

AN AUDIENCE'S GUIDE TO

STEPHEN

SONDHEIM



PASADENA  
PLAYHOUSE

# STEPHEN SONDHEIM

## A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Stephen Sondheim was never far from a theater. Born in 1930, he grew up between New York's Upper West Side and eastern Pennsylvania. His parents' bitter divorce while he was still young left a permanent mark on the young Mr. Sondheim, who soon found himself in the company of Oscar Hammerstein II, a writer and lyricist known for the 1927 landmark musical *Show Boat*. Hammerstein took the teenager under his wing and served as both an artistic mentor and a surrogate father. As Hammerstein's career collaborating with the composer Richard Rogers took off in the 1940s with a string of remarkably successful hits, including *Oklahoma!* (1943), *Carousel* (1945), and *South Pacific* (1949), Sondheim learned about theater—the industry and the art—from Oscar.

Sondheim began writing even before he enrolled in Williams College, where he continued to refine his craft. After graduating in 1950, he spent a few years struggling to break through in the entertainment industry. This struggle did not last long, however. *West Side Story*, a collaboration with playwright Arthur Laurents and composer Leonard Bernstein, opened in 1957, and *Gypsy*, written with Laurents and composer Jule Styne, followed in 1959 and Sondheim wrote lyrics for both. These incredible hits set Sondheim on the path to becoming one of Broadway's biggest names.

The 1960s saw a mix of hits and flops: his comedy *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962) ran for two years while *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964) closed after nine performances. Mainstream success was not far-off.

FIG. 01 Stephen Sondheim in New York, 1972.



FIG. 02 Stephen Sondheim (on the piano) and Leonard Bernstein at rehearsal for *West Side Story*. 1957.

He began the 1970s with a bang, and he would not slow down for decades. Sondheim's revolutionary *Company* (1970) significantly reimagined the American musical. The story of a 35-year-old man facing his age, his society, and himself, the musical broke ground not just thematically but formally and structurally, too. Taking a page from the avant-garde playwrights of the 1960s, *Company* rethought traditional ideas of plot, character, and dramatic action. But Sondheim didn't stop there. His musical *Follies* followed the next year. In this memory play set in a decrepit theater that once hosted grand musical productions in the style of Florenz Ziegfeld, Sondheim continued his exploration of nihilism and meaning, while furthering his musical and lyrical experiments.

Not two years passed before Sondheim had another hit. *A Little Night Music* (1973), a sweet and strange sex comedy written in variants of waltz time (a  $\frac{3}{4}$  time signature), Sondheim developed a musical structure of overlapping musical motifs which created an entire layer of musical subtext which runs underneath the farce's story. Lots of popular musicals appeared on Broadway in the 1970s and early 1980s—including groundbreaking shows like *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *The Wiz*, and *Annie*—but Sondheim's shows were different.

In *Pacific Overtures* (1976) and *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981), Sondheim continued to push the envelope musically and dramatically. He closed out his active 1970s with the mega-hit *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1979), an operetta that manages to be creepy and odd and comic and overwhelming and desperate at once. In the 1980s and early 1990s, he began his collaboration with James Lapine, with whom he wrote the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), *Into the Woods* (1987), and *Passion* (1994). With librettist John Weidman, he created the scrappy and angry *Assassins* (1990), a medley of imagined encounters between actual and attempted assassins of U.S. presidents, which takes a bitter look at Americana and suggests no solutions, and returned Sondheim to his earlier themes of loneliness and despair.



FIG. 03 Chorus kids performing a number from the Broadway production of *Follies*. 1971.



FIG. 04 Meryl Streep, Stephen Sondheim and Audra McDonald at the 2017 PEN Literary Gala.

Although Sondheim's writing slowed in the 1990s and after, he remained active in theater and film. His shows have seen countless revivals in regional theater, Broadway, and opera stages, and many have made their way to the silver screen; *West Side Story* has been filmed twice. Some of the world's greatest actors and singers have played his roles, including Audra McDonald, Elizabeth Taylor, Emma Thompson, Angela Lansbury, Bryn Terfel, Bernadette Peters, and Whoopi Goldberg. Musicians like Judy Collins, Frank Sinatra, Sarah Vaughan, and Barbara Streisand have covered his songs.

Sondheim discussed his personal life little, though as he aged he sometimes spoke about the effects that having a difficult relationship with his mother had on his work. At the news of Sondheim's death in 2021, tributes from the many whose work he touched flooded media and the internet. His impact will continue to grow. No one worked like Sondheim and no one understood people in quite the same way that he did. Because with Sondheim, there was always something new to see.



FIG. 05 Stephen Sondheim with poodle, 1993.

