Come From Away – Reviews

Kev Castle

"Come From Away" by Irene Sankoff and David Hein.
Carlton Operatic Society.
Nottingham Theatre Royal.

I really look forward to Carlton Operatic Productions because I know that they will be so easy to review. This is because I know practically everyone involved on (and off) stage and I know their calibre and the work ethic that they apply to anything that they put their name to.

This is the third time seeing this musical and it gets better at every viewing, and I adore the Celtic infused soundtrack. Being part Irish myself I can never keep my feet still at the sound of a fiddle and a bodhran.

"Come From Away" shares the real-life story of the 7,000 air passengers from all over the world who were grounded in Canada during the wake of 9/11, and the small Newfoundland town of Gander community that invited these "come from aways" into their lives with open hearts.

The comedy is so gentle and in abundance, balancing perfectly with the obvious confusion and terror from the passengers who had no idea what was happening and the reason for their flights' diversions. There's emergency panic from the townsfolk who had no idea as to how many people to expect and where they were going to put them up, or how to feed them.

The feeling of comradery though becomes infectious with even Walmart staff offering them to come home with them for a shower!! Can you imagine that being offered by an Asda employee? (other supermarkets are available of course).

Strangers become friends, and friends become lifelong friends, some even staying in the town, and some become even closer friends. But of course, there's those who lost family and friends because of what happened on September 11 2001, and they are also remembered.

Many of the stories related were not known about until this musical, let's face it the pregnant Bonobo monkey or the cat who was on tablets didn't make front page news, but is equally as interesting to hear about, as well as Bonnie Harris who realised that there would have been animals on the planes and, as she worked in an animal shelter, made it her job to go looking for them, and caring for them.

The stories of the local news reporter, who had just started working for the TV company, the Mayor Claude Elliott, the Police Officer, the female flight staff, as well as the passengers, some of which didn't speak English and had specific dietary needs, the party of children who were travelling over as part of the "Make A Wish" foundation, so many different people of different ages and religions, all scared and unaware of the horrors that were unfolding on that day.

It also depicts how in a situation like this, people can also become very wary of some people and treat them very differently, especially if they are Middle Eastern, the horror and embarrassment of a strip search before they let him on the plane told in such a way that you almost feel ashamed for what he had been put through, just because of his religion.

There's also the story of the gay couple, Kevin and Kevin, who didn't want to reveal their relationship for fear of a backlash, and the Jewish man who discovered that one of the Gander residents was also Jewish, but had never revealed that fact.

There are so many wonderful human stories that are woven into this wonderful comfort blanket of life happenings, all bought about by such a sad turn of events by such evil forces. The resilience and love though won through.

I very rarely look through the cast list before the show, especially when it's such a big production as this, because I love spotting people who I know from other societies, and there are plenty to spot in this production. It's a great credit to see so many actors also wanting to be a part of these big productions that Carlton Operatic Society stage, some actors who have been tempted back to the stage after a theatrical hiatus and some who are making their debuts with Carlton Operatic Society.

Here's the list of the characters and the wonderfully talented actors who bring this true story back to the Nottingham stage....

Daniella Anderson (Patsy), Meghan Borg (Janice), Joe Butler (Margie/Micky), Jennifer Chatten (Martha), Adam Collishaw (Dwight), Claire Collishaw (Crystal/Brenda). Poppy Cook (Annette), Aston Fisher (Beulah), Maddie Gradwell (Bonnie), Cliff Hart (Doug), Chris Heeley (Garth/Matty), Sarah Hill (Linda), Sam Howard (Brenda's Brother/Eddie), Celine McKeown (Britney), Gavin Owen (Oz/Terry), Katie Waller (Janet), Graham Ward (Claude/Derm) and Bekki Wilson (Patricia).

These are the Newfoundlanders who received the planes and the people and welcomed them into their homes and hearts.

The Come From Aways are just as star studded....

