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# STEPHEN SONDHEIM



**STEPHEN SONDHEIM** wrote the music and lyrics for *Road Show* (2008), *Passion* (1994), *Assassins* (1990), *Into the Woods* (1987), *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981), *Sweeney Todd* (1979), *Pacific Overtures* (1976), *The Frogs* (1974), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *Follies* (1971, revised in London, 1987), *Company* (1970), *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964), and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962), as well as lyrics for *West Side Story* (1957), *Gypsy* (1959), *Do I Hear A Waltz?* (1965), and additional lyrics for *Candide* (1973). *Side by Side by Sondheim* (1976), *Marry Me A Little* (1981), *You're Gonna Love Tomorrow* (1983), *Putting It Together* (1992) and *Sondheim on Sondheim* (2010) are anthologies of this work as a composer and lyricist. For films, he composed the scores of *Stavisky* (1974) and *Reds* (1981) and songs for *Dick Tracy* (1990), for which he won an Academy Award. He also wrote songs for the television production "Evening Primrose" (1966), co-authored the film *The Last of Sheila* (1973) and the play *Getting Away With Murder* (1996), and provided incidental music for the plays *Girls of Summer* (1956), *Invitation to a March* (1961), and *Twigs* (1971). He won Tony Awards for Best Score for a Musical for *Passion*, *Into the Woods*, *Sweeney Todd*, *A Little Night Music*, *Follies*, and *Company*. All of these shows won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, as did *Pacific Overtures* and *Sunday in the Park with George*, the latter also receiving the Pulitzer Prize for Drama (1985). He received a special 2008 Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Theatre. Mr. Sondheim was born in 1930 and raised in New York City. He graduated from Williams College, winning the Hutchinson Prize for Music Composition, after which he studied theory and composition with Milton Babbitt. He is on the Council of the Dramatists Guild, the national association of playwrights, composers, and lyricists, having served as its president from 1973 to 1981, and in 1983 was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 1990 he was appointed the first Visiting Professor of Contemporary Theatre at Oxford University and in 1993 was a recipient of the Kennedy Center Honors. A Broadway theatre was named for him in 2010.

# ABOUT THE SHOWS, FILMS, AND SONGS

## CHRONOLOGICALLY

Shows are stage musicals unless otherwise indicated. For stage musicals and films, the date cited is the year of first production or release. For unproduced material, the date cited is the year of composition. Some of the commentaries about the shows and song plot notes were adapted from previously published material by Sean Patrick Flahaven which appears in the various vocal selections of the shows.

### SATURDAY NIGHT

1954

Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

Book by Julius J. Epstein

Based on the play *Front Porch in Flatbush* by Julius J. and Philip G. Epstein

*Songs in this collection:*

So Many People

What More Do I Need?

After writing four musicals as a student under the tutelage of Oscar Hammerstein II, Sondheim's first professional writing assignment as a composer and lyricist was *Saturday Night*. It began as a play called *Front Porch in Flatbush*, written by the twin Epstein brothers, co-authors of the screenplay for *Casablanca*. Lemuel Ayres, one of Broadway's leading set designers (*Oklahoma!*, etc.) and co-producer of *Kiss Me, Kate*, wanted to make a Broadway musical of the Epstein play, which was about working class youths in 1929 Brooklyn who pool their money to make a killing in the stock market, soon to crash. The show was completely written and half the money secured to back the production when Ayres died suddenly. The project went into limbo and was left unproduced. *Saturday Night* became part of the Sondheim lore, with individual songs from the show occasionally turning up in various retrospectives and albums. A new life for the musical began with the Bridewell Theater Company in London, where it was given its world premiere production in 1997, with the blessing of the composer. Sondheim revised the book and wrote two new songs for the 1999 Chicago production by Pegasus Players, a revision that was performed Off-Broadway in 2000, and in the West End of London in 2009.

Set in Brooklyn, New York, in 1929, young bachelor friends (Gene, Dino, Artie, Ray, Ted) are dateless on yet another Saturday night. They are joined by Hank and Celeste, a young married couple. Gene, a clerk in a Wall Street brokerage firm, urges them in a scheme to make a quick profit in the (pre-crash) stock market, pooling their money to buy Montana Chem shares on margin. Gene dresses in a tuxedo and heads to Manhattan to crash a party, leaving the rest to go to a movie. Denied entrance to the party at the Plaza Hotel, Gene meets a flirty young woman who introduces herself as Helene, a young southern coquette, and says she has just had a fight with her fiancé. Helene also has no ticket for the party. Gene, who lies about himself, consoles her and persuades her to dance in the hall outside the party, because it will be private and cozy. As romance blooms she later admits she is not Helene from the South, but Helen from Brooklyn. Gene admits his own lies, but promises her that he will have thousands of dollars by the end of the week from the stock market. The next day Gene rents a luxury apartment in Manhattan which he can't afford, but Montana Chem stock drastically falls over the next days, and Gene, desperate for cash, sells a car owned by a cousin who is away in Florida. Helen despises Gene's actions, but admits she loves him in "**So Many People**," and the two become engaged. Meanwhile, Gene's cousin returns looking for his car, and when Gene says it was stolen, his cousin calls the police, who hound Gene. With the situation against him whipping Gene into a suicidal state, Helen assures him that whatever he has done, she

# PREFACE

Whether a singer chooses to perform a Sondheim song in character in its original scenic context, or chooses instead to perform it with an insightful yet artistically defensible different spin, deliberately independent from a show, without its original character and story, knowing the situational plot and character enveloping a song is crucially important information for study. Besides comprehension of specifics in a lyric and musical/theatrical point of view, such study allows one to investigate and ponder the reason a theater song was written for a particular scene.

Sondheim's songs are so deeply and organically considered regarding character and plot that any singer would be crazy and lazy not to prepare them with the same integrity a dedicated actor brings to working on a scene or monologue. We have provided brief plot notes for songs, and digested information about each show or film, but we encourage further study from other sources.

To inform the singing actor who is auditioning for a show or preparing to perform a role in one of the stage musicals, most songs are labeled as original show keys (which almost always match the orchestration) or transposed keys. Outside the context of a show, certainly many Sondheim songs may be (and have been) sung by a singer other than the original gender or voice type, and in various keys. For this reason we have included transposed versions of selected songs, almost all which appear in print for the first time in this multi-volume series. Adventurous singing actors may want to investigate songs in volumes different from their own voice type (Soprano, Belter/Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor or Baritone/Bass).

I am greatly indebted to Stephen Sondheim's two volumes of collected lyrics, *Finishing the Hat* and *Look, I Made a Hat*, from which many quotes are taken. (See the Endnotes for specific citations.) Rarely has a writer of any kind provided such thorough documentation, both objective and wonderfully subjective, of his or her own work. I strongly urge singing actors to undertake a close reading of those two volumes.

It is an honor to work with this amazingly varied and accomplished body of theater music of such a consistently high standard. There are more songs from Sondheim's enormous output than could be included. I hope the choices made will be useful to most singers. I would like to thank Stephen Sondheim, Sean Patrick Flahaven, and assistant editor Joel Boyd for invaluable help in the development and preparation of the *Sondheim for Singers* five-volume series.

Richard Walters, editor