

Sondheim 102:1982~2023

Contact Information & Schedule

Instructor: Alan Teasley, alanteasley@yahoo.com, (919) 812-0185

Dates & Times: Ten Thursdays: February 1-April 4, 2024, 9:00-10:15 am, via ZOOM

Course Website: www.sondheim101.com

For each class meeting, a separate page of the site will provide materials students can use to preview the class content as well as links to the online videos shown in class.

Course Description

After the failure of *Merrily We Roll Along* in 1981, composer/lyricist Stephen Sondheim considered leaving musical theater altogether; however, new collaborators rekindled his desire to work. In 1982, he met James Lapine, an avant-garde playwright and director. Their first collaboration—*Sunday in the Park with George*—won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. They followed this with *Into the Woods* and *Passion*. With John Weidman, Sondheim wrote *Assassins* and *Road Show*. At his death in 2021, he was working with playwright David Ives on *Here We Are*, an adaptation of two films by Luis Buñuel. This final musical opened off-Broadway in fall 2023.

We will survey this last part of Sondheim's remarkable career by listening to and watching excerpts from the shows, focusing not just on the hits, but also on those shows that were considered failures at the time. In addition to experiencing his memorable music, students will learn how Sondheim applied his three "necessary principles" for writing lyrics: "Content Dictates Form. Less Is More. God is in the Details." The course is primarily lecture with video and audio clips, but students will be able to ask questions and make comments during each class.

Instructor Bio

Alan Teasley began his career as a high school English and drama teacher. After retiring from the Durham Public Schools in 2006, he taught in Duke's Master of Arts in Teaching Program. A member of the OLLI Advisory Board, he is an avid theatergoer with a particular fondness for American musicals. This is his twelfth course on musical theater for OLLI. Previous courses have focused on Rodgers & Hammerstein, Kander & Ebb, Frank Loesser, Lerner & Loewe, Jerry Herman, Bock & Harnick, Leonard Bernstein, the ten musicals that have won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, six "Off-Broadway Classics," and *The Women of Broadway*, a survey of musicals with book, lyrics, and/or music by women. In Fall & Winter Terms 2023-24, he presented a two-course survey of *Broadway's Silver Age*, focused on the musicals of Rodgers & Hart, George & Ira Gershwin, Irving Berlin, and Cole Porter. In Fall and Winter Terms 2023-24, he is presenting a survey of the career of Stephen Sondheim.

Class Participation/Expectations

The instructor will provide background about each show, but the bulk of class time will be listening to or watching documentaries about or excerpts from the shows. Since the titles are announced in advance, and most of the scores are readily available on CD, streaming services, or YouTube, you're certainly free to conduct your own preview of each show using materials on the course website. All participants are expected to abide by the OLLI Code of Conduct.

Session Topics

- Class 1: 2/1/24** **“White. A blank page or canvas.”**
Introduction to the Course
Sunday in the Park with George (1984)—Act I
- Class 2: 2/8/24** **“You have to move on.”**
Sunday in the Park with George (1984)—Act II
- Class 3: 2/15/24** **“There are giants in the sky!”**
Into the Woods (1987)-Act I
- Class 4: 2/22/24** **“Children will listen.”**
Into the Woods (1987)-Act II
- Class 5: 2/29/24** **“Every now and then the country goes a little wrong.”**
Assassins (1990)
- Class 6: 3/7/24** **“I thought I knew what love was.”**
Passion (1994)
- Class 7: 3/14/24** **“No one has ever loved me as deeply as you.”**
Passion (continued)
- Class 8: 3/21/24** **“Just brotherly love, brother, brotherly love—”**
Wise Guys/Bounce/Road Show (1998-2008)
- Class 9: 3/28/24** **“Sooner is better than later.”**
Sondheim at the Movies: *The Last of Sheila* (1973), *Stavisky* (1974), *The Seven Percent Solution* (1978), *Reds* (1981), *Dick Tracy* (1990)
- Class 10: 4/4/24** **“You have to have something to believe in— might as well be Stephen.”**
• The Later Revues: *Putting It Together* (1993), *Sondheim on Sondheim* (2010), *Stephen Sondheim’s Old Friends* (2023)
• *Here We Are* (2023)

Recommended Books

Kantor, Michael, and Laurence Maslon. (2019) [*Broadway: The American Musical, Third Edition*](#). Guilford, CT: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books. ISBN 978-1-4930-4767-3 (paperback) This is the companion book to the PBS documentary film of the same name, a six-part series first broadcast in 2004. The third edition of the book has been updated to include shows that opened in the 2018-19 Broadway season. Although this book doesn’t have much on the particular shows we’ll cover in the course, it does have additional material on the creators of these shows and on the Broadway background of the 1950s-1980s. The book provides a comprehensive treatment of American musicals and hundreds of photos. It’s worth the heft and the cost—a doorstopper of a tome listing on Amazon.com for about \$40.

Sondheim, Stephen. (2011) [*Look, I Made a Hat: Collected Lyrics \(1981-2011\) with Attendant Comments, Amplifications, Dogmas, Harangues, Digressions, Anecdotes and Miscellany*](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf. ISBN-13: 978-0-307-59341-2 The title pretty much says it all. From *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984) through *Road Show* (2008)—plus songs for movies, television, and various other occasions—the book provides the complete lyrics, including alternate versions and deleted songs, for each show. In addition to providing background on many of the songs, Sondheim also shares his opinions of his fellow lyricists (at least those who were no longer living as of 2011), critics, and a host of other targets.