



How Sondheim Found His Sound

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Steve Swayne

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to my parents

LOUIS SWAYNE, JR. AND
LELIA CATHERINE SWAYNE

*for their high expectations,
great sacrifices
and boundless love*



Acknowledgments

This book represents the culmination of work that began more than fifteen years ago in a classroom at the University of Washington. I had no idea that a term paper on *Merrily We Roll Along* would lead to graduate study at the University of California at Berkeley, a serendipitous lunch with an outgoing professor there, and a stimulating apprenticeship with an incoming one. Neither did I think that a letter from Sondheim—the first of many, as it happened—would lead me to abandon my plan to mine my doctoral thesis for this book and choose instead to prospect another, more challenging claim.

There have been many who have assisted me thus far, and if I fail to name them all in these pages, it is one more of the errors this book undoubtedly contains. I take full responsibility for these errors, even as I take pleasure in thanking those who have helped me get a few things right.

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And Mike Backman: For the birthday gift twelve years ago of every Sondheim Broadway score, for the daily gift of your love, and for so much more: thank you.



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A Chronology of Sondheim's Creative Career

- 1946 *By George* (musical; book, music, and lyrics by Miriam Dubin, James Lincoln, and Steve Sondheim; George School)
- 1948 *Phinney's Rainbow* (musical; book and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and Josiah T. S. Horton; Williams College)
- 1949 *All That Glitters* (musical; book by Stephen Sondheim; Williams College)
(ca.) *Bequest* (novel; abandoned)
Variations on a Theme (Katie Malone) for Piano
- 1950 Sonata for Piano in C major
"No Sad Songs for Me" (song in revue, *Where To From Here*, Williams College)
Mary Poppins (musical; abandoned)
- 1951 *High Tor* (musical; abandoned)
I Know My Love (play by S. N. Berman; song, a Christmas carol)
Sonata in G minor for Violin Solo ("A Very Short Violin Sonata")
- 1952 (ca.) Concertino for Two Pianos (three out of a projected four movements)
- 1953 *Topper* (screenplays for television series [with George Oppenheimer])
Climb High (musical; unproduced)
The Man with the Squeaky Shoes (television show; unproduced)
- 1954 *The Lady or the Tiger?* (television musical [with Mary Rodgers]; song, "I Wonder Why"; unproduced)

Saturday Night (musical, first version; book by Julius J. Epstein)

1955 *A Mighty Man Is He* (play by George Oppenheimer and Arthur Kober; song, “Rag Me That Mendelssohn March”)
The Madwoman of Chaillot (musical treatment; based on play by Jean Giraudoux; abandoned)

1956 *The Girls of Summer* (play by N. Richard Nash; song, “The Girls of Summer”)

I Believe in You (television play; song, “They Ask Me Why I Believe in You”; unproduced)

The Last Resorts (musical; song, “Pour le sport”; abandoned)

1957 *West Side Story* (musical; lyrics; music by Leonard Bernstein; book by Arthur Laurents)

Ring Round the Moon (musical; abandoned)

1958 *The Jet-Propelled Couch* (television musical; abandoned)

1959 *Gypsy* (musical; lyrics; music by Jule Styne; book by Arthur Laurents)

Happily Ever After (television musical; abandoned)

1960 *Invitation to a March* (play by Arthur Laurents; incidental music)

1962 *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (musical; book by Burt Shevelove and Larry Gelbart)

The World According to Jules Feiffer (revue by Jules Feiffer; song, “Truly Content,” and incidental music for *Pas-sionella*; incidental music for monologue, *George’s Moon*)

1963 *Hot Spot* (musical; music [with Mary Rodgers]; lyrics [with Martin Charnin]; book by Jack Weinstock and Willie Gilbert; two songs: “Don’t Laugh” and “That’s Good, That’s Bad”)

1964 *Anyone Can Whistle* (musical; book by Arthur Laurents)

1965 *Do I Hear a Waltz?* (musical; lyrics; music by Richard Rodgers; book by Arthur Laurents)

1966 *Evening Primrose* (television musical; screenplay by James Goldman)

The Mad Show (revue; book by Larry Siegel and Stan Hart; song: “The Boy From. . .,” lyrics by “Estaban Ria Nido”)



- 1968 *The Exception and the Rule* (alternately, *The Race to Urga* and *A Pray by Blecht*) (musical; lyrics; music by Leonard Bernstein; book by John Guare; abandoned)
crossword puzzles for *New York* magazine
- 1969 *The Thing of It Is* (film; screenplay by William Goldman; song, “No, Mary Ann”; unproduced)
- 1970 *Company* (musical; book by George Furth)
- 1971 *Follies* (musical; book by James Goldman)
Twigs (one-act plays by George Furth; incidental music)
- 1973 *A Little Night Music* (musical; book by Hugh Wheeler)
The Last of Sheila (film; coauthor with Anthony Perkins)
The Enclave (play by Arthur Laurents; incidental music)
- 1974 *Candide* (musical; additional lyrics; music by Leonard Bernstein; book by Hugh Wheeler)
Stavisky . . . (film score; Alain Resnais, director)
The Frogs (musical; book by Burt Shevelove)
- 1976 *Pacific Overtures* (musical; book by John Weidman; additional material by Hugh Wheeler)
Side by Side by Sondheim (musical revue)
The Seven Per Cent Solution (film; song: “I Never Do Anything Twice”)
- 1979 *Sweeney Todd* (musical; book by Hugh Wheeler)
Madwoman of Central Park West (play; book by Phyllis Newman and Arthur Laurents; two songs [see *Hot Spot*, 1963])
- 1980 *Marry Me a Little* (musical revue; book by Craig Lucas)
- 1981 *Merrily We Roll Along* (musical; book by George Furth)
Reds (portion of film score; Warren Beatty, director; song: “Goodbye for Now”)
- 1984 *Sunday in the Park with George* (musical; James Lapine, director)
- 1985 *Merrily We Roll Along* (La Jolla production; additional material by James Lapine)
- 1987 *Follies* (revised for London production)
Into the Woods (musical; book by James Lapine)
- 1990 *Dick Tracy* (film; Warren Beatty, director; five songs: “Sooner



or Later (I Always Get My Man),” “More,” “Live Alone and Like It,” “Back in Business,” and “What Can You Lose?”)

- 1991 *Assassins* (musical; book by John Weidman)
- 1992 *Putting It Together* (musical revue)
Singing Out Loud (film musical; screenplay by William Goldman; songs: “Dawn,” “Sand,” “Water Under the Bridge,” others; unproduced)
- 1994 *Passion* (musical; book by James Lapine)
- 1995 *The Doctor Is Out* (play, coauthor with George Furth; San Diego)
- 1996 *Getting Away with Murder* (new name for *The Doctor Is Out*; New York)
The Birdcage (film; two songs: “Little Dream” and “It Takes All Kinds” [cut])
- 1997 *Saturday Night* (premiere in London)
- 1999 *Saturday Night* (premiere in Chicago)
Wise Guys (workshop production; book by John Weidman; later, *Gold!*, then *Bounce*)
- 2000 *Moving On* (musical revue)
- 2003 *Bounce* (musical; Chicago and Washington, D.C., productions)
- 2004 *The Frogs* (revised by Nathan Lane; Broadway premiere)
Opening Doors (musical revue; revision of *Moving On*)

