

# ARENA'S PAGE

STUDY GUIDE

## CONTENTS

- The Play
- Meet the Playwright
- Meet the Composer
- The Book Musical
- World War I
- Trench Warfare
- Setting the Stage
- Amnesia
- Three Big Questions
- Resources

## THE PLAY

Take a trip through time in the musical *Unknown Soldier*.

The play begins in Troy, New York, with 11-year-old **Ellen** and her grouchy grandmother, **Lucy**. While researching World War I for a book report, young Ellen stumbles upon a curious magazine clipping in her grandmother's home. The article — "Has Unknown Soldier Found True Love?" — includes a picture of a man and woman, who might be Ellen's grandmother. Her grandmother refuses to answer her questions.

Fast forward 30 years, and Ellen, now all grown up, rediscovers the article. Her grandmother has died, but has the secret died with her?

A determined Ellen looks to **Andrew**, a Cornell University librarian, for clues and answers. Eventually, Andrew joins Ellen in her quest to uncover the truth behind the story her grandmother hid from her — a story about love, devotion, pain, loss, delusion, and a man referred to as the "Unknown Soldier."

# UNKNOWN SOLDIER

## A NEW MUSICAL

BOOK BY DANIEL GOLDSTEIN

MUSIC BY MICHAEL FRIEDMAN

LYRICS BY MICHAEL FRIEDMAN AND DANIEL GOLDSTEIN

DIRECTED BY TRIP CULLMAN

**NOW PLAYING ON THE KREEGER THEATER STAGE**

**MARCH 29 – MAY 5, 2024**

BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH HUNTER ARNOLD

Unknown Soldier is made possible through generous funding from **AARP** with additional support from Patricia and David Fisher, Catherine and Chris Guttman-McCabe, and Herb and Dianne Lerner.

Kerstin Anderson in the Playwrights Horizons production of Unknown Soldier. Photo by Joan Marcus.

**"Did you know that World War One was how we know that war can make people crazy, like a bomb ripped out a part of who they used to be?"**

— Young Ellen, *Unknown Soldier*



Photo by Jeremy Daniel.



LEARN THE STORY BEHIND HOW  
EACH SONG IN THE SHOW WAS WRITTEN!

# MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT AND CO-LYRICIST: DANIEL GOLDSTEIN

Daniel Goldstein is an accomplished director who has directed more than 100 plays across the globe, including the Broadway revival of *Godspell* in 2011. He received his performance studies degree from Northwestern University.

Though he is known for directing, the musical *Unknown Soldier* marks his transition to playwriting. In an interview with Playwrights Horizons, Goldstein says that, for him, “Being a writer is way more vulnerable than being in the director role.” He also believes that what he has learned as a director has made him a better writer. As a playwright, Goldstein says that he is “interested in sort of impossible stories to tell on stage.” With an affinity for storytelling through music, he says, “I am interested in human emotion and human behavior in a way that I think musicals speak to really beautifully.” *Unknown Soldier* is the fruit of that passion.

Goldstein was commissioned by Huntington Theatre Company, where he developed *Unknown Soldier* with lyricist and friend Michael Friedman. A commission is a fee that theater companies pay to playwrights to write a new play. For a playwright to be commissioned is an honor, because it demonstrates a theater company’s faith in the playwright’s talent. He has also been commissioned by The Public Theater in New York City to write a musical adaptation of Tori McClure’s memoir, *A Pearl in the Storm*. He is also writing a solo show with Wayne Brady.



Monica Simoes, Playwrights Horizons

# MEET THE COMPOSER AND CO-LYRICIST: MICHAEL FRIEDMAN

Michael Friedman was born in Boston and grew up in Philadelphia. When he was a young child, his crying could only be comforted by music. He began playing piano as early as age four. Throughout his youth, Friedman classically trained on the piano and went to music camp. He also enjoyed collaboration and that passion led him to pursue theater as a career.

Over the years, Friedman evolved from music director to composer to lyricist for numerous musicals. Among his most famous work is the off-Broadway then Broadway rock musical, *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*, which garnered multiple awards and a Tony nomination.

Friedman channeled his restless, playful energy into a signature eclectic musical style. Mixing genres, such as pop, rock, and gospel, he wielded a fluid musical identity that was especially a hit with satirical plays. In *Unknown Soldier*, Friedman returned to his classical roots and left behind a rich emotional journey for audiences to experience.