Wendy Austin-Giddings (Diane), Charlotte Barrington (Flight Attendant), Paolo Elias (Kevin J), Oliver Wheddon (Kevin T) who I've not seen in over a year; so good to see him back on stage again. Lizzie Fenner (Maria), Tobias T Fries (Muhumuza), Fabian Golding-Williams (Captain Bristol), Riley Halls Backler (Joey/Rabbi), Hannah Haywood-Cupitt (Roxanne), Stacey Ireson (Winnie), Lindsey Jaycock (Sara), Alice Kirkby (Lisa), Joseph Straw (Bob), Helen Taylor (Lana), Kate Taylor (Hannah), Sarah Thompson (Delores), Helen Tunnicliff (Deborah), Sam Turpin (Ali/Mr Michaels), Darren Ward (Nick) and Abby Wells (Beverley).

This show is truly an ensemble piece of theatre that was non stop, and Carlton Operatic Society have increased that ensemble to allow more people to be involved in such a wonderful story, which in turn also depicts a bigger Gander community, and the sound of everyone singing together sounded like a heavenly choir.

Directed and Choreographed by Rachael Rees. This is a show where the timings have to be spot on and the choreography the same. The transitions from scene to scene were almost invisible in their application, the chairs, tables etc just seemed to appear by magic, but that will be because you are so focused on the storytelling by the actors that everything around them seemed not to exist until they moved away, and suddenly a whole new scene appears.

The choreography is gorgeous and I especially loved the playout section following on from the bows where the whole company join to dance to the playout music of Celtic music, almost like attending a Ceilidh. There was no way I was not going to get to my feet and have a little Irish jig and clap along with such infectious dancing; the perfect ending to a perfect show.

Musical Director is Christopher Rees, and as I have said earlier, I love the sound of Irish music and Chris and his orchestra created a very authentic Irish sound, I'm surprised they were not all dressed in green. Absolutely beautiful music throughout and the vocals from all were impeccable.

The set itself was supplied by Scenic Projects, but I was so invested in the storytelling and the action that I didn't take that much notice. Absolutely no disrespect to Scenic Projects but my eyes didn't stray from the stage area all the way through.

I've mentioned the stage transitions and in charge of stage management are Vicky Johnson, Deputy Stage Manager Nigel Newton and Assistant Stage Manager Ellis Jones. A stage management dream team if ever there was one.

Talking of dream teams Tom Mowat is the Lighting Designer and Rob Kettridge is Sound Designer, assisted by George Wilson. Sound and light complementing the other.

Costume Coordinator is Charlotte Turpin.

Props Coordinators are Patrick Humphreys and Carole Ellis who obviously had no problems locating a cod to kiss and an Ugly Stick; both props vital to one section of the production.

The programme is wonderfully educational. Designed by Chris Rees and Helen Tunnicliff, you'll find the usual cast biographies and rehearsal photographs but some fascinating sections on some of the original Come From Aways from 2001 as well as information about Newfoundland.

Can you believe though that 9/11 was twenty five years ago, making this production even more poignant. I think everyone can remember exactly what they were doing when the news of the first plane hit the first of the Twin Towers; I know I can remember every detail of where I was and what I was doing. Carlton Operatic also have a series of Facebook posts telling what some Nottinghamshire people were doing when this happened as well as several other posts about that day, which make for fascinating insights locally. This information is sourced by Celine McKeown.

The musical has no interval and is sung almost straight through.

There's also a collection after the performances to collect for the Fire Fighters Charity, so please give generously if you're able.

"Come From Away" is at the Nottingham Theatre Royal until Saturday 30 May, so get prepared to kiss the cod, and welcome to the rock!

East Midlands Theatre Review

Matthew Bird



Come From Away
Theatre Royal, Nottingham

On the northeast tip of North America, on an island called Newfoundland, there's an airport – it used to be one of the biggest airports in the world – and next to it is a town called Gander.

Come From Away is the story of that small town and the people in it, when 38 planes were diverted there following the 9/11 attacks in 2001. Overnight the town population nearly doubles as the passengers on those planes are unloaded into Gander leaving residents rallying together to feed, clothe, and support an extra 7,000 people.

Community spirit is the heart of the show and it really shines through in this production by Carlton Operatic Society at the Theatre Royal in Nottingham this week. The cast is huge, which works well for this show as the feeling of a small town being filled beyond capacity is easy to believe when the stage itself is bursting at the seams.

