Sondheim 101: 1954-1981

Class 56 “Me, I Like to Live”
Follies (1971)

OLLI at Duke Fall Term 2023 • Alan Teasley, Instructor

Today’s Opening Number

[2:13]

Goals of the Course: You Will . . .

Be familiar with:

- The career of composer/lyricist Stephen Sondheim from his earliest works in the 1940s through 1981
- The plots, scores, and critical reception of 14 musicals by Sondheim (original Broadway productions as well as subsequent revivals)

Understand:

- How Sondheim's collaborators influenced his work—especially director Harold Prince and librettists Arthur Laurents, George Furth, James Goldman, Hugh Wheeler, & John Weidman
- Sondheim's three "necessary principles" for writing lyrics: Content Dictates Form, Less Is More, God Is in the Details

Appreciate:

- The complex relationship between/among critical reception, commercial success, and enduring popularity.

Today's Focus

You will know:

- The book and score of *Follies* (1971)
- The contributions of Sondheim's collaborators to this work—particularly James Goldman, Harold Prince and Jonathan Tunick
- Definitions of "concept musical" and "pastiche" as they apply to *Follies*

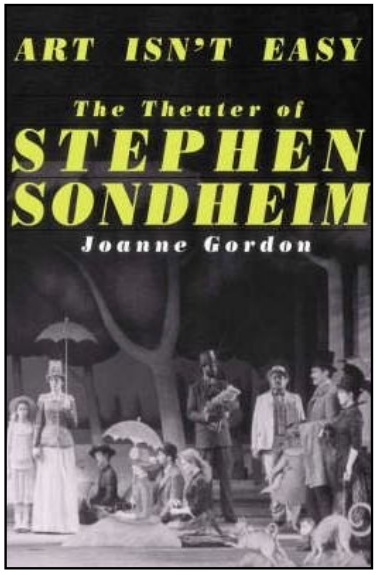
You will understand:

- Sondheim's meticulous attention to details in the songs for *Follies*
- How the aspects of *Follies* that Sondheim, Goldman and Prince worked hard to achieve were often the things the show was criticized for

You will be on the lookout for:

- Songs you will add to "The Great American Songbook"

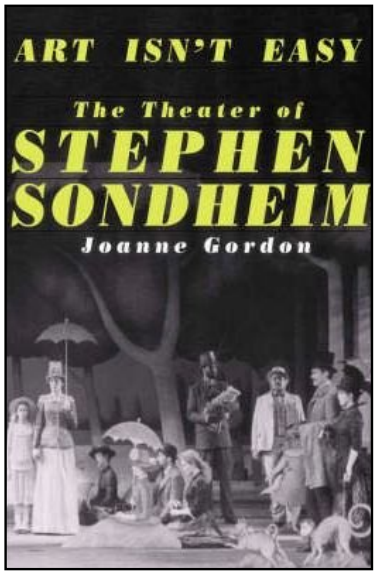
"Concept Musical"



"*Concept*, the word coined to describe the form of the Sondheim musical, suggests that all elements of the musical, thematic and presentational, are integrated to suggest a central theatrical image or idea. . . . A central conceit controls and shapes an entire production. The thematic thrust of the work dictates not only the content of the piece, but also the presentational form."

—Joanne Gordon,
Art Isn't Easy:
***The Theater of Stephen Sondheim* (1992)**

Sondheim repudiates the designation "Concept Musical"

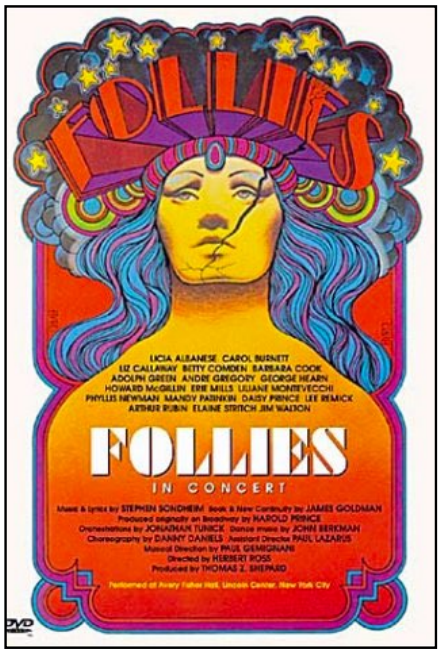


"'Concept' is this decade's vogue word just as 'integrated' was the vogue theatrical word of the '40s, referring to an approach in which a story is told and characters are advanced through song. . . .

