

a new musical

HI, MY NAME IS
BEN



I CAN'T TALK
BUT I CAN HEAR

GOODSPEED MUSICALS
AUDIENCE INSIGHTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

HI, MY NAME IS BEN

MAY 17 - JUNE 9, 2019
THE TERRIS THEATRE

Synopsis.....	3
Characters.....	4
Meet The Creative Team.....	5
Writers' Notes.....	6
The Development of <i>Hi, My Name is Ben</i>	7
An Onstage Biography.....	8
Inside Ben's World.....	9
New York City and Homelessness.....	10
Content Warning.....	12
Resources.....	13

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MAX
SHOWALTER
CENTER FOR EDUCATION
IN MUSICAL THEATRE

Audience Insights updated 05.13.19

Synopsis

SHORT TAKE: The spoiler-free synopsis

An old man walks onstage and introduces himself: he is Ben, and he can hear, but can't talk. We see Ben being given a small room in New York City to live in, then we flashback to Ben's youth in Iowa, where the young Ben is a rebellious teenager (with a fully functional voice), anxious to get to New York to build skyscrapers. His family, including an unstable mother, Meta, and his sister Helen, doesn't want him to leave. When Ben decides to leave for the army, Meta tells him she never wants to see him again.

We see the older Ben recovering from an illness with the help of his neighbor, Pat. He begins to connect with the people of his neighborhood, including Jorge, a Colombian doorman at a nearby building who doesn't speak English well. Ben teaches him with the aid of a notebook and pen.

Again we flashback to the younger Ben, now in college and about to leave for New York for a job as an architectural

draftsman. News comes that Ben's mother has died. Ben decides not to go home for the funeral. A few years later, he's a successful architectural draftsman about to go on a date with a sweet waiter named James. After the date, Ben learns from Helen that their father has killed himself. Ben returns home but doesn't stay, and after pushing James away, he has a total breakdown, losing his voice in the process.

Years later, Ben is living on the street. He is spotted by an older James, who helps Ben get set up in the room we saw in the beginning of the show. Ben makes more friends in the neighborhood as the years pass, but he eventually learns he has prostate cancer. As he is fighting it, Pat tells him his sister Helen has died, and she appears to Ben to forgive him for his long absence. The details of Ben's life swarm around him, and the next morning his voice returns. But does this medical miracle mean Ben is cured?

SPOILER ALERT! Read the short take for no spoilers.

An old man comes on stage and, via a notebook he uses to write on, introduces himself to the audience: he is Ben, and he can hear, but cannot talk. He tells us a little about himself, but soon enough we are drawn into the show. We see a bedraggled Ben being given a small room to live in, thanks to another man—James. As James leaves, Ben flashes back to himself as a teenager in Davenport, Iowa. The young Ben has a fully functional voice and a reputation as a troublemaker in school for his habit of drawing all over school property, but Ben says they are designs for the skyscrapers he is going to build one day. We see that Ben has a connection with a fellow student, Noah. At home, we meet Ben's family, including his newly-married sister Helen, and learn there is some tension among them—Ben's mother, Meta, isn't mentally stable and gets very upset at the idea of Ben not staying in Iowa after high school.

The older Ben wakes up in 1991, having passed out. Luckily his neighbor Pat is a nurse, and supervises his healing while telling her own story. When he feels better, Ben ventures into the outside world, and begins to connect with his community via his notepad. At a local building, he meets Jorge, a Colombian doorman who doesn't speak much English. Ben offers to teach him, and via his notepad, does.

Back in 1952, Ben is graduating from high school and leaving for the army, which terrifies his mother. She tells him that if he leaves, she never wants to see him again. As we see Ben serve in Korea and then study to be an architectural draftsman, Helen sings about their childhood together. At his dorm, Ben is getting ready for his new life in New York and debating whether to tell his family where he's going when he gets the news that his mother is dead. Ben decides to travel to New York anyway, and sings about how much he loves his new home—a song echoed by Jorge and another doorman, Juan.

A few years later, Ben, now a successful architect with a fancy apartment, ignores his ringing phone while preparing for a date. His date is James, a sweet waiter, and they connect. But when Ben gets home he answers the phone to hear Helen on the other line—their father has committed suicide. Ben goes home for the funeral but doesn't stay, and when he returns to New York he pushes James away. The guilt over his parents' deaths causes him to have a breakdown, at the end of which he is left without his voice.

