



June 11, 2022 at 7 pm  
Zipper Concert Hall



## Program Notes

*"The world has always been chaotic. Life is unpredictable. It is - there is no form. And making forms gives you solidity. I think that's why people paint paintings and take photographs and write music and tell stories... that have beginning, middles and ends, even when the middle is at the beginning and the beginning is at the end."*

*Stephen Sondheim, interviewed by Terry Gross, 2010*

With his inimitable musical style and thought-provoking works, American composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim has made an indelible mark on the history of musical theater. Sondheim's output polarizes audiences: his music is notoriously complex and challenging to sing, his concepts cerebral, and his characters emotionally elusive. And although Sondheim's shows don't typically break Broadway box office records, his work nevertheless commands a deeply loyal following. In his lifetime, Sondheim was recognized with multiple awards, including a Pulitzer Prize in 1985 for *Sunday in the Park with George*, an Oscar for a song performed by Madonna in the 1990 film *Dick Tracy*, and **eight** Tony Awards - more than any other composer. Tonight, we celebrate Stephen Sondheim and his unparalleled contributions to the artistry of musical theater.

### Sondheim as Lyricist

*The air is humming,  
And something great is coming.*

When *West Side Story* premiered in 1957, 27-year-old Sondheim was the unknown newcomer amid an unstoppable creative team of Broadway veterans: Leonard Bernstein (music), Arthur Laurents (book), and Jerome Robbins (director and choreographer). Leonard Bernstein had intended write both music and lyrics for the show, but when he, Robbins, and Laurents decided upon a dance-heavy mode of storytelling for their *Romeo and Juliet* update, Bernstein realized that the scope of the music had ballooned, and he needed a lyricist. Laurents happened to run into Sondheim at a party and struck up a conversation about the auditions he'd watched for Sondheim's folded show *Saturday Night*, which Sondheim had developed with the encouragement of his mentor Oscar Hammerstein II. Sondheim auditioned for Bernstein the next day, and he expressed his wish to help with both lyrics and music. Bernstein (and Hammerstein) advised Sondheim to bide his time with the music and just come on board as the lyricist.

We open with a medley of two famous songs from *West Side Story*: the restless and hopeful "Something's Coming", and the love duet between star-crossed lovers Tony and Maria, "Tonight", and the Act II anthem "Somewhere." Later in his career, Sondheim expressed some embarrassment about the self-conscious poetry of his lyrics for *West Side Story*, lamenting that they don't always match the character. But in these two songs, the poetic earnestness of Sondheim's lyrics melds with Bernstein's expansive melodies and soars with the idealism of youth, of hope, and of love.

## Sondheim and Relationships

*Somebody crowd me with love,  
Somebody force me to care,  
Somebody let me come through,  
I'll always be there as frightened as you,  
To help us survive being alive.*

Next, a set about Sondheim's portrayals of personal relationships -- with our children, with our partners, with our family, our community.

*Anyone Can Whistle* premiered on Broadway in 1964 – and closed after just nine performances. It's since become a cult favorite for its beloved score and its zany satirical plot about conformity, politics, and personal ethics. “Everybody Says Don’t” is an anthem to courage, even if it may at times be driven by folly: “Tilt at the windmill and if you fail, you fail!”

With *Company* (1970), Sondheim proved that he was a composer/lyricist that would make history. The show's proximity to the emergence of the 1960s counterculture subtly informs the concepts at stake as the nonlinear narrative centers around a set of couples grappling with a variety of relationship issues, and a single man and his reluctance to commit to a partnered life. “The Little Things You Do Together” offers a humorous and ironic rundown of the daily ins and outs of keeping a marriage together: from the sly to the petty to the destructive. Sensitive to the overall tone of the show, Sondheim composed four different ending songs for *Company* before settling on “Being Alive.” The third attempt, called “Happily Ever After”, was a bitter march with many of the same lyrics (“Someone to hold you too close...”) and some significantly different ones (“Someone to bleed you of all/The things you don't want to tell--/That's happily ever after/In Hell.”). Finally, Sondheim transformed the lyric and set it to gentler music, taking us through a process of realization of what it means to need someone – and to want to take that chance.