# SONDHEIM'S STYLE

“Writing is a form of mischief,” Stephen Sondheim said, and anyone who hears one of his songs or sees one of his musicals will know that there is an ineffable mischievous quality at play in this man’s work. Sondheim’s work might seem complicated at first listen—and in many ways, it is—but part of the brilliance of his work is its ability to make things clear. Sondheim uses precision and specificity to communicate thoughts and emotions in detail. Despite the work’s melodic and lyrical complexity, you can always sense what a character is thinking and what they want. That’s deliberate.

Sondheim wrote his music and his lyrics together. To him, they were equally important parts of the storytelling. His lyrics tell the singer what to say and his music tells the singer how to say it. Unlike earlier musical theater composers, whose lyrics could sometimes sound like poetry, Sondheim believed that lyrics should sound like speech (and make sense). Sondheim couldn’t stand lyrics that sounded nice but did not add to the audience’s understanding of the character singing them. Poking fun at his mentor Oscar Hammerstein II’s lyric from *The Sound of Music* (1959), “to sing through the night / like a lark who is learning to pray,” Sondheim questioned: “How can you tell a lark that is just learning to pray from one that’s actually praying? Wait a minute—a lark praying? What are we talking about?”

Sondheim believed in the “perfect rhyme.” Rhymes should be precise and correct. He had no time for “false” rhymes. For example in “America the Beautiful,” “for spacious skies” does not rhyme with “purple mountain majesties,” unless you pronounce one of the words completely wrong. Sondheim took pains to craft clever, perfect rhymes that were character-specific. You’ll have to look deep into his song catalog to find an imprecise rhyme. That’s how, in *Company*, he was able to rhyme “personable” with [matador] “coercin’ a bull.”



FIG. 06 Actor Dean Jones in a scene from *Company*. 1970.

Though Sondheim’s individual songs have been covered by many artists and rearranged into revues, each song is tightly connected with the character who sings it. Countless singers have performed “Send in the Clowns,” but the song doesn’t completely make sense until you hear the character Desiree sing the song about the foolishness of love after her own misadventures at the end of *A Little Night Music*. The songs are also connected intricately to the scores from which they come. To Sondheim, each part of the music and lyrics must contribute to the storytelling. In his scores, songs connect lyrically and musically and come together with the musical’s book (its non-musical dialogue) to form a complete whole. Sondheim worked diligently in all his shows to create rhythms, moods, melodies, and tempos that were unique to the musicals they came from and the characters that sang them. The songs and score of *Sweeney Todd*, for example, fit tightly with Hugh Wheeler’s book to create a vision of the stratified class structure of nineteenth-century London. Mrs. Lovett’s first song, “The Worst Pies in London,” could never fit in any other musical. No other character would speak in Mrs. Lovett’s dialect or sing her tempos—Sondheim created them both specifically for her.

**“Don’t you love farce?  
My fault, I fear.**

**I thought that you’d  
want what I want –  
Sorry, my dear.**

**But where are the clowns?  
Send in the clowns,**

**Don’t bother,  
they’re here.”**

—Desirée, *A Little Night Music*

**FIG. 07** Glynis Johns sings “Send in the Clowns” to William Daniels in the original Broadway production of *A Little Night Music*.

## SONDHEIM'S

## LASTING INFLUENCE

Michael R. Jackson's musical *A Strange Loop*, the winner of the 2022 Tony Award for Best Musical, begins with its main character standing on stage surrounded by unnamed members of the chorus, singing just one word—his name, Usher—over and over, pitches and rhythms varying, creating a patchwork of voices and sounds.

Stephen Sondheim and George Furth's *Company*, the winner of the 1971 Tony Award for Best Musical, begins with its main character standing on stage surrounded by unnamed members of the chorus, singing just one word—his name, Bobby—in a discordant and strangely pitched cacophony.

The similarities between *A Strange Loop* and *Company* do not end there—both shows tell the story of a young man facing adulthood, dating, doubt, and failure in New York city while surrounded by their unhelpful family and friends. And yet, they are completely different tonally and musically. Michael R. Jackson knew exactly what he was doing in his opening song, and he knew that theater-geek audiences would instantly identify the song as a (loving) parody of *Company*'s opening number. Musical theater is littered with tributes to Sondheim—both overt and subtle. And it's not just an imitation of his style or music; Sondheim's lasting influence is what he showed musicals could do. Sondheim's characters speak and sing in achingly relatable ways, about issues that people feel deeply in their bones. Sondheim makes even demon barbers and fairytale witches as sympathetic as you or me, because he gives

them real experiences to sing about: losing your family, wanting people to understand you, worrying about money, disappointing your parents, hoping your life will someday change. Even when his characters live in fantastic circumstances, audiences can recognize them as real humans.