"The watershed . . . was *Oklahoma!* Everything that followed can be seen as a development of it—either a rejection or a carrying on. Me, I'm carrying it on, making variations."

—quoted in Joanne Gordon,
Art Isn't Easy (1992)

Follies (1971): Creative Team



Poster by David Edward Byrd

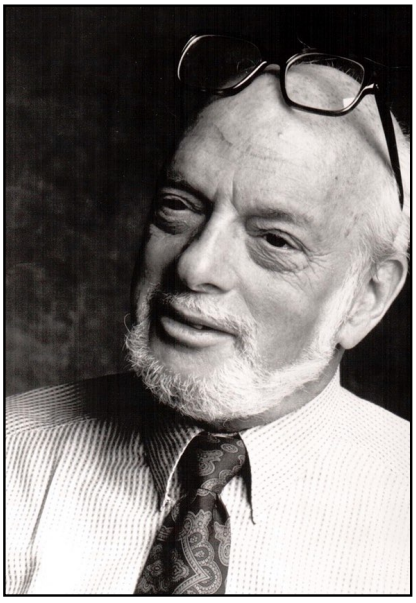
- Producer: Harold Prince in assoc. w/Ruth Mitchell
- Music & Lyrics: Stephen Sondheim
- Book: James Goldman
- Direction: Harold Prince & Michael Bennett
- Choreography: Michael Bennett
- Orchestrations: Jonathan Tunick
- Scenic Design: Boris Aronson
- Costume Design: Florence Klotz
- Lighting Design: Tharon Musser
- Cast: Dorothy Collins, John McMartin, Gene Nelson, Alexis Smith, Harvey Evans, Kurt Peterson, Marti Rolph, Virginia Sandifur, Yvonne De Carlo, Fifi D'Orsay, Mary McCarty, Ethel Shutta, Justine Johnson

LENGTH OF RUN: 522 performances

Harold Prince (1928-2019)

MUSICALS WITH SONDHEIM:

- 1957 *West Side Story*
- 1962 *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*
- 1970 *Company*
- 1971 *Follies*
- 1973 *A Little Night Music*
- 1976 *Pacific Overtures*
- 1979 *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*
- 1981 *Merrily We Roll Along*



James Goldman (1927-1998)

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

PLAYS & FILMS:

- **1961: *They Might Be Giants* (play)**
- **1966: *A Lion in Winter* (play)**
- **1968: *A Lion in Winter* (film, Oscar)**
- **1971: *Nicholas and Alexandra* (film)**
- **1976: *Robin and Marian* (film)**
- **1985: *White Nights* (film)**

WITH SONDHEIM:

- **1965: Begins work on *The Girls Upstairs***
- **1966: *Evening Primrose***
- **1971: *Follies***

Jonathan Tunick (b. 1938)

EARLY LIFE & CAREER:

- **Born in New York; fascinated with instruments when his teacher played records like *Tubby the Tuba* and *Peter and the Wolf***
- **Graduated from New York's High School of Music and Art in 1964; major instrument was clarinet**
- **Majored in composition at Bard College**
- **Earned master's in composition from Juilliard in 1960 with a minor in conducting**
- **While in grad school, worked summers as an arranger at Tamiment, a Poconos resort, conducting more than 50 musicals**
- **First Broadway break: orchestrating *Promises, Promises* for Burt Bacharach (1968)**

Jonathan Tunick (b. 1938)

MUSICALS WITH SONDHEIM:

