Folkestone Schools for Girls: Come From Away - A Production That Soars

As an NSTA Theatre Representative, it was a pleasure to watch Folkestone School for Girls' production of *Come From Away*, performed on 14 July 2026. Directed by Mr Ferguson, with choreography by Mrs Barnes, musical direction by Ms Livingston, vocal coaching by Mrs Riley, technical management by Mr Andrews, lighting design by Mr Beaumont and Max Sykes, and costumes by Ms Goodchild, the production celebrated the power of human connection through a moving and uplifting piece of musical theatre.

Come From Away tells the remarkable true story of approximately 7,000 airline passengers who found themselves grounded in Gander, Newfoundland, following the events of 11 September 2001. Through music, humour and heartfelt storytelling, the musical celebrates the kindness of strangers and the strength of a community coming together in extraordinary circumstances. The original Broadway production won a Tony for Best Direction of a Musical in 2017, and the West End production won multiple Olivier Awards in 2019, including Best New Musical.

The staging by Folkestone School for Girls' established a distinctive visual world, with a raised stage, wooden shutters across the back and two flats framing the performance space. The iconic wooden chairs were incorporated into the choreography, becoming an integral part of the storytelling. Lighting was used with particular imagination to evoke Gander's rocky landscape, while the shape of the shutters cleverly suggested the New York skyline at the close of "Lead Us Out of the Night". This visual language created a particularly poignant atmosphere, bringing the production's emotional themes into focus.

"Welcome to the Rock" opened the show with energy and purpose. The large cast was supported by a live orchestra, and the performers delivered the fast-moving dialogue with clarity and commitment, embracing the distinctive accents that give the musical its character.

Leading the Gander residents, Sienna brought an engaging authority to the role of Claude, Gander's mayor, leading the other Gander residents in welcoming the "Plane People". Her gruff vocal quality and confident stage presence suited the character beautifully, while her transitions between Claude and the various cameo roles demonstrated an assured command of the storytelling.

Tehilah's Janice helped anchor the narrative, bringing a distinctive Newfoundland accent and an engaging portrayal of a novice journalist discovering a remarkable story. Her overlapping narration in "38 Planes" conveyed Janice's nervous excitement with particular skill. Mirabelle brought warmth and humanity to Beulah, with an Irish-influenced accent and a generous portrayal of the character's care for the visitors. Her excerpts from "My Heart Will Go On" were beautifully sung.

Ophelia's portrayal of Oz combined gentle concern with an appealing sense of humour. Her vocal contributions to the ensemble numbers were a highlight, as was her comic exchange with Beulah in "Blankets and Bedding".

Angel's portrayal of Bonnie (the Gander resident determined to provide care to the animals onboard the grounded planes) was full of warmth and irrepressible enthusiasm. Knowing that this was Angel's debut musical makes her performance particularly special. Her closing monologue was deeply moving, conveying the character's heartfelt connection with the animals and the poignancy of their separation from their young.

In “Something’s Missing”, her solo line, “it started to rain”, was beautifully delivered, with a delicate vibrato that brought real tenderness to the moment.

The portrayals of the visitors were no less impressive. Emerald portrayed Beverly, the pioneering female pilot, with a strong sense of character. Her performance of “Me and the Sky” moved expressively from speech-led delivery into melody and showtune belts, conveying Beverly’s pride in her record-breaking career. Her physical characterisation was especially telling: whilst wearing Beverly’s captain’s hat and coat, she maintained the character’s adventurous spirit, even while singing chorus vocals in “Stop the World”, when her gaze across the audience suggested a grounded pilot looking longingly towards the open seascape.

Audrey brought confidence and swagger to Kevin T, the high-powered executive from Los Angeles, capturing the character’s professional authority and assured manner with an engaging stage presence. Audrey and Nicole shared a wonderful comic rapport, with both actresses demonstrating impeccable timing in each exchange between Kevin T and Kevin J. Nicole’s portrayal of Ali was also fantastic and added greatly to the portrayal of the human connections of *Come From Away*. Nicole’s physical delivery, portraying nervousness through fidgeting behaviour and tugging at her shirt showed real nuance and delicacy.

Hettie portrayed Diane with delicacy and delivered outstanding vocals, while Felicity brought precise gentleness and endearing nervousness to Nick opposite her. Together, they developed the characters’ growing relationship with natural warmth. Their duet, “Stop the World”, was a standout moment, with beautifully matched vocals and convincing characterisation from both performers.

As Hannah, Beatrix’s desperate attempts to contact her son, a Brooklyn firefighter, brought a deeply moving dimension to the musical. She gave a deeply affecting performance of “I Am Here”, with delicate vibrato and touching emotional expression. Beatrix conveyed the emotional weight of this uncertainty with great sensitivity in “Something’s Missing”, before delivering her final solo lines with a beautiful soprano that brought further poignancy to Hannah’s story.

Bernice gave Bob, the anxious New Yorker, a wonderfully engaging comic presence. Her timing and characterisation brought warmth and likeability to the role, while the development of Bob’s community outlook was communicated with sensitivity.

Come From Away is a truly ensemble musical, and a better fit for this talented cast couldn’t be found. Harmonies and rounds were delivered with skill, particularly in “Welcome to the Rock”, “38 Planes”, “28 Hours/Wherever We Are”, “Phoning Home” and “Something’s Missing”. The layered choreography in the first chorus of “28 Hours” created a striking visual arrangement, while “In the Bar/Heave Away” brought energetic movement and a strong sense of camaraderie.

Folkestone School for Girls created a heartfelt and engaging production, bringing together expressive performances, vibrant ensemble work, imaginative staging and a compelling musical score. The final sequence, through “10 Years Later” and “Finale”, reflected the lasting impact of the characters’ shared experience, before the curtain call brought the evening to an exuberant close. The company’s commitment to telling this story with warmth, humour and humanity made for a memorable celebration of collaboration and the enduring power of community.