



THE
GRAND
THEATER

Performing Arts Foundation, Inc.
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Press Release

One of the most beloved, inspiring shows of our time comes to Wausau: **COME FROM AWAY**

The Grand Theater's current 2023-24 season features its biggest ever lineup of Broadway shows. But the next one on the calendar is a truly inspiring, uplifting musical that captures everyone's hearts, even those who aren't typical fans of Broadway.

Coming to Wausau February 7 and 8, *Come From Away* tells the remarkable true story of kindness and generosity when 38 planes were diverted to the small town of Gander, Newfoundland, after U.S. airspace was suddenly closed following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Instead of feeling stranded in a strange place, the 7,000 passengers and crew found themselves cared for on a moment's notice by the local residents, who banded together to transport, house, feed and comfort them. In that week after 9/11, the town of Gander's population nearly doubled with these unexpected visitors who had "come from away."

Though tensions ran high, the connections formed over those several days created deep friendships that endure to this day. While books and numerous news articles have been written about the amazing events in Gander, *Come From Away* has become best known for capturing that spirit of generosity and compassion and for offering one of the most heartwarming, emotional evenings in musical theater.

"This is a production we've been trying for years to bring to Wausau," says Grand Theater Executive Director Sean Wright. "It is absolutely one of my favorite shows of all time, and I hope anyone who is even a bit curious will come out to share in this incredible experience."

Several aspects of *Come From Away* make this different from most major Broadway musicals.

First is the fast running time. At just 1 hour and 40 minutes without intermission, this show grabs you from the beginning and doesn't let go. (Most Broadway musicals run two to three hours with intermission.)

People will notice the music is a little different from typical Broadway. The original songs have a more pop/rock feel, with plenty of Celtic influence that reflect the real musical traditions of Newfoundland, Canada – an island called "the Rock" as referenced in the show's opening song, "Welcome to the Rock."

There is no single star of the story. Each member of the cast plays multiple characters – at least one Gander resident and one passenger. And each character is either a direct representation of a real person or composite of two or more real people.

Those real stories are fascinating and worth further exploration for anyone interested in the historical context of this show.

For example, the trailblazing Capt. Beverly Bass, who piloted one of the 38 grounded planes, was the first woman ever to captain an American Airlines plane. As portrayed on stage, her moving song “Me and the Sky” recounts Bass’s personal journey moving up in a profession long held only by men, and then her heartbreak upon learning that the thing she loved most – flying airplanes — was used as a weapon.

The grounded planes carried not only people, but also hungry and thirsty animals: 12 dogs, five cats, and two bonobo chimpanzees that were being transferred from Belgium to zoos in Columbus, Ohio, and Milwaukee. The determination of a local SPCA worker, Bonnie, to care for these animals provides some of the most memorable moments of humor in *Come From Away*.

Come From Away has received numerous accolades, such as: the Tony Award for Best Direction and six other Tony nominations; three Drama Desk Awards (including Outstanding Musical) out of nine nominations; and a Grammy Award for the cast album.

As the New York Theater Guide review said, “No one will leave untouched by this show. The spirit that is on the stage sweeps past the footlights and scoops everyone in the audience up into its arms.”

Showtimes for the national touring production of *Come From Away*:

- 7:30 pm Wednesday, February 7
- 7:00 pm Thursday, February 8

Tickets starting at \$75 are available online at grandtheater.org, or by phone and in person through The Grand’s Ticket Office, 401 N. Fourth St., downtown Wausau, 715-842-0988.

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