- 1970 *Company*
- 1971 *Follies*
- 1973 *A Little Night Music*
- 1976 *Pacific Overtures*
- 1979 *Sweeney Todd*
- 1981 *Merrily We Roll Along*
- 1987 *Into the Woods*
- 1994 *Passion*
- 1996 *Forum* (revival)
- 2004 *The Frogs*

Jonathan Tunick (b. 1938)

MUSICALS WITH OTHERS:

- 1968 *Promises, Promises*
- 1975 *A Chorus Line*
- 1976 *Ballroom*
- 1982 *Nine*
- 1983 *Baby*
- 1997 *Titanic* (Tony Award)
- 2005 *The Color Purple*
- 2015 *Dames at Sea* (revival)
- 2018 *Carousel* (revival)
- 2020 *West Side Story* (revival)

Jonathan Tunick (b. 1938)

AWARDS:

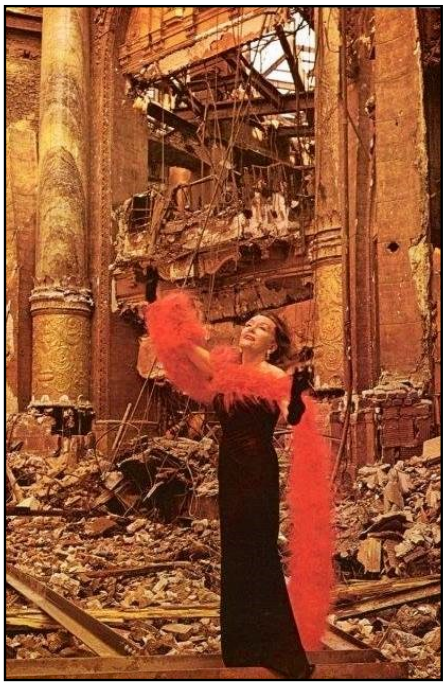
- First winner of Best Orchestrations Tony in 1997 for *Titanic*
- Nominated for Tonys 10 times since (all for Best Orchestrations)
- Seventh person to earn EGOT status:
  - Emmy: Outstanding Achievement in Music Direction (*Night of 100 Stars*, 1982)
  - Grammy: Instrumental Arrangement Accompanying Vocals (Cleo Laine, "No One Is Alone," 1989)
  - Oscar: Original Song Score or Adaptation (*A Little Night Music*, 1978)
  - Tony: Orchestrations (*Titanic*, 1997)

Follies (1971): The Inspiration(s)

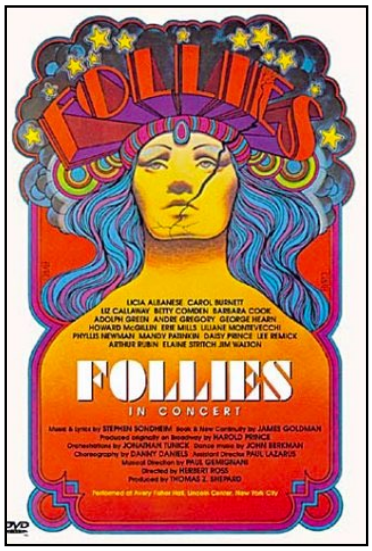
- During very early discussions Sondheim & Goldman focused on a musical set at a high school reunion.
- Then a story appeared in the *New York Times* about a reunion of Ziegfeld Follies alumnae.
- Thus was born *The Girls Upstairs*, a musical murder mystery.

