

STUDY GUIDE

COME FROM AWAY

A NEW MUSICAL



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INTRODUCING

COME FROM AWAY

The North American Tour, Photo by Matthew Murphy

On September 11th of 2001, a series of attacks rocked the United States. The planes that felled the World Trade Center, damaged the Pentagon, and crashed in the fields of Pennsylvania on the way to the White House led to thousands of deaths and changed the course of American history. But that day saw more than destruction: it also saw people coming together to help those in need. While first responders rushed to provide aid, 38 flights from around the world were forced to land in the small Canadian town of Gander after American airspace was closed. There, the townsfolk rallied to help their visitors—whom they dubbed “come from aways”—see out the aftermath. Now, this true story of heroism and compassion is a critically acclaimed musical making its way around the country after a long development journey and a successful, ongoing run on Broadway.

Performed by a cast of twelve taking on both townsfolk and passengers, *Come From Away* dramatizes one of the most enduring stories to come out of that dark hour back in 2001. In this supplement to the official production guide, you'll get to know the musical's narrative, one of its key numbers, and its place among theatre that has responded to the events of 9/11. Start by reading the **Summary**, which will give you an overview of what you'll see on the stage, complete with a snapshot of key lyrics from the score. Then, check out **Anatomy of a Song: Between Me and the Sky**, for a look at a solo sung by Beverley Bass, a character based on the real-life airline pilot who broke barriers in American aviation long before she landed on the Gander tarmac. In **9/12 and Beyond: Theatre Responds to Tragedy**, you'll learn more about how artists reacted in the wake of the attacks, and how theatre has helped us grapple with the challenges of a “post-9/11 world.” Consult the official *Come From Away* study guide for more information about how the show came together.

SUMMARY

The show begins with “**Welcome to the Rock**,” an introduction to the small town of Gander on the Canadian island of Newfoundland. The townsfolks recount their memories of the morning of September 11th, 2001: Mayor Claude is getting his usual morning Pepsi, Beulah is covering for schoolteacher Annette, Bonnie is off to work at the local SPCA, and Garth is getting ready to sit down on behalf of the school bus drivers’ union to negotiate better terms. This is a day unlike any other, however, as Bonnie proves when she catches constable Oz on the way to work and tells him to turn on the news: flights from all around the world are heading their way.

As Doug and the rest of the air traffic controllers rush to manage the incoming flights, pilots and passengers get ready to make their emergency landing to the tune of “**38 Planes**.” One set of passengers—Diane, Nick, Bob, Hannah, and couple Kevin T and Kevin J—talk fretfully amongst themselves as Captain Beverley Bass and the flight attendants hurriedly prepare for landing. As the number “**Blankets and Bedding**” kicks up, the townspeople of Gander scramble to find food and housing for the thousands of passengers arriving from all over the world.

Meanwhile, the number “**28 Hours/Wherever We Are**” shifts back to the passengers, who have been mandated to stay on the plane even after landing. As the passengers sing through their frustration, rumors of what happened in the US spread. Thankfully, the number “**Darkness and Trees**” kicks off with a bit of good news: Garth’s bus driver’s union has voted to pause their strike so they can transport the passengers to their lodging. Finally, the passengers are let off the plane and into the airport. Many of them immediately seek out phones so they can call their loved ones.

Eventually, everyone boards the buses and descends into the darkness outside. Bus drivers Mick and Terry give passengers the lowdown on Gander: how it used to be a refueling spot for planes carrying the likes of Frank Sinatra, Albert Einstein, and the Queen, before jet planes came along and made their airport almost entirely unnecessary. Meanwhile, an African man named Muhumuza tries to determine their whereabouts through Garth, who doesn’t speak the same language. Back at the airport, Bonnie and

Welcome to the Rock

“When the sun is coming up
And the world has come ashore,
If you’re hoping for a harbour,
Then you’ll find an open door.
In the winter from the water,
Through whatever’s in the way,
To the ones who have come from away
Welcome to the Rock!”

38 Planes

“One plane then another
And then another
And then another
And then
Thirteen planes then another
And then another
And then another
And then...”

