

# A Pulitzer winner's play about war and three generations of a Puerto Rican American family gets its Texas debut

 [dallasnews.com/arts/theater/2018/01/31/pulitzer-winners-play-war-three-generations-puerto-rican-american-family-gets-texas-debut](https://dallasnews.com/arts/theater/2018/01/31/pulitzer-winners-play-war-three-generations-puerto-rican-american-family-gets-texas-debut)

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ADDISON — The more things change, the more they stay the same.

There were wildly different reasons for the Korean, Vietnam and Iraq wars. But there's no talk of ideology or politics in the regional premiere of Quiara Alegría Hudes' *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* at WaterTower Theatre in Addison. Instead, we get the emotional journey of three individual soldiers, each representing a generation of one family of Puerto Rican Americans.

Like the musical piece for which it's named, the multiple stories wrap around each other and ultimately harmonize into one.

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Christopher Llewyn Ramirez performs in *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*, presented by WaterTower Theatre in Addison through Feb. 18, 2018.

(Evan Michael Woods)

The stories follow the emotional journeys of cocky young men going off to war who learn to face discomfort, fear, hunger, pain and tragedy in different eras marked by different idioms and musical tastes, ranging from Bach for Grandpop (Rodney Garza) to rap for Elliot (Christopher Llewyn Ramirez).

The scenes unfold on an expansive set, designed by Brian Clinnin, glowingly lit by JoJo Percy, to resemble a forest of interlocking trees with raised roots in sand. It's modeled on intertwined trees in Puerto Rico, but the set also suggests interlocking nerves and bloodstreams. How can you separate one person from another in a family like this? How can you separate the life of anyone who has interacted with and become part of another?

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Christopher Llewyn Ramirez (on the ground) is studied by Rodney Garza (left), Gloria Vivica Benavides and David Lugo in *Elliot, a Soldier's Fugue*, presented by WaterTower Theatre at the Addison Conference and Theatre Centre in Addison through Feb. 18, 2018.

(Jason Anderson/Pendleton Photography)

The tricky part of the piece is the cerebral construction. Most of the intermissionless show is filled with alternating monologues. The tension builds and emotions steep as the characters finally begin to interact. Under David Lozano's direction, the scenes that crackle are the

charged and sexy ones between Pop (David Lugo in a moving, layered portrayal) and Ginny (Gloria Vivica Benavides in a rich, feeling performance), the nurse who starts falling in love for the man she tries to heal.

Then there are the tender moments between Ginny and her son, Elliot (Christopher Llewyn Ramirez, like a charged, frayed wire), whom she tries to heal with plants from her garden.

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Christopher Llewyn Ramirez in *Elliot, a Soldier's Fugue*, presented by WaterTower Theatre at the Addison Conference and Theatre Centre in Addison through Feb. 18, 2018.

(Jason Anderson/Pendleton Photography)

The show trails off, more than it ends. But that makes sense when you consider that *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* ultimately became the first in a trilogy. Hudes, a Tony Award-winner for her book for *In the Heights*, the pre-*Hamilton* musical that propelled Lin-Manuel Miranda to fame, won the Pulitzer Prize for the second show, *Water by the Spoonful*, the story of Elliot trying to reclaim his life as a civilian after leaving the military. All three are being done in Los Angeles at different theaters: *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* at the Kirk Douglas Theatre through Feb. 25; *Water by the Spoonful* at the Mark Taper Forum through March 11; and the final play, *The Happiest Song Plays Last*, to be presented by Latino Theater Company at Los Angeles Theatre Center from Feb. 17 to March 19.

Here's hoping some enterprising theater company follows up with those stories of what happens next. In the meantime, check the lobby walls before or after the show. WaterTower Theatre has hung portraits of fallen soldiers commissioned by the Addison-based The American Fallen Soldiers Project. The nonprofit, which has dedicated itself to honoring the fallen by providing paintings of them for their families, offers a heartbreaking reminder of young lives lost at war.

'Tell our family's story': Her mom's request drives prize-winning writer Quiara Alegría Hudes

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Continues through Feb. 18. WaterTower Theatre at the Addison Conference and Theatre Centre, 15650 Addison Road, Addison. \$25-\$42. 972-450-6232. [watertowrtheatre.org](http://watertowrtheatre.org). Performance reviewed was Monday. Running time: 1 hour, 12 mins.

**CORRECTION, Jan. 31, 2018:** An earlier version of this story incorrectly named the play's director as David Lugo. It is David Lozano.