

Goodbye Barcelona, hello London: musical on civil war hits town

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The show attempts to recapture the spirit of the fight against fascism

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It might not seem natural material for song-and-dance but a new musical telling the story of how thousands of Britons joined up to fight in the Spanish Civil War will reach the London stage later this year. *Goodbye Barcelona* will attempt to recapture the spirit of volunteers who joined the International Brigades to fight fascism in Spain.

Penning an upbeat musical about a conflict that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives might, at first, seem daunting. Karl Lewkowicz and Judith Johnson, the writers, were inspired to write the piece after reading about the British survivors.

It is based loosely on the story of Sam Lesser, a volunteer who died last year, aged 96. Mr Lesser, from London, was shot in the leg and left to die in December 1936. He was saved by a colleague who came back to rescue him.

“It might seem like a strange subject for a musical but we tried to tell an uplifting story of people who made a stand against fascism with no support,” Mr Lewkowicz said. “It has parallels for what is happening in the Middle East with people standing up to repression.”

In the musical Sam falls in love with Pilar, a Spaniard whose family has been murdered by the Falangists, a fascist political party closely allied to General Francisco Franco, who staged a coup to topple Spain’s Republican Government in July 1936.

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Victoria Hislop, the bestselling author of *The Return*, a novel set in the Spanish Civil War, told *The Times*: “Music might be just the way to get younger people interested in the civil war who would never pick up a history book.”

The musical will open in London this autumn to mark the 75th anniversary of the formation of the International Brigades. In an interview with *The Times* before his death, Mr Lesser said: “When we come back to Spain we are always treated well. But one girl said to me, ‘You fought for us but your country didn’t’.”

The remark was a reference to the refusal of Britain and France to offer aid.

Musical madness