaks most powerfully to him is the finale of his 2007 staging of “Much Ado About Nothing,” which starred Simon Russell Beale and Zoë Wanamaker as the quarrelling Benedick and Beatrice. “They dance, as required,” Hytner said. “I pulled Beatrice and Benedick out of the dance. As the show is ending, everybody else is partying, and they’ve found a quiet corner. Once they find each other, they’ve got so much to talk about. That’s all they’re going to do for the rest of their lives: talk *to* each other, not *at* each other. The world is there for them. They can leave it and join it at will. Contentment is in

being in quiet retreat.” Hytner paused, and gazed across the river toward the clock on the Savoy Hotel. “It’s what I want,” he said.

In 2010, at Hytner’s initiative, the National launched the National Theatre Future Project, a seventy-million-pound plan to transform and refurbish the buildings. Below Hytner’s balcony, work on the expansion was noisily under way. The project is expected to be completed in 2014; and then, Hytner told me, he planned to move on. “I’d like to have one more chance at a life,” he said.

Meanwhile, he was running late. On his desk, the schedule for the rest of his day was laid out in front of him: a script meeting; a performance of a play for primary-school children; a meeting with a technical director about problems with the Olivier’s lighting grid; a model showing for the newest production in the Cottesloe; an interview with the Spanish newspaper *El País*; a briefing on a fundraiser later in the week; a preview of the new show at the Lyttelton. It was a schedule, I suggested, that could rival the Queen’s.

As it turned out, the Queen, who not long ago went to see “War Horse” at the New London Theatre, where it transferred after its sold-out National run, had been in touch with Hytner’s office to make Joey, the brilliant three-man puppet horse and star of the show, an offer he couldn’t refuse. The Queen had first made Joey’s acquaintance last summer, when he put in a surprise appearance at Queen Victoria’s stables at Windsor Palace, where she was inspecting the guns of the King’s Troop Royal Horse Artillery. The Queen was thrilled. She insisted on looking at Joey’s hooves, and asked for one of the King’s Troop to ride him. So Joey trotted around the stables with a soldier on his back. Now Her Majesty was requesting Joey’s company for a private screening of Steven Spielberg’s film version of “War Horse” at Windsor Palace this spring. The invitation was later rescinded when the event was changed, but the offer itself was news, a victory for the power of the dramatic imagination. The idea of Joey and the Queen watching the movie together gave the old question about the relation between life and art new meaning. Hytner’s blue eyes fairly sparkled at the prospect. “It’s delicious,” he said. “She’s taken a real shine to him.” ♦