



IFIC RTURES

ATIONAL OPERA
ON COLISEUM
7/88

HAROLD PRINCE
with MITCHELL

Dean Jones
Barbara Barrie
George Coe
John Cunningham
Teri Ralston
Charles Kimbrough
Donna McKechnie
Charles Braswell
Susan Browning
Steve Elmore
Beth Howland
Pamela Myers
Merle Louise
Elaine Strich

COMPANY

A MUSICAL COMEDY

Book and Lyrics by
Stephen Sondheim
Music by
George Furth
Book & Lyrics (Adapted by)
Doris Aronson
Characterized by
D.D. Ryan
Lighting by
Robert Ormbo
Musical Supervision by
Harold Hastings
Associate Director
Jonathan Tunick
Director
Craig Altschuler
Orchestra
Columbia Records
Special Properties
Jimmy Valande
Musical Numbers Staged by
Michael Bennett
Production Directed by
Harold Prince

ALVIN THEATRE
101 W. 40th St. at Broadway
New York, N.Y.

SUNDAY in the PARK with GEORGE

A Musical

The Student Organization and Emanuel Asserberg
in cooperation with
Playwrights Horizons
present
Mandy Patinkin Bernadette Peters
SUNDAY in the PARK
with GEORGE
A Musical
Book and Lyrics by
Stephen Sondheim
Book by
James Lapine
Lighting by
Tony Patricio
Sculpture by
Suzanne Spang
Special Effects by
Brian Fawcett
Music Director
Paul Gemignani
Directed by
James Lapine



Booth Theatre 45th Street West of Broadway

HAROLD BARRI CHARLES WOODWARD
MARY LEA JOHNSON MARTIN RICHARDS
PRESENT

LA URY

LEN
CARIOU

weeey Todd

an Barber of FLEET STREET



A MUSICAL
BOOK BY
STEPHEN
SONDHEIM
LYRICS BY
CHRISTOPHER YOUNG
DIRECTED BY
HAROLD PRINCE
COSTUMES DESIGNED BY
FRANNE LEE LIGHTING DESIGNED BY
KEN BILLINGTON
MUSICAL DIRECTOR
LARRY FULLER
PRODUCERS
BY HAROLD
ASSISTANT TO MR. PRINCE
(WITH MITCHELL)
RECORDING ON
RCA Records and Tapes

ALVIN THEATRE
101 WEST OF BROADWAY



PASSION

Someone's been fooling with our fairy tales

BROADWAY'S BEST MUSICAL!

1988 A. R. Award
1988 Drama Desk Award
1988 Tony Award

INTO THE WOODS

Music and Lyrics by
STEPHEN SONDHEIM
Written and Directed by
JAMES LAPINE

W... you... to see the tale
Sondheim... you've only heard about.

Anyone Can Whistle

Get Your
Tickets
NOW!

January 26
Thru



FOLLIES





The Drink Tank issue 426

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Letters of Comment to DrinkTankEditorial@gmail.com

I love Sondheim. He's the first Broadway writer whose name I knew . . . other than Rodgers and Hammerstein.

He writes the most entertaining musicals that challenge the sensibilities of the time. Shows like *Company* were steeped in the musical theatre tradition but still racked it in with the newer forms of theatrical expression. Sondheim has always played with something in every musical . . . for the most part. He wasn't doing much experimental in *Passion*, and that may be why it wasn't as much of a success as others he did, but also it might have been his finest work. Whether it was bringing more modern horror to Broadway, or giving us $\frac{3}{4}$ time across the board, or even exploring true crime and assassinations with *Assassins*, he has constantly reassessed where theatre was at the moment. The best of his work ran from *Follies* through *Passions*, though you could debate just about any other segment of his career and have a good point.

I've only seen two of his shows live, *Sweeney Todd* and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. I have owned nearly every original cast recording. The ones that I am fondest of are *Anyone Can Whistle* and *Assassins*. They are absolute masterpieces of American Musical Theatre recordings. The actual recording of the original cast album for *Company*, documented by the legendary documentarian D.A. Pennebaker, led to one of the finest works that examines what happens when artists are forced to work in new modes. Sondheim wrote music for *Dick Tracy* to be performed by Madonna and Mandy Patinkin. Sondheim almost gave it all up to write video games or mystery novels. Basically, he was the twentieth century in so many ways.

This issue has been a long time coming, and one that I started on a couple of times. We're getting to it now, and partly because we end the years now with musicals! There will be more.

We're home, finally, after four months of evacuation. We're glad to be home with a newly-cleaned house! A newly-cleaned house full of boxes to be unpacked.

So much other stuff going on. We lost the legendary writer/editor Ben Bova, who was one of the first to ever see anything in my writing. Pat Patterson, one of the greatest wrestlers who ever lived and a wrestling mind like few others, passed away. He was also very much an LGBT+ icon.

Rafer Johnson, Piem, Connery and Trebek, all gone daddy gone. Go figure.

I'm working on podcasts. My newest is [Short Story, Short Podcast](#), with the genius True Crime podcaster Kristy Baxter. It's a lot of fun and means that I have to read more short stories. Of course, we typically choose stuff that we know really well. Like "The Veldt" and "If You Were A Dinosaur, My Love," and that makes it pretty easy. Our motto: You've got a little time; we've got a little podcast.

