

Assassins (1990, 2004)

First Produced Off-Broadway at Playwrights Horizon

Original Off-Broadway Production:

Opening Night: December 18, 1990

Closing Date: February 16, 1991 (73 performances)

Creative Team of the Original Off-Broadway Production

Music & Lyrics by: Stephen Sondheim

Book by: John Weidman

Directed by: Jerry Zaks

Choreography: D.J. Giagni

Set Design: Loren Sherman

Lighting Design: Paul Gallo

Costume Design: William Ivey Long

Orchestrations: Michael Starobin

First Broadway Production:

Opening Night: April 22, 2004

Closing Date: July 18, 2004 (101 performances)

Creative Team of the 2004 Broadway Production

Directed by: Joe Mantello

Musical Staging: Jonathan Butterell

Set Design: Robert Brill

Lighting Design: Jules Fisher & Petty

Eisenhauer

Costume Design: Susan Hilferty

Orchestrations: Michael Starobin

Casts

Role	Original Cast (1990)	Broadway Cast (2004)
Proprietor	William Parry	Marc Kudisch
Leon Czolgosz	Terence Mann	James Barbour
John Hinckley	Greg Germann	Alexander Gemignani
Charles Guiteau	Jonathan Hadary	Denis O'Hare
Giuseppe Zangara	Eddie Korbich	Jeffrey Kuhn
Samuel Byck	Lee Wilkof	Mario Cantone
Lunette "Squeakey" Fromme	Annie Golden	Mary Catherine Garrison
Sara Jane Moore	Debra Monk	Becky Ann Baker
John Wilkes Booth	Victor Garber	Michael Cerveris
Balladeer	Patrick Cassidy	Neil Patrick Harris
Lee Harvey Oswald	Jace Alexander	Neil Patrick Harris

Awards

The 2004 Broadway production was considered a revival. It won 5 Tony awards: Revival of a Musical, Direction of a Musical (Montello), Featured Actor in a Musical (Cerveris), Orchestrations (Starobin), and Lighting Design (Fisher & Eisenhauer). **It was also nominated for 2 additional awards:** Featured Actor in a Musical (O'Hare) and Scenic Design (Brill).

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Synopsis

Setting: “A shooting gallery in a derelict fairground.”

Characters: With the exception of two fictional characters—**The Proprietor**, a gun salesman who provides the characters with their weapons at the beginning of the show, **The Balladeer**, a narrator—the main characters are all historical figures who are failed or successful assassins of US Presidents:

- John Wilkes Booth, assassin of President Abraham Lincoln
- Charles Guiteau: assassin of President James Garfield
- Leon Czolgosz: assassin of President William McKinley
- Giuseppe Zangara: attempted assassin of President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt^[25]
- Lee Harvey Oswald: assassin of President John F. Kennedy
- Samuel Byck: attempted assassin of President Richard Nixon
- John Hinckley, Jr.: attempted assassin of President Ronald Reagan
- Lynette “Squeaky” Fromme: attempted assassin of President Gerald Ford
- Sara Jane Moore: attempted assassin of President Gerald Ford

They present their stories to the audience as well as interact with each other.

A detailed synopsis is available on Wikipedia:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assassins_\(musical\)#Synopsis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assassins_(musical)#Synopsis)

Selected Song Lyrics

“The Ballad of Booth”

BALLADEER

Someone tell the story,
Someone sing the song.
Every now and then
The country Goes a little wrong.

Every now and then
A madman's Bound to come along.
Doesn't stop the story-
Story's pretty strong.
Doesn't change the song...

Johnny Booth was a handsome devil,
Got up in his rings and fancy silks.
Had him a temper but kept it level.
Everybody called him Wilkes.

Why did you do it, Johnny?
Nobody agrees.
You who had everything,
What made you bring
A nation to its knees?

Some say it was your voice had gone,
Some say it was booze.
They say you killed a country, John,
Because of bad reviews.

Johnny lived with a grace and glitter.
Kind of like the lives he lived on stage.
Died in a barn in pain and bitter
Twenty-seven years of age.

Why did you do it, Johnny,
Throw it all away?
Why did you do it, boy,
Not just destroy
The pride and joy
Of Illinois,
But all the U.S.A.?

Your brother made you jealous, John,
You couldn't fill his shoes.
Was that the reason, tell us, John-
Along with bad reviews.

BOOTH
Damn!

HEROLD
They're coming! They'll be here any minute-

BOOTH
I need your help, Davey.

I've got to write this and I can't hold the pen

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“The Ballad of Booth” (cont)

HEROLD

Johnny, they've found us!
We've got to get out of here!

BOOTH

No! I have to make my case!
And I need you to take it down!

HEROLD

We don't have time!