—and—

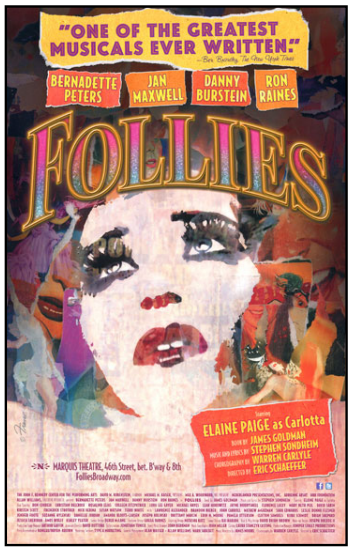
- For Harold Prince: A 1960 photograph of Gloria Swanson standing in the rubble of the Roxy Theater, published in *Life*. Caption: "Swan Song for a Famous Theater"



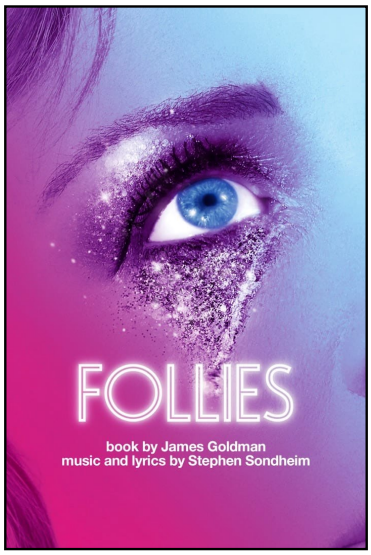
Three Key Productions of *Follies*



1971

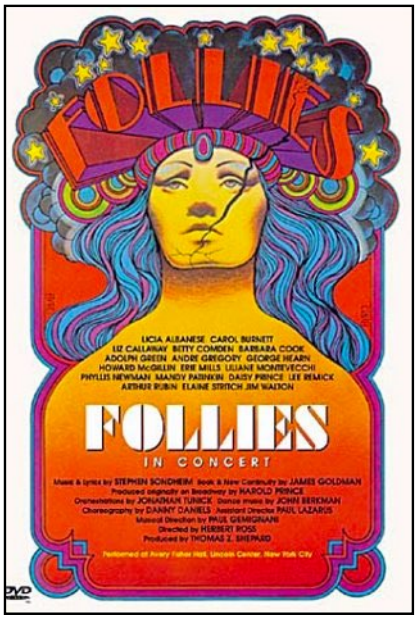


2011



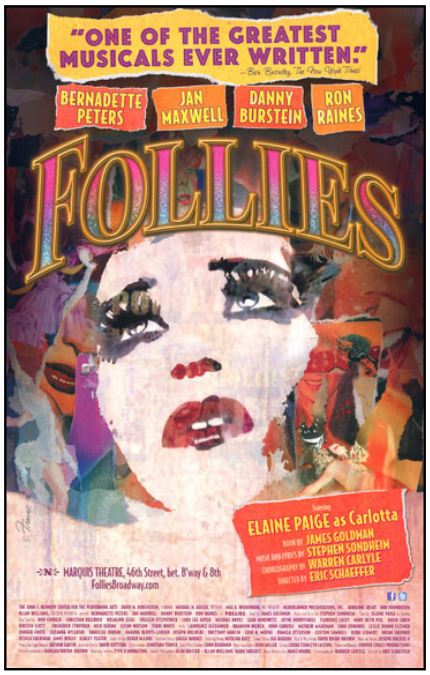
2017

Follies at the 1972 Tony Awards: 11 Nominations & 7 Wins



- Best Musical
- Book of a Musical: James Goldman
- Original Score: Stephen Sondheim
- Actress (Musical): Alexis Smith
- Actress (Musical): Dorothy Collins
- Featured Actor (Musical): Gene Nelson
- Direction (Musical): Harold Prince & Michael Bennett
- Choreography: Michael Bennett
- Scenic Design: Boris Aronson
- Costume Design: Florence Klotz
- Lighting Design: Tharon Musser