Also, this marks the return of Letter-Graded Mail! You wanna tell us stuff? drinktankeditorial@gmail.com. That's also where you can send your submissions for future issues? What's next? Well, the next issue will be all about Cults (and if any of you were members of The Cult APA, I wanna hear from ya!) and the deadline is the 20th of January! This one is gonna be fun!

So now, Sondheim.



LEWEL DUVAL
Sent to Drinktankeditorial
BY OUR GENTLE READERS

Our First letter of 2021 (and were there any in 2020?) comes from a fellow I miss quite a bit... BILL WRIGHT!!!!

Chris:

I read *Drink Tank* 425 on eFanzines with more than my usual level of interest. Horror stories that grew as a subgenre of science fiction and flowered in the 1970s in Hollywood Film and Literature constitute a topic of endless fascination for fans of my generation who observed it happening. Perceptions of the whys and wherefores of it vary. My take follows...

After the trauma of the 1930s Great Depression and World War II, westerns, mystery-writing, and detective stories no longer satisfied a voracious public demand for escapist literature. Space opera offered liberation from Earthly concerns and was embraced enthusiastically by millions. The atomic bomb had demonstrated the power of science, albeit most people were hazy about the scientific method if they had heard of it at all. That changed with education, which improved greatly from and including the 1960s. People began to understand what science was about and that its benefits depend on how it is used. There were sharp increases in reader education and standards of literary criticism of science fiction, as universities became interested in the genre as both a product and part of the social consciousness of the contemporary world. But, by the 1970s, belief in science as a panacea for the world's ills had waned. Fantasy and horror gradually took over from science fiction as the dominant sub-genres in speculative fiction. In the twenty first century we have enough real horrors to contend with. Vast numbers of people these days don't seek solace in escapism but, instead, redefine Truth in terms of factoids that reflect the world as they would like it to be, rather than what it is. Dangerous, that.

I can absolutely see that! An excellent example of how they mesh is a guy named Stephen King who is in many ways a science fiction writer who has been adopted by horror...

Anchored in the seemingly cheerful anarchy of science-fiction fandom that has its own underlying order, we at least believed in our fantasies only for the duration of the story/movie but remained sane enough to relate to the real world over time as the story line faded from the forefront of memory.

The title of the editorial by Chuck Serface, "Playing Bucknall Elementary: *Abbott and Costello meet Frankenstein*," was a bit of a curve ball until I twigged to his technique of tying Horror into his life experiences dating from High school in the 1970s. You, of course, like any good storyteller, took us back to the beginning with Universal's silent horror movies, setting the scene for Kathryn Duval's comparison of Universal's two Draculas, then you taking us the rest of the way to the end of the twentieth century. Chuck Serface brought the zine to a fitting conclusion with book covers and accompanying explanations of printed literature that always accompanies great dramatic presentations

I often worry that issues won't flow right, but it sounds like we pulled it off! I've never seen the Spanish Dracula, or at least I don't think I have. My Gramma used to have the TV on when I'd be over there on a Saturday morning, and I seem to remember a Spanish Dracula being shown, but I'm pretty sure it was a translated Legosi version.

` As always with your zines, I had a great read – this time more enjoyable than most. Thanks, mate.

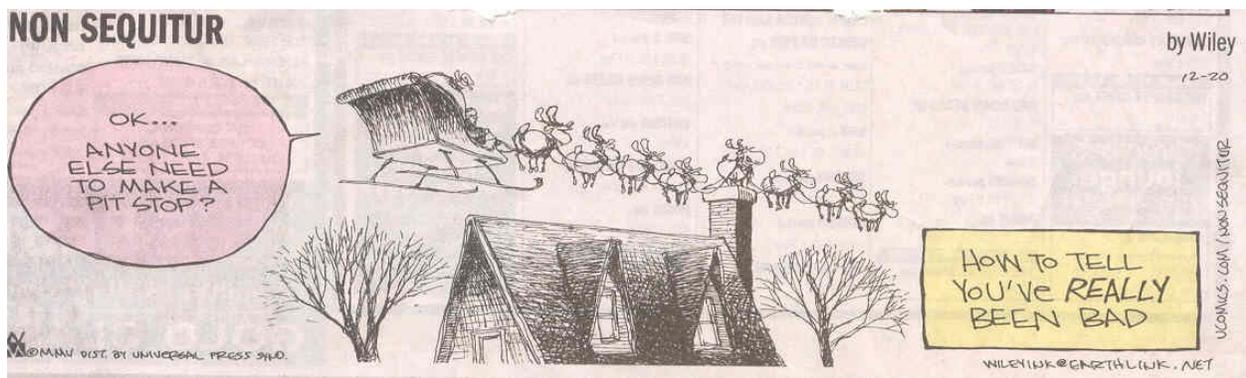
` Images of Christmases past are attached for your edification. 2020 has been a horrible year for us all, and we need such images to keep our Inner Child in check so as not to let the Monster out. All children are natural savages until they learn to censure their will. We must all keep working at that to keep ourselves nice. There's a story in there somewhere, perhaps the greatest story ever, that's waiting to be told.

My boys, Benji and JohnPaul, are still working to control those savage urges, but at least JohnPaul is a reader, and he has devoured that James White book you gifted me all those years ago!

` Regards from

` Bill Wright

` Melbourne, Australia





**Follies: The Best Broadway
Poster of All Time
by Christopher J. Garcia**

There is no question that the 1980s and 1990s were about the show poster. A certain company from a certain island where upon a certain Brit wrote a lot of shows that annoy the fuck out of me, and each of the shows was supported by a poster that was nigh-perfect in getting across a single image. That image was responsible for communicating so much, and it did so marvelously.