Act 2 begins in 1990, with the older Ben living on the street. A man passing by stops to give him money and Ben recognizes an older James. James brings Ben to his home, which he shares with his wife, Sarah. They help Ben find a room, as we saw in the first scene. On a walk in the neighborhood, Ben meets a brassy journalist, Joan, and her dog Clementine.

Time passes, and Ben sees a doctor. He asks Jorge and Juan to bring him to the grave of James, who has passed away, and tells them he has been diagnosed with cancer. As a surprise, the doormen and Joan arrange for Ben to have a swanky evening out at the opera, which he loves. When he returns, Pat tells him that his sister Helen has died. She appears to Ben, forgiving him for his long absence. The details of Ben's life swarm around him, and the next day a miracle occurs—his voice returns. However, his joy is short-lived, as his cancer forces him into hospice care. Ben sees a vision of his younger self, and celebrates a life that went very differently than he had planned before he slips away.

At Ben's funeral, Jorge praises Ben's ability to make you see the beauty in life. The community, now united in friendship thanks to Ben, celebrates the lesson he taught them: that everyone has a story, and it's worth connecting with those around you to find out theirs.

Characters

BEN WICHMANN III: As a young man, he's a rebellious, slightly selfish dreamer anxious to leave Iowa for New York City to fulfill his dreams of building skyscrapers. As an old man, he has been humbled by life and the loss of his voice to become an open-hearted, generous friend eager to connect with those around him.

JORGE: A doorman who works at the Mayfair, a building in Ben's neighborhood, Jorge has moved from Colombia without speaking much English. After Ben teaches him, he and Jorge become close friends.

JUAN: Another doorman at the Mayfair, Juan is a friend of both Jorge and Ben's. He is a little slicker and savvier than Jorge, but equally kind.

JAMES: Kind and good, James is a young waiter who connects with Ben on a date. Later, their paths intertwine again and he becomes a key figure in Ben's life.

PAT: A nurse who lives near Ben, Pat is Irish but has lived in NYC for years. She is no-nonsense to the point of seeming harsh, but she has a good heart.

JOAN: A journalist with a big personality and a beloved Bulldog named Clementine, Joan meets Ben while walking Clementine, and they all become great friends.

HELEN: Ben's tenderhearted sister, who tries her best to keep her family together. Content to remain in Iowa, she doesn't really understand Ben but loves him deeply anyway.

META: Ben's mother, whose warmth and love for her family hides a mental instability that manifests as an obsession with keeping her family close.

BERNHARDT: Ben's father, an opera-loving man whose tendency is to retreat from the conflict that besets his family.



Joel Rooks as Ben. ©Adrien Broom

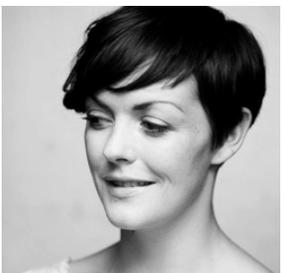
— Meet The Creative Team —



SCOTT GILMOUR (Book and Lyrics) and **CLAIRE MCKENZIE** (Music) Noisemaker is the award-winning writing partnership of bookwriter/lyricist Scott Gilmour and composer Claire McKenzie. Both graduates of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, the pair work throughout the UK and internationally creating innovative, original work to challenge the expectations of musical theatre. Scott and Claire have worked with a wide variety of companies, including The National Theatre of Scotland, Royal Lyceum, Singapore School of the Arts, The Other Palace, New York Musical Festival, Merry-Go-Round Playhouse, Sheffield Crucible, NYMT, American Musical Theatre Project at Northwestern University, Dundee Rep, Goodspeed Musicals, Citizens Theatre, and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Most recently, the pair were awarded Unique Business of the Year at the Scottish Business Awards 2018. Noisemaker credits include *The Snow Queen* (Dundee Rep/Citizens Theatre); *My Left/Right Foot* (National Theatre of Scotland/Birds of Paradise - Fringe First Winner/Herald Angel Winner 2018); *Songs From The Seven Hills* (Sheffield Crucible); *Ceilidh* (Noise Opera/Glasgow 2018 European Championships); *Atlantic: A Scottish Story* (Assembly/AMTP Northwestern University/Royal Conservatoire of Scotland - Herald Angel Award Winner 2017); *Little Red And The Wolf* (Dundee Rep Theatre - Nominated for Best Production for Children and Young People UK Theatre Awards and Critics Awards for Theatre in Scotland 2016); *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* (Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh); *Forest Boy* (NYMF, New York/The Other Palace, London/Edinburgh Fringe Assembly - Winner of S&S Award for Best Musical in Development, The NYMF 2016 Publishing Award); *The Girl Who* (Merry-Go-Round Playhouse/Assembly/AMTP); *Freakshow* (The Roundhouse/The Arches - Winner of the Scottish Daily Mail Drama Award 2012). Future projects include a collaboration with the National Youth Music Theatre to create a new musical for their 2019 season. The piece, entitled *Legend Trippers*, will open in London at The Other Palace in August and will feature a cast of 28 young people selected from across the UK. Noisemaker will also return to Dundee Rep this Christmas with their adaptation of Scotland's most renowned comic strip, *Oor Wullie*. This will be a co-production with Selladoor Worldwide, and will go on a national tour in 2020.