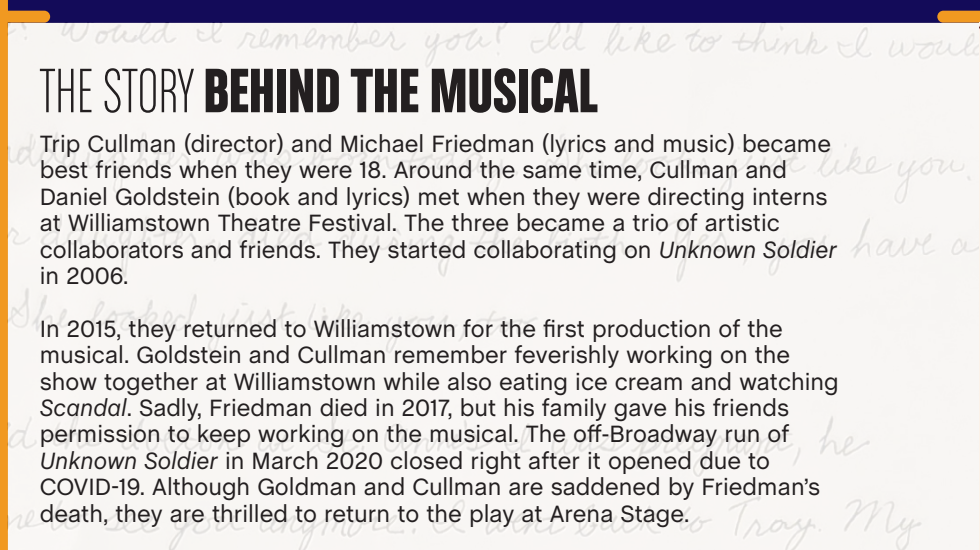
## THE BOOK MUSICAL

*Unknown Soldier* is a book musical. A book musical follows the traditional narrative storyline, which includes a well-developed plot and recurring main characters that are central to the story. Unlike shows like *Hamilton*, in which spoken lines are few (if any), in a book musical, dialogue and monologues give way to musical numbers that erupt out of a scene’s emotional tone or situation. In a book musical, you experience both script and music, even dance! The appeal of book musicals is the enjoyment of storytelling interspersed with cleverly crafted lyrics and sensational music that guides your heart into depths of romance, heartache, terror, or joy, sometimes all within the same show.

## THE STORY BEHIND THE MUSICAL

Trip Cullman (director) and Michael Friedman (lyrics and music) became best friends when they were 18. Around the same time, Cullman and Daniel Goldstein (book and lyrics) met when they were directing interns at Williamstown Theatre Festival. The three became a trio of artistic collaborators and friends. They started collaborating on *Unknown Soldier* in 2006.

In 2015, they returned to Williamstown for the first production of the musical. Goldstein and Cullman remember feverishly working on the show together at Williamstown while also eating ice cream and watching *Scandal*. Sadly, Friedman died in 2017, but his family gave his friends permission to keep working on the musical. The off-Broadway run of *Unknown Soldier* in March 2020 closed right after it opened due to COVID-19. Although Goldman and Cullman are saddened by Friedman’s death, they are thrilled to return to the play at Arena Stage.



# WORLD WAR I

World War I (WWI) is the backdrop for the play. The first, large-scale global war of the 20th century, WWI was ignited on June 28, 1914, by the assassination of both Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, and his wife, Sophie, Duchess of Hohenberg. The assassination was a reaction to centuries of oppression that Serbs and other ethnic groups endured under Austro-Hungarian rule. At this time, European countries had built up their militaries and formed complex alliances with other nations. If one country declared war, their allies would join them. Therefore, when Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, Germany and Austria-Hungary's other allies joined them. These countries were called the Central Powers.

Opposing the Central Powers were the Allies, comprised first of Serbia, Russia, Britain, and France, and joined by other countries, including Japan and the United States. Soldiers both enlisted or were conscripted (government forced) into service as young as age 18.

The battles erupted quickly. However, the use of new warfare technologies and strategies, such as poison gas, aerial strikes, and trench warfare, soon resulted in massive loss.

The casualties of WWI were unprecedented at the time. Many soldiers suffered life-altering injuries.

- Over 8.5 million soldiers died worldwide.
- 19 out of 25 Allies and 9 out of 10 Central Powers soldiers were either killed, wounded, imprisoned, or missing.

WWI ended at 11:11 a.m. on November 11, 1918. Some families never learned what happened to their loved ones who never came home from war.

# TRENCH WARFARE

World War I soldiers engaged in trench warfare, in which soldiers on both sides lived in deep, muddy trenches and emerged onto the land above to attack their opponents. These battles often resulted in gains of inches, since soldiers were exposed to enemy fire on these open fields with few barriers for protection. Thus, casualties were overwhelming. According to the National World War I Museum, trench life was dangerous, because soldiers could be trapped or killed from artillery strikes while inside the trenches.