Blankets and Bedding

“How do you know what you need
When you don’t know how many you’re
needing to feed,
When you don’t know how many are staying,
How long they are staying—
We better start praying the weather stays nice.”

28 Hours/Wherever We Are

“Open the airplane doors!
Let a little air in here
Cause I could use a shower—or a bar (or a bar!)
Open the airplane doors!
Look at all the planes out there,
There must be a convention, it’s bizarre,
Wherever we are.”

Darkness and Trees

“Off of the airplane,
Into the airport,
Out of the windows,
Darkness and trees.”





Darkness and Trees (Reprise)

“Kati ya giza (out of the darkness)
Ghafla mwangaza (suddenly brightness)
Ma-badiliko (everything changes)
Giza na miti (darkness and trees)
Kati ya giza (out of the darkness)
Ma-badiliko (suddenly light).”

Lead Us Out of the Darkness

“Lead us out of the darkness,
Lead us somewhere to safety,
Lead us far from disaste,
Lead us out of the night.”

Phoning Home

“PASSENGER 5: Hello? Yes—it’s me.
BOB: Dad, I’m okay, it’s okay.
PASSENGER 2: I’m calling from Canada.
KEVIN J: Safe and sound on the ground here
in Iceland.
KEVIN T: No, Newfoundland.”

Costume Party

“It’s like I changed into somebody else—but who?
And it’s somehow like we’re at a costume party.”

Doug search the holds of the planes for animals and find several dogs and cats—and, amazingly, a pair of chimpanzees!

Back on the bus, Nick finds his way to Diane in an effort to get to know her better. He asks if she has any news about David, the man she has been trying to contact, but is unable to get a straight answer, leaving him uncertain as to whether he should pursue her romantically. During the **“Darkness and Trees (Reprise),”** Muhumuza and the other passengers look on in fear as they arrive at a center manned by staff in Salvation Army uniforms. Garth spies Muhumuza’s wife holding a Bible and directs her attention to Philippians 4:6, which states “Be anxious for nothing.” This assures Muhumuza and the other passengers that they have nothing to fear.

After they disembark, Beulah shows the passengers to their rooms and offers them a chance to get caught up on the news. This results in **“Lead Us Out of the Darkness,”** in which the passengers and pilots learn the truth about the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Beverley has her worst fears confirmed: Charles Burlingame, a friend and fellow pilot, was the captain of flight 77 that crashed into the Pentagon. The scene transitions into the number **“Phoning Home,”** in which Claude provides phones and crisis counselors to help the passengers grasp what is going on and reach their loved ones.

The following morning, Beulah and Annette rise early to prepare breakfast for the nearly 7,000 “come from aways.” As the music for **“Costume Party”** kicks up, the passengers accept donations of clothes from the townsfolk. Beverley announces that American airspace is still closed, so they may be hanging around for some time. Meal preparations continue, complete with accommodations for vegetarians like Kevin T and Kevin J, as well as a Rabbi and several Hindu and Muslim passengers. An Egyptian passenger named Ali tries to get involved, but Beulah shuts him down, insisting they have it all under control. Bob, meanwhile, is amazed by the townspeople’s hospitality but is keen to get home. Unfortunately, as Derm, the mayor of a nearby town, informs him, it will take two or three days of travel on land and sea to get back to the United States.

With that in mind, Nick and Diane join Kevin T and Kevin J for a day out. Nick learns that David, the man Diane has been trying to contact, is actually Diane's son; this leaves the way clear for him to pursue her. Kevin T and Kevin J end up at a local bar and are immediately uncomfortable as they have no idea what the locals' attitudes are towards gay people. Thankfully, many of the folks there have loved ones who are gay, and they welcome the Kevins in. Bob and Derm, meanwhile, collect barbecues from neighboring yards to help with meal preparations. At the Gander Academy, the bathrooms start to overflow with filth, prompting Beulah and Annette to rally a team of renowned cardiologists willing to take on the job of cleaning them.