Come From Away is an ensemble show and there are very few moments in the show where there aren't at least ten people on the stage at one time. Director and choreographer Rachel Rees does an excellent job at ensuring everyone is given a moment in the spotlight whilst maintaining a frenetic energy throughout. The show is in almost constant motion making for an extremely engaging production. The show doesn't have an interval, but you barely notice as the show is perfectly paced to keep the scenes, action and music flowing.

Abby Wells as pilot Beverly is a particular standout. Beverly Bass was the first female captain of an American Airlines plane and Wells' performance of the Me and the Sky is full of character and vocally powerful. Through Wells, you can see how important flying is to Beverley and how the use of planes in 9/11 has shook her world.

Another vocal highlight is Kate Taylor playing Hannah, mother to one of the firefighters who attended the scene. Taylor captures Hannah's desperation as she tries to find any news about her son. Her performances of I Am Here and Something's Missing are emotionally wrought and, I am not ashamed to say, brought tears to my eyes.

On board those 38 planes were people from many different faiths. Ali (played by Sam Turpin) is a Muslim and is ostracised by some people given their fear that he might be a terrorist. However, he finds kindness in the Newfoundlanders who help him to find peaceful places to pray.

Around the midway point of the show is the beautiful Prayer led by Oliver Wheddon's (playing Kevin T) smooth rendition of the Prayer of St Francis. Characters of other faiths join in the prayer, singing in their own language to produce a beautiful and hopeful picture of community togetherness.

There are too many people in the cast to be able to celebrate every person by name for their excellent performance, but I will give a final cast shoutout to Graham Ward playing Claude, the Mayor of Gander. Ward leads the cast for Screech In. Here, Claude inducts some of the 'Come From Aways' to become honorary Newfoundlanders in what can only be described as a song-and-dance number of pure, unadulterated joy.

As is typical for this show, the set is relatively spare, consisting primarily of chairs which are manoeuvred around the stage by the cast to represent whatever space is needed in that moment. This is complemented by Tom Mowat's lighting design to centre attention on the characters.

The live orchestra under the musical direction of Chris Rees is excellent, really helping to heighten the emotion and fun of the production.

This production is one of the easiest five stars I've awarded: a triumph of theatre and community spirit. It is playing in Nottingham until Saturday 30 May.

Theatre Online

Come From Away
Carlton Operatic Society
Theatre Royal Nottingham
May 26th, 2026

What a wonderful night at the theatre, watching this incredible musical about the 7,000 or so air passengers who were stranded in Newfoundland following the 9/11 attacks in the USA.

This musical has received many awards since its first performance in 2013 and tonight I found myself totally emotionally engaged throughout, which was down to the brilliance of the show itself, but also due to the wonderful performances of the very talented cast assembled by The Carlton Operatic Society. Their productions are always very good, but I think this is one of the best I have seen.

It is incredible to think that the seismic events in September 2001 will be 25 years ago this year. It is often said that many people can vividly remember where they were when the twin towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington were attacked.

Come From Away is not directly about the attacks in New York and Washington, but is about 38 commercial international flights that were forced to divert and land at a largely defunct airport in Gander, Newfoundland (a town on a large island off Canada's eastern coast). Virtually overnight, Gander's local population of roughly 10,000 people doubled as the stranded passengers from all over the world—speaking different languages and deeply traumatised—were welcomed into their community. The musical covers the tense, chaotic, and ultimately beautiful five days that the passengers spent stranded in the town.

The small Newfoundland community of Gander invited these 'come from aways' into their lives with immense generosity and kindness. We hear the stories of the bewildered passengers who have come from all over the world and meet the hosts who worked tirelessly to provide them with hospitality and friendship. In the original production, there were 84 characters in all, played by 12 actors, who moved smoothly from one to another. This production is different: there are 38 in the cast (some of whom played more than one character) split into two groups – Newfoundlanders and Come from Aways. In my opinion, this worked very well indeed. The show still moves very quickly and there is no interval, which I felt contributed to the overall momentum.

One of the important features of this show is that it is very much ensemble-driven. It is not composed of just a few leading characters, and therefore everyone must be given credit for superb performances throughout.

Therefore, here is the cast in no hierarchical order.