Sondheim's musicals have been performed repeatedly on stages around the world over the years, and his material is endlessly flexible. 2022 saw two incredibly different productions of *Company* on prominent stages: a gender-bent production opened on Broadway with Katrina Lenk and Patti LuPone, and a Spanish-language version directed by Antonio Banderas in Barcelona ("Where are you going? Barcelona. Oh."). In 2021, *West Side Story* found itself completely reimagined in the modern day by Flemish director Ivo van Hove, while a new film adaptation, directed by Steven Spielberg with a book by Tony Kushner, opened 60 years after the original. That's how you know you're in the canon—when people start messing with your work and creating something breathtakingly original.



FIG. 08 Patti LuPone and Katrina Lenk in the 2020 Broadway Musical Revival of *Company*. 2020.

# LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC

Sondheim's *Company* (1970) and *Follies* (1971) were critical successes that established their composer-lyricist's name as a major force in the American musical theater, but after *Follies* closed with devastating box office receipts, Sondheim and Hal Prince, his director and producer, looked for something that might be a more reliable financial success. A comedy? A romance? The two



FIG. 09 Beth Fowler, Teri Ralston & Barbara Lang in a scene from *A Little Night Music*. 1973.

first wanted to adapt *Ring Round the Moon* (1950), an English adaptation of a Jean Anouilh play, but the French playwright's agent wouldn't give them the time of day. Finally they came to Ingmar Bergman's film *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955), and they hired Hugh Wheeler to write the musical's book. They kept the film's story but Sondheim suggested a new title, one inspired by Mozart's serenade *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*; they named the musical *A Little Night Music*.

To create his score for *Night Music*, Sondheim experimented with the idea of theme and variation, one taken from Western classical music. This is just what it sounds like: Write a tune, then experiment with small variations throughout the piece (think of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*). For this musical, Sondheim composed a number of melodies, each representing an idea or character (called a leitmotif) and he repeated each of them throughout the show, switching their key and time signatures, throwing them from instrument to instrument, changing their rhythms and tunes slightly. This is an example of Sondheim using his music to serve his story: As an audience learns a tune, they associate it in their head with an idea, or a person. When the tune repeats later, even quietly in the background or subtly in a bassline, the audience hears the tune, and without realizing it, they are reminded of that idea or person from before. Thus, the musical's writers can make audiences connect ideas and people in their heads without saying it aloud.

*A Little Night Music* overflows with leitmotifs. As you listen to the show's score, pay attention to the musical themes that repeat throughout. Don't just listen for them in the melody of a song, pay attention to the songs' introductions, accompaniments, and basslines, too. Sondheim uses leitmotifs generously in *A Little Night Music*, and he used the technique extensively in his scores for *Sweeney Todd*, *Into the Woods*, and *Passion*, too.

Hal Prince described the social satire of *A Little Night Music* as "whipped cream with knives." Led by its tongue-in-cheek title, the musical seems like a fun farce with nice costumes, but it has a real punch to it. Sondheim later said "[Hal] was more interested in the whipped cream and I was more interested in the knives." *A Little Night Music* has some of Sondheim's most dextrous wordplay and extraordinary choral moments, but it cuts deep, too. Like *Follies*, *Night Music* plays with musical irony—devastating lyrics set to fun or jaunty music. There's a lot in this intricately assembled play: humor, sex, contemplation, mockery, redemption. It's a beautiful, tempting dessert of a musical; enjoy the whipped cream, but watch out for the knives.



FIG. 10 Bernadette Peters and Mandy Patinkin in a scene from *Sunday In The Park With George*. 1984.

## SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE

Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's musical *Sunday in the Park with George* begins with a repetition of its main character's artistic mantra: order, design, composition, balance, light, and harmony. Any viewer of the French painter Georges Seurat's 1884 painting "A Sunday Afternoon the Island of La Grande Jatte" can see these principles at play: The figures in the composition stand at order, organized by light, perfectly balanced, in harmony.

Like Seurat, Sondheim also worked by a mantra. Or rather, a few, in service of a whole: "less is more," "content dictates form," "God is in the details," "all in the service of clarity." Any viewer can see these dictums at work in his musicals. Despite the complexities of Sondheim's music and lyrics, his work is always clear-sighted: Sondheim valued clarity of thought in his work. Sondheim and his collaborators fought to create work that could guide its audiences on emotional and intellectual journeys by fusing sound, thought, and character in a harmonious way.



FIG. 11 Stephen Sondheim with Mandy Patinkin, Bernadette Peters, and James Lapine at a rehearsal for *Sunday In The Park With George*. 1984.



FIG. 12 Company of *Sunday In The Park With George*, Pasadena Playhouse. 2023.

Both Georges in *Sunday*—the historical George Seurat in Act One and the fictional contemporary George in Act Two—experience before our eyes the costs of dedicating a life to art. Both men shut out others in their lives as they devote themselves to their work. And both pay a price. What is worth the sacrifice? What is worth sacrificing? How do you make that decision? There is no one way to make art. “Anything you do,” sings Dot at the play’s close, “let it come from you, then it will be true.” The struggle at the center of *Sunday*—the tension between work and relationships—will resonate with anyone who has worked hard to make an impact on their world.

