

University of Central Florida

**STARS**

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 2020-

---

2020

## How Artists Can Capture Us: Educating About the Works of Stephen Sondheim Through Parody

Jarrett Poore

*University of Central Florida*



Part of the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd2020>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Masters Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 2020- by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).

---

### STARS Citation

Poore, Jarrett, "How Artists Can Capture Us: Educating About the Works of Stephen Sondheim Through Parody" (2020). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 2020-*. 117.

<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd2020/117>

HOW ARTISTS CAN CAPTURE US:  
EDUCATING ABOUT THE WORKS OF STEPHEN SONDHEIM THROUGH PARODY

By

JARRETT POORE  
B.F.A, University of Central Florida 2017

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in the Department of Theatre  
in the College of Arts and Humanities at the  
University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term  
2020

© Jarrett Mark Poore 2020

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examined the modern renaissance man and his relationship between musical theatre history and parody; it examined how the modern artist created, produced, and facilitated an original parody in which humor can both influence and enhance an individual's interest in the art form. In the creation and production of *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*, I showcased factual insight on one of the most prolific writers of musical theatre and infused it with comedy in order to educate and create appeal for Stephen Sondheim's works, especially those lesser known, to a wider theatrical audience. My two greatest research methods were as follows: (1) historical research of Stephen Sondheim's personal life, as well as his completed scores as composer, lyricist, or both which, along with my co-writers, culminated into a written theatrical piece and (2) the production of said written piece for audiences. Most of my information had been collected from published scripts and scores, biographies, non-fiction books and articles detailing production history, and filmed archival footage of the works of Stephen Sondheim. This thesis confronted the issue that comedy often lacks educational merit and proves that proper research can be synthesized into a product that is both palatable and memorable for audiences. It is this author's contention that enlightening individuals on the works of Stephen Sondheim through a parody, differing from the typical styles, mainly revue and cabaret, that often examine his career will provide the most satisfying mixture of education and humor.

To the dreamer of dreams, the wisher of wishes, the strongest person I have ever known who will  
forever have the best seat in the house.

You told me once to follow my dreams; this dream is for the both of us, Noni.

I love you.

*Mama did things  
No one had done.  
Mama was funny,  
Mama was fun,  
Mama spent money  
When she had none.  
Mama said, "Honey,  
Mustn't be blue.  
It's not so much do what you like  
As it is that you like what you do"*

“Children and Art” from Stephen Sondheim’s *Sunday in the Park with George*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would not be possible without the following individuals:

My Mother, Annette Cobb, who has been there since the beginning. Through thick and through thin, she has supported me mentally, emotionally, and financially to see me follow my dreams. She is all I have left in the world and is a constant reminder that working hard is not always easy and that sometimes we can lose sight of the things that are important, but its never too late to remind ourselves and try again.

My show co-writer, Bryan Jager, who inspires me all the time. Even in turmoil, I am reminded to look for the good in situations. With you, I always seek to do the next right thing.

My dear friend, Decca Dennett, who is always down for a laugh, or for a cry. You have seen me through some of my darkest times and never once have judged me for them. In this circus I call life, I'm forever glad I have you to clown around with. Thank you for reminding me that demanding the respect that I give to others is a virtue, not a flaw.

One of my mentors, Sue Glerum, who gave me so much kindness to keep going every day of my first semester, even on the stormiest of days.

My chair and friend, Earl Weaver, who allowed me to cry at his desk in my master's track more times than I ever did in my bachelor's track. I can't thank you enough for the listening ears, the words of wisdom, and your ability to get me out of my slump. If it weren't for you, who knows where this thesis would be (though, probably still stuck on page fourteen or so of this document.)

And my biggest fan, even still, Estelle Bartocci. The night before you passed, I talked to you about many things: what classes I was teaching for in the summer, the absurdity of

McDonald's once selling tube-socks, and getting my master's degree. Sometimes, I was not sure if I was ready for this program. Sometimes, I'm still not. But I promised you I would do it, and here I am. The next day, when you were holding on, despite all odds, I finally told you that I would be alright without you, and soon after you gently passed, as if you were waiting to hear that from me. I knew even then that you had faith that if I had the strength to admit that to myself, you knew somewhere along the way I would be alright. I don't know if I've fully paved the way, but it's been almost two years since you've been gone, and I think I'll find it eventually. Someone once told me that when people pass on, they don't just turn to dust but instead live on through the actions of those who loved them and remember them. I hope I'm still making you proud. I love you, and good dreams.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	viii
CHAPTER ONE: ONCE UPON A TIME.....	1
Project Overview .....	3
Sondheim’s Work .....	4
Writing a Comedy.....	5
The Importance of Collaboration.....	6
CHAPTER TWO: OPENING DOORS .....	7
The Early Life and Works of Stephen Sondheim .....	7
The Mid-Years .....	9
The 1980’s to the Present.....	11
CHAPTER THREE: A COMEDY TONIGHT!.....	13
Structuring the Parody .....	14
The Plot of the Show.....	15
CHAPTER FOUR: GOD IS IN THE DETAILS.....	24
The Parodied Songs .....	24
CHAPTER FIVE: THERE’S NOT ENOUGH TIME .....	37
The Writing and Rehearsing Journals.....	37
CHAPTER SIX: THE TALE YOU TELL .....	49
The Future of the Show.....	49
The Takeaway .....	50
Finale Ultimo .....	55
LIST OF HELPFUL RESEARCH SOURCES .....	56
REFERENCES .....	59

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Lyrics for "Parody Tonight" from <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> .....	9
Figure 2: Excerpt about <i>Follies</i> from <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> ....	10
Figure 3: Some opening dialogue from <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> . 16	
Figure 4: Dialogue from "West Side Gypsy of the Best of All Possible Worlds" from <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> .....	17
Figure 5: Throw-away gags of <i>Anyone Can Whistle</i> , <i>Do I Hear a Waltz</i> , <i>Assassins</i> , and <i>The Frogs</i> from <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> .....	18
Figure 6: Dialogue from the parody of <i>Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street</i> in <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> .....	22
Figure 7: Additional lyrics for "Parody Tonight" from <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> .....	25
Figure 8: Segment from "West Side Gypsy of the Best of All Possible Worlds" in <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> .....	26
Figure 9: Lyrics from "Broadway Shamey" in <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> .....	27
Figure 10: Lyrics from "It's a Little Night Music" in <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> .....	28
Figure 11: Comparison of rhythmic structure between parody lyrics of "The Lapine Prologue" from <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> and the original "Prologue" from <i>Into the Woods</i> .....	29
Figure 12: Parody lyrics of "Ever After" from <i>Into the Woods</i> in <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> .....	30
Figure 13: Lyrics from "The Best God Damn Song in the Whole Show" in <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> .....	31
Figure 14: Lyrics from "Being Sondheim" in <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> .....	31
Figure 15: Lyrics from "Attend the Tale I" in <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> .....	32
Figure 16: Lyrics from "The Worst Lies in London" in <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> .....	33
Figure 17: Lyrics from "My Friends" in <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> 33	
Figure 18: Lyrics from "A Little Pun" in <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> .....	34
Figure 19: Lyrics from "Attend the Tale II" in <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> .....	35
Figure 20: Lyrics from "Attend the Tale III" in <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> .....	36
Figure 21: Parody lyrics of "Someone in a Tree" from <i>Pacific Overtures</i> in <i>The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]</i> .....	36
Figure 22: Gabriella Juliet sitting at a piano working through "Parody Tonight" .....	43

Figure 23: Logo for *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]* premiering at the Orlando International Fringe Festival in May 2020 ..... 50

## CHAPTER ONE: ONCE UPON A TIME...

It began with “Once upon a time...”, as all good stories do. I acquired a battered-up VHS copy of the 1997 filmed stage production of *Into the Woods* for my tenth birthday. As most children who fell in love with the musical retelling of The Grimm Brother’s fairytale canon, I was fascinated by the show and how it combined beloved characters I knew with one another, attached with music that was intricate and challenging, creating something I had never experienced in my adolescence: smart theatre. Up until that point, I had not experienced anything live, but rather found my love of musical theatre through animated movie-musicals such as *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Pocahontas*, but never anything live. I suppose, technically, I still was not seeing anything live, and yet I felt immersed in the world. I could see the actors sing and dance their way through these songs, and I felt inspired to do the same. The rest, as they say, was history, as I developed something that would follow me for the rest of my life: a love of Stephen Sondheim.

Eventually, I would get my chance to shine in *Into the Woods* as The Baker my sophomore year of high school, the same year I also directed and performed in a production of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare [abridged]*. Working on these shows at the same time, I learned many things about the importance of ensemble, timing, and, most importantly, that specificity and detail is what makes all the difference to an audience. I never thought I would dream of combining the two, but as I got older and studied more of Stephen Sondheim and his work, I began to discover the thematic elements that overlapped, the character tropes which appeared often, and the musicality that was so prevalent in all his works. Originally, this project came about in conversation with my partner, a fellow Sondheim aficionado, as we joked about

the character of Joanne in *Company* and how she lives on in so many other Sondheim characters: Phyllis in *Follies*, Countess Charlotte in *A Little Night Music*, The Witch in *Into the Woods*, and so on. We then began to talk about the hilarity and absurdity that would ensue if there was one character that would continuously show up throughout Sondheim's works to comment on the action. Eventually, we discussed the other overarching themes that prevailed throughout and thought: "What would it look like to combine all of his shows into one evening?" Our very first concept was to combine *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Into the Woods*, and *Passion* a la the opening prologue of *Into the Woods*, but instead of the typical "I wish!", the characters would relay what they do in their plots: Cinderella would remain the same, of course, but George instead stated "I paint!" while Fosca retorted "I read."

Over time, the idea morphed as I recounted my time working on *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare [abridged]* and we landed on an ensemble of characters trying desperately to tell anyone who would listen about the works of Stephen Sondheim, the good and the bad. Neither of us really knew where to begin, or if the idea was even worth having, but the more we spoke about it, the more jokes we came up with: creating a gag that nobody would know the show *Anyone Can Whistle* and that the audience would be requested to simply whistle instead of learning about the show fully, the idea that *Company* would not be presented in a linear fashion and that it would be something we come back to later in the evening, a trope about one character constantly wanting to do *Pacific Overtures* while the others constantly put him down because they seek to be politically correct, and so forth. Eventually, we talked about the idea so much, that it culminated into a laundry list of jokes and references that we began to piece together in an attempt to make a coherent script. We had the idea that, through writing parody lyrics and

crafting the show as a love-letter to Stephen Sondheim, we were able to present it to a paid audience for the Orlando International Fringe Festival. The following thesis is what ensued in the creation of *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*.

