

# Private Jones

## CREATIVE NOTES

By Marshall Paillet, Writer & Director and Alexandria Wailes, Director of Artistic Sign Language (DASL)

Hi! We're a company of hearing, deaf and hard-of-hearing artists who've come to tell you a story we think is cool. The show is inspired by the (probably) true story of a deaf Welsh sniper in WWI, and it tells the story mostly from his perspective. He's recently lost his hearing, so he speaks and reads lips, allowing him to navigate a hearing environment. To



*Marshall Paillet*



*Alexandria Wailes*

like it sounds, so that every audience member gets the same emotional experience. We think about that in choreography, design, but especially in our use of the sound foley—how we use it, where we use it, what it represents, all of it has to be so carefully calibrated to be both beautiful and clear.

illustrate his emotional life we use live, onstage, actor-driven sound foley. Everyone plays Welsh soldiers, everyone plays nurses, everyone plays deaf factory workers. In our world, everyone is everything.

Like the real world, ours is funny at times. And heart-warming at others. And at other times, brutal in its indifference.

What we're interested in exploring is what happens to the mind and spirit when it's asked to commit violence, and how that relates to how we value each other—how we do and don't empathize with people we don't understand. Which is a fun challenge for a hearing and deaf company creating a show for both a hearing and deaf audience.

Let's talk about music. Music does a lot in a musical—it gives energy, it creates characterization, it conveys emotion. This show is basically 90% music, but not all of our audience will hear it—so we are consciously making the show look

Now let's talk sign language. Our goal is to authentically reflect lived experiences through different cultures and signed languages, to let that authenticity inform our story but also allow ourselves creative license. Ultimately our goal is to have every performance be fully accessible, all the while honoring the integrity that this story is told through Gomer Jones' eyes—a boy who doesn't know sign language until he's confronted with it. With this in mind, we note that the centuries of histories of deaf people around the world vary. Signed languages differ—even across the pond. In the world of this musical, we are creating space for both American Sign Language and British Sign Language.

Though our story is specific in its perspective, our goal is to make it feel absolutely universal: where everyone in the audience, hearing and deaf, all of us empathize with Gomer—his dreams are ours, his shame is ours, and so too his triumph over cynicism and dehumanization.

Everyone is everything.