“Come From Away” / National Tour

August 2019

Pre-show Audio Description Notes

You are listening to the audio description pre-performance notes for “Come From Away”, originally prepared for the American National Tour performance in Chicago in August 2019. My name is Bridget Melton and I will be your audio describer.

The show credits:

COME FROM AWAY

A New Musical Based on a True Story

Book, Music and Lyrics by IRENE SANKOFF and DAVID HEIN

Scenic Design BEOWULF BORITT

Costume Design TONI-LESLIE JAMES

Lighting Design HOWELL BINKLEY

Sound Design GARETH OWEN

Orchestrations AUGUST ERICKSMOEN

Music Supervision and Arrangements IAN EISENDRATH

Musical Staging KELLY DEVINE

Directed by CHRISTOPHER ASHLEY

General production notes:

The performance is in one act and runs 100 minutes with NO intermission.

Alerts about this production include the use of a camera flash effect.

COME FROM AWAY includes 15 songs.

The music is performed by a live band with 8 members, located on stage at the rear left and right and visible for the entire performance. Any sound effects in the show, such as animal noises, are also done live by actors.

The Stage:

The stage opening is a standard proscenium with an archway framing the stage painted beige, rust and dark gold. The opening is made smaller by flat rectangular panels in black that frame the sides and top of the opening, which is 30’ wide by 20’ tall. The opening is outlined on the top and sides with wooden plank paneling that is medium brown.

The stage extends 20’ front to back. The floor is wooden planked and painted medium blue with the brown boards showing through in worn spots. In the center of the floor is a large circular revolve that is flush with the floor and 15’ wide. This revolve can turn clockwise and counterclockwise.

As we wait for the play to begin we face the empty set, no curtain or covering hides it.

The back wall is entirely covered in wooden planking, horizontally laid. The back wall is painted light blue with the faded grey boards showing through in spots, reminiscent of wispy clouds in a sky. The back wall appears solid with minimal light shining through in between the slats, however two openings exist. The first is a hatch opening located in the wall just left of center and 5’ from the floor. It is 2’x5’ tall, and opens by hinging up at the top. It is used to denote the opening to the cargo hold of an airplane. The second opening is a doorway located in the wall just right of center. This is used as the entrance to a church.

At the left and right of the stage are clusters of 8 tree trunks, 2-3’ in diameter and covered in bark, that reach from the floor and disappear into the heavens. Black stage lighting instruments are bolted to them like stumpy branches. Scattered on a few trees and hanging from nails are outdoor lanterns, two neon beer signs, and an oval “tim hortons” coffee shop sign. At the back right, two of the trunks have been shattered to a splintery end about 10’ up.

Behind the clumps of trees are just visible the members of the band, split between the left and right. The musicians are dressed in casual street clothes of jeans and shirts, and sit in black armless chairs with black music stands in front of them. At the left, the top of the upright piano acts as a counter at times for the actors.

On the stage between the trees are scattered the 3 wooden tables and 12 wooden chairs that make up the entirety of the furniture in the play and are always present on stage. None of the pieces match, but all are hardwood and in tones of brown.

As the set is very minimal, and the staging very fluid with scenes melting from one into the other without pause, locations are suggested through dialogue and configuration of the chairs. All furniture is moved by the characters as part of the musical staging, never by stagehands.

When at a bar or coffee shop, the chairs might be clumped around the tables.

When on a plane or school bus, the chairs are lined up in short rows all facing one direction with stage lights creating a boundary around the seating.

When characters speak from the same location but seperately, such as an air traffic controller tower, or a phone bank, or the cockpit of the planes on the runway, the chairs will be scattered with tight spotlights illuminating the character’s faces. At times the revolve is used to show the passage of time or movement of a vehicle.

Entrances and exits for the actors are very fluid with characters coming in to the scenes as needed, mostly from the left and right sides of the stage, and occasionally from the two openings in the back wall.

CHARACTERS:

COME FROM AWAY is an ensemble show with 12 actors playing a primary role as well as incidentals, for a total of 42 different characters. The characters all fall in to 2 main groups -“Islanders” with a distinctive Newfoundlander accent, and “plane people” with a mix of international accents, though mostly American.