Newfoundlanders: Danniella Anderson, Meghan Borg, Joe Butler, Jenny Chatten, Adam Collishaw, Claire Collishaw, Poppy Cook, Aston Fisher, Maddie Gradwell, Cliff Hart, Chris Heeley, Sarah Hill, Sam Howard, Celine McKeown, Gavin Owen, Katie Waller, Graham Ward, and Bekki Wilson.

Come from Aways: Wendy Austin-Giddings, Charlotte Barrington, Paolo Elias, Lizzie Fenner, Tobias T Fries, Fabian Golding-Williams, Riley Halls Backler, Hannah Haywood-Cupitt, Stacey Ireson, Lindsey Jacob, Alice Kirkby, Joseph Straw, Helen Taylor, Kate Taylor, Sarah Thompson, Helen Tunnicliff, Sam Turpin, Darren Ward, Abby Wells, and Oliver Wheddon.

The music by Irene Sankoff and David Hein suits the story beautifully and is heavily influenced by Celtic and Irish folk-rock. The musical numbers range from catchy, narrative-driven tunes to moments of poignant emotion and longing. A particular highlight is the rousing 'Screech In', where the stranded passengers are invited to down some local whisky, kiss a fish, and become honorary Newfoundlanders.

In stark contrast, the production hits a deeply moving emotional peak during 'Prayer', where people of different faiths gather to pray. Here, the modern version of the Prayer of St Francis (Make me a Channel of Your Peace) beautifully morphs into Jewish, Hindu, and Islamic prayers for peace. I found this incredibly moving and highly appropriate given some of the issues affecting our world today.

The set is simple and effective, and the frequent use and movement of chairs and tables to create different settings, including the interior of the plane, are seamlessly executed. There were absolutely no delays. The Stage Manager, Vicky Johnson and her team are to be congratulated for the smoothness of set changes.

The lighting (Tom Mowat) and sound (Rob Kettridge) are excellent and perfectly suited to the story. The decision not to use back projections is a choice I like.

Down in the pit, the orchestra sounds fantastic under the direction of MD Chris Rees. He has obviously worked incredibly hard with the cast, as the quality of the singing is absolute perfection throughout.

Director Rachael Rees (also choreographer) and her production team are to be highly commended for this fast-paced, beautifully directed, and memorable version of the show.

The final scenes are particularly good, as they offer hope for the future, affirmed by a joyous final Irish dance which is well choreographed and performed by the whole cast. It is a wonderful end to 90 minutes of great musical theatre.

I will be honest and say that the first time I saw this show here at the Theatre Royal in 2024 I was a little underwhelmed, but tonight I thought this one was stupendous.

Thanks again Carlton for yet another wonderful production. It continues at the Theatre Royal until Saturday May 30th. Do come and see it if you can.

There is a collection in the theatre and outside for the Nottinghamshire Fire Service.

David

NODA

Company:	Carlton Operatic Society
Production:	Come From Away
Director:	Rachael Rees
Musical Director:	Christopher Rees
Choreographer:	Rachael Rees
Venue:	Theatre Royal Nottingham
Date:	26 May 2026
Author:	Irene Sankoff & David Hein
Written by:	Martin Holtom

TBC

Audience Comments

“I went to see the show on Wednesday, I’ve never seen the musical before and it was amazing and the cast were incredible 😉” – Leanne Thornton

“It was a great production professionally done by Carlton Operatic Society” – Mike Yeomans

“It was absolutely incredible, everyone on that stage was outstanding. Thank you for sharing those stories.” – Becky Birch

“Absolutely awesome show, and has left a big impression on us. Anyone who couldn't get to see it missed something very special ❤️” – Shaz Broome

“Such a good production- as good as the professional version we saw in the West End” – Michelle Hillary

“Went last night. Absolutely fantastic show. Well done all. Perfect harmonies. Loads of stand out performances.” – Sarah Carley

“I couldn't agree more, it really was 5 stars and it kept you captivated from start to finish with an emotional rollercoaster. Well done everyone involved.” – Suzanne Gardner

“It’s incredible! Been tonight. Congratulations to every single member of the team, on stage and off. Just brilliant! 🤩 x” – Christine Shaw

“As good as the touring cast! Standing ovation well deserved 👏👏👏❤️👏” – Katie Sarah Keating

