

## Reminiscences of Arranger and Orchestrator Larry Moore concerning the Pulitzer Prize for *Sunday in the Park with George*

**April 24, 2021:** Thirty-six years ago today, *Sunday in the Park with George* won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. I had something to do with it.

### **First connection with Stephen Sondheim**

After *Merrily We Roll Along* failed on Broadway, I spent an afternoon in June 1982 chatting with Steve Sondheim in the balcony of Alice Tully Hall. He was attending a New York City Gay Men's Chorus dress rehearsal to hear my arrangement of "Our Time" (from *Merrily We Roll Along*). He was complimentary about my choral arrangement, which the Chorus later recorded, and he recommended it to his publisher Tommy Valando. The result was my first published choral arrangement.

**Still very bruised by the failure of *Merrily We Roll Along***, he told me that afternoon that he would never write another musical; he was going to work on computer games for Parker Brothers. I was flabbergasted. This really upset me, and I called his office occasionally to ask his office manager Patricia Sinnott how he was, if by any chance he was doing any writing, and to let him know that I had been thinking about him. Then, one day, Patricia told me that he was working on a show with James Lapine.

**Not long after that in the summer of 1983**, Patricia called me. "Steve wants to know when you want to come to the show," she said. I was floored. Steve Sondheim was inviting me to see the Playwrights Horizon workshop of *Sunday in the Park With George*! I was dying to see it, but I couldn't afford a ticket on my salary. At the time I was working for a book shop on Sixth Avenue, making about \$200 a week. After taxes and rent, I was lucky to have money for food or transportation.

So, I gave her the date for a Sunday matinee, saw a performance of the first act—all that existed then—on a very warm Sunday afternoon, and left the theatre in tears, overcome by its imagination, its message, and its glorious score. I remember calling Steve the next day to thank him for the ticket and gushing effusively about how much I liked it and how "Finishing the Hat" had hit me so hard.

When my arrangement of "Our Time" was published, Patricia and I were chatting about a thank you gesture I could make. It was frustrating; I didn't really know what to give to someone who could pretty much acquire whatever he wanted. I asked her about the Pulitzer Prize, and she told me that, to her knowledge, he had never been nominated. This surprised me; I'm still amazed that *Follies* wasn't nominated. **I thought, I could nominate *Sunday In The Park With George*, by George!**

**The only problem was, neither Patricia nor I knew anything about the Pulitzer Prizes.** I called the New York Public Library Music Division and asked my librarian friend Charles Ogle if anyone there knew anything about the Pulitzers and learned its office was in the Columbia University School of Journalism. I called the school for further information, and someone promised to send all pertinent information to me. Once I knew what I needed to do, I called Patricia back.

**Requirements for the Pulitzer nomination:**

I needed biographies and photos of Steve and James Lapine, a recording, a vocal score, and libretto. She could take care of that. I would make the nomination and pay the entrance fee. I wanted to surprise Steve, but Patricia was worried about his reaction if he learned that she and I were up to something without his knowledge. She thought, for everyone's benefit, that I needed to ask his permission. So, I asked her to have Steve call me, and that evening we spoke on the phone.

I never knew, when I spoke to Steve, if I would get the busy Steve, who was cordial but gave an air of impatience, or the friendly Steve, who enjoyed the socializing. He was always cautious on the phone until he knew the purpose of the call. So, what did I need?, he asked.

I thanked him for the publication, and told him that I wanted to nominate *Sunday In The Park With George* for the Pulitzer Prize. His immediate reaction was "We'll never win." My response was, perhaps, but you never know, and I think it's about time you were nominated. He relaxed, we talked about it for a bit, and he agreed. He promised full cooperation, and told me to make all arrangements for the materials I needed through Patricia. Big sigh of relief. I might have danced about the apartment for a bit.

**The application process:**

Around August or September 1984, I made the trek to Sondheim's home with the Pulitzer application and forms. Steve and I chatted while Patricia typed out the forms. I left with a huge bundle containing the score, which was a large, very heavy manuscript, the original cast recording, libretto, photos and biographies of the authors, and the application. I walked down Second Avenue to 42nd Street, picked up the uptown 104 bus, and rode to Columbia at 116th Street. I found the School of Journalism office, turned over the materials to a gentleman who remarked how early this nomination had come in, paid the entry fee with a check, caught the downtown 104 bus home, and forgot about it.

**On Wednesday morning, April 24, 1985**, my dad woke me with a very early phone call. Early phone calls generally bode no good. He was in tears, which was rare, so I knew this was something serious. I must fly home immediately. My mother was having an emergency quadruple bypass the following morning, and he wanted me at the hospital with my brothers. I called my employer at the time—it was the Drama Book Shop at Seventh Avenue and 48th Street—and explained the situation. I spent the rest of the morning getting a check from an employer for whom I wrote occasional band arrangements, booking flights, and clearing my calendar.

When I returned home for lunch, there was a message from Patricia, and I called her back. She told me that the Pulitzers would be announced in the afternoon, the office phone had been ringing off the hook, and she was thinking about me. I told her about my mother, and that I had a few more errands to accomplish before I left for LaGuardia around 5:00. Then, my Chinese fortune cookie at lunch said, "You will hear great news today."

I returned home to pack around 4:00 to a phone message of Patricia screaming "We won!" We won!" I called her, and she said, "Where are you? Steve wants to talk to you." He called me from the theatre, we spoke briefly, and I flew home to my mother's surgery. That went well, too, and I flew back to Manhattan on Sunday, April 28th. In the mail, there was an invitation to a party at Steve's home celebrating the 100th performance of *Sunday In The Park With George*.

**Aftermath:**

Since 1989, I've barely seen Steve. He was in a great, affectionate mood backstage at Avery Fisher Hall after a 1989 All-Sondheim concert by the New York City Gay Men's Chorus. Much

of it was my work. As soon as he found me, I got a huge, affectionate bear hug. There was a lovely note from him about my orchestrations for Bruce Kimmel's 1994 recording "Unsung Sondheim."

The success of that recording kept me busy throughout the 90s with a lot of recordings for various labels, concerts, and regional theatre before I abandoned that streak of work in 2001 for what I thought was the security of working for the Packard Humanities Institute and a demented dream of conductor John McGlinn to record all of Jerome Kern and Victor Herbert. I went from that foundation to another foundation for whom I produced five recordings between 2010 and 2014.

I did see Steve at the final performance of *Gypsy* with Patti Lupone at City Center in 2007. He was seventy-seven, I was sixty-one, and we were both walking slower than we did when I last saw him. I was heading backstage to see friends, and he was crossing the lobby in search of the closing party and the bar. I called, "Steve, it's Larry Moore." There was no hug, only a short "Good to see you," as he hurried on. I agree; it was good to see him, and I smiled broadly all the way backstage. He had played a major part in my life when I was trying to get a foot in the door, and I will be eternally grateful for that. I am even more grateful that I, a minor player in the life of a truly great artist, was lucky enough to thank him in a major way.

Thirty-six years later, I remember everything about the events of April 24, 1985, very clearly. I wish I could say the same about what I did this morning.