



Course Title: Four More by Sondheim: West Side Story, Gypsy, A Little Night Music, and Pacific Overtures

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

These class sessions will be recorded

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.*

Materials Documenting Musicals

As stated for the last Sondheim class: I have very few “rules,” when it comes to using documentation of musicals, maybe “principles” is a better word than rules, 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 and

complete score documentation, 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 recent *Company* is a great example, as is the recent film adaptation of *West Side Story*).
- 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 know what that is and chose to do so. (I see you...)
- Revivals: DUCK!! Just kidding. As a writer I focus more on the show, but clearly some revivals are better than others, and many of you feel *strongly* (DUCK!!) about which are better than others, not to mention their leads. I will enjoy learning from *you*.

Homework

There really aren't "assignments" for this course. You will find that listening to the cast album(s) and, if possible, viewing a production of the show *beforehand* will greatly enhance your understanding, enjoyment, and level of participation. 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 et al. NB: The course is not designed to be a comprehensive overview of Sondheim's career. 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 (see next section). Again, you are not *required* to read anything for class.

Most of these recordings and videos are available on a streaming platform. Just make sure you are accessing the version you want.

Recommended Reading

Books on Sondheim (in no particular order)

- Stephen Sondheim, *Hat Box: The Collected Lyrics of Stephen Sondheim: A Box Set*
 - Sondheim musings and lyrics, a series of small masterclasses 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*
 - Another more academic, hard-core book

Tentative Weekly Outline

Week 1 - April 29

West Side Story

- You have to start with the 1957 Original Cast Album (OCR), now remastered
 - Label: Masterworks Broadway ASIN: B000056TB2
- If WSS were an opera, this 1985 effort would be the recording
 - Label: Deutsche Grammophon ASIN: B00FY3CE0M
 - I have a soft spot for this Allstar pickup "thing" as it's *Lenny* conducting, and I worked for him during this period. It has glorious moments and... and is a complete rendition of the score as he wanted it.
 - There is an accompanying documentary *The Making of West Side Story* (1985) that you can stream
- Film versions. We now have two!
- The familiar 1961 Robert Wise DVD
 - This has been repackaged in a number of formats
 - Studio: WarnerBrothers ASIN: B084S3R764
 - I'm not sure if the 2021 Spielberg adaptation is still in theaters or available streaming

Week 2 - May 6

Gypsy!

- The 1959 OCR is *the* benchmark. After all it was written for Merman. Worth it for the overture alone.
 - Label: Masterworks Broadway ASIN: B00000J28I
- 1973 London revival with Angela Lansbury and directed by Arthur Lawrence
 - Label: Alliance ASIN: B000003F2A

- Gypsy - 2008 Broadway revival with Patti Lupone
 - Label: Time Life ASIN: B001CHFM12
- Movie
- 1962 movie with Rosalind Russell, um... don't?
- You can buy/rent/stream the 2015 National Theatre stage production with Imelda Staunton
 - Studio: Shout Factory ASIN: B01JQXEKQG

Week 3 - May 13

A Little Night Music

- The 1973 OCR with Johns & Cariou is the one
 - Label: Masterworks Broadway ASIN: B00000DHSO
- There is a 1990 New York City Opera production as well
 - Act 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dslqa8NfRSo>
 - Act 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRMxAC2Kok8>
- Movie?
 - No

Week 4 - May 20

Pacific Overtures

- The 1976 OCR is the one
 - Label: Masterworks Broadway ASIN: B000002W6P
- How about the original cast filmed?
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQ546PASgHI>

I may post more links as class approaches.