“Congratulations to the cast, some amazing voices there. We thoroughly enjoyed the performance last night. What a great production. Highly recommend it!” – Barbara Gaffney

“I went last night- it was fantastic 👏” – Dawn Wigley

“We went last night. Fantastic performance, a rollercoaster of emotions, and a well told story. Thoroughly recommend x” – Jane Taylor

“Incredible performance” – Susan Smith

“Excellent show! Fabulous performance tonight 👏👏👏” – Naomi Cummins

“Superb performance from talented cast!” – Linda Jones

“Absolutely fantastic performance! Huge well done to all the cast, Christopher Rees and Rachael Rees. 🎤👏🎶” – Rebecca Lomas

“Congratulations on an excellent production!” – Angela Adams

“Wow wow wow! Absolutely incredible! Seen a lot of shows in London and on tour but this is genuinely top 3! Amazing passion for the characters’ stories and the songs. Everyone so friendly at stage door after - signing my daughter, Izabella’s, theatre book. Can’t say thank you enough. Wish you had filmed a performance so we could rewatch it again and again! X” – Laura Murphy

“Saw this last night (Fri) an absolutely brilliant performance. Fully deserved the standing ovation it received. Thank you to everyone concerned. 👏👏👏” – Michael Parr

“What an incredible show performed by incredible people. Loved meeting many of you at the stage door this afternoon and giving your time to talk to us and sign my daughters book. We haven't stopped talking about the show and the how amazing you all were. Thank you all for such an amazing afternoon, I hope you all have enjoyed this time, and I hope to see many of you next year for Chitty!!!!” – Hannah Murphy

“It was stunning! It benefitted hugely from a larger cast, fantastic stagecraft and some truly gorgeous voices. All involved should be hugely proud. 🌎✈️” – Dan Backler

“Saw this show twice this week. Absolutely brilliant, well done everyone involved. Stand out performances for me were the lady playing Hannah, I felt the anguish and the grief in her acting. Tall Kevin, his rendition of MMACOYP was awesome and truly beautiful. Beulah actored her socks off, her confidence shone the whole show. And Annette, her comedy timing in her facial expressions was so funny. Im booking for next year 😍” – Christa Bales

“Come from away is my absolute favourite show. I have seen it 6 times including west end. I came to see it last night with you and omg you were all incredible. Goosebumps from the very second it started. Every actor played their character so very true to form, I was absolutely blown away. I cried a lot! I was an emotional but happy mess by the end. Massive well done. Thank you for bring my favourite show back to Nottingham x” – Sarah Cleobury

“We saw the matinee, what an amazing cast and show. Non-stop singing and acting, a really professional show well worthy of the standing ovation” – Louise Davies

“It was fantastic , could easily see that again unfortunately my husband was ill n couldn’t go , pity there’s not a dvd / download of the show as he would’ve loved it ❤️. Went on a Tuesday Fantastic show , we’ve seen couple of your shows now and they’ve all been very professional & singing is excellent , can’t wait for next year now❤️” – Helen Fearn

“Congratulations on a brilliant show! We loved it! X” – Jean Pallant

“Saw it today, so good! Well done to all involved!” – Eileen Evans

“Enjoyed watching it tonight. Congratulations all x” – Hils Lee

“My husband and I saw the matinee performance this afternoon and it was absolutely brilliant. We really thought they were professionals and worthy of the West End. Well done to all 😊” – Debra Osmond Cook

“Stunning show, absolutely loved it last night. You all rocked! ✈️” – Alex Lamb

“Such a brilliant show with a brilliant cast. I'm going again on Saturday” – Carolyn Ward

“It was fantastic. Well done to everyone involved, wish i could see it 3 more times 🥰” – Hannah Willmer

“If you've not seen this production you should. Great book and fantastic cast.” – Geraldine Gray

“We went on Wednesday. Fantastic show. Massive well done to everyone involved 👏👏👏” – Maggie Butler

“🎭🎉 What a great show! watched on Tuesday evening, your guys always know how to put on top class shows , I’ve seen Charlotte in many performances x” – Sue Reynolds