ANDREW PANTON (Director) Born in Scotland, Andrew has worked internationally across theatre, television, film and music. He is Artistic Director and Joint Chief-Executive at Dundee Rep Theatre where he has directed *The Snow Queen*, *The Yellow on the Broom*, *Passing Places*, *Spring Awakening*, *A Christmas Carol*, the Scottish Premiere of *August: Osage County*, *Love Song*, and *The Mill Lavvies*. Hewas Movement Director for the TMA and CATS award-winning production of *Sweeney Todd*. Andrew has directed productions for the National Theatre of Scotland, Edinburgh Royal Lyceum, Glasgow Citizen's Theatre, Royal & Derngate, Perth Theatre, and The Stephen Joseph Theatre. Work for TV includes *Children in Need*, Gareth Malone's *The Naked Choir*, and *The Voice*, all for the BBC. Andrew was vocal director for Susan Boyle on her last five albums and devised and directed her UK and international concert tours. In 2014, he was one of the creative directors for the opening ceremony of the Glasgow Commonwealth Games. Andrew is a Visiting Professor at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and a previous winner of the Bruce Millar Award for directing.



EMILY-JANE BOYLE (Choreographer) is a Glasgow-based choreographer and movement director and Artistic Associate of Dundee Rep. Theatre: *Exit The King* (National Theatre); *Oresteia: This Restless House* (Edinburgh International Festival); *Forest Boy* (NYMF); *Sunshine on Leith*, *Pride and Prejudice* (*sort of)* (UK Tours); *How To Act* (National Theatre of Scotland); *Trainspotting*, *Nora: A Doll's House* (Citizens); *The Red Balloon* (NYB/Sadlers Wells); *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Black Oil*, *The Snow Queen*, *Passing Places*, *Great Expectations* (Dundee Rep); *Jumpy*, *Hedda Gabler* (Lyceum). Film/Television: *The Crown* (Netflix); *In Plain Sight* (ITV); *Two Doors Down* (BBC); *God Help the Girl* (Sundance); *Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games* (BBC).



GAVIN WHITWORTH (Music Director) is a graduate of York University and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Musical directing credits include *The Snow Queen* (Dundee Rep); *But First This*, *The Witches of Eastwick* (Watermill Theatre, Newbury); *Beauty and the Beast*, *Hansel and Gretel* (Citizens Theatre); *Merrily We Roll Along*, *Brigadoon*, *London Road* (RCS); *Wasted Love*, *The Improvised Musical* (Edinburgh Fringe); *Room* (Stratford East/NTS); and *Glasgow Girls* (RAW Materials). Composition credits include *Some Small Love Story* (Arts Theatre, London), *Neverland* (Theatre Deli, Sheffield), *White Fang* (freeFall Theatre, Florida), and *Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Selby Abbey).

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.