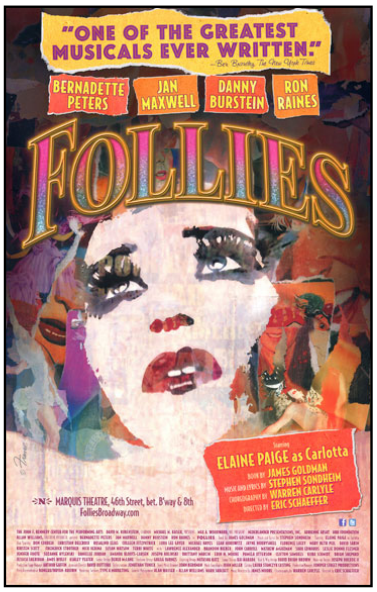
Follies (2011): Creative Team



- Producers: Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Nederlander Presentations & others
- Music & Lyrics: Stephen Sondheim
- Book: James Goldman
- Direction: Eric Schaeffer
- Choreography: Warren Carlyle
- Orchestrations: Jonathan Tunick
- Scenic Design: Derek McLane
- Costume Design: Gregg Barnes
- Lighting Design: Natasha Katz
- Cast: Bernadette Peters, Jan Maxwell, Ron Raines, Danny Burstein, Elaine Paige, Rosalind Elias, Jayne Houdyshell, Susan Watson, Terri White

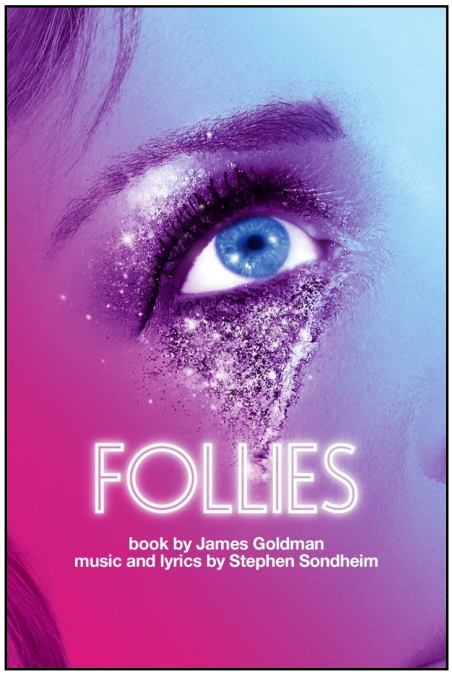
LENGTH OF RUN: 152 performances

Follies at the 2012 Tony Awards: 8 Nominations & 1 Win



- Best Revival of a Musical
- Actor (Musical): Danny Burstein
- Actor (Musical): Ron Raines
- Actress (Musical): Jan Maxwell
- Featured Actress (Musical): Jayne Houdyshell
- Costume Design (Musical): Gregg Barnes
- Lighting Design (Musical): Natasha Katz
- Sound Design (Musical): Kai Harada

Follies (National Theatre, 2017): Creative Team

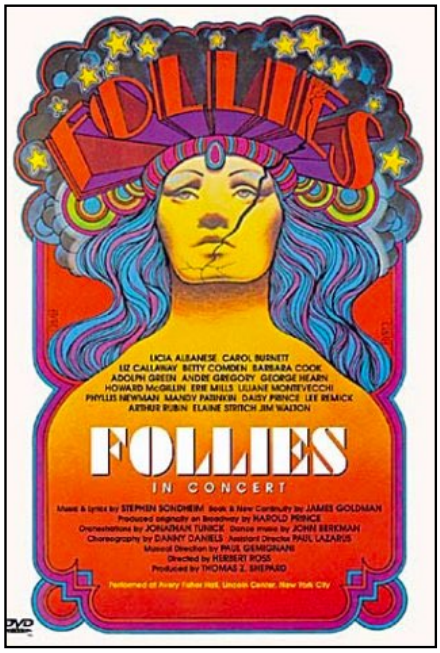


- Producer: National Theatre
- Music & Lyrics: Stephen Sondheim
- Book: James Goldman
- Director: Dominic Cooke
- Choreographer: Bill Deamer
- Orchestrations: Jonathan Tunick w/Josh Clayton
- Set & Costume Design: Vicki Mortimer
- Lighting Design: Paul Constable
- Cast: Imelda Staunton, Janie Dee, Philip Quast, Peter Forbes, Tracie Bennett, Geraldine Fitzgerald, Josephine Barstow