But the shows were crap.

OK, it's too harsh, I think that *Miss Saigon* is a really smart show, and I think *Starlight Express* is so much fun, but overall, they relied on gimmicks, scale, bombast. The tradition of theatre posters is a long one, but no one relied on it like the good people associated with Cameron Macintosh . . . which included Hal Prince.

The history of theatre posters is long, and of course there's the work of folks like Hirshfeld, but really, they all could have stopped in 1971. That's when the single greatest, most perfect Broadway poster of all time was released with the amazing show *Follies*.

The show is one of memory and place and time turning things sepia, in a way. The complexity of the relationships and the music is some of Sondheim's most impressive. He drives the music with characterization, and even when songs like "I'm Still Here" are in the hands of an aging master like Elaine Stritch, I believe in the last couple of years of her life, it's still amazing. The show is very inside Broadway baseball. A group of former showgirls from a legendary theatre where a legendary impresario lorded over an annual theatrical tradition. The building is in its last night before demolition, so it's time to tread the boards one last time.

OK, so the theatre thing's just a renamed version of the *Ziegfeld Follies*, and there are some hints that some of these characters are based on actual women who had been in the actual *Follies*. The best part of the show is that the theatre itself, the building and the idea of THE THEATRE, are characters in the show. The funny thing is, we're given the endings, not the story itself, which is why it's so often said to not have a significant plot. It does, even taken at the base value, but instead we're getting a window on a moment, and it's the final moment. There's a lot of complexity to it, largely complex characterization, and the whole idea of what it means then the THEATRE rug is pulled out from under you, and what happens when the last marker of your greatness is razed.

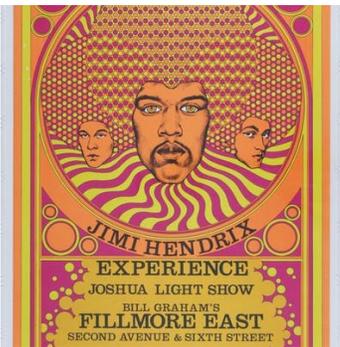
How do you express a rather complex set of ideas as a poster?

Now, the three elements that need to be expressed – the performers, the theatre, and the passage of time. There are secondary considerations, of course – beauty, the loss of status, fame, permanence, flaw. In a way, to express visually the ideas of “Ozymandias,” but for the stage:

“Look Upon My Works, Ye Mighty, and despair.”

That may not have been a theme that Sondheim saw, but looking at it today, at least the three versions I've seen on video (and thanks Laura!!!) seem to speak of old glories deteriorating in the face of the grinding winds of time.

The image of the poster speaks that story perfect.



The artist, David Edward Byrd, is a legendary poster artist. His form of graphic design is instantly recognizable. He created an iconic poster of Jimi Hendrix, the original poster for the Who's *Tommy*, and he even won a Grammy for back when they had an award for cover art and packaging. His work has a flatness to it that is perfect for theatre posters, but there's also a sense of timelessness, or more accurately, of a time that never existed. Some are psychedelic, others are fantasy, all are impressive. His use of materials is incredible, and the inks and transparent dyes are well used in all of his posters.

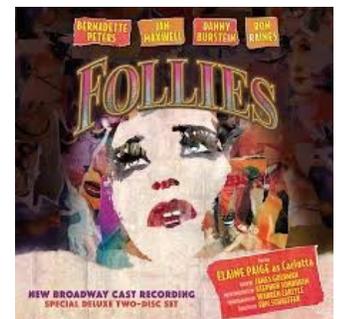
His method for tackling the poster was to give us an image of a showgirl, or at least we're supposed to think she's a showgirl. The image of the woman is based on a Marlene Dietrich still from *Shanghai Express*. She is standing tall, head held high, the look on her face is somewhat impassive, I read it as resolute, but I could see concerned, or wistful, or longing. Actually, those can all co-exist, no? Her hair is a series of waves of blue and purple-pink, falling down on to unshown shoulders. The form of her upper torso is shown as empty space, present but not undefined. From her forehead, explodes the word “FOLLIES” in a beautifully ornate font. It's as if it's exploding out of her forehead. While it may seem like a projection of her thoughts, that she is first and foremost presenting herself as “FOLLIES!!!” I tend to see it as one of the magnificent headdresses that Ziegfeld was known for. That alone makes this image tied in all over the place, from the history of Broadway, to the idea that every girl in the Follies must always, at all times, project FOLLIES as brightly as she can. There's beauty, there's boldness, there's something else.

A crack.

Running down the left side of her face, and up into the crown, the crack is easily visible, running next to her left eye, down her cheek, terminating just above her chin. It is both the perfect image element and the perfect metaphor. Each of these women are supposed to be decades beyond their best, but they are all still beautiful, capable, for the most part, and strong. Likely stronger than they were in their youth because they had to battle what came after, but they are all cracking, cracking. They're not crumbling though, and the theatre, obviously having seen better days, has its cracks as well, and you can read theatre as both building on grand idea.

But overall, the image is still beautiful. The woman's face is radiant, and at times, you can over-look the crack because she is so beautiful. While there are other posters for other productions of the show, none but the 2010 Revival have anything that even exists in the same realm as this poster, and none so perfectly capture the meaning of the show. They might give you an idea or present you with an image of what you'll get, but the sensation of what you might well walk out of the theatre understanding is all in that one picture.