As passengers continue to phone home, Hannah sings "**I Am Here**," offering words of assurance amidst her efforts to contact her son, a New York firefighter. Beulah takes her to a Catholic church to light a candle for her son. Kevin T, the Rabbi, and Ali then join Hannah in singing the song "**Prayer**." Each of them comes from a different faith: Kevin T and Hannah are Christian, the Rabbi is Jewish, and Ali is a Muslim. Eddie, a local Jewish man who has kept his faith secret, and a selection of Hindu passengers also join in the song, blending different faiths and languages into a single call for deliverance. Sadly, Ali is later set upon by some passengers as he makes a call to his own loved ones. As they demand to know if he is in league with the terrorists, Ali sings "**On the Edge**," while other townspeople and visitors try to calm the crowd. Later, Ali makes a breakthrough with Beulah when he reveals that he's the master chef for an international hotel chain; she gratefully accepts his help.

As a selection of passengers and townsfolk arrive at the local bar, the local men and women welcome them with a Newfoundlander folk song. They then transition into the number "**Screech In**," featuring a Newfoundlander tradition in which visitors drink some "screech" (rum), then kiss a cod on the lips! During the ceremony, Diane refuses to kiss the fish, which leads Claude to offer kissing Nick instead—which she happily does. While the rest of the folks are having fun at the bar, Beverley sits alone and sings the solo "**Me and the Sky**." It tells the story of her falling in love with flying and coming through the ranks to become the first female captain at American Airlines.



The North American Tour. Photo by Matthew Murphy

I Am Here

"I should be there when it's over and done,
When he comes through the door
And says, 'I'm home, Mom.'
I should be there for my son,
But instead
I am here,
I am here."

Prayer

"Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love,
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord,
And where there's doubt true faith in you."

On the Edge

"On the edge of the world or wherever you are,
We are—we are—we are on the edge.
Is there something—I need to do something
To keep me from thinking of all of those
scenes on the tube.
I need something to do—cause I can't watch
the news,
No I can't watch the news anymore.
On the edge."

Screech In

"Cause we speaks a different language, son,
We adds some esses and some rum.
You'll have to try a good cod tongue."

Me and the Sky

"Suddenly I'm in the cockpit.
Suddenly everything's changed.
Suddenly I'm not too young or too short,
And the passengers in the back don't complain.
Suddenly I'm flying company charters.
Suddenly everything's high.
Suddenly there's nothing in between
Me and the sky"

Stop the World

“Stop the world,
Seize the moment,
But the minute he goes
You’re alone and it’s through.
Pinch yourself,
Tell yourself you’re just dreaming.
That means he’ll forget about you.”

Somewhere in the Middle of Nowhere

“Ladies and Gentlemen: if you look out your
windows,
Underneath all that rain—is Maine.
We’ve just crossed the Canadian border.
Welcome back to the U.S. of A.”

Something’s Missing

“Something’s gone.
Something’s over.
Something’s done.
Something’s missing.
Something’s changed.
Something’s rearranged.
Something’s strained.
Something’s missing.”

Finale

“Welcome to the friends who have come
from away,
Welcome to the locals who have always said
they’d stay,
If you’re coming from Toledo or
you’re coming from Taipei,
Because we come from everywhere.”

Then, at last, the call comes in the middle of the night: it’s time to fly away again. As everyone is saying their goodbyes, a flight attendant steps up to Beverley and says she does not want to fly with Ali on the plane. Security brings Ali into a separate room for a very thorough, and violating, body search. They find nothing, and he is allowed to board; Beverley is ashamed for her part in this. Meanwhile, Nick and Diane slip away to take pictures in Gander, singing “**Stop the World**” and wishing that they could just enjoy this moment before they return to real life. As Beverley takes them back into the air, the cast sings “**Somewhere in the Middle of Nowhere**,” remarking on the incredible place they discovered. As Nick and Diane approach the potential end of their brief romance and Kevin T and Kevin J find themselves in a lover’s quarrel, the flight finally passes into Texas headed for Dallas, their final destination.