OLIVIER AWARDS: 10 nominations and 2 wins:
(Best Revival of a Musical, Best Costume Design)

BROADCAST: in cinemas worldwide November 2017

Follies (1971): The Book



- Setting: The stage of the Weissman Theatre, 1971 ("tonight"), which is to be torn down
- Dmitri Weissman hosts one last reunion of performers who worked in the annual productions of the Weissman Follies between 1918 and 1941.
- The central characters are two couples:
  - Sally and Buddy Plummer
  - Phyllis and Benjamin Stone
- Sally & Phyllis were showgirls—and good friends—during their days in the Follies; Buddy and Ben were their suitors.

Follies (2011): Principals

Danny Burstein
Buddy Plummer

Bernadette Peters
Sally Durant Plummer

Ron Raines
Benjamin Stone

Jan Maxwell
Phyllis Rogers Stone

Follies (1971): The Songs*

ACT I:

- "Beautiful Girls"
- "Don't Look at Me"
- "Waiting for the Girls Upstairs"
- "Rain on the Roof"
- "Ah, Paris!"
- "Broadway Baby"
- "The Road You Didn't Take"
- "Bolero d'Amour" (instrumental)
- "In Buddy's Eyes"
- "Who's That Woman?"
- "I'm Still Here"
- "Too Many Mornings"

Act II:

- "The Right Girl"
- "One More Kiss"
- "Could I Leave You?"
- "Loveland"
- "You're Gonna Love Tomorrow/ Love Will See Us Through"
- "The God-Why-Don't-You-Love-Me Blues"
- "Losing My Mind"
- "The Story of Lucy and Jessie"
- "Live, Laugh, Love"

*As listed on the Internet Broadway Database for Opening Night

pastiche

noun

"An artistic work in a style that imitates that of another work, artist, or period." (New Oxford American Dictionary)

Examples:

Fiorello!: "'Til Tomorrow" is a pastiche of sentimental songs of the 1890s-1910s like "After the Ball."

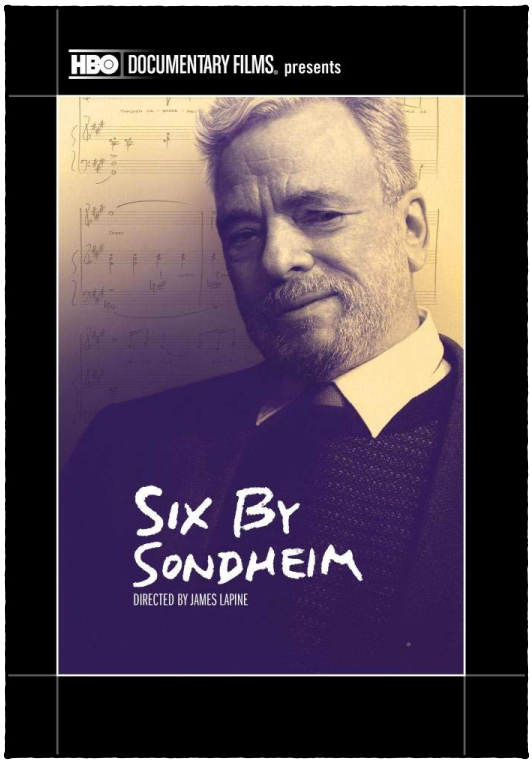
Many of the songs of *Chicago* are pastiches of 1920s popular songs: "All I Care About Is Love," "Mister Cellophane," et al.

Sondheim's *Follies* mixes pastiches ("Broadway Baby," "One More Kiss," "Who's That Woman?") with more contemporary "Sondheim" songs ("In Buddy's Eyes," "The Road You Didn't Take")—which Sondheim refers to as "Character Songs."