The Development of Hi, My Name is Ben

— One Inspiration, Two Writers, Two Countries and One Show —

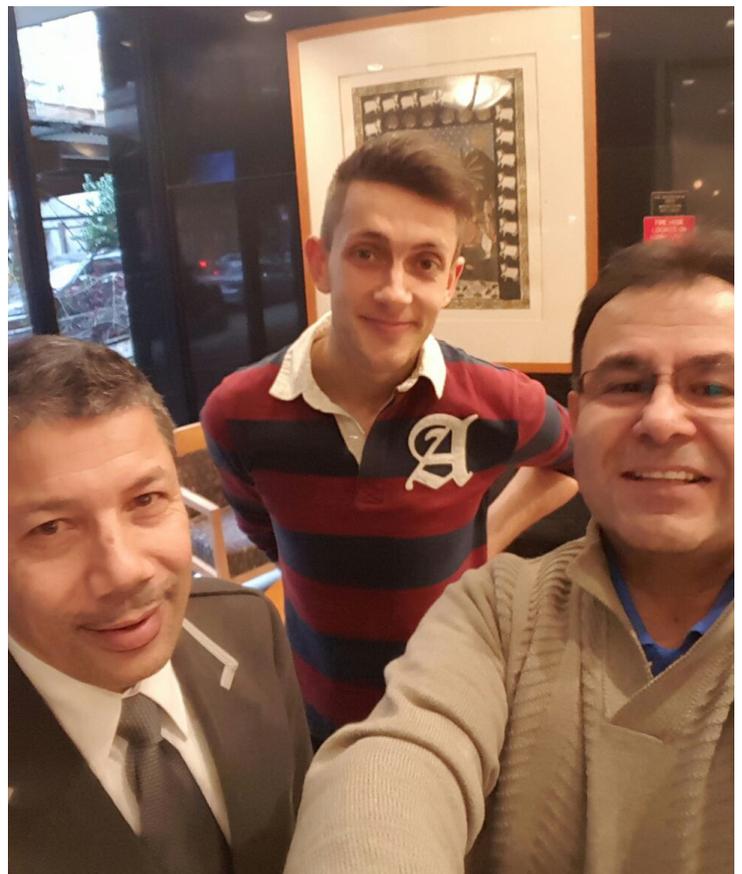
Writers say that inspiration can strike anywhere, but they usually know it when they find it—something they encounter will have a spark that draws them in, and promises a greater story. That was the reaction that writer Scott Gilmour had when he read an [obituary in the *New York Times*](#) in the summer of 2016. It was for a man named Bernhardt Wichmann III (known to everyone as Ben), who had lived in a small room on the Upper East Side of New York City and become a beloved neighborhood fixture by writing on pieces of paper (he had lost his voice in a botched surgery) to befriend many of those around him. His voice had miraculously returned one day, and when he died his best friends, two doormen who worked at a building nearby, put fliers up around the neighborhood asking for donations so that Ben, a veteran, could have a proper military funeral. The neighborhood paid for the funeral.

Scott read this article and shared it with his writing partner, composer Claire McKenzie. They both agreed there was something there in this story of an ordinary and yet extraordinary life. They had this kernel of an idea when they applied for the Johnny Mercer Writers Colony at Goodspeed, and they were accepted. There, they developed the idea further, catching the attention of the Goodspeed artistic staff. When Scott and Claire (who are, as a writing duo, known as Noisemaker) returned to their native Scotland, they produced a reading themselves using space at the National Theatre of Scotland. After this, they connected with Andrew Panton, the Artistic Director of the Dundee Rep Theatre and a Director who already knew their work (and who knew Goodspeed as well—he had nominated Scott and Claire for the Colony). He came on board as Director of the piece.

At this point, Goodspeed knew they were interested in developing the musical further, and a plan was hatched with Andrew to give the musical as much development help as possible. Goodspeed hosted a developmental reading in February of 2018 in New York City. Then, in September of that same year, Dundee hosted its own developmental workshop. This workshop focused both on the script and on a movement language for the piece—as the script had developed, it featured many moments of Ben moving through his world in a way that called for something between literal staging and full dance. While the initial New York reading was closed to audiences, in Dundee the workshop culminated with a staged reading for the Dundee Rep audience to allow the team to get a sense of audience reactions. The two readings were spaced such that the writers had time in between to take what they'd learned from each reading to make the changes to the script and score, and Goodspeed's Artistic Associate, Anika Chapin, a Dramaturg, was with the team both times and

working with the writers in between.

All of these readings culminated in a full production at Goodspeed's Terris theater in May 2019. And although two and a half years may seem like a long time, it is relatively short for the development of a new musical, whose complexities often mean they are in development for several years. But in this case, the partnership between Goodspeed Musicals and Dundee Rep Theatre (with a little help from Scottish National Theatre) was able to give the show a faster development track, with each side providing invaluable resources and time to help the musical become the beautiful, moving, warmhearted piece it is today.



Real-life doormen, Juan and Jorge with writer Scott Gilmour (center).

— AN ONSTAGE BIOGRAPHY —

Hi, My Name is Ben tells the true story of an ordinary man, Ben Wichmann, who led an extraordinary life in which he profoundly touched the lives of the people in his neighborhood without ever speaking a word. To understand how Ben, who grew up in Davenport, Iowa, came to live in New York, the show investigates his life from his high school years until his death. With over 60 years of life to cover, this musicalized biography follows a nonlinear timeline, with flashbacks giving the audience glimpses into different periods in Ben's life.