At a quiet moment in the second half of Act Two of *Sunday in the Park with George*, the elderly Marie sings to her grandson that the two things worth leaving behind on this earth are children and art. *Sunday* presents many kinds of children, and many kinds of art. The two are deeply entwined. Perhaps they are not so separate, perhaps they are just points on a spectrum. What do we leave behind? What do we teach our world? What speaks for us when we are no longer able to? “The child is so sweet,” Marie sings to her grandson, “and the girls are so rapturous. Isn’t it lovely how artists can capture us?”



“There’s a part of you  
always standing by



Mapping out the sky  
Finishing a hat

Starting on a hat  
Finishing a hat...



Look, I made a hat...  
Where there never  
was a hat”



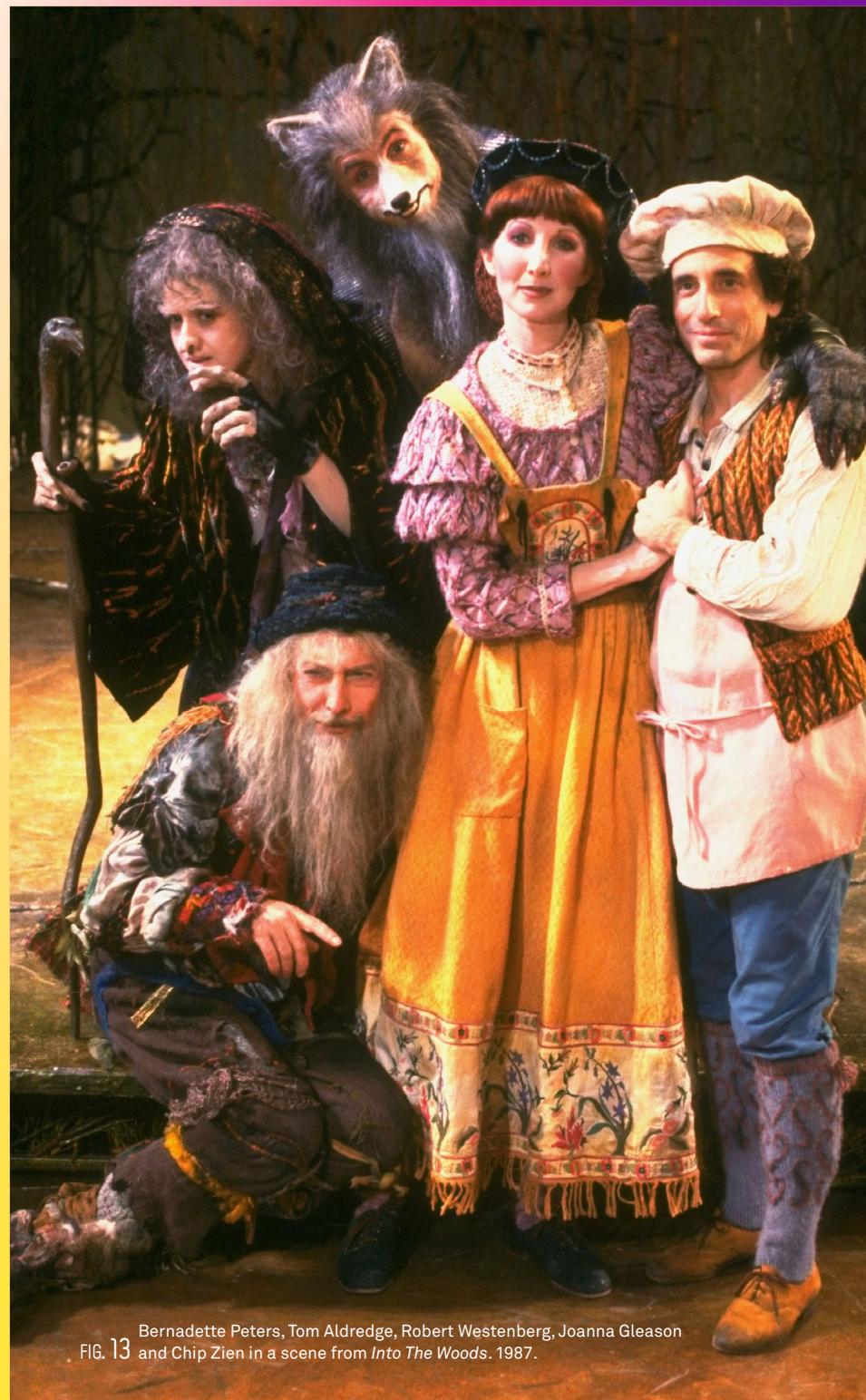
—Georges Seurat,  
*Sunday in the Park with George*



