



From this month, the National Theatre in London will be offering smart captioned glasses for all productions. **Jean Straus** wore them to *War Horse* and *Hadestown* and spoke to the head of Accenture Digital, the company that created them.

A coup de theatre

Once upon a time, if your compromised hearing meant you struggled to watch live theatre, you had just one option – you could hope to attend a captioned performance that might be on a date when you were free. This meant booking well ahead of time, so that you obtained one of the few places. Once in the theatre, your captions were fixed, high up, or off on the side, so you had to sit in a specified seat to see them, while the performance moved all around the stage. Sometimes, you might leave the theatre with a crick in your neck, from the bobbing movement of reading and watching the performance.

After more than four years trialling options, the National Theatre has now cleverly done away with all that, with its smart captioned glasses.

There are unlimited glasses available on any night, with staff to demonstrate. You sit wherever you want in the theatre, watch, read what's being said, and enjoy.

Let me say, first of all, that I loved the confidence that came with knowing I wouldn't be missing out on any of the dialogue. I loved the feeling of being part of something brand new that would change the experience of live theatre for so many. It was even fun seeing people look at me, trying to figure out what was going on.

I felt special, too, in the way I was mollycoddled by staff on both occasions. They understood I needed a quiet space where they could explain things to me, and they seemed to take personal delight in showing me the options, including viewing the captions at the top or bottom of the glasses, changing their colour and size, or even providing a background. They really cared about my experience – so much,

in fact, that I decided later to interview one of them. And all this is before the performances even began!

The viewing of the future

The view of the captions on glasses has to be experienced to fully appreciate it. Somehow, you don't feel the glasses after a while – you're simply aware of smart-looking and unobtrusive captions as you take in the production.

War Horse is the much-lauded and popular World War I drama in which life-sized 'puppet' horses replicate real ones onstage. Now you can appreciate their every magically-engineered move, while not losing a word of dialogue. When there are multiple characters speaking, you can watch each one as they speak.

My companion, who has no

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