With life seemingly back to normal, the townsfolk and the passengers reflect on the fact that, as the song says, “**Something’s Missing**.” An exhausted Claude comes to terms with the attack. Bob goes to visit ground zero and see the wreckage. Kevin T and Kevin J break up. Nick and Diane return to their separate countries, longing to be together. Beverley is forced to take some time off to recuperate. Hannah calls Beulah with sad news: her son has died. All in all, Gander is much emptier without the come from aways, while the come from aways long for the friendships they left behind.

Thankfully, life moves on. Claude and Garth sort out the bus drivers’ union issues. People send money and gifts to Gander in thanks for their hospitality. Ali thanks Beulah for her kindness during the crisis. Tom Brokaw, the legendary news anchor, reaches out to reporter Janice to do a documentary. Eventually, time comes for a ten-year anniversary reunion. Beverley brings her family in on her retirement flight; Bob comes with over a million dollars-worth of scholarship money; Kevin T arrives with a new boyfriend; Nick and Diane, now married, return to where their love began. The biggest gift of all is a selection of steel from the World Trade Center, making Gander the only place outside of the United States to have any. With that, the “**Finale**” picks up, recapping the remarkable tale and reiterating the opening number’s refrain: “Welcome to the Rock!”



The North American Tour. Photo by Matthew Murphy

ANATOMY OF A SONG: ME AND THE SKY

In this section, you'll dive deep into one of *Come From Away's* major numbers: "Me and the Sky," a solo delivered by airline pilot Captain Beverley Bass. The real-life Beverley Bass is a significant figure in American aviation history, as you will learn by working your way through these lyrics and annotations. Bass was a huge fan of *Come From Away* and formed a tight bond with actress Jenn Colella, who played the role in the original Broadway production. Once you get to know Bass's incredible story, you'll understand why the composers gave her such a standout moment.



The real-life Beverley Bass, left, meets with Jenn Colella, who played Bass in the musical's original Broadway run. Photo by Candace Kennedy for *The New York Times*.

As a girl, Bass repeatedly jumped off her mother's washing machine in an effort to fly across the kitchen! Her aunt Ginger frequently took her down to the airport in her hometown of Fort Myers, Florida to watch the planes come in.

BEVERLEY

My parents must have thought
They had a crazy kid
Cause I was one of those kids
Who always knew what they wanted.

They took me down to the airport
To see all the planes departing.
Watching them fly something inside of me was starting.
I was eight when I told them
That I'd be a pilot.

But I was too young and too short
And there were no female captains
And my dad said be patient,
He said just see what happens.

But I took my first lesson,
Came down from the sky and
Told my father I'd fly for the rest of my life.

According to Bass, her father really encouraged her to stay involved with riding and showing horses—partly because that was a family pastime and partly because it would presumably keep her away from boys and drugs.

Bass took her first lesson at age 19 after finishing her freshman year at Texas Christian University. During her senior year at TCU, she logged as many flight hours as possible while also working as an instructor at Fort Worth's Meacham Airport.

And I got my first job
Flying for a mortician
In a tiny Bonanza,
Just a corpse and me,
Five dollars an hour
For flying dead bodies.

The plane was an
old 1953 D model
Bonanza, a four-seater
prop plane.

Bass took on jobs flying
planes for corporate
executives as well as
industrial freight flights.
Sadly, she faced some
resistance from men unwilling
to have a woman piloting
their craft; apparently, they
worried what their wives
might think.

I had to climb over their faces
Just to get to my seat.

And suddenly the wheels lift off,
The ground is falling backwards,
I am suddenly alive.

Suddenly I'm in the cockpit,
Suddenly everything's changed,
Suddenly I'm not too young or too short
And the passengers in the back don't complain.

Suddenly I'm flying company charters,
Suddenly everything's high,
Suddenly there's nothing in between
Me and the sky.

American Airlines
Had the prettiest planes,
So I applied as a flight engineer,
But the World War 2 pilots, they all complained.

By this point, Bass
was 24 years old. She
eventually moved up
to become American
Airlines' third female
pilot.

Despite all the misogyny
she faced, Bass never
succumbed to acting like
"one of the guys": she
believed in staying true to
herself and doing her job
the best she possibly could.