Photo of the "Harlem Hellfighters (369th Infantry Regiment)," engaged in WWI trench warfare, from Fox News via National WWI Museum and Memorial



Photo of WWI soldiers sleeping and writing letters in a trench from BBC Bitesize

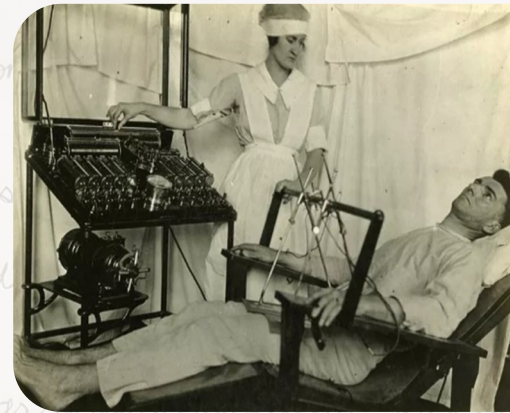


Photo of war-traumatized WWI veteran undergoing electric treatment from PBS.org via Otis Historical Archives National Museum of Health and Medicine



WWI VETERAN  
SUFFERERS  
TREATMENT &  
RECOVERY

# SHELL SHOCKED

"Shell shock," what we now know as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), affected many WWI veterans who returned home alive. Amnesia, disturbing emotional reactions, intense nightmares, and various physical impairments were common signs of shell shock in traumatized soldiers.



# AMNESIA

In *Unknown Soldier*, Francis is found in Grand Central Station with no idea who he is. Amnesia is memory loss that happens when the brain is damaged from a traumatic injury or serious illness. It can last from weeks to years. Some amnesia sufferers who have experienced extreme emotional shock, like war veterans, can become disconnected from their own identity.

# SETTING THE STAGE

The play is set in two small cities in New York: Troy and Ithaca.



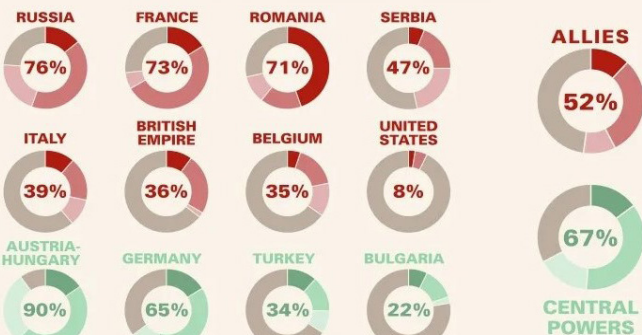
# FIRST-PERSON ACCOUNTS OF TRENCH WARFARE

## CASUALTIES

OF MAJOR COUNTRIES INVOLVED

■ Killed/died   
 ■ Wounded   
 ■ Prisoners/missing   
 ■ Mobilized forces

76%/90% Percentage of mobilized forces that became casualties\*



Infographic excerpted from Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc./ Kenny Chmielewski

\*Total casualties = killed/died + wounded + prisoners/missing.

Credit: The National Atlas of the United States, United States Department of the Interior (image modified)

## WARTIME WOMEN RETURN TO POST-WAR HOMEMAKING

As you journey through the play, you will encounter the post-war homemaker, a woman dedicated to managing the affairs of home and caring for her family's welfare. During the war, women supported the war effort as manufacturing and vehicle production workers (traditionally men's roles before WWI). After WWI, many women left their industrial wartime roles to resume homemaking, as returning soldiers re-entered the industrial workforce.



# THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1

How does music and/or dance support the telling of this story?

2

What is the impact of truth or secrets on relationships?

3

What time period would you write a musical about?

## RESOURCES

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## HELPFUL HINTS FOR THEATER AUDIENCES

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience.

To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- **Arrive early.**
- **Visit the restroom before the show starts.**
- **Sit in the seat indicated on your ticket.**
- **Ushers are there to help you!**
- **Before the show begins, turn off your phone, watch alarms, and any other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, turn it off immediately.**
- **Do not use your phone for texts, calls, games, pictures or recording.**
- **There is no food allowed in the theater.**
- **If you must leave, during the show, wait for a scene change and exit quietly and quickly.**
- **Respond to the show; you can laugh, cry, and gasp. However, don't distract the performers on stage.**
- **Be sure to applaud at the end! During a musical, audiences sometimes clap after a song or dance. If you love the show or a performer, you can give a standing ovation. The actors bow to thank you.**



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Visit [www.arenastage.org](http://www.arenastage.org) for more information on Arena Stage productions and educational opportunities.

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