In order to tell Ben's story in a way that highlights his character and impact on those in his community, *Hi, My Name is Ben* pinpoints select moments in his adolescence and young adulthood that, throughout the first act in particular, answer questions about his past and give the audience a more complete picture of his upbringing. We see glimpses of Ben in high school, heading off to college, and making choices that help us understand the Ben we meet in the first scene: 60-something years old and using a notepad and pencil to communicate with passersby on the street. By shifting between time periods and geographic locations, the show gives audiences a sense of Ben's life as played out in small vignettes depicting pivotal moments in his past.

Using flashbacks to events and conversations throughout Ben's life also allows the audience to draw connections between moments in different decades and locations,

providing a better canvas for characters' decisions and motivations. In our introduction to 60-year-old Ben, we see him pick up a photo of himself in high school, and suddenly we are transported back there with him, giving us insight into what he was like as a young man. Later, when Ben's friend Jorge is promoted at work, the timeline jumps back to Ben's last days of college, during which he announces his plans to move to New York—his own promotion of sorts, moving on to bigger and better things. Some of these mirrored events even provide juxtaposition between moments of great joy and times of sorrow.

The structure of this nonlinear musical is particularly fitting, because by meeting Ben in the latter years of his life, the audience gets to know him much the way the other characters in the show do. This is also how the creators of the show came to know of him; they started with the end of his life and traced their way back to the beginning. Ben had an immediate and palpable effect on those around him, but it was not until his obituary, which described his remarkable impact on the lives of his neighbors despite never speaking a word, was published that anyone outside of his immediate area learned about him. These articles inspired the creation of this show, and through interviews with those who knew him; researching Ben's past; and sifting through his collection of notes, photos, and articles lining the walls of his room; the story of *Hi, My Name is Ben* was created.

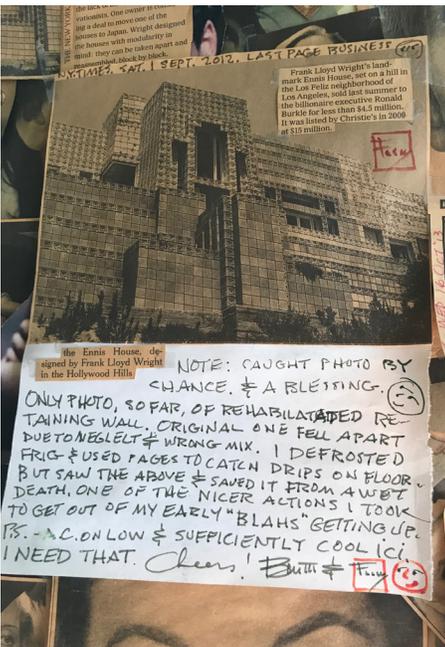
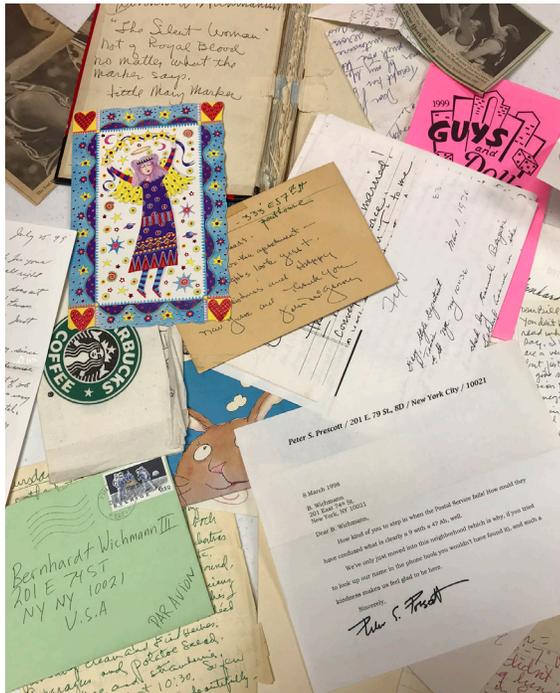
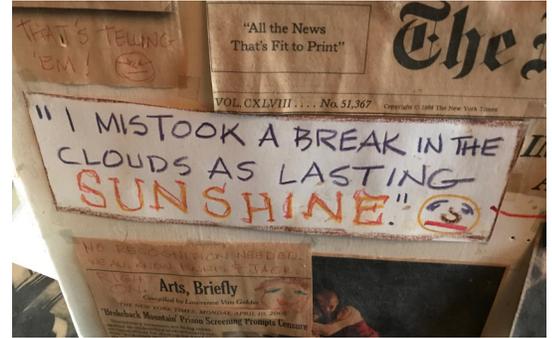
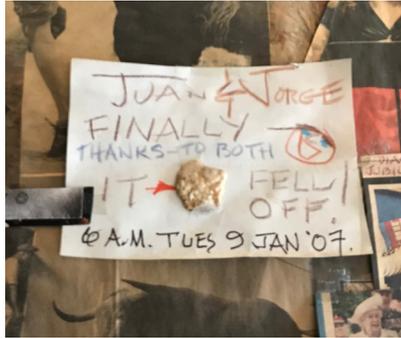