BOOTH

Take it down-

An indictment. Of the former President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, who is herein charged with the following high crimes and misdemeanors.

BALLADEER

They say your ship was sinking, John...

BOOTH

One:

That you did ruthlessly provoke a war between the States, which cost some six hundred thousand of my countrymen their lives. Two-

BALLADEER

You'd started missing cues...

BOOTH

Two:

That you did silence your critics in the North, by hurling them into prison without benefit of charge or trial. Three-

BALLADEER

They say it wasn't Lincoln, John.

BOOTH

Shut up! Three-

BALLADEER

You'd merely had a slew of bad Reviews-

BOOTH

I said shut up!

VOICE

Booth! I have fifty soldiers out here Booth!
Give yourselves up or we'll set fire to the barn!

HEROLD

Don't shoot! I'm coming out!

BOOTH

No!

I have given up my life for one act, you understand?

Do not let history rob me of its meaning.

Pass on the truth! You're the only one who can.

Please...

BALLADEER

He said

"Damn you, Lincoln,

You had your way-

BOOTH

Tell them, boy!

BALLADEER

With blood you drew out

Of Blue and Gray!"

BOOTH

Tell it all!

Tell them till they listen!

BALLADEER

He said,

"Damn you, Lincoln,

And damn the day

You threw the 'U' out

Of U.S.A!"

He said:

BOOTH

Hunt me down, smear my name,

Say I did it for the fame,

What I did was kill the man who killed my country.

Now the Southland will mend,

Now this bloody war can end,

Because someone slew the tyrant

Just as Brutus slew the tyrant-

BALLADEER

He said:

BALLADEER, BOOTH

Damn you, Lincoln,

You righteous whore!

BOOTH

Tell 'em

Tell 'em what he did!

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“The Ballad of Booth” (cont)

BALLADEER, BOOTH

You turned your spite into civil war!

BOOTH

Tell 'em!

Tell 'em the truth!

BALLADEER

And more...

BOOTH

Tell'em, boy!

Tell them how it happened,

How the end doesn't mean that it's over,

How surrender is not the end!

Tell them:

How the country is not what it was,

Where there's blood on the clover,

How the nation can never again

Be the hope that it was.

How the bruises may never be healed,

How the wounds are forever,

How we gave up the field

But we still wouldn't yield,

How the union can never recover

From that Vulgar,

High and mighty

Niggerlover,

Never!

Never. Never. Never.

No, the country is not what it was...

. . . Damn my soul if you must,

Let my body turn to dust,

Let it mingle with the ashes of the country.

Let them curse me to hell,

Leave it to history to tell:

What I did, I did well,

And I did it for my country.

Let them cry, "dirty traitor!"

They will understand it later-

The country is not what it was...

BALLADEER

Johnny Booth was a headstrong fellow,

Even he believed the things he said.

Some called him noble, some said yellow.

What he was was off his head.

How could you do it, Johnny,

Calling it a cause?

You left a legacy

Of butchery

And treason we

Took eagerly,

And thought you'd get applause.

But traitors just get jeers and boos,

Not visits to their graves,

While Lincoln, who got mixed reviews,

Because of you, John, now gets only raves.

Damn, you, Johnny,

You paved the way

For other madmen

To make us pay.

Lots of madmen

Have had their say-

But only for a day.

Listen to the stories.

Hear it in the songs.

Angry men

Don't write the rules

And guns don't write the wrongs.

Hurts a while,

But soon the country's

Back where it belongs,

And that's the truth.

Still and all,

Damn you, Booth!

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“Another National Anthem”

CZOLGOSZ

I did it because it is wrong for one man to have so much service when other men have none...

BOOTH

I did it to bring down the government of Abraham Lincoln and avenge the ravaged South...

HINCKLEY

I did it to prove to her my everlasting love...

FROMME

I did it to make them listen to Charlie...

ZANGARA

I did it 'cause my belly was on fire...

GUITEAU

I did it to preserve the Union and promote the sale of my book...

MOORE

I did it so my friends would know where I was coming from...

BYCK

Where's my prize?

CZOLGOSZ

I did it because no one cared about the poor man's pain...

MOORE

I did it so I'd know where I was coming from...

BYCK

I want my prize...

ZANGARA

I did it 'cause the bosses made my belly burn...

HINCKLEY

I did it so she'd pay attention...

MOORE

So I'd have someplace to come from, and someplace to go...

BYCK

Don't I get a prize?...

GUITEAU

I did it 'cause they said I'd be ambassador to France...

BOOTH

I did it so they'd suffer in the North the way we'd suffered in the South...

BYCK

I deserve a fucking prize!...

FROMME

I did it so there'd be a trial, and Charlie would get to be a witness, and he'd be on TV, and he'd save the world!...

GUITEAU

Where's my prize?