### Project Overview

To properly explore the themes of my thesis, I became knowledgeable about the works of Stephen Sondheim but also needed to determine what facets of his personal life and career influenced his work: What are his most prominent works and how do they fall into the canon of musical theatre? Which of his shows were not received well by audiences? How did his life influence his writings? How will I format his works into a cohesive story? What challenges will I face when presenting each show? How exactly will I parody each work in order to make it palatable and funny for a modern audience? My research included seeing productions written by him both in person and through other media, as well as reading the original scripts and other supplemental books that enhanced my knowledge and appreciation for the subject.

I formed an ensemble that consisted of myself and two others, presenting the information I knew, as well as gaining feedback from my ensemble that highlighted what is well-known knowledge. I posed the question: how can we make some of the most cerebral and dramatic works in the landscape of musical theatre funny? I then synthesized this material with my colleagues into a working script.

As we finalized the draft, we began to put this show, referred to as *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*, on its feet, allowing for changes and edits as we discovered new moments. How did my original vision change and alter over the writing process? What

devices would I use to structure the work? How would I navigate the music and lyrics of his songs? All of this, and more, were discovered throughout the course of my thesis as I continued to investigate what it meant to write an original parody. In crafting the piece, I focused on three topics heavily:

1. Stephen Sondheim and his canon of work.
2. The inclusion of humor.
3. Working with collaborators for feedback and the growth of ideas.

### Sondheim's Work

Beyond what we consider to be some of Stephen Sondheim's well-known works (*Into the Woods*; *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*; *Company*; and so forth), we find there are many instances in which his work is not lauded, if known at all. While some have had a resurgence of popularity in recent years, such as *Follies* and *Merrily We Roll Along*, many remain relatively unknown, even to those studying or practicing musical theatre for a living. Shows such as *Pacific Overtures*, *Anyone Can Whistle*, and *Road Show* are rarely produced by theatrical companies, and when they are, they typically draw only a select crowd. In *Art Isn't Easy*, Joanne Gordon highlights this fact, stating that "the genre is often dismissed as escapist entertainment" [Gordon p.1] and illuminates that, in some cases, those productions lauded by a widespread audience have now been placed into that category.

There is something raw and primordial to audiences about the tale in which ultimate revenge reigns supreme; the melodramatic *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* has that base covered. Perhaps we instead are more entranced by seeing the tales we know and love

when they are twisted into something more realistic and befitting of our corrupted society. *Into the Woods* panders to that audience and some would consider the loss of “happily ever after” in the show adjacent to the loss of Americana and nostalgia for the older styles of musical structure. While *Company* did not play well to the sensibilities of audiences in the 1970’s, it certainly has come full circle, sparking many revivals, and, most recently, a gender swap of the main character. *Company* emphasizes the growth of cynicism in American culture and, by proxy, the growth of cynicism in audiences.

However, we often praise these shows and skim over the cultural significance of his others. *Pacific Overtures*, for example, showcases a pentatonic scale that encompasses the composition of traditional Japanese music and bears a great example of cultural significance, and yet it remains one of the many unknown scores (Horowitz). I aimed to bring light to his lesser-known works while still championing those which our society has already embraced.

### Writing a Comedy

While it is no surprise that society likes to laugh, we often forget that comedy, at its root, is based on truth; whether it is the truth of the action, the truth of the dialogue, or the examination of the human condition, all comedy has truth. In *The Art of Comedy: A Guide to Scriptwriting for TV, Radio, Film and Stage*, Ronald Wolfe exemplifies that material is funniest when it is written for truth, not for laughs. I explored this more through a medium that is not often associated with the retelling of Sondheim’s legacy: through parody. Often times, his work is presented in a funny or satirical manner by the means of revue such as *Putting it Together* or *Sondheim on Sondheim*, or through small comedic vignettes in concert such as *Sondheim: The*

*Birthday Concert*, but never has there been a show specifically focused on bringing to light all his shows and biographical information through strictly a comedic viewpoint. This creates an atmosphere that is both fun and educates audiences on a topic that, while widely popularized in the theatrical community, has many holes and gaps.

### The Importance of Collaboration

Ethan Mordden describes *Company* as “an actor’s musical” in his book *On Sondheim: An Opinionated Guide*, but why are we creating a delineation between what constitutes an actor’s musical versus a singer’s musical versus a dancer’s musical. If our focus as theatrical artists is to tell a story, why do we put so much emphasis on the differences in the ways we tell it? By working with a collaborator, I was able to grow and enhance *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]* and aimed to illuminate the importance of a strong ensemble to tell a story through these three mediums equally. Infusing the music of Stephen Sondheim by twisting his lyrics through similar rhyme structure, pulled from *Hatbox: The Collected Lyrics of Stephen Sondheim*, and with the dialogue created by myself with enhancements from my ensemble, I aimed to enhance the visibility of his lesser-known works by sparking interest in what many either pass over or of which people completely lack knowledge.

## CHAPTER TWO: OPENING DOORS

One thing I could not get around was the fact that there is so much information on Sondheim's work and his personal life that misinformation in the show would be quickly debunked. As I began to write, I made it my duty to know as much as I could about the man himself and fill in the gaps of the shows about which I was less knowledgeable. This would allow for me to craft a parody that not only was educational for audiences, but also had a healthy dose of intellectual humor, rather than just being your average, run-of-the-mill parody show.

### The Early Life and Works of Stephen Sondheim

Stephen Sondheim was born in New York City on March 22, 1930. His parents are often mentioned as being neglectful or cold towards him (*Stephen Sondheim: A Life*) which has influenced much of his life and career. It was because of this that he grew to have a mentorship with lauded American composer, Oscar Hammerstein II. Sondheim, who was friends with James Hammerstein, grew to know Oscar as a father figure during his own parent's divorce. According to Sondheim in *Sondheim on Sondheim*, he wrote a musical called *By George* in finishing school, based on local happenings in his community. When he asked for feedback from Hammerstein II, Sondheim was told that it was terrible. Oscar then asked him if he would like to know why he thought that, and they spent several hours discussing the piece, to which Sondheim "learned more about songwriting and the musical theater than most people learn in a lifetime." [Zaden p. 4] He grew to relish the information passed down to him and later completed several writing assignments, given to him by Oscar Hammerstein II, in order to grow as a composer. While these

works were never properly produced, Sondheim still admits that it was through these writing exercises that he grew as a young composer.

In his college years, Sondheim decided he wanted to write for the theatre, but was put-off by the amount of disdain his professors at Williams College had for musical theatre. He went on to study with Milton Babbitt, who was able to combine Sondheim's love for theatricality with music theory, as the two equally discussed the writings of Jerome Kern and George Gershwin as they did Beethoven.

After graduating, Sondheim had a chance encounter with Arthur Laurents at a party who discussed his upcoming adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. Laurents was down a lyricist and offered to audition Sondheim in front of Leonard Bernstein. Ultimately, Sondheim joined the writing team for the show which became *West Side Story* and was credited as the sole lyricist, though that was not the case initially. Sondheim has gone on record to say that he does not like all his lyrics for *West Side Story*, but that it was pivotal in his early Broadway career.

The death of Oscar Hammerstein II in 1960 was a large blow to Sondheim. Oscar as a mentor was more a parental figure to him than either of his own biological parents, and he mourned his loss greatly.

The first show he wrote both the music and lyrics to that was commercially produced on Broadway was *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, based on several different farces by Plautus, a Roman playwright. While the score was not well-received commercially, it did win Best Musical at the Tony Awards. In *Sondheim on Sondheim*, Stephen wrote that the musical was plagued with problems from the beginning, stating that the opening song just did not set the mood for the show that proceeded. After songs entitled "Forget War" and "Love is in the

Air” missed the mark, he finally crafted “Comedy Tonight,” which finally set the right mood. This was the first song I felt connected to our parody, since it showcases a simple rhyme scheme and musical structure (AAB/CCB). At first, we were prepared to write only small snippets of songs, both as a logistical simplicity and because neither of us had a strong music theory background, we did both have experience with poetry and re-writing lyrics, so we invested the time and energy to re-write lyrics to over thirteen passages, and it all began with “Parody Tonight”:

<p style="text-align:center"><b>PARODY TONIGHT</b> (a la “Comedy Tonight” from <i>A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum</i>)</p> <p style="text-align:center"><b>JARRETT</b> <b>SOMETHING STUPENDOUS</b> <b>SOMETHING PRETENTIOUS</b> <b>SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE</b> <b>A PARODY TONIGHT!</b></p>
---

Figure 1: Lyrics for "Parody Tonight" from *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*

### The Mid-Years

Sondheim is widely considered one of the most prolific writers in the musical theatre canon, even so far as being referred to as other-worldly in different forms of media, most famously the song “God” from *Sondheim on Sondheim*, in which the cast praises him in the lyrics using “his nickname, God” to describe his wit and finesse in crafting lyrics. However, Sondheim has not always been the top of his field. In his earlier years, many of his works did not land well with critics or audiences. Pieces such as *Anyone Can Whistle* and *Do I Hear a Waltz* were plagued by book problems and remain largely unknown by even a savvy theatre-goer, mainly because they are often not produced. Even though *Anyone Can Whistle* hosts one of

Sondheim's most personal songs, aptly named after the title of the show [Morden 59], many audiences are left bewildered by a dense book by Arthur Laurents that lacks full character development.

Other works such as *Company*, *Follies*, and *Merrily We Roll Along* were considered too ahead of their time, as Sondheim began to dabble in non-linear storytelling and sensitive subject matters, such as depression, suicide, divorce, and infidelity that Americans were not accustomed to seeing on stage. Theatre was, for many, a form of escapism, and many were not prepared to see their own struggles portrayed on stage.

In *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*, I explored this topic largely in the parody of *Follies* in which our ensemble broke the fourth wall to illuminate many of the problems that plagued Sondheim's shows in the 70's for audiences, and what ultimately almost made him quit writing for the musical theatre. Below is an excerpt which highlighted the problems audiences and critics alike had with the stories Sondheim was helping to tell:

LEXI

Well, it was Sondheim's way of holding up a mirror about marital issues, even more so than *Company*. It was a glitzy take on show business and the fading splendor of a once beloved art form that had continuously been bastardized until all that was left was a bunch of people wishing for how things used to be rather than accepting how they were, both in the physical sense that their theatre was being knocked down and replaced by a parking garage, and in the metaphorical sense that the relationships they shared in their youth didn't exist as they wanted them to anymore.

LAUREL  
Wow, really?

LEXI

Yeah, and there is this whole sequence called "Loveland" in which we essentially see the inner psyches of our four main protagonists who are having very different mental breakdowns revolving around adultery, depression, and their inability to cope with their own realities they forged, and the show ends with what little hope they can muster to lie to themselves that tomorrow will be a new day and that every emotion they have felt in the span of one evening will forever haunt them in an endless cycle due to their reluctance to change what has become comfortable to them.