Ben's yearbook photo

Ben in his room in Manhattan in 2009.
Photo by Ángel Franco/The New York Times

INSIDE BEN'S WORLD

Hi, My Name is Ben is the true story of Ben Wichmann, a man who brought people together through small acts of kindness and compassion. The title, a phrase he would write on pieces of paper and show to people to introduce himself since he could not speak, is representative of Ben's character: warm, inviting, simple. Inside his SRO on East 74th Street, Ben covered his walls with newspaper and magazine clippings, photographs, notes, cards, and letters, most of which are still intact. Below are some of the images the creators of this show, Scott Gilmour and Claire McKenzie, used as inspiration to write the musical about Ben's life and the impact he had on those in his neighborhood.



WHAT'S AN SRO? SRO stands for "Single Room Occupancy." In other words, an SRO is a more affordable rental housing option in a dorm-style building; tenants typically have a single room with a shared bathroom, often lacking a complete in-unit kitchen. Frequently, SROs are specifically designed to help mitigate homelessness, with some buildings focused on providing affordable housing to those who are most likely to experience homelessness, such as individuals with mental health conditions, special needs, who are living with HIV/AIDS, have substance abuse issues, or young adults aging out of the foster care system. While SROs were

once prevalent in New York, particularly in upper Manhattan, their number has diminished from an estimated 200,000 in the early fifties to approximately 35,000 today, with many experts estimating half that amount. This decline mimicked the national trend toward private homeownership and away from more communal housing types from 1955-1995, but with scarce affordable housing today, some see an opportunity to revitalize SROs in New York. Right now in New York, a recently renovated SRO goes for between \$1,100 and \$1,450 a month, versus the average one-bedroom apartment's going rate of \$3,502 per month.

— NEW YORK CITY AND HOMELESSNESS —

In *Hi, My Name is Ben*, our protagonist's life takes a sharp turn in the wake of a traumatic event that occurs early on in his adult life. As a result, Ben loses much of the control that he once had in his life, leading to him losing nearly everything and spending several years homeless and living on the streets of New York City, depending on the kindness of strangers. While Ben eventually receives life-saving assistance and a room of his own, not all homeless youth and adults receive the same type of help. In order to better understand Ben as a character and the musical as a whole, it is important to understand the root causes of homelessness itself and the physical, mental, and emotional toll that it takes.



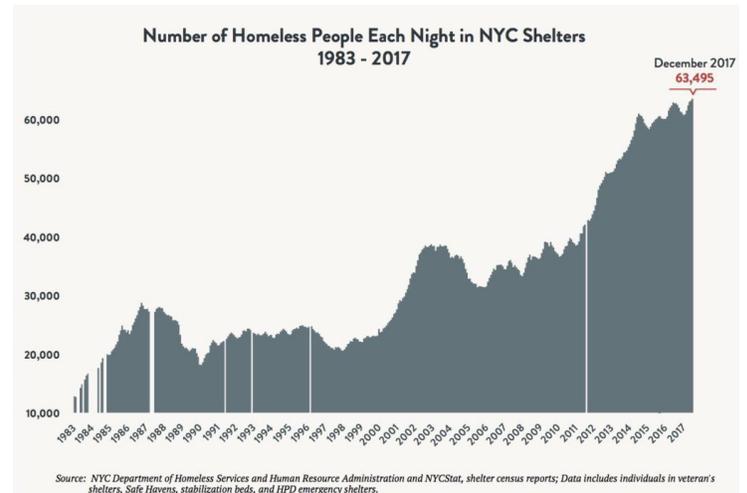
- **Health Problems:** Those who are suffering from chronic illness, recovering from an injury, or coping with other physical or mental health problems may also be at a higher risk of homelessness, especially when the cost of medical bills inhibit their ability to keep up with rent or utility bills. Homelessness often makes these conditions worse, as individuals are made to live in harsh or dangerous conditions, like city streets or Subway platforms, with no easy access to proper hygiene or medical care. Lack of insurance also limits the ability to see qualified medical professionals.
- **Escaping Violence:** Homeless youth and adults may be without proper housing because they are escaping violent, abusive, or otherwise unsafe living conditions. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH), "...a domestic violence experience is common among youth, single adults, and families who become homeless. For many, it is the immediate cause of their homelessness. Survivors of domestic violence may turn to homeless service programs seeking a safe temporary place to stay after fleeing an abusive relationship. Others may turn to homeless service programs primarily because they lack the economic resources to secure or maintain housing after leaving an abusive relationship."