They said, "Girls shouldn't be in the cockpit—
hey lady, hey baby,
Hey, why don't you grab us a drink?"
And the flight attendants weren't my friends back then
And they said, "Are you better than us, do you think?"

But I kept getting hired and
The World War 2 crew—they retired and
The girls all thought much higher of me.

1986—the first female American captain in history!

Suddenly I'm in the cockpit,
Suddenly I've got my wings,
Suddenly all of those pilots protesting me
Well they can get their own drinks!
Suddenly there's no one saying stay grounded,
Looking down—passing them by.
Suddenly there's nothing in between
Me and the sky.

Bass was the first woman
to captain a commercial
flight operated by
American Airlines. Later
that year, she became the
first woman to command
an all-female crew on a
flight from Washington,
D.C. to Dallas.

Bass went on to establish the International Society of Women Air Pilots with fellow pilot Stephanie Wallach. It provides mentorship and career support to aspiring pilots.

Suddenly I've got an all female crew,
The news caught and made headlines across the world.
Suddenly it stopped, no-one's saying

BEVERLEY (WITH FLIGHT ATTENDANTS)

(You can't) or (you won't)
Or you know you're not anything (cause you're a girl)

BEVERLEY

Suddenly I'm getting married
And we're putting pins on a map where we've flown.
Suddenly I am a mother
And suddenly shocked at how much they've grown.

Suddenly I'm wond'ring how my parents would feel
Seeing me teaching men to be pilots,
Cause suddenly I am a senior instructor
And somehow I'm fifty-one.

Suddenly I'm flying Paris to Dallas,
Across the Atlantic, and feeling calm,
When suddenly someone on air-to-air traffic says,
At 8:46 there's been a terrorist action
And the one thing I loved more than anything
Was used as the bomb.

Suddenly I'm in a hotel,
Suddenly something has died,
Suddenly there's something in between
Me and the...

Bass married Tom Stawicki, who managed the pilot pension fund for American, in 1989. The couple's son Taylor was born in May 1991; their daughter Paige was born the following year.

After learning that an American 737 had crashed into the World Trade Center, Bass immediately locked down the cockpit to prevent anyone from using her craft for similar purposes.

In 1994, airline manufacturers Boeing produced the first 777 aircraft, a.k.a. the "Triple Seven." Bass became the first woman to captain a Triple Seven in an airline operation. American Airlines later chose her to be one of their first Triple Seven flight instructors.

After the song ends, Bass receives the call to return to the air. In real life, Bass kept flying for American Airlines until 2008.



In 1986, Bass became the first woman to captain a commercial flight operated by American Airlines. Photo courtesy of Beverley Bass.



Bass retired in 2008 after spending over twenty years as a captain and instructing countless fellow pilots. She is now recognized as a pioneer and an advocate.

Photo by Stephen Hayford.

RESPONDING TO TRAGEDY, FROM 9/12 ONWARD

The 9/11 attacks were a pivotal moment in American history, and as such, they have not escaped the attention of theatre-makers and audiences. Unsurprisingly, the attacks were of immediate concern to the New York theatre community. Every Broadway show—and indeed, virtually all major theatrical performances of any kind—was cancelled that night as the city reeled from attacks. At the behest of then-Mayor Rudi Giuliani, however, the theatre community made a swift return to the stage. On Thursday, September 13th, just two days after the fall of the World Trade Center, every Broadway theatre reopened. As is the custom, each one briefly dimmed its lights in recognition of the lives lost and held a moment of silence at the top of the show. In addition, the cast and crew of many shows, like that of Tony-winning smash *The Producers*, sang renditions of patriotic songs, such as “God Bless America.” Bringing Broadway back so quickly was critical to the city’s recovery, both emotionally and economically. While some shows had to close partly because of the constraints brought on by the aftermath of the attacks, others, particularly those that were already hits, could depend on audiences returning to the auditorium to show their support.



Nathan Lane and the cast of *The Producers* leads the audience in a rendition of “God Bless America” during the curtain call on September 13th. Photo by Richard Corkery for the New York Daily News.