LAUREL  
Well... that's... incredibly depressing.

Figure 2: Excerpt about *Follies* from *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*

It was important to me to highlight the problems Sondheim was having with audiences, because it is largely what drove him to write some of his more successful pieces. *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* took a Penny Dreadful and transformed it into a Tony Award-winning musical about one man's obsession for revenge. *Sunday in the Park with George*, a musical about the artist's process versus the criticism of a misunderstanding audience, won the Pulitzer for Drama in 1985. *Into the Woods*, of course, did not win the Tony Award for Best Musical, but has lived a long and healthy life as one of the most often-produced Sondheim shows and pays homage to Oscar Hammerstein II as he writes "Careful the tale you tell, that is the spell. Children will listen" (*Into the Woods*, 136) to echo his mentor's sentiment from *South Pacific* that "You've got to be taught to hate and fear". (*South Pacific*, 179)

#### The 1980's to the Present

And yet still, in all his success, Sondheim was continuously faced with backlash from the theatrical community for being too heady. In his first collaboration with James Lapine, *Sunday in the Park with George*, Sondheim famously lost the Tony Award for Best Musical to Jerry Herman's *La Cage Aux Folles*. Herman, upon accepting his Tony, remarked that "There's been a rumor around... that the simple, hummable showtune was no longer welcome on Broadway. Well, it's alive and well at The Palace [theatre, where *La Cage Aux Folles* was playing]!" (Morden p.122)

After *Passion's* success in winning Tony awards for Best Musical, Best Score (Stephen Sondheim) and Best Book (James Lapine) in 1994, Sondheim has not written another major musical that has received a full-fledged Broadway production. His latest show, *Road Show*

(originally titled *Wise Guys*, renamed to *Bounce!* until finally landing on its current title) has gone through many re-writes and changes over the years, but the closest it has come to Broadway was the 2019 Off-center series at the New York City Center.

While Sondheim is often lauded as the composer behind the reason for modern musical theatre's sound, it is interesting to me that so many of his works have not been received well or, at the very least, viewed as mediocre by critics and audiences alike. I vowed, in my writing, that I would make sure to highlight this fact while still maintaining a level of respect for his work. Ultimately, the parody I wrote with my collaborator is a love letter to Sondheim's life and his works and is largely made to educate audiences on the man behind the writing in a humorous and memorable style.

## CHAPTER THREE: A COMEDY TONIGHT!

In crafting *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*, one question that continuously popped up was the legality of the show. Many of my peers, mentors, and even collaborators questioned how this show was legally able to be profitable, especially if we utilized music that Sondheim wrote. In order to squash those fears, I turned to Copyright Law and found the following regarding the use of copyright materials in The United States Code, Chapter 17, Section 107:

### §107. Limitations on exclusive rights: Fair use

Notwithstanding the provisions of sections 106 and 106A, the fair use of a copyrighted work, including such use by reproduction in copies or phonorecords or by any other means specified by that section, for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship, or research, is not an infringement of copyright. In determining whether the use made of a work in any particular case is a fair use the factors to be considered shall include-

- (1) the purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes;
- (2) the nature of the copyrighted work;
- (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and
- (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work.

The fact that a work is unpublished shall not itself bar a finding of fair use if such finding is made upon consideration of all the above factors.

Likewise, when researching the law, we wanted to make sure we were clearly defining the status of our show and looked to the Merriam-Webster dictionary to help us define parody as “a literary or musical work in which the style of an author or work is closely imitated for comic effect or in ridicule.”

By the law's definition, the show we were writing was legal because it was both criticizing and commenting on the works of Stephen Sondheim. All the music we used we made a point to create some sort of gag or parody lyric that would cover the definition, and none of the scenes or songs were presented in their entirety, but rather short snippets or quotes to emphasize comedy.

### Structuring the Parody

One of the largest decisions I had to make in constructing *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]* was how to structure the piece and how many performers I would utilize. Since it is based off the structure used in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare [abridged]* by Adam Long, Daniel Singer, and Jess Winfield, I originally considered using three performers. A lot of the humor in that piece derives from its fast-paced nature, the comedy of a small ensemble switching characters every few seconds, and the physical gags, so I felt it was imperative that I honor that in our parody.

I discovered the most common ways that *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare [abridged]* addressed retelling Shakespeare's plays were the following:

1. A shortened, straight-forward retelling of the plot.
2. An elongated retelling of the plot.
3. A combination of multiple plots to tell one comedic retelling.
4. Smaller vignettes that culminate into one through-line of a retelling.
5. A throw-away gag or line that addresses the work without ever going further.

While crafting *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*, I also faced the challenge of how to format the piece. Would it be chronological? In order of importance? A combination of the two? The answer was not so clear cut, and I ended up weighing the pros and cons of each:

- If I did, in fact, decide to do everything chronologically, it would make the most sense when interspersing information about Sondheim’s life. It wouldn’t be nearly as jarring for an audience to hear about his works in context and how his work evolved over the years. However, it wouldn’t allow for much wiggle room in writing and would force my hand to vary the styles expressed above but would not necessarily agree that two sections “fit” next to one another.
- If I did not stick to a chronological order, I would have liberty and freedom to stylize the show in any method I saw fit, but would lose the convenience of having a structure built in. Eventually, what I landed on was a combination of both.

### The Plot of the Show

*The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]* would begin with three individuals setting the stage for the show’s parameters and why they were doing something as crazy as fitting an entire composer’s musical canon into sixty minutes (Jarrett was doing it for the glory of saying he could, Bryan was doing it to inform his audience about every little detail they would never know about otherwise, and Lexi was doing it because her friends made her). Eventually, Laurel would enter by accident and, being a willing professional, agree to do the show, as long as

she was heavily featured. After the four come together and agree to do the impossible, the show begins with Sondheim's first show as both composer and lyricist *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* as the four sing "Parody Tonight" (to the tune of "Comedy Tonight") where they set up the rules of the show and what the audience can expect.

JARRETT  
And there are none better to take you on this journey than the three of us. I hold a B.F.A.  
Degree in Musical Theatre.

LEXI  
I'm a character actress well versed in despair.

BRYAN  
And I grew up homosexual.

JARRETT  
Didn't we all... BUT! Together, the three of us will attempt the Herculean task-

Figure 3: Some opening dialogue from *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*

After that, we dive head first into his earlier works (his lyrical shows: *West Side Story*, *Gypsy*, and *Candide*) by combining the three together. Although he wrote the updated *Candide* lyrics, I felt it was appropriate to include it in his early works since it chronologically was written in the same time period as *West Side Story* and *Gypsy*, so the three together became "West Side Gypsy of the Best of All Possible Worlds," a comedic retelling of Mama Anita-Rose trying to get her daughters, Baby June-ardo and Louisa, onto the Orpheum Circuit by beating out Riffulsa and his Jets for the part by attending "The Dance Call at the Gym." This plot follows alongside *Gypsy*'s, as Mama Rose attempts to get her daughters to stardom, with the added tensions of the gang wars from *West Side Story*. Anita-Rose and her daughters are from the Spanish-speaking Sharks, while their rivals, Tony and Riffulsa are from the white-bred Jets gang. Interspersed

throughout are characters such as Tony, who offers much of the morality and optimism from *Candide*, and Chin-erbie, the manager of the Shark's act. Tony falls in love with "a cow butt named Louisa" (as an obvious reference to *Gypsy*'s own Louisa character, who, quite literally, always plays a cow), and Baby June-ardo ends up running away with Riffulsa. Angered by the dissolution of his act, Chin-erbie comes loaded with a gun and kills Tony because the Jets ruined their act, ending of course with Louisa giving the classic speech from *West Side Story* and asking "How many bullets are left in this gun?" while Anita-Rose continues to ask the question, a la Rose's turn from *Gypsy* "For me?!" The section ends as all of them realize that the only thing to do moving forward is to stop living in hatred and, as *Candide* tells us, "Make our garden grow!"

LEXI (Riffulsa)  
We need to find a way to improve our act!

LAUREL (Jet Member)  
Yeah! Otherwise we'll never beat out those Sharks.

LEXI (Riffulsa)  
Say! What if we got Tony to rejoin our gang/act?

BRYAN  
Enter Tony! The heterosexual male ingenue!

LAUREL (Jet Member)  
Oh Tony! Won't you join us at the Dance Call at the Gym tonight?

LEXI (Riffulsa)  
Otherwise we'll never beat out Baby Juneardo.

BRYAN (Tony)  
I don't know guys! Vaudeville's old hack. And I just got this feeling that somethin's comin. I mean, maybe I'm just being OPTIMISTIC-

(MUSIC: *Candide* Overture underscoring.)

Figure 4: Dialogue from "West Side Gypsy of the Best of All Possible Worlds" from *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*

His next works chronologically we skipped over were *Anyone Can Whistle* and *Do I Hear a Waltz*, which would be introduced later as throw-away gags, as would *The Frogs* from 1974 and *Assassins* from 1990 that occur much later in the show, right before the cast performs their epic retelling of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*.

JARRETT  
*Pointing to someone in the audience:*  
**ANYONE CAN WHISTLE... THAT'S WHAT THEY SAY...**  
You there, can you whistle?  
*If no: You're wrong. (And he goes to the next person)*  
*If yes: (A la the song "Anyone Can Whistle") Easy...*

BRYAN  
Oh! And *Do I Hear a Waltz*!!!

LEXI  
No, you don't.

JARRETT  
Oh, there's *Assassins*...

BRYAN  
Listen, they closed it down early because nobody wanted to see it after 9/11. I feel like nobody wants to be reminded about dead presidents in our current political climate.

JARRETT, LEXI, and LAUREL  
Well...

LAUREL  
What about *The Frogs*?

BRYAN  
Didn't we do that one?

JARRETT  
No, we sang from *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, the other Nathan Lane show set in Greco-Roman times.

BRYAN  
Close enough, right?

ALL  
Yeah.

Figure 5: Throw-away gags of *Anyone Can Whistle*, *Do I Hear a Waltz*, *Assassins*, and *The Frogs* from *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*

*The Company* segment of *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]* has a scene that begins with married couples arguing while Bobby laments “God, I’m so lonely” but is interrupted in favor of presenting it in a non-linear format, much like the original, later in the show. Near the end of our segments, we return to Bobby who faces Joanne and laments that everyone criticizes Sondheim’s shows for being too cold, cerebral, or heady, but no one often thinks about the human being behind the art, or why he wrote the way he did in a parody of “Being Alive” called “Being Sondheim.”