# INTO THE WOODS

Sondheim and James Lapine's second collaboration, *Into the Woods*, premiered on Broadway in 1987, three years after *Sunday*. Some of Sondheim's earlier works, like *Night Music* and *Sweeney Todd*, had been traditional adaptations—they came from plays and films, so they were already structured as dramatic stories. For those works, the process of adaptation was one of genre, not one of form. Lapine, however, chose more complicated projects. *Sunday in the Park with George* was a musical adaptation of a painting (and its creation), and *Into the Woods* was an amalgam of fairy tales (some from very different origins) with a healthy dose of artistic license thrown into the second half of the story. *Into the Woods* did much more than imagine these familiar fairy tales intertwining, it asked its audience to consider these morality tales from a contemporary viewpoint. Are we right to wish for more? What do we owe to our community? Who gets to define what family is? Does morality serve us? Why must we live by rules, or, as the Baker's Wife asks: "Is it always or? Is it never *and*?"

In the near-forty years since *Into the Woods* premiered, the musical has been revived frequently around the world, adapted into a film, and even performed as a children's version that skips the show's complex and morally ambiguous second half. Despite its ubiquity—it is certainly Sondheim's most-produced musical—critics and audiences seem to be constantly surprised that the show is more than a cleverly plotted aggregate of familiar fables. It is a musical with incredible lyric density and thematic complexity, and it addresses some of modern culture's most pressing issues. Sondheim remarked that he and Lapine had often faced the question: What is the show a metaphor for? Related questions he has faced are: What do the woods represent? Who or what does the giant stand in for? Sondheim and Lapine have been consistent in their answers over the years: There's no single metaphor in *Into the Woods*. The show's strength is its ability to withstand whatever ideas an audience member brings to it.



Bernadette Peters, Tom Aldredge, Robert Westenberg, Joanna Gleason and Chip Zien in a scene from *Into The Woods*. 1987.



FIG. 14 Patina Miller as The Witch and Shanice Williams as Little Red in *Into the Woods*. 2019.

As is the case with all of Sondheim's musicals, *Into the Woods* presents a world where moral choices are not easy to make. All of the characters—most notably the Narrator—are morally compromised in some way. The Baker and his Wife, perhaps the most modern characters in the story, make questionable choices. Jack steals, the Princes cheat, Little Red Riding Hood disobeys and provokes. Characters with whom the play asks us to sympathize lie and kill. And characters change their ethical stances, too. The Witch, seemingly the play's most odious character, displays the most consistent moral code—even if it is not one with which you or I would agree. Many of *Into the Woods*'s songs “Maybe They're Magic,” “I Know Things Now,” “On the Steps of the Palace,” and “Moments in the Woods,” for example, depict characters wrestling with their choices and figuring things out right in front of us. In this musical, the process of decision-making is as important, if not more important, than the decision itself. *Into the Woods* is not just about what comes *after* happily ever after, it's also about *how* these characters get to happily ever after.

In *Into the Woods*, Sondheim builds upon many musical techniques that he previously used: the leitmotif (a repeated tune to suggest a dramatic idea), the patter song, the musical soliloquy. Some songs he repeats throughout: “Children Will Listen” and “No One Is Alone” recur throughout the show,

sometimes just in snippets. The five-note “bean motive,” seen below, is perhaps the composer's most-used leitmotif in and of his scores. The five notes represent the five beans, since the Baker's father's theft of the five beans catalyzes the action of the show, each repetition of the melody reminds the audience of the ever-important beans.

Fig. 2 - Bean motive



The bean motive repeats in numerous songs; Jack sings it, Rapunzel sings it, the Princes sing it, and the Witch sings it in parallel moments in both “Stay with Me” and “Lament.” But Sondheim repeats in different keys and rhythms in the instrumental parts, too. Sondheim gives the tune to the orchestra to play alongside Jack's lyrics in “Giants in the Sky” and Cinderella's in “No One Is Alone.”

The complexity of *Into the Woods*' score mirrors the complexity of the musical's dramatic structure. This is a classic example of Sondheim's innovation: the play serves the music and the music serves the play. They are not separable. They are all part of a cohesive whole. That's what a Sondheim musical is.



FIG. 15 Danielle Ferland as Little Red Riding Hood and Robert Westenber as the Wolf in a scene from *Into The Woods*. 1987.

# COLLABORATORS & MUSES



Creative team for *West Side Story*, including composer Leonard Bernstein, playwright Arthur Laurents, choreographer Jerome Robbins, costume designer Irene Sharaff, lyricist Stephen Sondheim, producer Robert Griffith, and production assistant Sylvia Drulie. 1957.