A masterpiece.



HAROLD PRINCE

in association with RUTH MITCHELL
presents

ALEXIS GENE DOROTHY JOHN
SMITH NELSON COLLINS McMARTIN

FOLLIES
A NEW MUSICAL

also starring
YVONNE DE CARLO

with
FIFI D'ORSAY MARY McCARTY ETHEL SHUTTA
ETHEL BARRYMORE COLT MICHAEL BARTLETT

book by
JAMES GOLDMAN
music and lyrics by
STEPHEN SONDHEIM
choreography by
MICHAEL BENNETT

scenic production designed by
BORIS ARONSON costumes by
FLORENCE KLOTZ lighting by
THARON MUSSER

musical direction by
HAROLD HASTINGS orchestrations by
JONATHAN TUNICK dance music arrangements by
JOHN BERKMAN

original cast album on CAPITOL RECORDS music publisher TOMMY VALANDRO

production directed by
HAROLD PRINCE AND MICHAEL BENNETT

WINTER GARDEN BROADWAY at 50th ST.
MATS, WED. & SAT.

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street by Chuck Surface

Musicals

aren't my first choice for entertainment. I'm more agnostic than atheist with this genre, however. I've enjoyed sing-along performances of *My Fair Lady* played at the Retrodome, now 3Below, here in San Jose, California. During my 1989 three-month tour of Europe, I spent a week in Salzburg, Austria, where I stayed at a hostel which offered daily *Sound of Music* tours and then off to their pub for viewings along with wienerschnitzel served fresh and hot. Finally, I adore *An American in Paris*. We have that final sequence where Gene Kelly dances with Leslie Caron to Gershwin's "An American in Paris," and throughout the film here comes that Dufy, Rousseau, Utrillo, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Renoir inspired scenery. What's not to love? Still, musicals aren't my go-to when choosing cinema or stage performances.

So now I'm writing about Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1979), the version starring George Hearn and Angela Lansbury (1982). My co-editor Chris Garcia touted it as the perfect entry into Sondheim's world. "It's got many genres happening at once," he claimed. "And it's kind of horror. But go Lansbury and Hearn, not Bonham Carter and Depp."

I tread carefully, knowing only that the story stems from *The String of Pearls*, a penny dreadful from the Victorian era. Very light research revealed that the story has been evolving since first appearing in serialized form (1846 -1847). *The String of Pearls* contains the usual gore you'd expect from a penny dreadful, relating the tale of Sweeney Todd, a barber and serial murderer who slit the throats of men wanting shaves not quite that close. Over time writers have expanded and changed the story until Christopher Bond added Sweeney's background for his stage play (1973), how he's actually Benjamin Barker coming back to London after having been transported to Botany Bay for trumped-up crimes. The villainous Judge Turpin (Edmund Lyndeck) had raped Barker/Todd's wife before shipping him off to Australia. Worse, the judge has been raising Todd's daughter, Johanna (Betsy Joslyn), grooming her so that he can marry her. Beyond penny dreadful, beyond splatter-drama fit for the Grand Guignol, we now witness elements of those genres along with a musical and, I argue, a revenge tragedy.

I'll adapt methodology from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Vol. 5 (DSM-5)* to illustrate how I've reached this conclusion. Psychiatric practitioners diagnose patients based on how many criteria an individual meets for any given condition. For example, a diagnosis of (fill in mental disorder) might require that someone exhibits five out of nine criteria listed. Let's see how *Sweeney* does with features defining revenge tragedies that I lifted from the Internet. **WARNING! SPOILERS AHEAD!**

Spectacle for the Sake of Spectacle

Revenge tragedies virtually explode with gory content, and *Sweeney* is no exception. Sweeney Todd (George Hearn) slices the throats of his victims with much blood oozing to titillate the audience. Then he shoots their remains downstairs to Nellie Lovett (Angela Lans-

bury) who processes them into filling for her meat pies. Blood? Cannibalism? Spectacle for the sake of spectacle? Check.

Villains and Accomplices That Assist the Avenger are Killed

Sweeney's ultimate goal is revenge against Judge Turpin for what he's done to him, his young wife, and his daughter. His accomplice, Nellie Lovett, dies when Todd hurls her into the pie-baking oven. Her main motive throughout has been obtaining meat for her tasty pies. And in fact, she's keeping secrets from Todd involving his wife's true disposition. But despite her motives, she's working with him, and she dies when Todd murders her after suffering a Greek-tragedy-level emotional shock. Check.

The Supernatural (Often in the Form of a Ghost who Urges the Protagonist to Seek Vengeance)

Memories haunt Todd, and definitely he's plagued with obsession, but the narrative clearly doesn't include ghosts or supernatural occurrences. No check.

A Play Within a Play, or a Dumb Show

With what to catch the conscience of anyone? No check.

Madness or Feigned Madness

Nellie Lovett's got issues, Sweeney Todd's got issues, and so does mostly everyone on stage. Check.

Disguise

Benjamin Barker becomes Sweeney Todd so no one will recognize him while he plots his revenge. Check.