*A Little Night Music* earned a mid-size segment in the form of a parodied, fast-paced rendition of the show’s plot, where a quartet of couples are intertwined in love triangles (thus, the 3/4-time signature segment). It ends with Desiree Armfeldt singing a rendition of “Send in the Clowns” with one performer noticeably appearing as a clown in the background while our singer laments that one day she will get a song not dripping in heavy metaphor. *Pacific Overtures* was tricky to handle, as it is one of his least-produced shows, but does include Sondheim’s favorite song, “Someone in a Tree” (which he states himself in the 1976 documentary *Anatomy of a Song*.) We decided to include it in the ending to comment on the details that create the sum whole of a piece, rather than the larger picture, which was fitting for our own show.

*Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* is noticeably absent for a large part of the show and became the “forgotten” piece that is spaced into the end of the show when our ensemble was feeling confident about having excess time. His Lapine collaborations became a combination of plots to tell the story of how Sondheim worked with James Lapine to craft three musicals in order to win a Tony Award, so we combined together *Sunday in the Park with*

*George*, *Into the Woods*, and *Passion* into a parody of “Prologue” from *Into the Woods*. We began with *Sunday in the Park with George*, which triumphantly wins The Pulitzer Prize for Drama, but not the Tony Award for Best Musical. A caricature of Jerry Herman arrives on the scene to give his infamous Tony speech, in which he reminds theatregoers that the hummable show tune is alive and well. *Into the Woods*, of course, is later snubbed for Andrew Lloyd Webber, who won for *Phantom of the Opera* in 1988. A large segment of *Passion* is finally presented, with everyone anticipating its big loss to Disney’s hit *Beauty and the Beast* in 1994, but surprisingly wins, sending Fosca into hysterics with everyone else questioning how *Passion*, above all else, won. They end lamenting that of the three, *Into the Woods* would be the only true success, as it lived on in several major productions, as well as a healthy life in licensing.

Since *Roadshow* is still being worked on, despite several rewrites, name changes and major productions, we decided to comment on the plot changes and inconsistencies in the show by doing a parodied version of “The Best Thing That Ever Has Happened to Me” by altering it to “The Best God Damn Song in the Whole Show,” a song between two gay lovers quarreling over the best things in each Sondheim show and how this was the only truly memorable song from a show that has already had many revisions. Bobby from our *Company* segment returns to comment on how crazy lovers can quarrel, where he then goes into the previously mentioned “Being Sondheim” parody.

*Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet* is finally remembered by the cast, and they begin to weave the tale, setting up that “old patrons love a well-scored bloody plot.” Sweeney Todd enters and interacts with Anthony, the sailor, and The Beggar Woman, who explicitly makes sexual advances using salad innuendos. After she is turned away and Anthony leaves,

Sweeney stumbles upon his old residence and Mrs. Lovett, who conveniently sets up the lynchpin of the plot giving Sweeney “the worst lies in London,” play on-words for the original song “The Worst Pies in London.” Sweeney is then given his “old friends,” a collection of Stephen Sondheim’s frequent collaborators, like Bernadette Peters, Elaine Stritch, Donna Murphy, Mandy Patinkin, and Patti LuPone, to help him seek revenge on the evil Judge Turpin who has taken his daughter. After a steam whistle transition, Anthony returns and falls madly in love with Johanna, played by a doll in a cage, and is quickly told by the Beggar Woman that she is unavailable and that the Judge intends to marry her as the Judge’s right hand-man, the Beadle (played quite literally as a sock-puppet on the right hand of our actress playing Judge Turpin) takes her away. Anthony runs off in hopes of obtaining Sweeney’s help. Another steam whistle transition occurs, and we are taken to a barbering contest where Pirelli loses a contest to Sweeney and the Beadle declares him the winner, stating he would surely consult with Judge Turpin to come in for a shave.

LEXI (The Beadle)

*(Carrying a puppet on her right hand that looks mysteriously like one of the Beatles in Victorian garb and speaking in a Liverpool dialect:)* Well, would you lookie here! It's my job to observe things and I have just observed that we've got quite the shaver here mate.

BRYAN

*(Aside to Mrs. Lovett:)* It's The Beadle! Judge Turpin's right hand man! Literally!

LEXI

Hello there, I see you've got some skill in shaving. It just so happens that, as a man, I shave, and at least three of my friends do as well. One of them is the most noble and greatest, splendid, incredibly wonderful Judge Turpin. Perhaps I could have him visit your barber shop? Wait one moment please, while I consult with him.

*(LEXI turns around and puts a beard on her face and is suddenly Judge Turpin)*

I've heard from my right hand man that you've got the smoothest shave. I've been looking for someone to help me look good before I fuck the living shit out of my ward, Johanna.

Figure 6: Dialogue from the parody of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* in *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*

After the Beadle leaves and Toby, Pirelli's apprentice, leaves with Mrs. Lovett, Pirelli immediately reveals himself to be his former shop-sweep. Sweeney kills him, and Mrs. Lovett returns to find Pirelli dead, to which she suggests using him as meat for their new business ventures as the town's only Barber/Meat Pie Emporium/Pun Makers in "A Little Pun" (a parody of the original's own "A Little Priest").

We then go into overdrive as we fast-forward to the end of the plot, using another rendition of "Attend the Tale" to give exposition of what happens in Act II. As the Beadle approaches Sweeney for a shave, Sweeney prematurely kills The Beadle, followed by another accidental killing of The Beggar Woman. Finally, as the Judge approaches, Sweeney promises not to jump the gun again, but, of course, does. Finally satisfied with his work, he goes back to

making puns about the people he just murdered and accidentally realizes that the beggar woman is his wife and promptly kills Mrs. Lovett. A final verse of “Attend the Tale” occurs as the cast explains that for some reason, above all other Sondheim shows, this is one of the most well-known and followed, whether it is due to its frequent adaptation, or how jarringly it sticks out from the rest of his canon is up for them to decide.

At long last, all shows are accounted for, except, of course, for *Pacific Overtures*, and the cast begins to sing a parody of “Someone in a Tree” as they recount the reason they love Sondheim in the first place, stating it is the detail and care he puts into his art that connects us to his pieces and makes them human, more so than other composers in some instances. The cast discovers that Sondheim is not afraid to touch upon hard subject matter, tough themes, or depressing motifs, because they are all part of the human experience, and there is something absolutely refreshing about him not being afraid of criticism. His struggles as a writer, all the times he wanted to throw in the towel or quit, and all his flops humanize the man that so many jokingly refer to as “God,” and there is something so humbling about an artist still choosing to push forward and put out works that defy the musical theatre genre, despite so many people saying not to for so long. In the end, Sondheim has become iconic for his sound, and without him pushing the boundaries, who knows where our art form would be.

## CHAPTER FOUR: GOD IS IN THE DETAILS

One thing that was very important to me was honoring some of the wit and attention to detail Sondheim put into all his lyrics. The first step was to narrow down a list of songs that would be included in *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*, which turned out to be a lot harder than anticipated. Originally, I had planned out a few additional parodies that did not make it to the final product in favor of time, such as a parody of “Sunday” from *Sunday in the Park with George*, “Johanna” from *Sweeney Todd the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, and “Everybody’s Got the Right” from *Assassins*.

Though these original draft ideas were in various stages of being complete, we had to cut a lot due to timing and pacing issues that were bogging down our script. Apart from “Parody Tonight” and “Being Alive,” no song of Sondheim’s was parodied in complete, but rather was featured in small segments that lasted anywhere from ten seconds to a minute long in length. This allowed us at times to fit multiple songs from a show into a musical’s segment, especially if it was important for thematic purposes, and also gave our script room to breathe in terms of pacing, as we were aware there would be applause and laughter with which to contend.

### The Parodied Songs

Though Sondheim’s work is widely discussed, one receives a whole new appreciation for his form when having to recreate lyrics that fit his music. Based on the final draft, we worked with fifteen of his songs and parodied the following:

1. “Comedy Tonight” – *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*: This song became “Parody Tonight” in which our troupe descends on the tropes that typically are

utilized in Sondheim shows and how we made them funny. "Comedy Tonight" went through three stages of alternate song melodies and lyrics before Sondheim finally landed on the right tone, and we felt it encompassed the spirit of our show.

LAUREL  
... And the question is?  
(*"PARODY TONIGHT CONTINUES"*)  
**SOMETHING WITH PIE STORES  
SOMETHING WITH GANG WARS  
SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE:  
A PARODY TONIGHT!**

BRYAN  
(*Pulling out a "Sunday in the Park with George" Playbill*)  
**SOMETHING WITH PAINTING**

LEXI  
(*Pulling out a "Passion" Playbill*)  
**SICK WOMEN FAINTING**

JARRETT  
**SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE:**

LEXI & JARRETT  
**A PARODY TONIGHT**

LAUREL  
**SOMETHING THAT'S HIGH  
TO SHOW OFF MY BELT**

LEXI  
**I'LL TAKE WHATEVER SHIT ROLES I'M DEALT.**

BRYAN  
**SOME EDUCATION**

JARRETT  
**NEW PRESENTATION**

ALL  
**ALL SHOWS ARE HEADY AND CONTRITE**

Figure 7: Additional lyrics for "Parody Tonight" from *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim* [abridged]

2. “America” – *West Side Story*: Though it was only a small snippet of “America,” we changed it to “Orpheum” in which our Mama Rose type character sang to her daughters about the wonders of the Orpheum Circuit, paying homage to both *Gypsy* and *West Side Story* by combining Mama Rose’s obsession with playing the Orpheum circuit, as well as the back and forth between the Shark girls over whether America is good or bad. In this instance, it is Mama Anita-Rose singing to her daughters Baby June-ardo and Louisa about the joys of working the Orpheum circuit, while her daughters retort back.

JARRETT (Baby Junardo)  
Yes mother!

LEXI (Anita-Rose)  
How else are we ever going to get on the Orpheum Circuit?

JARRETT (Baby Junardo)  
What’s so special about the Orpheum Circuit?

LEXI (Anita-Rose)  
I’m glad you asked:  
*(To the tune of “America” from West Side Story.)*  
**I’D LIKE THE CIRCUIT THAT’S ORPHEUM!  
KNEES OF THE BEES ON THE ORPHEUM!  
GLAMOUR AND GLITZ ON THE ORPHEUM!**

JARRETT (Baby Junardo)  
**WON’T SHOW MY TITS ON THE ORPHEUM.**

Figure 8: Segment from "West Side Gypsy of the Best of All Possible Worlds" in *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*

3. “Broadway Baby” – *Follies*: “Broadway Baby,” a number sung by an aged character actress, became “Broadway Shamey,” our first song to comment directly on a Sondheim show rather than parodying the lyrics. In the song, references are made to *Follies* being a critical failure, as well as often being deemed one of Sondheim’s more criticized

depictions of women. Despite *Follies* having a large following and the ability to be revived relatively frequently, it still remains one of his most divisive pieces for many theatregoers.