FIG. 16

Throughout the years, Sondheim returned again and again to a roster of familiar collaborators: actors, directors, and musicians all became staples of Sondheim's works, and muses to the composer. Sondheim never wrote alone; he was always bouncing ideas off writers and listening to his casts perform his music. He relied heavily on the voices—and the input—of a trusted few. Here are a few recurring names in Sondheimworld.

## WRITERS

In the mid-1950s, **Arthur Laurents**, a playwright and screenwriter (and later director), approached the young Mr. Sondheim, who was shopping around his new musical, *Saturday Night*. Laurents was at work on a new musical, an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* set in the modern day, with director-choreographer Jerome Robbins and composer Leonard Bernstein. Laurents brought Sondheim onto the team to write lyrics for *West Side Story* (1957), and later, for the musical *Gypsy* (1959), which the two wrote with the composer Jule Styne. Had Laurents not been present to give Sondheim his first big break on these two mega-successful musicals, he might not have had the connections to launch his career. The two continued to collaborate for decades, most recently on Laurents-directed revivals of *Gypsy* (in 2008) and *West Side Story* (2009), for which Sondheim worked with Lin-Manuel Miranda, then fresh from the success of his show *In the Heights*, to create bilingual lyrics for the show.

## DIRECTORS

*West Side Story* also introduced Sondheim to **Hal Prince**, who co-produced the musical's original production. By the 1960s, Prince had become one of Broadway's leading producers, and he also backed *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962), Sondheim's first solo-authored score to play Broadway. Later that decade, Prince became a director, too, directing the first productions of *She Loves Me* (1963), *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964), and *Cabaret* (1966). The 1970s proved especially fruitful for the two: Prince also directed Sondheim's *Company* (1970), *Follies* (1971), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *Pacific Overtures* (1976), and *Sweeney Todd* (1979), and produced a revue of Sondheim's songs, *Side by Side by Sondheim* (1977). The two parted ways after the disastrous New York production of *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981) and both found success with other collaborators. In 2003, the two reunited for *Bounce* (a musical also called *Wise Guys* and *Road Show* in other drafts).



FIG. 17 Sondheim with Bernadette Peters and Mandy Patinkin at a rehearsal for *Sunday In The Park With George*. 1984.

## ACTORS

**Bernadette Peters** first met Stephen Sondheim in 1971. “I was in Joe Allen’s,” she remembered, referring to the restaurant frequented by theater folk, blocks from Broadway, “and I was with some people, and he knew someone I was with, and he sat down at the table, and I was dumbstruck.” It would be a number of years before the two first worked together professionally, however. That opportunity came in 1984, when James Lapine invited her to take part in the workshop of *Sunday in the Park with George* at Playwright’s Horizons, an off-Broadway producer of new plays. When Peters joined the project, the musical’s script was far from complete. *Sunday* was “thrill after thrill every day,” Peters said, “because [Sondheim] was writing the score as we were doing it.” Peters moved with the production to Broadway, returning a few years later to play with Witch in *Into the Woods*. She later appeared in Broadway productions of *Gypsy*, *A Little Night Music*, and *Follies*. Over the decades, she recorded albums of Sondheim’s music and performed his work in countless concert halls.

Though trained as an actor at Juilliard, and one who cut her teeth in plays by Mamet and Chekhov, **Patti LuPone** is perhaps most associated with the musical theater. Though her breakthrough was in an Andrew Lloyd Weber musical—she was Broadway’s first *Evita*—she has since worked largely on Sondheim revivals, winning Tonys for her performances as Rose in the Laurents-directed revival of *Gypsy* and this past year as Joanne in the

gender-swapped *Company*. Through all these performances, LuPone has consistently surprised audiences by taking on wildly different roles in these shows, from Joanne to Mrs. Lovett (in *Sweeney*) to Fosca (*Passion*) to Desiree (*Night Music*). LuPone’s relationship with Sondheim, both personal and professional, was an ongoing source of inspiration—and of stress. His music “is not easy to sing accurately. It’s a challenge to interpret the lyrics as he intended them with depth,” she said shortly after his death. “Steve makes me better,” she continued. “I keep saying, ‘Who will make me better now that Steve is gone?’”

## MUSICIANS

Throughout his career, Sondheim was loyal to his musical collaborators, as well. He began his collaboration with **Jonathan Tunick**, his long-term orchestrator, with *Company* and the two worked together on nearly every one of Sondheim’s shows until the composer’s death in 2021. As orchestrator, Tunick’s job is to take the composer’s score, usually written just for vocals and piano, and create the accompaniment that the orchestra plays from that framework. Given the length of their collaboration, Tunick can claim responsibility for much of Sondheim’s singular musical sound. Also enjoying a long-term collaboration with these two musicians was **Paul Gemignani**, Sondheim’s longtime music director. Gemignani’s first job with Sondheim was playing percussion in the pit for *Follies*, though he later went on to conduct and direct music for many of Sondheim’s productions (and their revivals). The two men are intimately familiar with Sondheim’s music, and have also contributed to concert presentations, film adaptations, and numerous recordings of Sondheim’s works. The length of these collaborations speaks to Sondheim’s fondness for working with the same artists consistently and developing decades-long relationships.



