

WRITERS' NOTES

BY SCOTT GILMOUR & CLAIRE MCKENZIE

We met as students studying at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and quickly realized that we shared a passion for stories. After graduating in 2012, we decided to form Noisemaker, a writing partnership dedicated to developing innovative, original work to challenge the expectations of musical theatre. Since then, we've worked throughout the UK and internationally for companies including The National Theatre of Scotland, The Royal Lyceum, Dundee Rep, New York Musical Festival, The American Musical Theatre Project, Northwestern University, and Walt Disney Imagineering. We are delighted to now be collaborating with Goodspeed Musicals on *Hi, My Name is Ben*.



different ways a character can let an audience in—how they relay information, and emotion, when the spoken word isn't an option. Eventually, through the use of music, projection, and physical interaction, we began to create a language that allowed Ben to communicate. A language which we hope reflects the spirit of how Ben spoke to those around him. This is one of the key elements of the show that we're excited to explore for the first time here at Goodspeed.

In August 2016, we read the obituary of an extraordinary man who had lived on East 74th Street in New York City. His name was Ben, and he was mute. Despite being unable to talk, Ben managed to communicate with and impact the lives of those around him, turning a neighborhood of strangers into a community of friends. His story is a modern-day fairytale about hope, friendship, and grief, before finally encountering a miracle.

We began to interview the people who had known Ben, and in January 2017 we brought everything we'd learned to the Johnny Mercer Foundation Writers Colony here at Goodspeed, where we began to create *Hi, My Name is Ben*. Since then, we have developed the show with Goodspeed, along with support from the National Theatre of Scotland, Dundee Rep, and Creative Scotland.

One of the unique challenges we encountered with interpreting Ben's story was discovering how to write for a protagonist who can't speak. We experimented with the

This piece was created as a true transatlantic collaboration, and we are delighted to be presenting this developmental production of *Hi, My Name is Ben* with a creative team made up of both Scottish and American artists. Each member of our team brings their own unique style and approach to Ben's story, and we hope this will allow for the production to feel specific in its storytelling, but also universal in its appeal.

As writers, it's been a privilege to have the infrastructure and experience of Goodspeed as our guide throughout the writing process. It's a rare thing to feel so valued and supported as freelance artists (particularly when you have funny accents!), and we're both deeply grateful to have received that while creating this show. This is the first time the work will be seen by an audience, and we couldn't be happier that will be happening at Goodspeed.

We hope our audiences will experience a true story that moves them, with an orchestral folk score, dynamic movement sequences, projections, and a message that echoes the sentiment of what Ben's life was about: communication and connection.

HI, MY NAME IS BEN

a new musical