JARRETT  
IT'S A BROADWAY SHAMEY!  
A SHOW THAT REALLY CAN'T TELL WHEN  
THE WOMEN SHOULD JUST LEAVE THE MEN  
AND BE ON THEIR OWN, OH...  
BROADWAY SHAMEY  
FOLLIES DIDN'T DO SO WELL  
AUDIENCES ALL CAN TELL  
THEY DON'T LIKE THE FLOW... OH!  
FLAT.  
THE SHOW FELL FLAT.  
THE BOOK WAS FAT...  
BUT LACKED SOMETHING MORE.  
STILL,  
THEY PLAY IT TILL  
THE CRITICS WILL  
NOT THINK IT'S A BORE!  
SOMEDAY, MAYBE,  
IF STEPHEN WORKS IT LONG ENOUGH,  
AUDIENCES WON'T BE GRUFF!  
REVIVE IT WITH AN OLD STAR  
HOPE THE PUBLIC KNOWS WHO THEY ARE  
IN YOUR GREAT, BIG  
BROADWAY FLOP!

Figure 9: Lyrics from "Broadway Shamey" in *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*

4. "A Weekend in the Country" – *A Little Night Music*: This song became aptly known as "It's A Little Night Music," to which our ensemble sings about the contrite plot that is sometimes difficult for a general audience to follow. We also wanted to comment on the four sets of lovers being in love-triangles, thus giving reason for the score being in 3/4 time.

**IT'S A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC**  
*(a la "A Weekend in the Country"*  
*from A Little Night Music)*

**JARRETT**  
**IT'S A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC**

**BRYAN**  
**LOTS OF WALTZING**

**LEXI**  
**PLUS A SOAP OPERA PLOT**

**JARRETT**  
**A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC**  
**ONE PART HEADY**

**LAUREL**  
**ONE PART ROT**

**BRYAN**  
**A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC**  
**INGMAR BERGMAN**

**LEXI**  
**ROLLING ROUND IN HIS GRAVE**

**LAUREL**  
**A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC**

**JARRETT**  
**IT'S LIKE DIET FLAVA FLAV**

Figure 10: Lyrics from "It's a Little Night Music" in *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*

5. "Prologue" – *Into the Woods*: In *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*, I knew I wanted to reference Sondheim's struggle as he sought validation from his collaborations with James Lapine from critics, but, more importantly, their ambition to finally earn a Tony Award for Best Musical. I thought the perfect way to encompass that was to set the sequence to "Prologue" from *Into the Woods*, as a Narrator describes their

three collaborations (*Sunday in the Park with George*, *Into the Woods*, and *Passion*) as characters from each show yearn for the coveted award. Re-writing lyrics for “Prologue” proved to be quite a challenge, as the 12/8-time signature was unforgiving. It was imperative to me to match up both rhythmic values and syllabic stresses in order to create the parody effectively for this sequence. Below is a small snippet of “The Lapine Prologue,” a side-by-side with the original lyrics of *Into the Woods* to highlight the attention to detail put into this section’s rhythmic intricacies.

JARRETT Once upon a time...	Narrator Once upon a time—
<b>INTO THE WOODS STING</b>	(Music, sharp and steady. Light on Cinderella)
LAUREL (As Cinderella) I wish...	Cinderella (singing to us): I WISH
JARRETT In the 80's...	Narrator: --in a far-off kingdom--
LAUREL More than anything...	Cinderella: MORE THAN ANYTHING
JARRETT There were three musicals	Narrator: --lived a young maiden--
LAUREL More than life!	Cinderella: MORE THAN LIFE
JARRETT Sunday in the Park With George	Narrator: --a sad young lad--
LAUREL More than jewels	Cinderella: MORE THAN JEWELS
BRYAN (As George) I paint	Jack: (to us) I WISH
JARRETT And finally, Passion.	Narrator: --and a childless Baker--
BRYAN See a hat!	Jack: MORE THAN LIFE
LEXI (As Fosca) I read	Cinderella, Baker: I WISH
JARRETT All wanting to win...	Narrator: --with his wife.
BRYAN Finishing the hat!	Jack: MORE THAN ANYTHING
ALL More than the moon	Cinderella, Baker, Jack: MORE THAN THE MOON
LEXI To live!	Baker's Wife: I WISH

Figure 11: Comparison of rhythmic structure between parody lyrics of "The Lapine Prologue" from *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]* and the original "Prologue" from *Into the Woods*

6. “Ever After” – *Into the Woods*: We wanted a nice way to tie up the Sondheim/Lapine collaborations, and neither *Passion* nor *Sunday in the Park with George* offered a catchy enough tune that was able to wrap up the segment. The point we wanted to drive across to the audience was that, in the end, it did not matter that *Sunday in the Park with George* won the Pulitzer Prize, or that *Passion* had success at the Tony Awards, because ultimately, *Into the Woods* is the show that is produced most often and has the largest fan-base.

**ALL  
IN LICENSING!  
INTO THE WOODS WILL RUN AGAIN  
IT HAS TO EVERY NOW AND THEN  
INTO THE WOODS WILL PLAY AGAIN  
TO MAKE ANOTHER MILLION  
INTO THE WOODS MAKE LOTS OF BUCKS  
AS EVERY TIME IT GETS REDUX**

Figure 12: Parody lyrics of "Ever After" from *Into the Woods* in *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim* [abridged]

7. “The Best Thing That Has Ever Happened” – *Road Show*: Since this was a shorter segment and we didn’t necessarily feel like explaining all of the different nuances between the rewrites *Road Show* underwent from its first incarnation as *Wise Guys* or its secondary transformation as *Bounce*, we decided instead to make commentary on one of the only songs from this show that modern audiences had heard of and turned it into “The Best God Damn Song in the Whole Show.”

JARRETT  
**THIS IS THE BEST GOD-DAMN SONG IN THIS WHOLE MESSY SCORE  
THIS ONE  
THE ONLY MEM'RABLE SONG IN THIS WHOLE MESSY SCORE  
THIS ONE**

**THEY SAY HE'LL WORK ON IT  
WE NEVER BOUGHT IT  
IT DIDN'T WORK OUT AS WISE GUYS OR BOUNCE  
EVEN AN OUNCE...**

Figure 13: Lyrics from "The Best God Damn Song in the Whole Show" in *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*

8. "Being Alive" – *Company*: For one of the emotional catharses of the show, I wanted to have one of my actresses sing "Being Alive" but altered it to "Being Sondheim," a riff on the fact that we continue to do his work not because they are always commercially successful, but because we respect the art he makes and can relate to his characters which seem much more down to Earth than some of the characters in the musical theatre canon. Laurel sings this late in the show as we reference early in the *Company* section that we stopped in favor of doing the plot in a non-linear fashion to mimic the structure of the original show.

**CALL HIM A HACK.  
A PRETENTIOUS DICK!  
GIVE HIM SOME SLACK!  
DON'T JUDGE SO QUICK.**

**BUT SOUND RHYMES,  
ARE SOUND RHYMES,  
NOT SONDHEIM'S!**

Figure 14: Lyrics from "Being Sondheim" in *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*

9. “Attend the Tale of Sweeney Todd I” – *Sweeney Todd the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*:

The series of these were a bit trickier, as we wanted to maintain the fact it is a plot development song while still maintaining a sense of comedy throughout. Eventually, we landed on the correct parody lyrics for the first section to help set the scene.

*(STEAM WHISTLE BLOWS)*

LEXI AND LAUREL

**ATTEND THE TALE OF SWEENEY TODD  
THE SHOW IS DARK AND ITS MORAL ODD  
YET THEATRES LIKE TO DO IT A LOT  
‘CUZ OLD PATRONS LOVE A WELL-SCORED BLOODY PLOT.  
IT TRODS A PATH THAT FEW WILL TROD  
DOES SWEENEY TODD  
THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET**

Figure 15: Lyrics from "Attend the Tale I" in *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*

10. “Worst Pies in London” – *Sweeney Todd the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*: Since

*Sweeney* was our longest section, one of the big challenges we had was getting major plot points across without doing every song. Since a majority of the songs in the first part of the show are exposition, I had the idea of combining plot elements from “Worst Pies in London” with “Poor Thing” to get across to our audience both the fact that Mrs. Lovett is a down on her luck, lonely widow, and set up the fact she’s aware of what happened to Sweeney’s wife and daughter.

JARRETT  
**THESE ARE PROBABLY THE WORST LIES IN LONDON.  
I KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO THAT WOMAN  
AND DAUGHTER  
SHE'S GOT A  
NEW FATHER!  
THE WORST LIES IN LONDON  
AND THE MOTHER'S DEAD!  
THE WORST LIES IN LONDON  
WOULD YOU LIKE TO GET SOME HEAD?**

Figure 16: Lyrics from "The Worst Lies in London" in *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*

11. "My Friends" – *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*: For this next song, we wanted to take a moment to comment on what we thought is largely a ridiculous moment in the original script. We decided to allow this moment to be a prop-gag heavy song and break the fourth wall to allow Sweeney to sing to razors, but with a twist: they would all appear with the faces of Stephen Sondheim's frequent collaborators: Mandy Patinkin, Patti LuPone, Elaine Stritch, Donna Murphy, and Bernadette Peters.

BRYAN  
**THESE ARE MY FRIENDS  
MANDY AND PATTI  
ELAINE AND DONNA AND BERNADETTE PETERS  
MY FRIENDS!  
MY ONLY FRIENDS!**

Figure 17: Lyrics from "My Friends" in *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*

12. “A Little Priest” – *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*: I’ve always loved “A Little Priest,” even well before I knew some of the obvious innuendos that are played during the song such as:

*SWEENEY: I prefer general.*

*LOVETT: With, or without his privates? “With” is extra. (Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street, 110)*

I knew I wanted to do something relating to puns and how gratifying some of the pay offs were, especially in a moment of the show which came after such a cathartic moment in Sweeney’s arc (“Epiphany”). While this is one of the shorter segments, I wanted to honor both the silly nature of making puns about murdering and eating individuals, as well as the clear double-entendres and sexual references Mrs. Lovett makes in this moment of levity.

BRYAN  
Can we sing a song where we make jokes about what people taste like with lots of puns?

JARRETT  
...Yes.  
**IT’S PUNS  
HAVE A COUPLE PUNS!**

BRYAN  
**DO THEY MAKE YOU GROAN?**

JARRETT  
**GROAN AND GIVE YOU THE RUNS.  
AND WE GOT ENOUGH PENIS JOKES TO GO ‘ROUND  
EASY FOR THE POUND!**  
*(Mrs. Lovett begins cracking up, she thinks she is hysterical.)*  
Do you-Do you see what I did there? Like POUND as in the British pound? We’ll be making money?!?! But also pound as in SEX. SEE?

