



Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions

By Mark Eden Horowitz

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Stephen Sondheim is widely regarded as the most important composer and lyricist of musical theater in the second half of the 20th century. Celebrating his 80th birthday, this new edition of *Sondheim on Music* finds him in these guided interviews expounding in great depth and detail on his craft. As a natural teacher, thoughtful and opinionated, Sondheim discusses the art of musical composition, lyric writing, the collaborative process of musical theater, and how he thinks about his own work.

Where the first edition focused particularly on six shows—*Passion, Assassins, Into the Woods, Sunday in the Park with George, Sweeney Todd*, and *Pacific Overtures*—this second edition presents a new chapter that discusses Sondheim's entire career. Several shows that were not discussed previously are explored here, including *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, Merrily We Roll Along, Company, Follies, Anyone Can Whistle*, and *A Little Night Music*, as well as thoughts about the recent film adaptation of *Sweeney Todd*. The book also features an entire chapter on *Bounce*: the previous incarnation of his latest musical, *Road Show*. In addition to Sondheim's list of "Songs I Wish I'd Written," the songlisting and discography has been greatly expanded and updated to include all works composed and recorded over the last six years.

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Editorial Review

Review

Mr. Sondheim was interviewed onstage by Mark Eden Horowitz, whose essential book, *Sondheim on Music*, offers in-depth discussions with the composer. (*The New York Times*)

In this exciting new expanded edition, Mark Horowitz reveals the compositional process of Stephen Sondheim through a fascinating series of conversations with the composer himself. It is thrilling to discover the intimate details of how these classic songs, scores, and shows were created. Utterly captivating and illuminating. (Stephen Flaherty, Tony Award-winning composer of *Ragtime*, *Once On This Island*, and *Seussical*)

In these remarkable dialogues Mark Horowitz has elicited cogent, illuminating insights into the creative process from Stephen Sondheim, the ever-astonishing titan of the musical stage. (Robert Kimball, Musical theatre historian and artistic advisor to the estates of Cole Porter and Ira Gershwin)

Sondheim devotees will be forever grateful to Library of Congress music specialist Mark Horowitz for the interviews he conducted with Sondheim in 1997, the most extensive about how the composer works and the basis of an upcoming book, *Sondheim On Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*. (Chip Brown *Smithsonian Magazine*)

The first edition of this book, published in 2003, focuses on a set of interviews Horowitz conducted with Stephen Sondheim, the legendary composer and lyricist. It also includes a few of Sondheim's original sketches. This second edition expands on the original with transcripts from two subsequent interviews, as well as an updated song listing and discography. In the newer chapters, Sondheim talks about the evolution of his show *Bounce* (originally entitled *Road Show*), how different strings of harmony distinguish composers, and his thoughts on the film adaptation of *Sweeney Todd*. Sondheim enthusiasts will appreciate the lengthier discussion of *Merrily We Roll Along*, a musical that was barely touched upon in the first edition....Much of the content in the first edition is incorporated here, and libraries with that volume will appreciate the expanded discography and song listing. Recommended for libraries with a prominent emphasis on music. (*Library Journal*)

Indispensable for any student, writer, or ardent fan of drama and musical theater. *Sondheim on Music* opens up the usually private process of putting a show together; clarifying how science, craft and design can meet the mysteries and wonder of life and story. It puts the reader in the room with one of our greatest American masters. (Jeanine Tesori, composer of *Caroline, or Change* and *Shrek the Musical*)

One of the finest books focusing on [Sondheim's] work is Mark Eden Horowitz's 2003 study Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions. Horowitz is an invaluable music specialist at the Library of Congress, whose personal bailiwick is the manuscripts of Rodgers, Porter, Berlin, Bernstein and the like. While processing the incoming Sondheim Collection, he came up with the idea of conducting a series of intensive interviews with the composer 'with the intention of anticipating the questions of future scholars.' Sondheim readily agreed, with sessions on what were then his six most recent musicals (from Pacific Overtures through Passion). The general interest in these interviews was understandably enormous, so they were duly published. So invaluable was the resulting book that Horowitz and Sondheim got back together for two additional interviews, in which the composer discusses his earlier and later work. These have now been

incorporated into a second edition of Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions, which due to the additional material happily supplants the first volume. And for those of you who believe that the pop world—as embodied by network television—and the groves of Sondheimian academia cannot and will not ever mix, let us point out that Horowitz's book was used on camera to launch a joke in the Madonna episode of 'Glee.' So there. (Playbill)