Violent murders, Including Decapitation and Dismemberment

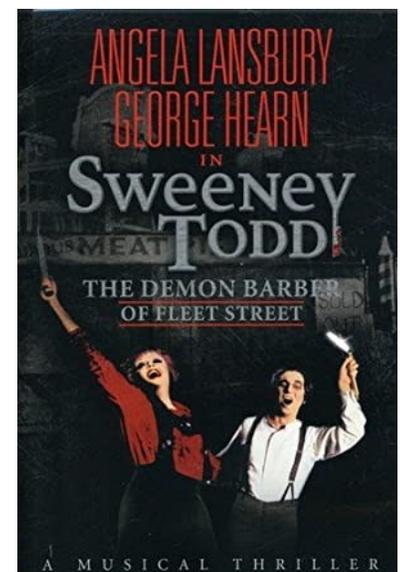
They call him the demon barber for good reason. Check.

Soliloquies

And all sung, since, you know, musical. Check.

A Machiavellian Figure

Nellie Lovett's quite the manipulator, especially when keeping secrets while prodding Sweeney to provide the meat for her yummy pies. Her goals aren't really political, however. She's in it for the money but also because she enjoys Todd's company. Tupac Shakur might have said about her, "Forgive me, [she's] a rider, still [she's] a simple [woman], all [she] want[s] is money, fuck the fame, [she's] a simple [woman]." Check.



Cannibalism (Thyestean Banquets)

There's a banquet scene of sorts during which Nellie makes her pies while her sidekick, Tobias Ragg (Ken Jennings), serves them to hungry punters who are dining alfresco at picnic tables. Those pies, though. Mm-mmm. Check.

A Fifth and Final Act Where Many Characters are Killed (Multiple Corpses on the Stage)

Viewers see quite the dogpile of corpses at the end. It's not the fifth act per se, but indeed we've reached a big finale. Check.

Degeneration of a Once-Noble Protagonist

Benjamin Barker was a hardworking barber who reportedly loved his wife, doted on his daughter, and lived contentedly. Then Judge Turpin took all that away, releasing the demonic Sweeney Todd upon the world. Check.

In later Jacobean and Caroline Revenge Tragedies, the Protagonist is More often a Villain than a Hero (Though This is Subjective)

Dexter Morgan, the serial-killer from the novels by Jeff Lindsay, only preys upon the wicked, so one could argue that he's an antihero. But Sweeney Todd's not picky. Check.

In Later Revenge Tragedies, There is Often More Than One Character Who Seeks Revenge

I'm stretching here, but Pirelli (Sal Mistretta), Todd's rival barber and a conman, does threaten to reveal Todd's true identity for a cut of his profits, only to find himself bled out and ground for meat pies . . . no, I'll not pursue that angle. No check.

The Avenger Is Killed

Tobias Ragg handles that for us. Check.

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street meets twelve out of fifteen criteria for defining revenge tragedies. We have a winner, and a cleverly devised one. I enjoyed *Sweeney* immensely and look forward to experiencing more of Sondheim's oeuvre.





Assassins: A True Crime Musical by Chris Garcia

I love *Assassins*.

This musical was greeted with anger, though with a bit more confusion than anything else. In typical Sondheim style, he took a taboo subject, assassination, gave it a new context, how assassins in America are fighting for various portions of the American Dream, and then created a complex world which he populated with amazing and unexpected songs. The problem for many was the subject matter, that murder should not be trivialized, though they missed this had been a part of so many musicals over the years that it really shouldn't have been a big deal. The way the show plays out, it's a complicated show, and you have to watch carefully to get the way the whole thing fits together. That makes it a little less than accessible.

The wonder of it is that, as is usually the case, Sondheim was ahead of the curve. If *Assassins* had been released in 2015 instead of 1990, it would have been a massive hit. It would have been praised for tapping into the true-crime zeitgeist and presented a nuanced musical that dealt with the bigger issues behind all these killers. The true-crime comedy movement was still relegated to the Denny's and Chili's late-night munching tables between those of us who were always seen as a little "off." In fact, when I was a theatre kid, or hanging out with my theatre kid friends after the show, we would go to a family restaurant and talk about things like cults, assassins, conspiracies, and so much more dark business. These things evolved to podcasts like *Last Podcast on the Left*, *My Favorite Murder*, *Old Timey Crimey*, and even more serious things like *True Crime Garage*. This is why so many of the revivals of *Assassins* have been so successful. Well, that and the fact that they've done shows with John Callum and Neil Patrick Harris.

The musical itself is something of a mash-up of styles and presentations. It takes elements of a sideshow, playing into the idea of the media circus, and the historical re-enactment, but then splashes in a whole bunch of this conspiratorial idea that there was so much going on behind-the-scenes. The difference is Sondheim replaces grand governmental conspiracy with a fantasticality that makes this a show almost a magical realism presentation.

The show is centered around two things: presentations of the individual murders and attempted murders of presidents. The opening is a shooting gallery where the various assassins get their guns given to them. This sets the stage for telling the various stories. The assassins are all now armed, and the sideshow aspect of the show is established. That's the key, because it both portrays the idea that every assassin is, in part, a player in a show, but also that guns and their easy availability are a big part of the problem.

Or at least that's how I read it.