*A Little Night Music* (1973) is a show full of exquisitely beautiful music that belies the wrenching regrets of people lamenting lost opportunities in their family and romantic relationships, self-acknowledged fools in their inability to overcome bad timing and sad choices. “The Glamorous Life” is the song of a daughter grappling with the reality of having a mother with a glamorous acting career that keeps them apart. “Send in the Clowns” is one of Sondheim's most frequently misunderstood songs. The leaping melody at the ends of phrases mimics the anticipating lifts and pauses of a Viennese waltz, but fails to achieve an ecstatic arrival. The peak is left hanging as the tune dips and retreats, a musical enactment of a romantic relationship that never came to be.

Whether comic or tragic, symbolic or imbued with agency, Sondheim treats the women in his shows with a deep sense of empathy. In *Follies* (1971) – former showgirls reflect on their careers and sing songs they once performed. “Losing My Mind” is a song sung by a woman who cannot let go of the past – her days and nights are structured with her obsession, and the music reflects this stasis of longing, as she repeatedly sings the same lyric: “I'm losing my mind.”

Sondheim wrote “I Never Do Anything Twice” for the 1976 film adaptation of Nicholas Meyer's Sherlock Holmes novel *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution*. The catchy chorus is in the style of a waltz song, which is simultaneously reflective of the popularity of that song type in Victorian England and suggestive of the whirling, ever-changing tastes of the brothel madam telling us her story.

## Brilliant Sondheim

*Careful the things you say,  
Children will listen.  
Careful the things you do,  
Children will see, and learn.*

On its surface, *Into the Woods* (1987) is a show about fairy tales and what happens after happily ever after, which in itself is already an unexpected treatment of the fairy tale characters that populate the story. Traditionally, fairy tales convey moral lessons and consequences for children, but in this musical Sondheim shows that the lessons imparted are as much a reflection of the adults who must confront the still-ongoing consequences of actions made in the previous

generation and are reminded of the responsibility that we all have to our legacy. “No One Is Alone” offers reassurance, yet also reminds us that since we are all not alone our actions will therefore affect others, and “Children Will Listen” cautions us to be responsible for our choices and our words.

## Solo Sondheim

*My window pane may not give much light,  
But I see you, so the view is bright.  
If I can love you, I'll pay the dirt no heed!  
With your love, what more do I need?*

Now we turn to a thematic element strongly associated with Sondheim's shows: the grim and melancholy. Though the darkness may at times seem unremitting when Sondheim turns to these topics, he nevertheless treats them in a way that reminds us of their humanity. When Sondheim was 15 years old, he saw Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical *Carousel* and later said he was deeply affected by the characters that – whether good or bad – were the social outcasts. His own musicals consistently demonstrate a fascination with outsiders, and in *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* he spins a horrific tale of a man who turns to mass murder in his determination to avenge his family. Todd's daughter Johanna finds kinship in a lark that won't sing in captivity in “Green Finch and Linnet Bird”, haunting us with themes of escape and rescue, never letting us forget the horrific situations that call for flight.

*Saturday Night* was Sondheim's first professional musical – written when he was 23 years old! – and was on its way to being produced on Broadway in 1955. But with the sudden death of the producer the project was stopped, and Sondheim's Broadway debut would have to wait until *West Side Story*. In the years following, “What More Do I Need” became a favorite for cabaret performers, with its witty take on finding love in New York City and Sondheim's signature composing for complex rhymes already on display. *Saturday Night* eventually premiered Off-Broadway in 2000, and aside from adding a few new songs, he left the original songs from the 1955 score unaltered: “There are some things that embarrass me...But I decided, Leave it. It's my baby pictures. You don't touch up a baby picture – you're a baby!”