FIG. 18 Patti LuPone as Joanne in the Broadway Musical Revival of *Company*. 2020.

# FURTHER READING

## AND A FEW FILMS

### BOOKS

***Finishing the Hat: Collected Lyrics (1954–1981) with Attendant Comments, Principles, Heresies, Grudges, Whines and Anecdotes (2010)***  
by Stephen Sondheim

***Look, I Made a Hat: Collected Lyrics (1981–2011) with Attendant Comments, Amplifications, Dogmas, Harangues, Wafflings, Diversions and Anecdotes (2011)***  
by Stephen Sondheim

These two books are compilations of all the lyrics Stephen Sondheim ever wrote, organized by musical. As both the writer and editor of the volumes, Sondheim peppered the margins of these books with bizarre anecdotes, touching remembrances, and more than one screed against his contemporary musical theater writers. The books are a must-read for even the casual fan of Stephen Sondheim's work, if not just to (re)discover some of his most complicated and scintillating wordplay.

***Stephen Sondheim: A Life (1998)***  
by Meryle Secrest

Secrest wrote the first biography of Stephen Sondheim. To this day, it remains the only book-length treatment of his life. With access to Sondheim himself as well as scores of his artistic collaborators and personal friends, Secrest created an image of Mr. Sondheim as both a person and an envelope-pushing artist in her exhaustive book.

***Stephen Sondheim and the Reinvention of the American Musical (2018)***  
by Robert L. McLaughlin

A more academic study than Secrest's, McLaughlin's book offers readings of Sondheim's works while placing them in the context of the American musical and the avant-garde movements of the 1950s–1970s.



### FILM & VIDEO

***Six by Sondheim (2013)***

This documentary-slash-imagining of six of Sondheim's most extraordinary numbers features a roster of top-notch musical talent. A collaboration between Frank Rich and James Lapine, with segments by film directors Todd Haynes and Autumn de Wilde, the film features performances by Audra McDonald, Will Swenson, America Ferrera, and more, and it even features Sondheim himself warbling through a short verse in one of his songs. (Available on HBOMax)

***Take Me to the World: In celebration of Mr. Sondheim's 90th (2020)***

The start of the pandemic was a weird time for all of us. In celebration of Mr. Sondheim's 90th birthday in March of 2020, a profusion of actors and musicians all stuck at home sang Sondheim songs from their living rooms and somehow streamed it live online.

McDonald, Christine Baranski, and Meryl Streep get drunk while singing "The Ladies Who Lunch" and Bernadette Peters sings "No One Is Alone" a capella. Technical glitches abound but the love is palpable. (Available on YouTube)

***Sondheim! The Birthday Concert (2010)***

Celebrities and the New York Philharmonic came together for a tribute to Sondheim performed over two nights just before his 80th birthday. It's incredibly sweet. No diva-lover can miss Act Two's "Red Dress Sequence" in which six of Sondheim's leading ladies, Patti LuPone, Marin Mazzie, Audra McDonald, Donna Murphy, Bernadette Peters, and Elaine Stritch each performed their own number in a crimson gown. Except Stritch, of course, who wore pants. (Available on PBS and on DVD)

***Original Cast Album: Company (1970)***

A film by D. A. Pennebaker, *Original Cast Album* is a documentary filmed during the studio recording of the LP for *Company*, one of Sondheim's first major successes. The film features footage of Sondheim, Hal Prince, Elaine Stritch, and more as they work their way through the process of capturing the landmark show on vinyl. The documentary is an absolute must-watch for anyone interested in watching the creative process unfold. The film was also parodied on the mockumentary show *Documentary Now!* in 2019 with actors John Mulaney,

Paula Pell, and Renée Elise Goldeberry. (Available on the Criterion Channel, on DVD and BluRay)



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## IMAGE CREDITS



**Fig 01**  
Gottfryd, Bernard. *Steve [i.e. Stephen] Sondheim [New York]*. 1972. *Library of Congress, Bernard Gottfryd Photograph Collection*. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2020733206/>.



**Fig 02**  
*Bernstein at rehearsal for West Side Story*. Carol Lawrence who played Maria is at his left, and lyricist Stephen Sondheim is playing the piano. *Library of Congress, Music Division*. <https://www.loc.gov/item/lbphotos.57a095/>



**Fig 03**  
Swope, Martha. *Chorus kids performing a number from the Broadway production of the musical "Follies."* 1971. *The New York Public Library Digital Collections, Billy Rose Theatre Division*. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/b0e63050-bdcf-0136-6238-25488e4119c3>



**Fig 04**  
Lederman, Ed. *Meryl Streep, Stephen Sondheim, Audra McDonald, 2017 PEN Literary Gala*. April 25, 2017. *American Museum of Natural History*. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/penamericancenter/33436445034>



**Fig 05**  
Katz, Nancy Lee. *Stephen Sondheim - couch*. 1993. *Library of Congress*. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2022630453/>.