The show then goes through the various scenes of assassinations, from John Wilkes Booth to Squeaky Fromme, to Charles J. Gauteau. The songs, like “Everybody Wants to be Happy,” tell the stories of the internal justifications for the murders, while the “Balladeer” tells at least some version of the truth. The interaction in this magic world where the assassins inhabit, are strange, telling, and, most importantly, distancing. They are designed to move us through each story, and to give us threads to pull at the personalities of the individual assassins. The real highlight, and the only way this show could end, was with the November 22nd, 1963 assassination of JFK. The other assassins are there as ghosts, and they convince him to murder JFK. There’s a lot more to this, but it says something incredibly powerful – each of these crimes stood on the shoulders of the ones before them. This idea is so important, and the way that Sondheim presents it in song is incredible. It seems to be saying that these images exist in all of us, and at our darkest times, they come to us most powerfully.

Assassins also has a strong connection to San Jose. San Jose Civic Light Opera hosted the first regional performance of the show way back in 1993. It was a huge success, and the debut of the currently-used orchestration. It was an important step in the process of becoming a major part of Sondheim’s catalog. Shows like *Anyone Can Whistle*, and to a lesser extent *Pacific Overtures*, are often pushed to the back of the pack for Sondheim, and though they’re both good shows, neither has exactly lit the world on fire in revivals. *Assassins* has and will likely continue to. I’d love to see a film version done in the style of *Zoot Suit* or *Company*, where they are attempting to capture the theatre experience within the filming. This is a show where that would actually enhance the viewing experience. As I understand it, *Follies* is the next Sondheim getting the film experience, so what you gonna do?



ASSASSINS



“Those Images That Yet Fresh Images Beget” — W. L. Yeats

by Chris Duval

A Little Night Music

From a newspaper: “Young Master Henrik’s violincello debut was well attended, less well received. The chosen pieces, steeped in melancholy, presumably expressed Henrik’s emotional state but did not provide the uplift reasonably expected by the audience at a December recital. Nor could the listeners understand how his sadness has not been overcome by the benign influence of his controversially acquired muse, Ann. . . . The main event’s disappointment was offset during the intermission by the perversely delighted whispers about Anne’s now defunct marriage to Henrik’s father.”

Passion

Case dismissed with prejudice: While Clara Doe, were she married to Giorgio Doe, might establish that the civil defendants -- Colonel Ricci et al. -- contributed to Alienation of Affections, Tortious Interference, and Criminal Conversation through their insufficient attention to the Colonel’s charge’s affections, she is married to another entirely. Thus, the basis of offense cannot be established, and even were the law unimaginably generous in its definitions, her own acts, egregious to her true spouse, would equitably deny her remedy.

Assassins

Spell (transformative, non-reversible, short range): Rods to Guns. Transforms the content of a closed box of curtain rods into a Mannlicher-Carcano, 6.5 millimeter, with a stopping range of 900 yards, sight pre-adjusted.

ORIGINAL CAST ALBUM

COMPANY

A LOOK BY Chris Garcia

A FILM BY D. A. PENNEBAKER

If you had me make a list of the ten most important artists of the twentieth century, there are the gimmes: Pollock, Stravinsky, Gaultier, Duchamp, Gershwin, Davis, Ford, and The Beatles. Then there are two other really important figures in with 'em: Pennebaker and Sondheim. Pennebaker figured out the concept of the fly-on-the-wall documentary. His approach is much more interesting than the traditional doc (even better than *The Maysles!*) and works within the world of cinema vérité. I can name five docs that really launched the 1970s and 1980s documentary movements. At the end of the 1960s, Sondheim was in his late 30s, and was riding a wave of solid work, including *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* and *West Side Story*. He was tackling structure and thematic norms and bringing musical theatre into the world that traditional theatre had been exploring in the 1920s and 1930s, only being much more successful than most of those writers had been. The two of them combined was a fascinating combo, not only because they were so significant at the moment, but because they were both so different. Pennebaker was less about creating in the mode of documentary, but instead was all about capturing a truth in the frame of the camera instead of creating one. Sondheim was about shaking the mode, creating a new way of doing musicals. He was about creating the image in the frame, largely by framing those things that were seldom put into view. It was so perfect for the time.

The idea here was that Pennebaker was creating a pilot for a series that would feature the various ways that an original cast album could be created. This would seem odd, that there is more than one way to do it, but really, there are about five significantly different methods. *Company* was doing the marathon recording with everyone method, which is a method less done these days. The entire cast was there, Dean Jones, the original Bobby, Donna McKechnie, Susan Browning, George Coe (who was AWESOME!), Charles Kimbrough (later of Murphy Brown fame), and most importantly, Beth Howland. She was a genius at playing the ditz, high-

strung character, as she would show on Alice, and she is given the best song in the show, “Not Getting Married Today.”

Oh yeah, Elaine Stritch was there, too.

If you don't know Elaine Stritch's name, that's okay, you're probably not a Broadway (or *Head of the Class* nerd, and in that case congrats on making it this far. She was one of the greatest actresses in the history of American theatre, and she originated the role of Joanne. She's the cynical rich woman who has caught a uniquely New York form of ennui.

In a way, that's the entire theme of the show, really.

She was known as an incredible pro, but the entire planning of the session made a minor problem; they scheduled Stritch to give the performance of “The Ladies Who Lunch,” at the end of the recording. More on that in a minute.

Pennebaker uses the camera in a fascinating way that highlights the still in a frame as much as the motion. This is literally the perfect form for documenting the process of people singing into a microphone. Howland and Jones are particularly impressive and expressive as they sing. Jones's performance on “Being Alive” is amazing, as you can see that he's performing the song within a new mode for him. He's acting through his voice, but he'd never have been able to give that sort of performance vocally onstage. There is a vocabulary to recording in a studio that is both more and less expressive. I have had this fight with various folks over the years about the differences between a live and a recorded performance, and it really shows in the capture of the recorded performance here. Howland is amazing. She gives her heart and every bit of energy to the performance. Having seen footage of her in performance, it's amazing to see how she played it here. The framing is amazing, less than a fly on the wall. It's a pin-hole camera presentation.