BYCK

I did it to make people listen.

CZOLGOSZ, FROMME

They promised me a prize...

HINCKLEY

Because she wouldn't take my phone calls --

ALL

(except Zangara)

What about my prize?...

ZANGARA

Because nothing stopped the fire--!

ALL

(except Byck)

I want my prize!...

BYCK

Nobody would listen!

BALLADEER

(entering, to assassins)

And it didn't mean a nickel,

You just shed a little blood,

And a lot of people shed a lot of tears.

Yes, you made a little moment

And you stirred a little mud --

But it didn't fix the stomach

And you've drunk your final Bud,

And it didn't help the workers

And it didn't heal the country

And it didn't make them listen

And they never said, "We're sorry"--

BYCK

Yeah, it's never gonna happen,

Is it?

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No, sir --

CZOLGOSZ
Never.

BYCK
No, we're never gonna get the prize --

FROMME
No one listens...

BYCK
-- Are we?

ZANGARA
Never.

BYCK
No, it doesn't make a bit of difference,
Does it?

OTHERS
(variously)
Didn't.
Ever.

BYCK
Fuck it!

OTHERS
Spread the word...

ALL
Where's my prize?...

BALLADEER
I just heard
On the news
Where the mailman won the lottery.
Goes to show:
When you lose, what you do is try again.

You can be
What you choose,
From a mailman to a president.
There are prizes all around you,
If you're wise enough to see:
The delivery boy's on Wall Street,
And the usherette's a rock star --

BYCK
Right, it's never gonna happen, is it?
Is it!

HINCKLEY, FROMME
No, man!

BYCK, CZOLGOSZ
No, we'll never see the day arrive --

ASSASSINS
(variously)
Spread the word...
Will we?
No, sir --
Never!

No one's ever gonna even care if we're alive,
Are they?...
Never...
Spread the word...
We're alive...
Someone's gonna listen...
Listen!

BYCK
Listen...
There's another national anthem playing,
Not the one you cheer
At the ball park.

MOORE
Where's my prize?...

BYCK
It's the other national anthem, saying,
If you want to hear --
It says, "Bullshit!"...

CZOLGOSZ
It says, "Never!" --

GUITEAU
It says, "Sorry!" --

OTHERS
Loud and clear --

ASSASSINS
(variously)
It says: Listen
To the tune that keeps sounding
In the distance, on the outside,
Coming through the ground,
To the hearts that go on pounding
To the sound
Getting louder every year --

Listen to the sound...
Take a look around...

We're the other national anthem, folks,

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The ones that can't get in-
To the ball park.

Spread the word...

There's another national anthem, folks,
For those who never win,
For the suckers, for the pikers,
For the ones who might have been...

BALLADEER

There are those who love regretting,
There are those who like extremes,
There are those who thrive on chaos
And despair.
There are those who keep forgetting
How the country's built on dreams --

ASSASSINS

People listen...

BALLADEER

-- And the mailman won the lottery --

ASSASSINS

They may not want to hear it,
But they listen,
Once they think it's gonna stop the game...

BALLADEER

-- And the usherette's a rock star.

ASSASSINS

No, they may not understand
All the words,
All the same
They hear the music...
They hear the screams...

BALLADEER

I've got news --

ASSASSINS

They hear the sobs,
They hear the drums...

BALLADEER

-- You forgot about the country --

ASSASSINS

The muffled drums,
The muffled dreams...

BALLADEER

So it's now forgotten you --

ASSASSINS

And they rise...

BYCK

You know why I did it? Because there isn't any Santa
Claus!

ASSASSINS

Where's my prize?

BALLADEER

And you forgot --

ASSASSINS

What's my prize?

BALLADEER

How quick it heals --

ASSASSINS

Promises and lies...

BALLADEER

That it's a place
Where you can make the lies come true --

ASSASSINS

Spread the word...

BALLADEER

If you try --

ASSASSINS

Gotta spread the word...

BALLADEER

That's all you have to do --

ASSASSINS

Right!

All you have to do...

(They advance on the Balladeer, forcing him off the
stage, then turn front.)

Well, there's another national anthem,

And I think it just begun

In the ball park.

Listen hard...

Like the other national anthem

Says to each and every fan:

If you can't do what you want to,

Then you do the things you can.

You've got to try again!

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Like they say—
You've got to keep on trying . . .
Every day—
Until you get a prize...
Until you get a prize ...

(One by one, they start to leave the stage.)

Until you're heard...
Mustn't get discouraged...
Spread the word...
Mustn't give up hope...

Up to you --
Don't say --
-- What you choose...
-- It's never gonna happen...
Spread the word...

ALL
You can always get a prize...

BOOTH
You can always get your dream...

BYCK
Sure, the mailman won the lottery...