WHAT CAUSES HOMELESSNESS?

To understand the root causes of homelessness, it is important to first acknowledge homelessness does not occur for any single reason, but rather a conflagration of several factors that make the securing of safe, secure housing nearly impossible.

- **Lack of affordable housing:** The United States is currently facing one of the largest housing crises in recent history. As rental costs continue to skyrocket, wages stay stagnant, making it difficult for families depending on minimum wage jobs to afford monthly rental payments.
- **Income Inequality:** In addition to homeless adults who are employed but negatively affected by wage stagnation, other low income households may be unemployed or underemployed due to a lack of access to proper education or reliable transportation. Other people may have a criminal record or a gap in work history that negatively impacts their ability to get hired. With those factors in play, it is much harder to be hired for a position that earns the salary required to rent or own adequate housing. As a result, families living in poverty may be forced to make difficult financial decisions, such as choosing whether to pay rent on time or pay for their children's' medical care or food.

HOMELESSNESS IN NEW YORK CITY



As one of the world's most expensive places to live, New York City's homeless population continues to grow. The city faces its own unique housing problems that continue to multiply as the gap between income and affordable housing widens, and previous housing solutions are eliminated. Below is a list of statistics provided by the Coalition for the Homeless, "the nation's oldest advocacy and direct service organization helping homeless men, women and children."

— NEW YORK CITY AND HOMELESSNESS —

- In recent years, homelessness in New York City has reached the highest levels since the Great Depression of the 1930s.
- In March 2019, there were 63,029 homeless people, including 15,193 homeless families with 22,412 homeless children, sleeping each night in the New York City municipal shelter system. Families make up three-quarters of the homeless shelter population.
- Over the course of City fiscal year 2018, 133,284 different homeless men, women, and children slept in the New York City municipal shelter system. This includes over 45,600 different homeless New York City children.
- In 2015, families entering shelter came from a few clustered zip codes in the poorest neighborhoods in New York City. However, homeless families and single adults come from every zip code in NYC prior to entering shelters.
- The number of homeless New Yorkers sleeping each night in municipal shelters is now 73 percent higher than it was ten years ago. The number of homeless single adults is 150 percent higher than it was ten years ago.
- Research shows that the primary cause of homelessness, particularly among families, is lack of affordable housing. Surveys of homeless families have identified the following major immediate, triggering causes of homelessness: eviction; doubled-up or severely overcrowded housing; domestic violence; job loss; and hazardous housing conditions.
- Research shows that, compared to homeless families, homeless single adults have much higher rates of serious mental illness, addiction disorders, and other severe health problems.
- Each night thousands of unsheltered homeless people sleep on New York City streets, in the subway system, and in other public spaces. There is no accurate measurement of New York City's unsheltered homeless population, and recent City surveys significantly underestimate the number of unsheltered homeless New Yorkers.
- Studies show that the large majority of street homeless New Yorkers are people living with mental illness or other severe health problems.
- African-American and Latino New Yorkers are disproportionately affected by homelessness. Approximately 58 percent of New York City homeless shelter residents are African-American, 31 percent are Latino, 7 percent are white, less than 1 percent are Asian-American, and 3 percent are of unknown race/ethnicity.

HOW DO WE SOLVE HOMELESSNESS?

On paper, the solution to homelessness is simple: provide more affordable housing options to those who need it. In reality, the process is a bit more complex, but proven to work: in order for homelessness to end, there have to be solutions for all aspects of homelessness. Many of these solutions include the creation of safe, supportive shelters, access to public housing that is affordable and in livable conditions, and the development of intervention programs that give financial, educational, and emotional support to those who are in danger of becoming homeless. Developing policies and programs that help vulnerable populations of people is also key to solving this problem, such as providing housing assistance and access to social services for youth who are aging out of foster care, low-income people living with mental illness who are leaving hospitals, or people leaving correctional institutions.



CONTENT WARNING

WHAT CAUSES SUICIDE?