The performances are great, and there's just the perfect sense of detachment that helps to explain the difference between in-theatre and a recording setting. It really becomes apparent with the performance of “Ladies Who Lunch” which is the tour-de-force of the show, as it carries with it all sorts of baggage. While “Being Alive,” “Barcelona, and “Another Hundred People” hit notes that give movement to the piece, there's a lot of work done by “Ladies Who Lunch,” particularly in expressing what Sondheim is saying with the entire show. In so many ways, Joanne is Bobby's heavy side, the side that wants, not the side that he needs. So much of Bobby is about rejecting needs, or at least redefining them, and Joanne is about having and wanting more and different, and hating the world that she is steeped in.

They saved it for last, and when you're a performer who is being asked to hit your hardest mark at the end of a marathon, well that's basically asking a marathoner to do a 4.4 forty-meter dash to finish the race. Here, Stritch is having a hard time with it. She's giving and giving, but there's not enough



there. In a way, Pennebaker is shooting it like a sports doc, using the idea that she's fighting an uphill battle.

And she loses that night. She pushes, and grabs, and Sondheim works at bringing it out of her. She tries and tries, but there's no way she's going to make it. Her voice is tired, but more importantly it's her spirit that is tired. She's giving everything, and it works for the documentary, but as a recording, it's nearly garbage. It's not complete garbage, she apparently had a few

drinks, but really it was the timing of the thing, which she had actually chosen because she wanted

She struggles, and they figure they'll just come back and record it later, which they do the following week, before she's about to go out and do a matinee. She's in full makeup and ready for the show.

And she kills it.

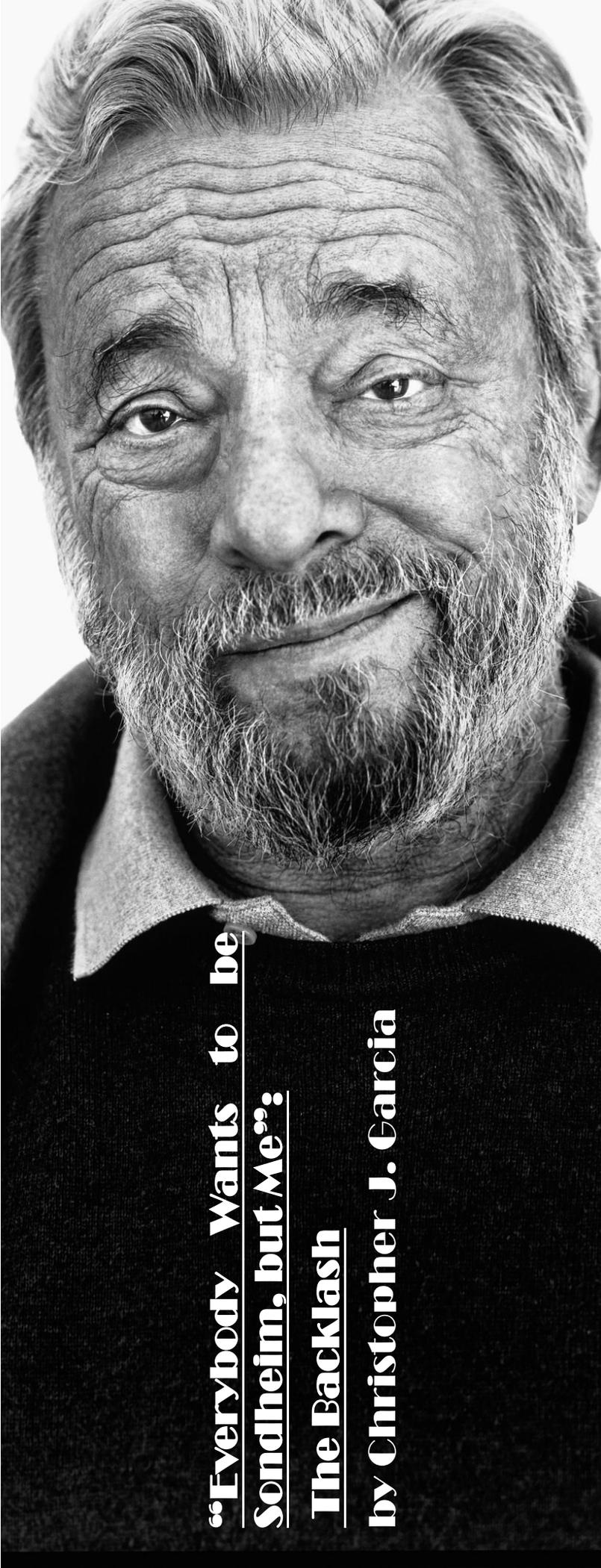
This is the canonical recording of the song, and it's everything. She hammers every note, and that's what "Ladies Who Lunch" requires. In the commentary they released, Stritch says she wanted to recreate the theatrical experience. Sondheim got it, though; he wanted her to sing it. Sondheim understood what the difference was. Pennebaker's choice to keep the entire weak version (that the engineer called "flaccid," was inspired. You can see her trying to run up the cliff, and it's painful, but the way that Pennebaker films it he's amped every moment.