**Fig 06**  
Swope, Martha. *Actor Dean Jones (C) in a scene fr. the Broadway musical "Company."* (New York). 1970. *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/f6aab990-d6a6-0130-a903-58d385a7bbd0>



**Fig 07**  
Daly, Kevin [@kevinddaly]. *Glynis Johns sings "Send in the Clowns" to William Daniels in the original Broadway production of A Little Night Music*. 09 Jul 2022. <https://twitter.com/kevinddaly/status/1545778387192619009/photo/1>



**Fig 08**  
*Company Broadway* [@companybwy]. *Patti LuPone and Katrina Lenk in the 2020 Broadway Musical Revival of "Company"*. 14 Mar. 2020, *Instagram*. [https://www.instagram.com/p/B9ti0JrnyrW/?utm\\_source=ig\\_embed&ig\\_rid=b821cb54-70f5-435e-8de1-2fba0f3e6981](https://www.instagram.com/p/B9ti0JrnyrW/?utm_source=ig_embed&ig_rid=b821cb54-70f5-435e-8de1-2fba0f3e6981).



**Fig 09**  
Swope, Martha. *Actresses (L-R) Beth Fowler, Teri Ralston & Barbara Lang in a scene fr. the Broadway musical "A Little Night Music."* 1973, *The New York Public Library Digital Collections, Billy Rose Theatre Division*. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/720026d0-da8e-0130-0b02-58d385a7b928>



**Fig 10**  
Swope, Martha. *Bernadette Peters and Mandy Patinkin in a scene from the Broadway production of the musical "Sunday In The Park With George"*. 1984, *The New York Public Library Digital Collections, Billy Rose Theatre Division*. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/cf1c9ef0-f826-0137-4db5-1d11284c48b2>



**Fig 11**  
Swope, Martha. *L-R) Composer Stephen Sondheim w. actors Bernadette Peters and Mandy Patinkin and writer/director James Lapine at a rehearsal for the Broadway production of the musical "Sunday In The Park With George."* (New York). 1984, *The New York Public Library Digital Collections, Billy Rose Theatre Division*. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/b4238231-4b2e-56ba-e040-e00a18066127>



**Fig 12**  
Lorch, Jeff. *Company of Sunday In The Park With George*. 2023. *Pasadena Playhouse*.



**Fig 13**  
Swope, Martha. *L-R) Bernadette Peters, Tom Aldredge, Robert Westenberg, Joanna Gleason and Chip Zien in a scene from the Broadway production of the musical "Into The Woods."* (New York). 1987. *The New York Public Library Digital Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Division*. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/b31f5d33-7f50-17da-e040-e00a18062482>



**Fig 14**  
Grudt, Greg and Mathew, Craig T. Patina Miller as "The Witch," Shanice Williams as "Little Red" in "Into the Woods": 2019. *Cultural Attache, Courtesy of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Association*. <https://culturalattache.co/2019/07/25/its-the-last-midnight-for-patina-miller/>



**Fig 15**  
Swope, Martha. *Danielle Ferland as Little Red Riding Hood and Robert Westenberg as the Wolf in a scene from the Broadway production of the musical "Into The Woods"*. 1987. *The New York Public Library Digital Collections, Billy Rose Theatre Division*. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/5a6e37c0-ba85-0136-f393-0d4247524295>



**Fig 16**  
Swope, Martha. *Creative team for musical "West Side Story" (L-R): Composer Leonard Bernstein, playwright Arthur Laurents, choreographer Jerome Robbins (seated), costume designer Irene Sharaff, lyricist Stephen Sondheim, producer Robert Griffith and prod.asst. Sylvia Drulie*. 1957. *The New York Public Library Digital Collections, Billy Rose Theatre Division*. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/b7347d30-2b34-0134-ac77-00505686a51c>



**Fig 17**  
Swope, Martha. *L-R) Composer Stephen Sondheim w. actors Bernadette Peters and Mandy Patinkin at a rehearsal for the Broadway production of the musical "Sunday In The Park With George."* (New York). 1984. *The New York Public Library Digital Collections, Billy Rose Theatre Division*. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/b4238231-4b33-56ba-e040-e00a18066127>



**Fig 18**  
*Company Broadway* [@companybwy]. *Photo of Patti LuPone by Matthew Murphy in the 2020 Broadway Musical Revival of "Company"*. Instagram, 29 Jan. 2022. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CZUcdZKoUjd/>