“Brilliant show, went again last night, it really is that good” – Nicky Wheddon

“Fabulous show.....” – Wendy Silver

“Amazing show tonight, well done everyone!” – Anthony Tallis

“Fantastic show, I laughed, I cried and I even had a little dance at the end 😄❤️” – Lynn Ward

“I love Come From Away saw it last night.. fabulous!..love that it's a local production..it certainly stands up well with the big money productions!.loved it!” – Nicola Barnfather

“Fantastic production well done all 🤩👐🏻” – Sarah Breen

“It was amazing from start to finish, talented group!” – Catherine Hanshaw

“Absolutely brilliant!!!” – Kirsty Woolley

“Loved watching every minute of this show. Xx” – Debs Cumberpatch

“I saw it last night from the balcony. Fabulously well done” – Phillip Lowe

“Saw the show this afternoon - absolutely incredible! So moving & powerful but uplifting at the same time! Congratulations to all involved on another fabulous show! Enjoy the rest of the run x” – Steph Metson Scott

“The chemistry and everyone singing between the whole cast on stage was amazing, well done , great performances” – Sue Reynolds

“It was a fabulous version of this show. Well done everyone!” – Margaret Burrell

“Came to opening night and was blown away!! Such an amazing performance, filled with laughter and tears. Definitely the untold story of 9/11 and how well communities can come together!!Special shout out to the Mayor (aka my dad!)” – Whitney Jay Murfin

“Massive well done to you all. Fabulous performance. Enjoyed every minute 👏👏👏” – Maggie Butler

“Fantastic show. Congratulations to all” – Diane Devonshire

“Incredible performance ❤️ well done to all involved and enjoy your final performance this evening xx” – Emily Townsend

“Saw this last night and we were so emotional when we left. Brilliant story telling, harmonies were on point. Absolutely the best thing we’ve seen so far this year. It was recommended by **Beyond the Barricade** Andy who we’ve followed for years. Well done all on a truly amazing show.” – Sarah Carley

“Just back from watching this afternoon- brilliant production- well done to all the performers 👏👏👏” – Maria Rowe

“Saw for the second time tonight, went Wednesday and was so impressed went again tonight. Great harmonies and stand out performances. Well done all, hope you party tonight.” – Sarah Carley

“Just got back hotel after watching this. Incredible production, well done to all involved. Il be back over for your next production that’s for sure 👍” – Matthew Jones

“Please can you thank everyone involved in any way, we're just on the way home, we all thoroughly enjoyed it 🥰✨👏 xxx” – Yvette Price-Mear Olm

“My first experience of one of yours shows and it won’t be the last! Thought the show was incredible.” – Fiona Ferguson

“I just want to say, the performance tonight was brilliant. I had goosebumps, i laughed, my eyes filled with tears. Thank you.” – Fiona Cook

"Just wanted to say thank you so much for Come From Away. We saw the show last night (Thursday) and were blown away by the quality of the production. Such strength in depth across the company on stage, and a special band in the pit. A real joy, and such a great advert for local amateur musical theatre. Please pass our grateful thanks to cast and crew." – Jon Seddon

"I just wanted to say that my close friend is Natalie Gallacher the casting agent who cast the OG West End Come From Away and having seen the show today I have messaged her to say your performance was as good as the professionals. She would be so proud of the casting and show! Blown away!!!"

"I have now seen Come From Away 6 times, the first time was inToronto!. My 6th time was your production here in Nottingham this week. Wow! What more can I say! I was slightly apprehensive, I have to admit , ,as to whether or not the amateur production would take something away from the original where the small cast all play different roles. I was not disappointed and in fact, I almost think I preferred it! Congratulations on a terrific production. I could easily have been in London watching the pros. It was slick and fast moving, as it has to be, very well cast and the staging and lighting perfect. I absolutely loved it. I am 85 years old and Worcester Operatic and Dramatic Society was part of my life for over 20years so I am pretty au fait with what is involved with putting on shows but this was something else! Just brilliant. Thank you for a wonderful evening." – Lyn Coxon

"Just wanted to say how much we enjoyed this afternoon’s performance. I am a huge fan of this show and have seen it several times before. You are all to be congratulated on a magnificent performance, seriously talented players. Well done to all of you, I will certainly look out for your future productions." – Stella Rippon