Other than the singers themselves, there's an amazing sort of coaching, and that's where to you get Sondheim himself. The way he interacts with the singers is great, and he then empowers the performers with the notes. At times, I had no idea what he was indicating, but when you saw how it came together, it all made sense. There is a great moment, and one which was pure Pennebaker, where Sondheim is wearing headphones and pressing his hands into his eyes. Hal Prince, director of *Company*, shows up too, but he's less of a figure in the piece. There's a great lunchbreak scene where Prince, book writer George Furth, Sondheim, and Stritch, which shows the beginning of the drag that the recording session is becoming.

This is, in many ways, a documentary of moments in a way that a lot of Pennebaker work ain't. He hits moments, pulling focus in and out between the singers in Barcelona that is butter-smooth. There's a shot of Stritch saying "I've done it three or four times," that somehow gives away the entirety of her performance. There's Elaine Stritch screaming at hearing her own terrible performance. The way that Pennebaker recorded several individual instruments separately, overriding the regular instrumentation and singing. There was the amazing moment when they tell Elaine Stritch that they're just going to record the orchestra, and she walks off. It's the best pitcher being pulled with their win on the line moment in the history of musical theatre history.

This is a masterful piece of documentary, and the way that it documents a seriously significant moment in theatrical history. On YouTube, you can find it with the Pennebaker/Stritch/Prince commentary. Sadly, we've lost the three of them over the last decade, along with Doug Jones, George Coe, and a few others have wended their way offstage. It's an excellent record of their careers, and I'm glad to see that this is available to the masses via YouTube and Criterion Collection.





**“Everybody Wants to be
Sondheim, but Me”:**

**The Backlash
by Christopher J. Garcia**

It is not

nice to speak ill of the dead, but I REALLY never liked Jerry Herman.

I know people who knew him, one rather well, and they all say he was a good, kind guy. His musicals were either of a time when I can't connect to the work (*Mame* and *Hello, Dolly*) and for the most part, his later work was okay (*Mack & Mabel* is great, honestly, and *La Cage Au Folles* has one truly great song and a whole lot of spectacle) but he had a good run from 1961 through the early 80s, with only a significant break after *Mack & Mabel* was a (completely undeserved) flop.

La Cage beat out Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George*. This was the greatest stunner since *Nine* beat *Dreamgirls*. The acceptance speech is what I remember: "This award forever shatters a myth about the musical theater. There's been a rumor around for a couple of years that the simple, hummable show tune was no longer welcome on Broadway. Well, it's alive and well at the Palace."

What a bastard!

That was, regardless of what Herman claimed for years, a broadside. Sondheim's work was transforming theatre in the same way that Wilder, Odets, Hellman, and Pirandello had in the first decades of the twentieth century. Jerry Herman was a classic Broadway writer, and his tunes were highly hummable, but really, they were seldom blockbusters. "I Am What I Am" is obviously a powerful piece, and you cannot argue that *Hello, Dolly* is one of the most memorable pieces in the American songbook. "We Need a Little Christmas" is great if you're trying to bring a little life to your elementary school pageant.

Yes, we did sing that in my fifth-grade pageant.

None of them were ground-breaking, they were rolling in furrows well-honed. The structure of a Jerry Herman song ain't too complicated, and they are undeniably catchy, but when you step back, they're just catchy songs.

In other words, you really don't have to chew them much.

Throughout the years, Sondheim's work

has been criticized for everything from being overly-intellectual, emotionally detached, flat, and most importantly, NOT PRETTY! I disagree with that last part (largely songs like “Happiness” are among the most beautiful in the history of theatre), but I can see that when you think about it in terms of the art of the twentieth century. How many people made those exact same criticisms about Kandinsky, or Cunningham, or Cage, or Rauschenberg, or Pollock, or Rothko, or Nevelson, or on and on and on. Sondheim was a MASSIVELY influential person by the early 1980s, and it would make sense that the old guard, though I think that Herman was a year younger, would be directly in opposition.

In 1995, while I was at Emerson and going to see shows like *Forbidden Broadway* frequently, there was a song that really hit all the points that came out called “Everybody Wants to be Sondheim, but Me.”

It opens as such:

Everybody wants to be Sondheim but me.

Everybody wants to be Sondheim but me.

So they try to write a melody

That goes somewhere unexpectedly

'Cause they think that's how you get to be

Like Sondheim.

Listen as they hammer out one chord.

Listen as they hammer it 'til everybody's bored.

That's the way they pray to their lord,

Mr. Sondheim.

And they pack their lyrics 'til they're so damn dense

You could put 'em in your yard and you could use 'em for a fence,

And they honestly believe that they have captured the sense

Of Sondheim.

Well, I want to be Oscar Hammerstein.

I want to be Cole Porter.

What's wrong if a song is prettier

And clearer and shorter?

Now, read those lyrics. It's more an assault on those follow-on Sondheims of the 1990s, the ones that would make a lot of money creating musicals that were darker, harder, more modern. In fact, without Sondheim, there's no *Once More with Feeling* or *Doctor Horrible*. I like Cole Porter, who was far dirtier than most folks today would understand, and while I'm not a Hammerstein guy (though Sondheim certainly is) I think those writers who have had Sondheim as their base (and everyone from Lin Manuel to Stone & Parker) are the ones who are really driving theatre forward.