

Alliance Theatre

Artistic Director
Susan V. Booth

Managing Director
Thomas Pechar

Present

ELLIOT,



A SOLDIER'S FUGUE

Written by

Quiara Alegria Hudes

Directed by

Kent Gash

You had recommended this book to me (which I read)!

*Greetings - hope all is well w/ you, the family, Laura & "the Project"!
Catch this play if ever the chance... could just as easily been any other (over)*

by Freddie Ashley, Literary Manager

When Quiara Alegria Hudes set out to write *Elliot, a Soldier's Fugue*, her goal was to write a play that would offer audiences a new, perhaps more personal perspective on war. Inspired by her young cousin and how his experiences as a soldier changed him, she underwent a period of painstaking research. Of all the books she encountered, she was particularly moved by Tim O'Brien's 1990 novel *The Things They Carried*. A fictional account of men and war, O'Brien's book creates a portrait of wartime severity and the toll it takes on the human spirit. But perhaps more importantly, it also illustrates the human spirit's capacity to survive in the face of battle.

During wartime, there is much talk of heroism and love of country. But buried by flag-waving rhetoric can be the brutal truth of a soldier's personal experience. In *The Things They Carried*, O'Brien explores this in painstaking and emotionally wrenching detail. It becomes impossible to dismiss a soldier's experiences with a glib toss-off or shake of

the head. For to understand the nature of war from the perspective of those fighting it is to really begin to grasp the meaning of heroism, all rhetoric aside.

On

Personalizing an experience leads to increased empathy, which in turn leads to understanding. This is a basic concept and a building block of all theatre. But when it comes to a discussion of war, somehow the experiences become more essential, more immediate—perhaps because

the issues of life and death are so immediate. So playwright Hudes captures something inherently and essentially theatrical in her approach to writing *Elliot, a Soldier's Fugue*.

Hudes explores the impact of war on three men but not solely in context of the battlefield. She frames the play as a story of family—three generations of men. The contrast of the men's experiences brings them into sharp focus and allows an audience to access the characters' personal experiences. Of her play, Hudes has said, "I want the audience to think about their own personal connection to war. Maybe it's through an uncle, a father, a child, maybe it's their own military

(over)

(continues from page 17)

experience. I want this play to start a discussion about the personal element of war. The family and community element."

What makes this approach so successful is that it is universal. It eschews partisanship in favor of thoughtful, emotional exploration. Everyone will have opinions about the realities and perceptions of war in the real world, but as a literary motif, "war" is too broad to discuss without the entry point of personal experience. Hudes said, "When writing *Elliot*, I had this strong feeling about people. War is very abstract to me. It's about politics and headlines. It's on the news. But I wanted to write about the fact that there are real people, generations, whose lives are fundamentally affected by war. There are invisible people who fight wars, people from barrios, ghettos. They don't make headlines. But they are part of the tapestry of our country."

When Hudes' teenaged cousin returned from Iraq, she was stunned by what she saw. "The second I saw his eyes and heard his stories I knew something had changed. He would never be the same little cousin anymore. On the plane ride back home, I couldn't stop thinking about him. I imagined my aunt's garden, and him sitting in it, and I began to write," she said. What she wrote was a gently elegiac play that marries the ideas of service and family into a mutual legacy. By doing so, she explores a topic that touches so many but about which so few can ever find a collective voice. Consequently, the play speaks for any family who has been touched by war or by military service.

One of the unexpected delights with *Elliot*, a *Soldier's Fugue* is its heroic ability to find something truly connective while exploring an issue that has, particularly in recent years, divided. By focusing on the intensely personal, something universal opens up. No party politics here, just fathers, sons and—dare I say it—heroes.

Founding (Italiano too!)
Touching, moving, provocative
and powerful.
Warmest regards,
(Tony) (Tony)