While New York theatre within and beyond Broadway dealt with the practical demands of recovering from crisis, artists immediately turned their attention toward the complex social and political issues raised by the events of that fateful day and the conflicts that followed. For many playwrights, that meant confronting what it meant to live in a “post-9/11” world. Anne Nelson’s play *The Guys* (2002), for example, tells the story of a New York journalist helping a local fire captain write memorial speeches for the first responders who died while responding to the World Trade Center crisis. Plays by celebrated writers such as Sam Shepard and Theresa Rebeck, meanwhile, focused on Americans wrestling with the shock of the attacks and the challenges presented to their self-perception and way of life. *Bystander 9/11* (2022), written by Meron Langsner and performed as a documentary drama, on the other hand, collected the author’s stream-of-consciousness writings in response to the attacks, bringing real-life reflections to the stage. While many Americans struggled to come to terms with this new landscape, Muslim Americans and residents were put into an especially precarious position due to a sharp increase in racist attacks and discrimination. Writers such as Rania Khalil and Laura Shamas quickly wrote plays in response to 9/11, while Ayad Akhtar’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *Disgraced* (2013) proved that the wounds of that day could affect even the most successful and accomplished Americans well over a decade later. As the 9/11 attacks became the pre-text for American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, many theatre makers also turned their attention to the ongoing atrocities of war and the political controversies surrounding American troop deployments and intelligence operations. Documentary plays such as *Guantanamo: Honor Bound to Defend Freedom* (2004) by Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo shone a light on the American detention center in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, while British playwrights like Caryl Churchill and David Hare wrestled with their own country’s entrance into the supposed “War on Terror” alongside their American allies.

The diverse and complex approaches to the post-9/11 landscape seen in American and British theatre are one small part of a new world that seemed to have split in two. Just as there was a surge in patriotic pride and a renewed interest in protecting the so-called American way of life, there was



The Broadway cast of Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced*. From left: Gretchen Mol, Hari Dhillon, Josh Radnor, and Karen Pittman.

Photo by Sara Krulwich for *The New York Times*.

also intense criticism aimed at the Bush Administration, which oversaw the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the passing of controversial surveillance measures such as the PATRIOT ACT. This duality—love of country on one side, outrage at what it was becoming on the other—can be seen not just on the stage but also on the screen, in the streets, and even at the ballpark. Patriotic spectacles became a fixture at major events around the country, including in Major League Baseball, where the New York Yankees were eventually taken to court for effectively forcing attendees to stay for a rendition of “God Bless America” during the seventh inning stretch. Meanwhile, protests

spread across the country as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan escalated, leading to major clashes over America’s rights and responsibilities on the world stage. On screen, dashing heroes like Jack Bauer in the TV series *24* (2001-2010, 2014) brutally responded to terrorist threats that were very familiar to American viewers, while documentarian and raconteur Michael Moore made a splash with his film *Fahrenheit: 9/11* (2004), a controversial takedown of the Bush Administration’s response to 9/11. Whatever the arena, the events of 9/11 and the “truth” of Americanness became a significant and intense subject of interest, a new battleground in itself.

These complexities and contradictions are part of what makes *Come From Away* a distinctive part of the post-9/11 theatre landscape. By centering a group of people who responded to the crisis by helping one another, creators David Hein and Irene Sankoff demonstrate that acts of kindness can be found in even the most tragic circumstances. As they like to say, theirs is less a “9/11 story” than it is a “9/12 story”: it focuses not on the tragedy itself, but on the unique community that was forged in the aftermath. Of course, the creators do not shy away from the trauma suffered by those who lost loved ones on that day, nor those who faced persecution in the aftermath. To do that would be a misrepresentation of how the world has changed since that day. Ultimately, the real-life events that inspired *Come From Away* are memorable because they are special. Sadly, tragedy will always be a part of life, but perhaps telling special stories like this will give audiences the inspiration they need to face new challenges head-on and hand in hand.



The North American Tour. Photo by Matthew Murphy

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