

# Stanford | Continuing Studies

**Course Title:** Four by Sondheim: Company, Follies, Sweeney Todd, and Sunday in the Park with George.

**Course Code:** MUS 178

**Instructor:** Joel Phillip Friedman

## Course Summary:

*\*Please see course page for full description and additional details.*

## Note About Live Attendance and Recording:

This class will be recorded and available for a limited time. The ability to comment and ask questions is a real benefit to participating live, versus watching a recording at a later date. However, we all have busy lives and conflicts, so if you are to miss a class live, you can watch the recording and it will not affect your ability to receive credit for the class.

## Grade Options and Requirements:

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
  - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
  - Students must attend and/or watch all class sessions.

*\*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*

## Tentative Weekly Outline:

### Materials Documenting Musicals

I have very few “rules,” when it comes to using documentation of musicals, maybe “principles” is a better word, and there are all always big caveats. Here are the caveats:

- Start with Original Cast Recordings (OCR) as they offer the freshest take from the original creative team.
- However: some (older) cast albums were (and still are) trimmed for financial expediency; dance numbers, additional verses, etc., sometimes whole songs are cut.
- More recently companies and producers have been putting together star-filled casts for “complete cast album” recordings or unstaged one-time events. Think of the many Sondheim-New York Philharmonic concerts. These are often wonderful for their full(er), often original-yet-augmented orchestration, but can lack cohesiveness and theatrical understanding as they’re essentially all-star “pickup recordings,” done in a matter of a days, vs a fully rehearsed and directed theatrical cast recording made after a show has rehearsed for weeks and then opened. You lose some; you gain some.

- Some shows have gone through substantial revisions and newer cast albums offer new lyrics, even different songs (the 1970 vs 1996 *Company* is a great example).
- Movie adaptations of musical are almost routinely wrong. Between star-driven casting, the original creative team usually shunted aside, and film being an entirely different medium than live theater, you should tread warily. But, in many cases it can be all we have to document a show beyond audio recordings. This isn't necessarily the case with the recent spate of filmed stage productions, although purists will disagree.
- Most of the recordings listed below (and a few of the DVDs) are readily available on your streaming service/platform of choice. You can also purchase "hard copies," if you still do that.

### Homework

There really aren't "assignments" for this course. You will find that listening to the cast album and, if possible, viewing a production of the show *beforehand* will greatly enhance your understanding and enjoyment of the material, and therefore class. Diehards may want to purchase the books/libretti to the shows (they are easily obtainable online or via order to your favorite bricks & mortar store). Being familiar with the plot, the songs, and the characters of each show will allow you to gain understanding both the overall direction of Sondheim's career as we move from musical-to-musical, as well as the details of construction *within* each musical. We will be spending time discussing *how* these works are constructed, *why* they work, what functions the song *serve*, and dive into specific songs to look at lyrical and musical choices made by Sondheim. NB: The course is not designed to be a comprehensive overview of Sondheim's career. That would entail starting with *West Side Story* and moving forward chronologically, covering multiple musicals per session. Instead, these are 4 excellent example musicals that also represent landmarks in a new kind of musical theater.

I am happy to recommend books on Sondheim (there's a short list at the end). Again, you are not required to read anything for class.

### Week 1 - May 1 *Company*

- The 1970 Original Cast Recording is one for the ages - periodic out-of-tune notes and all. They knew they were on to something special, and that energy comes through. While a tad dated, Jonathan Tunick's original orchestrations are alone worth the price of admission. Compact Disc, 1998 [Sony Classical/Columbia/Legacy SK 65283]
- I am personally sympathetic, but not keen on the recent "let's have the cast play the instruments, too!" school of Sondheim productions. They exist.
- The 1970 D. A. Pennebaker documentary *Original Cast Album: "Company"* is finally available streaming and is so worth watching. E.g. <https://www.criterionchannel.com/original-cast-album-company>
- What if you want to see how the show was originally staged by Hal Prince and Michael Bennett, including Bennett's innovative movement-choreography? That's difficult. The original was never officially filmed (only bootleg excerpts pop up)
- But here's the complete 1993 LA reunion concert! It is of terrible media quality but has most of the original cast with reconstructions of much of the original staging. Far from high-fidelity, but still worth watching. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QRQzVvgT-A>  
Here's some documentation of rehearsal for the 1993 reunion concert  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PiKplQu05hQ>
- The 2006 John Doyle/Raul Esparza DVD and accompanying CD offers some terrific performances within the "let's play some instruments, too!" format and has the 1996 script and score revisions. It will give you sense of the whole piece.
- The 2011 semi-staged all-star New York Philharmonic version offers similar strengths and weaknesses. Original orchestrations! Stars! An uneven semi-staged performance put together in a few days! But, it's fun.

Please contact the Stanford Continuing Studies office with any questions  
365 Lasuen St., Stanford, CA 94305  
[continuingstudies@stanford.edu](mailto:continuingstudies@stanford.edu)  
650-725-2650

**Week 2 - May 8**

**Follies**

- The 1971 OCR is the place to start, but it is *abridged*.
- The 1998 Papermill playhouse revival cast album is highly regarded and very complete. TVT Records
- Another good and complete recording is the 2011 Broadway revival with Bernadette Peters on P.S. Classics
- As for video, here's the accompanying Kennedy Center 2011 production (not a great video, but it is the complete show) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Fk6Cty7EKw>
- Here is the same 2011 production when it came to Broadway. Again, not professional video, but it captures the show. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjVxJbe5z-8>

**Week 3 - May 15**

**Sweeney Todd**

At last, it gets easier!

- The 1979 Broadway production has a terrific cast album with Len Cariou and Angela Lansbury. Definitive.
- And there is a terrific, filmed version of the stage production with Lansbury and George Hearn on Warner Home Video. The immense, cavernous size of Prince's original production comes through.
- I do not know the film version with Johnny Depp... as I am too scared to look.
- There is a star-studded New York Philharmonic unstaged version (Brynn Terfel!) if you so choose: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Z-nlwAuh9g>
- Are you brave enough to watch the original Broadway production in a bootleg video? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISp5sjaSnI0>

**Week 3 - May 22**

**Sunday in the Park with George**

- The original 1984 production with Mandy Patinkin and Bernadette Peters is superb and well documented both as a cast album and an accompanying film (available on DVD and streaming).
- Here's a lo-fi copy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFQGkm2VFy4>
- I do not know the Gyllenhaal revival

**Books to musicals**

- The revised *Company* and *Follies* books are available directly through Theatre Communications Group (<https://circle.tcg.org/home?ssopc=1>) or your favorite store/site.
- *Sweeney Todd* and *Sunday in the Park with George* are available directly through Applause Books (<http://applausebooks.com>) or your favorite store/site.

**Books on Sondheim (in no particular order)**

- Stephen Sondheim, *Hat Box: The Collected Lyrics of Stephen Sondheim: A Box Set*
- Sondheim musings and lyrics, with some great photos
- Mark Eden Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*
- For music geeks. It's about the music.
- Meryle Secrest, *Stephen Sondheim: A Life*
- A serviceable biography. Gives you a sense of where he came from and who he is a person.
- Stephen O Banfield, *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals* (The Michigan American Music Series)
- Hard core, for those interested and able to dig into details
- Craig Zadan, *Sondheim & Co*
- Sadly out of print, check your library. Good reporting on the creation/process of some of Sondheim's classic works.
- Joanne Gordon, *Art Isn't Easy: The Theater of Stephen Sondheim*

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- Another more academic, hard-core book