Figure 18: Lyrics from "A Little Pun" in *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*

13. “Attend the Tale of Sweeney Todd II” – *Sweeney Todd the Demon Barber of Fleet*

*Street:* As we were already short on time, I needed a way to fast forward the time and reveal several plot points at once to get to the emotional climax of the show. I liked the way the ensemble of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* came forth as a driving plot element in the show and felt it was a good device to use for this parody. Since we didn’t have an ensemble, however, I utilized our cast of characters in the first person to help relay the message.

JARRETT (Mrs. Lovett)  
**THE MEAT WAS GOOD, MY BUSINESS SOARED.**

LAUREL (Anthony)  
**I MADE A PLAN AND I STOLE THE WARD**

LEXI (Judge/Beadle)  
**(As Judge:) AND AS FOR ME, I CAME AROUND**  
**(As Beadle:) AFTER ALL SWEENEY TODD’S THE BEST BARBER IN TOWN**

LAUREL  
**AND TOBY GOT TO EAT A PIE**  
**IS THAT AN EYE?**  
**WELL THAT’S WHAT YOU GET EATING STREET MEAT.**

Figure 19: Lyrics from "Attend the Tale II" in *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*

14. “Attend the Tale of Sweeney Todd III” – *Sweeney Todd the Demon Barber of Fleet*

*Street:* The finale was something I really wanted to focus on, as I wanted to drive home the point that *Sweeney Todd* is perhaps one of the most well-known of his shows and is such a stark contrast to the typical thematic elements and motifs with which Sondheim is usually associated. Despite it being one of the darkest musicals ever to play Broadway, it

still has gone on to receive multiple revivals, a movie adaptation, and countless concert versions due to its faithful fan base.

LAUREL (Toby)  
**WELL NOW YOU KNOW THE TALE WE TOLD  
IT'S KINDA DARK, BUT IT'S OVERSOLD  
IT MIGHT NOT BE A BIG SUCCESS  
BUT EMO KIDS LOVE IT AND GOTH KIDS OBSESS  
OVER THIS SHOW  
AND NOW YOU KNOW  
THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET!!!**

Figure 20: Lyrics from "Attend the Tale III" in *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*

15. "Someone in a Tree" – For our final number, we circled back around to what Sondheim self-described as his favorite song he ever wrote (*Anatomy of A Song*, Paley) to really drive home why we did this. As Sondheim has said, "God is in the details" (*The Hatbox Collection*) and we really wanted to drive home that despite the past hour of lampooning the man and his works, we did it only because of the extreme reverence we have for his works.

ALL  
**IT'S THE LYRIC NOT THE SONG  
IT'S THE GESTURE NOT THE MOVE  
IT'S THE MOMENTS IN THE WOODS THAT ARE HAPPENING  
NOT THE RHYTHM BUT THE BEAT  
NOT THE MEASURE BUT THE LINE  
ONLY NOTES AND WORDS AND THEATRE NERDS  
AND SOMEONE IN A TREE**

Figure 21: Parody lyrics of "Someone in a Tree" from *Pacific Overtures* in *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*

## CHAPTER FIVE: THERE'S NOT ENOUGH TIME

A while before we started truly plotting out *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*, Bryan and I kept a long note on our iPhone that was a collection of jokes, parody lyrics, and concepts that might be funny in a show of this caliber. One of our biggest questions, however, was where we would produce this show, what it would look like, and all its possibility. Originally, we thought that writing it together would be easy, but as many collaborators find out, a multitude of different interpretations or ideas can get in the way of harmonious communication and that differing opinions can turn to chaos in seconds flat. Throughout the writing process, I kept a journal that would help me keep track of the different shapes our show took over time that would also help me reflect on the writing process.

### The Writing and Rehearsing Journals

August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019

First day of brainstorming! Bryan and I sat down and discussed what needed to be included. We compiled a list of the concepts we had been throwing around for a while (The Lapine Collaboration Trio, *Anyone Can Whistle*'s audience participation, etc.) and began to cycle through what was usable and what was not. We came to a consensus that we would stick solely with his musicals and not focus on his work as a composer for things like *Dick Tracy* or *Kukla, Fran and Ollie*. I don't think audiences know much about them to begin with, and I'd rather stick with his musical theatre canon.

Still, there's a lot to be discussed. When we apply for a Fringe slot in October, will we request sixty minutes or ninety minutes? I thought it would be more impressive to cover all his

works in sixty minutes. The shows we are including are as follows: *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *West Side Story*, *Gypsy*, *Candide*, *Anyone Can Whistle*, *Do I Hear a Waltz*, *Company*, *The Frogs*, *Follies*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, *Pacific Overtures*, *A Little Night Music*, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Into the Woods*, *Passion*, *Assassins*, and *Road Show*. It gives a good smattering of things that are both well-known and the obscure musicals of his.

I'm not sure what order these should be in yet and am struggling with whether to make the piece chronological or fluid in its composure. I also am not sure the length of each show we represent and how we'll fit all eighteen into sixty minutes, on top of any introduction or closure we have. Still, all things considered, this brainstorming session was enlightening!

August 19th, 2019

Prior to leaving for our California vacation, Bryan and I sat down to start outlining the show and figuring out the order of the musicals. We decided on starting with Sondheim's first shows and working our way through his career in the order in which the shows were created. This should give a better clarity to the way in which Sondheim evolved as an artist.

One thing we determined was how many performers would be involved. Part of the humor in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare [abridged]* is the fact that three men inhabit every single Shakespeare character presented, but we felt that some of the music might be a challenge without female vocal parts. We landed on placing two males and two females within the confines of the show, with some of the humor deriving from gender-swapping antics still. When I directed *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare [abridged]* back in 2009, I did

have a woman join the cast, but made sure that the gender-swapped gags (specifically in the *Romeo and Juliet* section) were still present. One of the critic's responses was that they were pleased to see a woman join the ranks in a typically all male show, but that it was smart to continue to allow the gender-swapped gags to remain, as that is where a lot of the humor originates. I assumed this fact would still hold true for modern audiences, especially in a completely new work that is instead replicating the formula of that show, rather than directly copying it.

With Bryan and I already slotted as the male roles in the cast, we had to decide who we wanted to join as our counterparts. Having worked with Lexi Nieto and Laurel Hatfield on one of our previous productions, *Mean Gays*, it was an obvious choice to request them. It is our hope that by knowing them personally, we can write in their styles of comedy that represents them the best.

August 24th, 2019

We used some free time during our trip to continue outlining and workshopping our script. Bryan began writing down some of the jokes we've been tossing back and forth and incorporated them into the outline. Though at first, I resisted muddying the outline with material that will end up in the script, I admitted that it did help to lock down what the script will feel like in the finished show.

We also decided on a trio of montage sequences in order to quickly move through some of the more well-known shows. One is for all of his lyric shows (*West Side Story*, *Gypsy*, and *Candide*), one for his James Lapine collaborations (*Sunday in the Park with George*, *Into the*

*Woods*, and *Passion*), and one more towards the end of the show as the actors try and rap up (tentatively *Anyone Can Whistle*, *Do I Hear a Waltz*, *Assassins*, and potentially *Merrily We Roll Along*). This will not only help break up the monotony of one show after another but will hopefully help bring connections between the shows to the surface and help the audience see Sondheim's guiding hand over the course of the shows presented back to back.

We also started outlining each performer's emotional journey through the show: Bryan wants to keep giving further and further detail about Sondheim; Jarrett wants to just try and get through all of the shows; Laurel wants a star making moment; and Lexi is just trying to keep everyone happy. We put a couple of benchmarks in the outline of how these objectives interact with one another and come into conflict, and how they snake their ways through each show.

September 1st, 2019

Today we finished outlining the entire show. As is, the outline felt longer than a sixty-minute show, and we already agreed to cut back certain sections. As is, the *West Side Story*/*Gypsy*/*Candide* montage will be cut down, as will *Company* and *Follies*. We determined *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* will be our longest and most thorough segment, a la the *Hamlet* section of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare [abridged]*. We then went about making sure each section will be shorter than that.

From here, we decided to begin at the beginning of the show and work our way through turning the outline into a first draft of a script. We wrote an introduction that seemed fast-paced in nature. I wanted audiences to know what they were in for, and I knew that the first five minutes of a show can make or break an audience's opinions on the performance, so I wanted to

make sure it was funny. We decided to try working separately on sections and then come together to edit and finalize before putting it into the draft.

September 5th, 2019

I completed the first draft of the opening and presented it to Bryan. It is a large sequence where we not only introduce the four actors (and set up all of their conflicts), but we also set up the conceit of the show (every Sondheim show, sixty minutes, etc.) and parody “Comedy Tonight” from *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* in our song with re-written lyrics called “Parody Tonight.” Bryan liked the overall structure of the sequence but felt the comedy could be punched up and the timing tightened. He said we needed to start the show with a bang comedically to get the audience invested and along for the ride. We decided to let him work on a rewrite for our next meeting.

He presented a first draft of (what we’re referring to as) the Lapine Montage. Using the structure of the “Prologue” from *Into the Woods*, the Montage follows each show (*Sunday in the Park with George*, *Into the Woods*, and *Passion*) as they journey to win the Tony Award for Best Musical. While I liked the concept of his idea, I felt the parodied lyrics he wrote were too jarring to the ears, as none of them matched with the music that Sondheim wrote. I made it a point to sit down and re-write the lyrics to “Prologue,” paying specific attention to the rhythmic intervals and how they matched with syllabic units in each lyric. Eventually, we combined humor from his source scene with my attention to detail with music and landed on what we hope will be close to a finished product. We also included dialogue from Jerry Herman’s and Andrew Lloyd Webber’s speeches at the Tony Awards to further the connection to real-life historical events.

Moving forward, we decided to be cognizant of just how obscure our jokes came across at times. Bryan brought up *[title of show]* (music and lyrics by Jeff Bowen, book by Hunter Bell) as an example of a show with a lot of insider references that still manages to be funny to an outsider, but I brought up that *[title of show]* ultimately did not run long or have a healthy life outside its original run. I agreed there could be some obscure references throughout that would appeal to the savvy theatre-goer, but ultimately the show had to stand on its own, even if someone walking in had absolutely no knowledge of Stephen Sondheim or his works. In that vein, I added a joke about Jason Robert Brown's response to *Passion* that elicited a big laugh from the both of us. Though Bryan brought up that people might not know who Jason Robert Brown is compared to Sondheim, we determined that the punch line isn't reliant on the audience knowing who he is.

Next week, we'll meet back with Bryan's revised opening and (hopefully) a few more original sequences.