- **On Writing Good Lyrics**
- **Hammerstein's Influence**
- **Song 4: "I'm Still Here"**

Six by Sondheim
(Directed by James Lapine, HBO, 2014)

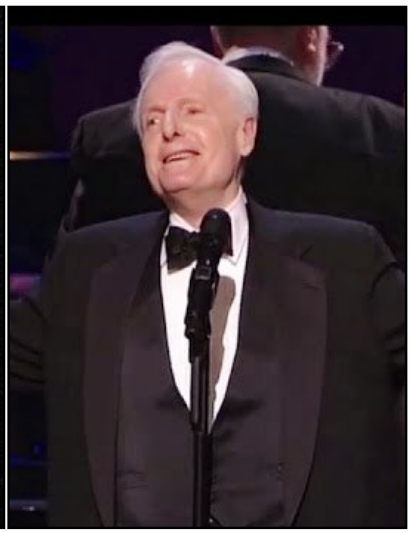
[8:57]



“I’m Still Here” • *Follies* (1971)

Yvonne De Carlo (Carlotta Campion) • The David Frost Show [3:31]

“The Road You Didn’t Take” • *Follies* (1971)



John McMartin (Benjamin Stone) • *Sondheim! the Birthday Concert* • 2010 [3:00]

“In Buddy’s Eyes” • *Follies* (1971)

Barbara Cook • “Mostly Sondheim” Concert • 2003 • [3:26]

“Too Many Mornings” • *Follies* (1971)

Dorothy Collins (Sally), Marti Rolph (Young Sally) , John McMartin (Ben) • *Follies* • 1971

"Too Many Mornings" • *Follies* (1971)

Nathan Gunn & Audra McDonald • *Sondheim! the Birthday Concert* • 2010 • [4:53]

The Loveland Sequence
(as time permits)

Follies (1971): Reviews

"*Follies* is intermissionless and exhausting, an extravaganza that becomes tedious for two simple reasons: its extravagances have nothing to do with its pebble of a plot; and the plot, which could be wrapped up in approximately two songs, dawdles through 22 before it declares itself done. . . . Ingenuity without inspiration can quickly become wearing . . . no one on the creative staff has had an idea for the evening capable of sustaining its weight in silvered feathers." (Walter Kerr, *NY Times*)

"*Follies* carried nostalgia to where sentiment finally engulfs it in its sickly maw. And yet—in part—it is stylish, innovative, it has some of the best lyrics I have ever encountered, and above all it is a serious attempt to deal with the musical form." (Clive Barnes, *NY Times*)

Follies (1971): Reviews

"A pastiche so brilliant as to be breathtaking at times. . . . Don't let the title mislead you. Nostalgia is not simply the undercurrent of the evening. It is the very subject of it. The follies are those committed by four people momentarily transported to the past." (Douglas Watt, *Daily News*)

"*Follies* is a brilliant show, wonderfully entertaining, extraordinarily intelligent. Dazzling, a rousing piece of American show business. Remarkable theatre! Overwhelming!" (Jack Kroll, *Newsweek*)

"*Follies* is an incredible display of musical virtuosity and expertise. An indelible achievement." (T. E. Kalem, *Time*)

Follies (1971): Reviews

"*Follies* was not quite ready to rely completely on concept as the organizational replacement for a book . . . . James Goldman was given short shrift by Prince and Sondheim, who were obviously more interested in the concept. . . . The music and movement are perpetual, the dances spectacular. . . . They have recreated the past with dazzling success. Nor is it ever camp, not ever, and that is important because the show is the antithesis of camp.

"Sondheim's work is stunning . . . . His score is a recreation of every songwriter of the '20s and '30s. It is a brilliant trick, consummately pulled off—in the stunning lyrics as well as in the music—but it is a trick nevertheless. . . . [The creators and company] achieve a structure of production that is quite nearly colossal . . . *Follies* is utterly magnificent. Every other musical should have its faults."

—Martin Gottfried, *Women's Wear Daily*)

Sondheim on *Follies*

"*Follies* allowed me to imitate the reigning composers and lyricists from the era between the World Wars, and I grabbed it with all ten fingers and a rhyming dictionary. *Follies* is an orgy of pastiche."

***—Finishing the Hat* (2010), p. 200**