## Sondheim and Life

*Order. Design. Tension. Balance. Harmony.*

*Sunday in the Park With George* is a fictionalized portrayal of the life of pointillist painter George Seurat and his single-minded completion of “A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte.” “Putting It Together” is an artist's fast-paced reflection on the challenges of art as a collaborative medium – working with others to create art and eventually present it to the world. The more languorous “Sunday” is sung at the end of each act, as the company assembles a tableau of the famous painting: a handful of lives, caught in a perfect moment in a park. Once the painting is completed, we go forward in time to witness the lives of Seurat's progeny, and when the tableau at the end of the show fades on the final notes of “Sunday”, Seurat's embittered great-grandson quietly reads words of hope from his great-grandmother's journal: “White: a blank page or canvas. His favorite – so many possibilities.”

*Merrily We Roll Along* (1981) begins with the main character at the height of his fame and success – but with all his friendships and relationships devastated beyond any hope of repair. The show then works backwards in time, ending with the unrelenting optimism of “Our Time.” This song is sung by the same characters when they are young, with their lives ahead of them and a determination to change the world together. In context, this song is perhaps one of Sondheim's most agonizing, as we are forced to witness the innocence that will grow into resentment, and the idealism that will fail as they try to find success.

But Sondheim's work can also transport us with the hope borne of courage to soldier on despite life's pain and setbacks, especially when his music performs the beauty and freedom to be found in human resilience.

—Holley Replogle-Wong is a teacher, scholar, and musician. She teaches courses on film music, popular music, American musical theater, and western music history in the Department of Musicology at UCLA, and is the Program Director of the UCLA Center for Musical Humanities. She sings with various Los Angeles-based vocal ensembles, and for the occasional film soundtrack.

# Being Alive: A Salute to Sondheim

Lisa Edwards, piano  
Carl Sealove, bass  
Jerry Kalaf, drums

## Sondheim as Lyricist

Something's Coming/Tonight (*West Side Story*) .....Leonard Bernstein  
arr. Lojeski  
Somewhere .....Leonard Bernstein  
arr. Albrittoni

Lesili Beard, soloist

## Sondheim and Relationships

Everybody Says Don't (*Anyone Can Whistle*) .....arr. Hayes  
Little Things You Do Together (*Company*).....arr. Huff

Abbey Thompson, soloist  
Lori Marie Rios, Assistant Conductor

The Glamorous Life (*A Little Night Music*)  
Cynthia Glass

Losing My Mind (*Follies*)  
Sumana Cooppan Wolf

I Never Do Anything Twice (*Seven Percent Solution*)  
Eileen Dorn

Send in the Clowns (*A Little Night Music*) .....arr. Huff  
Being Alive (*Company*) .....arr. Huff

Rhonda Dillon, soloist

## INTERMISSION

## Brilliant Sondheim

Putting It Together (*Sunday in the Park with George*) .....arr. Huff  
Merced Stratton, soloist

Into the Woods (*Into the Woods*) .....arr. Huff  
No One Is Alone/Children Will Listen (*Into the Woods*) .....arr. Levine

## Solo Sondheim

Green Finch and Linnet Bird (*Sweeney Todd*)  
Laura Pluth

What More Do I Need (*Saturday Night*)  
Missy Nieto

## Sondheim and Life

Sunday (*Sunday in the Park with George*) .....arr. Huff  
25th anniversary tribute

Tribute video created by founding member, Helen R. Mendoza

Our time (*Merrily We Roll Along*) .....arr. Huff

Alice Dryden, soloist  
Joined by VOX alumnae 1997-2022

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FOH and Projection: George Hicks  
Live Streaming Video: Derek Williams

We appreciate all our concert volunteers this evening and are grateful for their assistance in making this concert and the silent auction a stellar experience for our audience.

Thank you to Helen R. Mendoza for creating tonight's special 25th anniversary tribute to our Founding Artistic Director, Dr. Iris S. Levine.

Special thanks to our alumnae who have played such an important part of our history, including those joining us on stage again this evening.

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