September 10th, 2019

We read through Bryan's finished rewrite of the opening with our friend Gabriella Juliet. Although we wrote the script with two specific people in mind, it is important to me to get as much feedback and editing done before presenting it to them so that the script was as polished as possible. The updated scene hit the ground running. Again, there were a couple of lyrics that didn't quite fit in the structure of "Comedy Tonight," but we took note of them and plan to fix them later. There is no use getting stuck on one section now when there is still so much more to write.



Figure 22: Gabriella Juliet sitting at a piano working through "Parody Tonight"

September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019

After the reading, we changed a lot of the lyrics and added in whole new segments. Originally, the entirety of “Parody Tonight” was to be sung by our diva-type character we were writing for Laurel, but I felt like it didn’t allow for the other three characters to be present in the moment. I felt like she needed to potentially join in half-way, almost as a saving grace for the three of us already struggling with the concept of presenting all of Sondheim’s shows in sixty minutes or less. I altered around some of the dialogue to allow the entrance of that character and fixed the plot-hole we originally created by having her enter with little to no explanation as to who she was or what she was doing.

I began to work on a *Follies* sequence. We like the idea of gender-bending this section to comment on a recent trend in Sondheim shows of gender-bending characters, like Rosalie Craig playing “Bobbie” in the 2018 London revival of *Company*, Titus Burgess playing “The Witch” in a 2015 Miami production of *Into the Woods*, and Stacie Bono who played both “The Beggar

Woman” and “Pirelli” in the Off-Broadway Barrow Street Theatre production I saw of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* in 2017. Still, I am not sure where exactly to go in terms of scripting for this section, nor what I will do for the parody song. At this point, we are trying to be able to fit at least one song, or a section from each song, into each musical’s segment. This might mean we have to go back to our Lapine trio as well and incorporate some music from *Sunday in the Park with George*, as only *Into the Woods* was highlighted using “Prologue,” and *Passion* with “I Read.”

I am having trouble working separately, as I feel like our tones are not melding well. I have more success when we are working on segments together, but Bryan has trouble with that process, so for now I am fine writing separately. However, there are a few segments I am hoping we can work on together in the future. He has composed a section for *A Little Night Music*, which is honestly one of the Sondheim shows I am least familiar with. It includes music from “A Weekend in the Country” and a parody of “Send in the Clowns,” but I fear it might be too long.

One of my biggest goals is to get the show fully written so we can get a ballpark time figure. We’ve been discussing submitting it to The Orlando International Fringe Festival, and in my experience, the shows that fit within the sixty minute time slots are more apt to get patrons, as the seventy-five minute and ninety minute time slots often fall at odd times. I know this from previous experience working on *Jaws: The Movie: The Musical*, so I really think that sixty-minutes is the way to go. This means, however, that the show should probably only be a tight fifty-five minutes to account for any faux-pas or laughter that adds time to our performance. I’m hoping by the end of October we can have a finalized draft and do a full reading in November, either with our cast, or with others to give feedback.

September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019

*How I Became a Pirate* at The REP just opened, and while I wish I had more time during tech to write, we still were able to accomplish a lot. We worked on segments of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* together, we wanted this to be our longest segment, so we had to pick and choose which segments to include. I wrote parodies of “Attend the Tale of Sweeney Todd,” “Alms, Alms,” “The Worst Pies in London,” “My Friends,” “Johanna,” and “Not While I’m Around” while Bryan wrote some of the scene work revolving around Pirelli and the reveal of him as Sweeney’s former floor sweep. I’ve written a lot of the scene work revolving around this show but feel that it might still be too long. I am trying to figure out a proper way to convey the information while tightening up this segment so that it does not drag for too long.

October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019

I reworked our *Sweeney Todd* section and cut a lot of the second act in favor of time. Although we wanted to replicate how *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare [abridged]* handled *Hamlet*, we still needed to be more conscious of how long our show was becoming. I cut the parody songs I had written for “Johanna” and “Not While I’m Around” and instead wrote a second chorus of “Attend the Tale of Sweeney Todd” that would serve as a device to convey plot-elements that occurred in the second act to fast forward to the climax of the show where Sweeney begins to kill The Beadle, The Beggar Woman, Judge Turpin, and Mrs. Lovett. I thought this tightened up the show a lot more and added to the fast-paced nature.

With our draft almost complete, we decided to enter the lottery for the Orlando International Fringe Festival. We won't know whether we get in until December, but the registration fee is cheaper the earlier you enter, so I wanted to get it done sooner rather than later.

We are a little behind on our writing schedule. I was hoping we'd have fleshed out the transitions a bit more by now. I finished *Follies* and made it a short segment drawing attention to some of the criticisms of his works and landed on a parody of "Broadway Baby" entitled "Broadway Shamey" which explores the inherent problem of Sondheim shows not being received well by critics and often times being called sexist. My hope and goal is to finish the script by the end of October, but days are short and collaboration is difficult at times.

October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019

The show is complete, sans some minor inconsistencies we are hoping to clear up. I want to re-address the dialogue in *Sweeney* and make it tighter, as well as clear up the ending. There's no real catharsis for our characters when they achieve their goal, and I am wondering if we can incorporate them somewhere in the dialogue during "Someone in a Tree" at the end. The show needs to have something to build to, or at least reference... then again, maybe not. Maybe the simplistic ending that does slow the pace and allows the work to speak for itself is just how Sondheim would want it to be.

Right now, the show is sitting at sixty-eight pages long, and while that does account for a lot of stage directions, I am still worried that we have written too much for the time-limit we are shooting for and will have to do major edits.

November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019

Bryan and I sat in a Panera and read our complete script together, including playing music from original Broadway cast recordings for a ballpark estimate of our music's effect on timing. We clocked in at 58:47, which is a little too close to the sixty-minute mark, despite us trying to read slowly to account for any pacing issues. We've determined to shorten up the following sections:

- The opening exposition of the show and Laurel's entrance
- Some of the dialogue in "West Side Gypsy of the Best of All Possible Worlds"
- Some of the dialogue in The Lapine Collaborations Trio
- Cut down some of the *Road Show* section
- Cut some dialogue from *Sweeney Todd* as well as the second verse of "My Friends"

We are hoping that by doing this, we will be able to get our script down to a tight fifty-five minutes, which will allow us roughly four-minutes for audience laughter, as well as any time that might be added by improv, stalled moments for quick changes, and participatory segments that might last longer than intended. We won't know whether or not our show has been selected for Fringe until December, but I am hoping that we can get this work done preemptively so that it won't be as stressful of a factor when we begin rehearsing. Both Lexi and Laurel have confirmed their interest in participating, so as long as schedules work out, our show is set!

November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019

We did some tweaking and edits after our first full read-through and did a second reading; this time we clocked in at 55:50, which still isn't my ideal time, but close enough at this

point. We're very happy with where the show is, so the next steps really are to find out if we will be able to present at Fringe! We submitted for the venue to be the black-box theatre at the Orlando Repertory Theatre, since we're both very familiar with the space and likely will be rehearsing there anyways if we are working on a show or teaching at the time. I'm excited the hard part of writing is finally over, mostly, and now the true fun can begin!

December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019

We were accepted to Fringe! My submission was not selected, but Bryan's was, and therefore we are slated to perform this May! Our cast includes me, Bryan, Laurel Hatfield, and Lexi Nieto. We're hoping to get Tara Kromer on board as well to direct, but this is a very exciting time for our show! Now, to start the hard part of rehearsing, memorizing, producing, and finding props and costumes for this monster we have created!

## CHAPTER SIX: THE TALE YOU TELL

After the completion of writing *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*, I went through many trials and tribulations. At first, I didn't have a slot to perform it at the Orlando Fringe and decided to take a trip to Asia that was offered to me, which had originally conflicted. Then, a month later, things changed, and I suddenly was faced with the ability to produce it again, causing me to reconsider and alter all my travel plans. After that, some of my cast possibly had to change due to major scheduling difficulties, but now it has worked itself out, and I am still wondering how all this came together.

There are many times along the way when I wanted to quit, and equally as many times I considered all this hardship to be somehow deserved. It never occurred to me though that I, in some small way, was also facing the same hardships and uncertainty Sondheim had in his early career. Reflecting upon it now, if I had thrown in the towel to write mystery novels like he wanted to, I too could be throwing out something important; perhaps nothing that will be important to others in the grand scheme of things, but something that was important to me. A new possibility. It is just like George says in *Sunday in the Park with George* (Sondheim, 174):

*“White. A blank page or canvas. His favorite. So many possibilities...”*

### The Future of the Show

*The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]* was set to premiere at the Orlando International Fringe Festival in May 2020, but due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the festival was cancelled. Despite that, we still had prepared marketing materials and a decent social

media following. We are hoping that we will be selected again next year to premiere at the 2021 festival but are also looking at possibility of a Fringe circuit tour in the U.S.A. once the pandemic ends. We had just designed a logo for our premiere which was crafted using a compilation of letters from different Sondheim show logos (*Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, *Company*, *A Little Night Music*, *Into the Woods*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Follies*, *Assassins*, and *Merrily We Roll Along*).



Figure 23: Logo for *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]* premiering at the Orlando International Fringe Festival in May 2020

### The Takeaway

Sondheim wrote it best when he said, “Art isn’t easy,” and that was certainly true for this process. This was my first real dabble in writing for the stage and my first time collaborating with someone on a project of this caliber. Along the way I had many snags, setbacks, and unforeseen circumstances that made this process both incredibly rewarding and incredibly stressful. There are several things I did that helped make the process smoother, and a number of

things I wish I had known from the get-go that would have taken a lot of the pain and guess-work out of the process in writing a parody musical:

1. Choose a subject you love:

- I chose Stephen Sondheim because he was a composer I already was very familiar with. This foundation of knowledge allowed for the concepts and dialogue to come naturally rather than having to force research on a topic I didn't know about.
- Sondheim's music has been in my repertoire for years, and having done several Sondheim shows, I was familiar with how he structures his songs. This made it challenging and fun to rewrite his lyrics and all the more rewarding to finally figure out when I got the right number of syllables in a line or found the perfect rhyme.

2. Research everything you can:

- Know the topic you are writing about by reading their works. If it is a musical, listen to everything they've composed, even if you don't plan on using it. The more information you have to back your ideas, the more confident you will feel going into the process.
- If your show is a parody, make sure you know what defines a parody. A lot of people have asked how a show like this could be written, and by knowing my rights as a parody artist, I have been able to combat any questions that arise.