Horowitz's...book quotes the composer extensively about the music that makes the words soar. (NPR)

Now in its second edition, *Sondheim on Music* by Mark Eden Horowitz makes an excellent companion work to the esteemed composer's book. The music scholar and Library of Congress staffer has conducted an extensive series of interviews with Sondheim about his craft and now includes expanded sections on productions not covered in the previous edition, plus an impeccably detailed discography, updated for all recent recordings, that is sure to please and inspire even the most ardent Sondheim fan. Horowitz skillfully balances his technical content, serving both the needs of the music student and the theatre enthusiast. (Bay Stages)

This second edition of the author's interviews with Sondheim builds on the original discussions of 'Assassins,' 'Into the Woods,' 'Pacific Overtures,' 'Passion,' 'Sunday in the Park with George' and 'Sweeney Todd.' The new material offers discussions of several other shows and a whole chapter on 'Bounce.' Horowitz, senior music specialist at the Library of Congress, asks exceptionally detailed, nitty-gritty questions about melodic lines, harmonies, time signatures, accompaniment, and more; he gets exceptionally detailed answers in return....The book also includes a valuable song list and discography, as well as the fascinating 'Songs I Wish I'd Written (At Least in Part)' that Sondheim prepared as part of the Kennedy Center's celebration of his 70th birthday in 2000. *Sondheim on Music* puts you just as deeply into the mind of the composer. Putting it all together, you've got a provocative, illuminating portrait of a creative powerhouse. (Baltimore Sun)

This is a series of interviews that the author conducted with Stephen Sondheim as they pored over Sondheim's manuscripts and sketches and discussed the creative process....Sondheim talks about his approaches to musicalizing characters and dramatic moments. (The Washington Times)

The first edition of *Sondheim on Music* appeared in 2003, and Mark Eden Horowitz has greatly expanded his text for this new edition, including new chapters (all based on interviews with Sondheim) on his career as a whole, on Bounce (later known as Road Show), on his thoughts about the film version of Sweeney Todd and on shows that were not discussed in the previous edition. The discography and other appendices have all been thoroughly updated and what was already an important book is now an essential companion for anyone seeking to understand Sondheim's musical mind, his influences and inspirations, his creative musical processes (including discussion of sketches) and his union of music and lyrics (and the problems that can sometimes pose). All of this is discussed in detail thanks to Horowitz's extremely perceptive questions (thanks to his own very detailed knowledge of the scores) and his ability to encourage some fascinating responses from the composer. All this is illustrated with extensive music examples that demonstrate specific points. For musicians, this is among the most revealing studies of Sondheim. Since this is a collection of interviews, there are occasional words and phrases in the text that might have been expressed more elegantly—but I applaud Horowitz's decision to quote Sondheim pretty much verbatim, rather than tidying up his responses: the result is fresh, authentic and vibrant. For musicians, Horowitz's book is a treasure trove of self-revelation from the most significant living composer for the American musical theatre. (International Record Review)

In the interviews collected in *Sondheim on Music* [Horowitz] serves Sondheim as a gracious yet provocative

inquisitor, often asking questions about tiny notations in his sketches. Sondheim's answers reveal much about his working process. Horowitz treats us to Sondheim the composer, who strikes a different figure from the cocky, combative lyricist. (*The Nation*)

What sets this milestone work apart from other texts on Sondheim or other interviews with the composer is the fine balance between broad and specific questions. The broader questions can be understood and enjoyed by any audience, since they deal very generally with Sondheim's thoughts and opinions about theatre. On the other hand, the specific questions provide an outstanding, first person source for scholars of music and theatre in particular, with pointed discussions on the musical scores, and a rare view of Sondheim's own compositional sketches. (*Studies In Musical Theatre* 2011-09-03)

About the Author

Mark Eden Horowitz is Senior Music Specialist at the Library of Congress where he has worked as archivist for the collections of manuscripts and papers of Irving Berlin, Leonard Bernstein, Vernon Duke, Oscar Hammerstein II, Jonathan Larson, Jascha Heifetz, Jerome Kern, Frederick Loewe, Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers, and Vincent Youmans, among others. He has taught courses in musical theater and Sondheim at Georgetown University and is Contributing Editor to *The Sondheim Review*.

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