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, "There is no single cause to suicide. It most often occurs when stressors exceed current coping abilities of someone suffering from a mental health condition."

Suicide most commonly occurs when traumatic or stressing moments of everyday life converge with mental or physical health problems, causing overwhelming feelings of hopelessness or despair. Depression is often the mental illness that is most commonly associated with suicide, and its symptoms often grow more severe if left untreated, which may lead to suicidal ideation, or thoughts about suicide. Other conditions, such as anxiety or substance abuse problems, raise the risk of suicide as well, though it is important to note that not all people who experience these conditions experience suicidal thoughts or tendencies. Traumatic events, such as natural disasters, the death of a loved one, divorce, or financial crisis may trigger suicidal thoughts as well.

In addition to the information listed above, the following characteristics or conditions are also considered risk factors:

- Serious physical health conditions that cause severe pain
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Exposure to another person's suicide, or to graphic or sensationalized accounts of suicide
- Previous suicide attempts
- Family history of suicide
- Childhood abuse, neglect, or trauma

SUICIDE FACTS AND STATISTICS

- Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the US for all ages. (CDC)
- Every day, approximately 123 Americans die by suicide. (CDC)
- There is one death by suicide in the US every 12 minutes. (CDC)
- Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are 3 times more likely than straight youth to attempt suicide at some point in their lives.
- Medically serious attempts at suicide are 4 times more likely among LGBTQIA youth than other young people. (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education)
- Each time an LGBTQIA person is a victim of physical or verbal harassment or abuse, they become 2.5 times more likely to hurt themselves. (SAVE)

WARNING SIGNS

If someone you know is contemplating suicide, they may exhibit one of more of the following behaviors:

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself
- Looking for a way to kill oneself
- Feeling hopeless or without purpose
- Feeling trapped or being in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs

- Acting anxious, agitated, or reckless
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Extreme mood swings

HOW CAN I HELP?

If you think that someone you know may be considering suicide, below are ways to have an open, honest, and supportive conversation:

- Find a private, quiet place to talk that is free from distractions.
- Take the time to listen to their whole story; they may go into as much or as little detail as they wish.
- Tell them that you care about them.
- Ask them directly if they are thinking about suicide.
- Encourage them to seek professional treatment or to contact their doctor or therapist.
- Avoid giving advice or trying to minimize their problems; it is important to show that you believe their story and are there to support them.

RESOURCES

Crisis Text Line: "Free, 24/7 support for those in crisis. Text 741741 from anywhere in the US to text with a trained Crisis Counselor." Visit www.crisistextline.org for more information.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: "A national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week."

Call 1-800-273-8255 to speak with a trained counselor, or visit www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org for live chat services and more information. Calls are toll free and completely confidential.

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention:

"Established in 1987, the AFSP is a voluntary health organization that gives those affected by suicide a nationwide community empowered by research, education and advocacy to take action against this leading cause of death." Visit www.asfp.org for more information.

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education: "SAVE was one of the nation's first organizations dedicated to the prevention of suicide. Our work is based on the foundation and belief that suicide is preventable and everyone has a role to play in preventing suicide. Through raising public awareness, educating communities, and equipping every person with the right tools, we know we can SAVE lives."

Visit www.save.org for more information.

The Trevor Project: "Founded in 1998 by the creators of the Academy Award®-winning short film *TREVOR*, The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer & questioning (LGBTQ) young people under 25." Call 1-866-488-7386 to speak with a trained specialist. The line is completely confidential, open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

RESOURCES

- "About Suicide--American Foundation for Suicide Prevention." *AFSP*, 7 Sept. 2017, afsp.org/about-suicide/.
- "About the Lifeline." *Suicide Prevention Lifeline*, 2014, suicidepreventionlifeline.org/about/.
- "Behind the Numbers." *Family Promise*, familypromise.org/behind-the-numbers/.
- "Saving Young LGBTQ Lives." *The Trevor Project*, www.thetrevorproject.org/#sm.01dssn03164efmf10sd2qqdyvo26f.
- "Suicide Rates Rising across the U.S. | CDC Online Newsroom | CDC." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2018/p0607-suicide-prevention.html.
- "The Catastrophe of Homelessness." *Coalition For The Homeless*, 2015, www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/.
- "Warning Signs of Suicide – SAVE." *SAVE*, save.org/about-suicide/warning-signs-risk-factors-protective-factors/.
- "What Causes Homelessness?" *National Alliance to End Homelessness*, endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/what-causes-homelessness/.