3. Plan for the worst, hope for the best:

- Structure your show first before even beginning to write dialogue. Know where you're beginning and ending and allow the rest to fill in naturally.
  - Set a writing schedule and goal for yourself. Try to adhere to it, even when life gets chaotic. Make deadlines earlier than you want them, that way if things get in the way, you will have a cushion to fall back on.
4. Know when to collaborate... and when not to:
- Understand that you and your partner both have strengths and weaknesses and allow that to bolster your work. If there is a section you are struggling with, ask for them to look at it. Likewise, if there is a section of theirs that you don't agree with or think could be embellished, don't be afraid to make the suggestion to them that might fix it.
  - Allow your ideas to meld together. Allow your ideas to morph. Allow your ideas to be dropped. When writing with a partner, realize it is not only your artistic vision which is hoping to be achieved. Be open and willing to try new ideas, but also know when to put your foot down about certain things.
  - Communication is key with a collaborator. The more you talk, the more you will understand where one another is coming from. Many setbacks could have been avoided if we had clearly and concisely discussed why we had written something the way we did.
  - Clearly define who is working on what section and when. Certain jokes and set-ups were referenced at multiple intervals in *The Complete Works of Stephen*

*Sondheim [abridged]* and it was imperative to know when each segment was complete in order to reference and keep consistency in tone.

5. Understand the confines of your show:

- Decide early on the demands of the characters you are writing and make them consistent. If you are writing with someone specific in mind, don't make the character so incredibly niche that you shoot yourself in the foot if they suddenly can't participate.
- Be aware of the time constraints and pacing of your show and understand that cutting may have to occur for the good of the show.
- If your piece does require your actors to change in and out of characters like *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*, consider the amount of time they might need when crafting your dialogue to save you hardship in the long run.
- Never underestimate the art of a sight or prop gag and what that can convey; it is sometimes funnier than any multitude of monologues you could ever write.

6. Write, write, write:

- Even if it's not a fully formed concept or you think it might not work, write it down anyway. If I hadn't done that for some of my thoughts, my script would have never come together.
- Write more than you think you'll need and still be willing to let it all go, even if you think it works really well.

- If your collaborator has written something already and you have a differing opinion, write it down and see which one works better. Be prepared to give yours up if it does not, but be willing to make your case if it does.
- If you're stuck on one section, move on and write a different one. You can always come back to an idea later. If you focus all your time and energy on fixing one specific segment, you'll grow to resent the process.

7. Edit and format as you go:

- Pick a consistent formatting for your dialogue and stick to it. A lot of time would have been saved if I had consulted with my collaborator on picking a set style to construct the script.
- Be clear and concise, especially in stage directions. No one knows how you envision a scene looking unless you tell them.

8. Get feedback:

- Don't be afraid to share your work with loved ones or friends. Ask them what works and what doesn't. I sought feedback from people I knew were Sondheim aficionados as well as those I knew who weren't as familiar in order to see if the script worked well with general audiences as well.
- Be willing to adapt your work by workshopping segments first to see what does and does not stick.

9. Get word out:

- We were faced with a particularly difficult scenario facing a global pandemic that shut down all arts organizations and theme parks in central Florida. One way we

combated that was by keeping a strong social media presence, sharing original content and information relating to Stephen Sondheim and our show. One humor post we made in direct response to COVID-19 reached over 60,000 individuals, including Lea Salonga, a well-known Broadway actress. We are hoping this following will help us when we do get to finally premiere our show.

### Finale Ultimo

Sondheim wrote: “Anyone can whistle, that’s what they say... easy” (*Hatbox: Look I Made a Hat*, 129) I suppose anyone can write a parody too... easy. My concept isn’t new or groundbreaking; in fact, it’s absolutely formulaic. The subject matter doesn’t include original content, but rather a rehashed telling of something already so renowned and beloved by theatre patrons. So why did I do it? I suppose just because I could; just for the fun of it. I was just the first person to come up with the idea, that is all.

I wanted to write a love letter to a composer who has written so many love letters to other composers: the pastiches of his songs in *Follies*, the continuation of Oscar Hammerstein II’s message that “you’ve got to be carefully taught” in “Children Will Listen” from *Into the Woods*, and so much more. Sure, I did it in my own funny little way, but I hope it educates audiences about shows they’ve never given the time to, inspires them to dig deeper into his music, and above all else, encourages them to laugh, because Stephen Sondheim put it best in his 80th Birthday interview with Terry Gross: “I love the theater as much as music, and the whole idea of getting across to an audience and making them laugh, making them cry - just making them feel - is paramount to me.” (Gross, NPR Fresh Air)

## LIST OF HELPFUL RESEARCH SOURCES

Below are just a few of the literature and media sources I used to help construct *The Complete Works of Stephen Sondheim [abridged]*.

*Art Isn't Easy*: Intended for theatre artist and critics, this book is meant to serve as an analyzation of Sondheim's work in the musical theatre genre. It dives into the different Sondheim shows and discusses factual information about the original productions and how they were staged and received. This was an important tool in my research as it discusses original productions and includes photographs to help for the creation and staging of our parody.

*On Sondheim: An Opinionated Guide*: Much like the previous entry, this resource focuses much more on the author's interpretation of each individual musical. It has a great sense of self-importance at times, but offers yet another viewpoint of Sondheim's works, specifically show by show, and makes commentary on what worked versus what did not, which made his work successful or flop. It is intended for theatre artists, though not as scholarly as some of the other entries. It showcases a biased opinion on Sondheim's work and utilizes humor and point of view to enhance reader's interest, much like our point of view enhances and influenced our audience's interest.

*Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*: This focuses largely on the music of Sondheim, including its melodic and rhythmic structure, as well as the poetry in his lyrics. It discusses Sondheim's love for internal rhyme and other poetic elements that sets his work apart

from other contemporaries. It is intended for music or theatrical scholars, but I used it as a tool to ensure I understood the structure of Sondheim's music as I rewrote lyrics and some melodic structures to parody his work.

*Stephen Sondheim and the Reinvention of the American Musical:* This views Sondheim's work through a postmodern lens, stating that Sondheim was one of the theatrical artists who changed the landscape of musical theatre. It discusses in depth the three "eras" of Sondheim's work (his early works, his collaborations with Hal Prince, and the Lapine collaborations) and discusses the cultural importance each has made. This is intended for theatrical scholars and was the basis of the structure of our parody, using his "eras" as units to discover.

*Stephen Sondheim: A Life:* This informs about and celebrates the life of Stephen Sondheim. It discusses his formative years with Oscar Hammerstein II as a mentor all the way to his modern projects. This book is a wonderful biography about the man behind the music and intended for general audiences interested in the composer's life. I utilized this information for structuring my piece (Will it be chronological? In order of importance? Random?) as well as giving key facts that were needed in order to properly discuss Stephen Sondheim's life.

*The Art of Comedy: A Guide to Scriptwriting for TV, Radio, Film and Stage:* This tells its readership about the dos and do nots of comedy writing and the pitfalls some writers fall into. Although there is a lot of information not pertinent to my project when it comes to TV, Radio, and Film, there are some great tips on writing comedy for the stage that I could utilize. This book

was intended for writers who are seeking to open their mind to the different possibilities and genres when it comes to script writing. I used this for formatting and as a general reference guide when beginning to synthesize my ideas onto paper.

*Putting it Together:* This is a taped recording of a musical revue that utilizes Sondheim's compositions in a way that tells a very basic narrative. It was useful when connecting songs from different shows or genres together in our final performance. It was made for general audiences, fans of Sondheim's work, musical theatre lovers.

*Sondheim: The Birthday Concert:* This is a taped recording of Sondheim's birthday concert where many Broadway stars came together to sing in celebration of the composer. It was useful in helping select his most popular arrangements, as well as the possibility of mimicry of famous individuals known to work with him frequently (Bernadette Peters, Mandy Patinkin, Donna Murphy, etc.) It was made for general audiences, fans of Sondheim's work, musical theatre lovers.

*Hatbox: The Collected Lyrics of Stephen Sondheim:* This is a complete collection of all of Stephen Sondheim's lyrics across all mediums including stage, screen, and television. It also includes anecdotes from Sondheim himself about the creation of songs, lyrical structure, earlier drafts, and much more. It is a great coffee table set of books but also intended for an audience who wants a deeper well of knowledge when it comes to his lyrics.

## REFERENCES

- Gordon, Joanne. *Art Isn't Easy: The Achievement of Stephen Sondheim*. Southern Illinois University Press, 1991.
- Gross, Terry. "On Sondheim: The Musical-Theater Legend At 80." *NPR - Fresh Air*, 2010.
- Horowitz, Mark Eden. *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*. Scarecrow Press, 2010.
- McLaughlin, Robert L. *Stephen Sondheim and the Reinvention of the American Musical*. Univ Press of Mississippi, 2016.
- Mordden, Ethan. *On Sondheim: An Opinionated Guide*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Paley, Stephen. *Anatomy of a Song*. Youtube, CBS, 1976, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPmRiJNOVz0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPmRiJNOVz0).
- "Parody." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/parody>. Accessed 17 Jan. 2020.
- Putting it Together*. Dir. Don Roy King, performances by Carol Burnett, George Hearn, Ruthie Henshall, John Barrowman, and Bronson Pinchot. Image Entertainment, 2006.
- Rodgers, Richard, et al. *South Pacific*. Williamson Music Inc., 1949.
- Secrest, Meryle. *Stephen Sondheim: A Life*. First Vinatge Books Edition, 2011.
- Sondheim, Stephen. *Hat Box: The Collected Lyrics of Stephen Sondheim*. Alfred a Knopf, 2011.
- Sondheim, Stephen, et al. *Sondheim on Sondheim*, PS Classics, 2010.
- Sondheim, Stephen, and James Lapine. *Into the Woods*. Theatre Communications Group, 1991.
- Sondheim, Stephen, and James Lapine. *Sunday in the Park with George*. Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1991.
- Sondheim, Stephen, and Hugh Wheeler. *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1991.
- Sondheim: The Birthday Concert*. Dir. Lonny Price, performances by Bernadette Peters, Elaine Stritch, Patti LuPone, Mandy Patinkin. Image Entertainment, 2013.

O'Connor, John. "TV: 'Camera Three' Offering 'Anatomy of a Song.'" *The New York Times*, 26 Mar. 1976, pp. 53–53, [www.nytimes.com/1976/03/26/archives/tv-camera-three-offering-anatomy-of-a-song.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1976/03/26/archives/tv-camera-three-offering-anatomy-of-a-song.html).

United States, Congress, House. United States Code. Title 17, section 107, Office of the Law Revision Counsel, 14 Jan. 2019, [uscode.house.gov](http://uscode.house.gov).

Wolfe, Ronald. *The Art of Comedy: A Guide to Scriptwriting for TV, Radio, Film and Stage*. Robert Hale, 2003.

Zaden, Craig. *Sondheim & Co.*, New York: Harper and Row, 1986.