Primary characters, as listed in the playbill, are:

Bonnie, an Islander in her early 40’s, wears a tan hoodie open over a knit shirt in periwinkle blue with a v-neck and short sleeves, untucked with fitted blue jeans and her shoes are brown hiking boots.

Oz, an Islander in his early 30’s, wears a black button down shirt with shortsleeves, tucked into fitted jeans belted at the waist, and on his feet are black leather boots. On his head he wears a black baseball cap that reads “POLICE” in large white letters across the front.

Beverly, a plane person aged 51, wears a navy blue pilots suit jacket with three silver stripes circling each cuff and on the breast pocket is a pin of silver wings. The jacket is buttoned up over a white knit shirt with shortsleeves, and tucked into a pair of black bootcut jeans and her shoes are black leather ankle boots with a low heel.

A distinguishing characteristic, she speaks with an assertive Texas drawl.

Janice, an Islander in her 20’s, wears a white button down shirt with long sleeves, tucked into fitted bootcut jeans with a brown belt. On her feet are light tan boots with a low heel.

A distinguishing characteristic is that as a reporter, she often speaks into a hand held microphone.

Bob, a plane person in his 30’s, wears a flannel shirt of rust colored plaid, worn open over a dark grey t-shirt with a New York Yankees logo on it. These are untucked and paired with straight leg blue jeans and white sneakers.

Claude, an Islander in his 50's, wears a sports coat of light grey plaid, open over a pale yellow button down shirt, which is tucked into grey slacks, and on his feet are brown leather lace dress shoes.

Kevin T, a plane person in his late 30’s, wears an olive green button down shirt with long sleeves, tucked into a pair of straight leg blue jeans and his shoes are black leather lace up dress shoes.

A distinguishing characteristics, he is one half of a couple that are almost always together.

Nick, a plane person in his 50’s, wears a pastel peach button down shirt with long sleeves, tucked into a pair of fitted light mocha brown trousers and his shoes are camel leather wingtip lace dress shoes.

A distinguishing characteristic, he speaks with an upperclass English accent.

Kevin J, a plane person in his late 30’s, wears a black polo that is fitted and shortsleeved, tucked into a pair of thin legged slacks in dark grey and his shoes are dark grey suede boots.

A distinguishing characteristic, he is one half of a couple that are almost always together.

Hannah, a plane person in her 50’s, wears a bright purple knit sweater with long sleeves, loose and un tucked, with bootcut blue jeans and on her feet are black leather dress shoes.

Beulah, an Islander in her 60's, wears a floral button down shirt with long sleeves, untucked, with wide leg trousers in dark khaki. On her feet are white tennis shoes.

Diane, a plane person in her 50’s, wears a black and gold floral blouse with three quarter sleeves, untucked, with black slacks and on her feet are black leather shoes.

A distinguishing characteristic, she speaks with a soft Texas drawl.

For their incidental characters, an actor might remove, or add, a jacket, or add a hat or change another item of clothing. The changes are intentionally left minimal to allow for the story to continuously be moving.

For example, the same actor who plays Kevin J, an American man, changes characters by placing a crocheted skullcap called a kulfi cap on his head and removes his jacket to reveal his fitted black polo shirt, and is now Ali, an Egyptian man.

Similarly, the actress playing Beverly removes her pilots jacket and dons a floral vest over her white t-shirt to become Annette, a Newfoundlander teacher.

About the concept of musical staging:

COME FROM AWAY relies more on musical staging rather than traditional choreography, choosing instead for more conversational interactions during songs to play to the true events nature of the play and characters.

Choreography implies traditional dance moves or movement heightened beyond everyday. “Musical staging” is when actors move during songs but in ways that are considered normal behavior and not stylized, such as strolling on stage or shifting chairs in rhythm to the song. These are not dance steps and therefore do not fall under the umbrella term “choreography”. The characters in COME FROM AWAY may shift dramatically in their seats when stuck in an airplane for 28 hours, or stamp their feet rhythmically while clapping their hands. But only during such songs as “SCREECH IN” when they are having a party in a bar does anyone actually engage in traditionally styled dance, a kind of clog dancing with strong foot slams and bent postures.

This concludes the preshow description for the National Touring performance of “Come From Away”.

Written and Recorded by BridgetMelton.com