

# The Heartbeat of *Come From Away*: A Conversation with Music Director Alan J. Plado

By Elizabeth Montgomery



Alan J. Plado, Music Director for *Come From Away*

In *Come From Away*, the story unfolds at a relentless pace. Twelve actors portray dozens of characters, scenes shift in seconds, and emotions move from humor to heartbreak and back again. Beneath it all is a score that keeps the story moving.

For the show's Music Director Alan J. Plado, guiding that momentum requires the same level of coordination as the story itself.

“Conducting the show, it’s very intricate,” Plado explains. “I have to make sure all the singers’ entrances are solid, as well as leading the band in and out of songs, controlling dynamics and all those details. So basically helping guide everyone through the show musically is a big part of my job.”

Plado brings an extraordinary depth of experience to The Phoenix Theatre Company's production. A veteran of Broadway productions including *Disney's Beauty and the Beast*

and *Kinky Boots*, and national tours of *Jersey Boys*, *Beautiful*, and *Legally Blonde*, he says *Come From Away* holds a special place among the many shows he's led over the years.

The musical tells the true story of the small town of Gander, Newfoundland, which welcomed nearly 7,000 stranded airline passengers following the events of September 11, 2001. While the story centers on the people who showed extraordinary kindness during a difficult moment in history, the music quietly does another important job. It acts as a guide, helping the audience track the many characters and perspectives that weave through the show.

"The characters, when they're introduced and every time they reappear, a lot of times they have their own theme musically," he says. "Ali, who's the Middle Eastern character, you'll often hear this instrument played by our percussionist that's very characteristic of that culture and that sound. Nick and Diane have their own theme, and Captain Bristol has his own thing. Musically, it's very, very cool writing."

The score, written by Irene Sankoff and David Hein, is a remarkable piece of musical storytelling. The music doesn't just accompany the story; it carries it.

What makes this production particularly special is that the band performs onstage, dressed in street clothes, fully embedded in the world of Gander, Newfoundland. Some musicians even step out during the bar scene to solo and become part of the community onstage, creating the feeling of a real Newfoundland bar band in the middle of the action.

"Because we're an onstage band, the energy has to stay even more focused on the story," Plado says. "We're really like part of the Gander community and part of the story."

The score demands extraordinary focus and craft. It runs nonstop for roughly an hour and twenty minutes, and Plado, who has even notated in his score with which hand to use to turn each page, is always thinking several bars ahead.

The instrumentation is unlike anything else in musical theatre. Flautist Tanner plays more than a dozen Irish flutes and whistles, switching between them throughout the show, and built his own flute warmer to keep them all in tune. Percussionist Kevin handcrafted the production's iconic ugly stick. The bodhrán, a frame drum, pulses through the show like a heartbeat, deeply rooted in the culture of the region the story calls home.

"I literally think this is the perfectly written show," Plado says. "It flows so well and so seamlessly, and everything musical makes sense. It supports the action on stage, which I think is really exciting."

For Plado, the most rewarding moment comes at the end of each performance. After the final bow, the band continues playing while the audience claps along.

“To see the audience clapping along all the way to the end,” he says, “that’s a very thrilling sight.”

It’s a moment that captures what makes *Come From Away* resonate so deeply: a room full of strangers, carried by music, sharing the same rhythm the whole time, bringing the audience together.

The show must close on March 29<sup>th</sup>. Get your tickets to experience the music and the heart of this show live.

### **Event Details**

What: *Come From Away*

When: January 28 - March 29, 2026

Where: The Phoenix Theatre Company, Dr. Stacie J. and Richard J Stephenson Theatre, 1825 N. Central Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85004

Tickets: Available at [www.phoenixtheatre.com](http://www.phoenixtheatre.com) or by calling the Box Office at (602) 254-2151

Click [here](#) to watch the full recording of the Creatives’ Download with Alan J. Plado.