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Careful the Things You Say: Sondheim's Didactic Nature and its Effects on Community

Stephen Sondheim is a well-known, award-winning musical theatre composer and lyricist. He has written the music and lyrics for 18 Broadway productions as well as songs for T.V. and movies. He has won seven Tony Awards, an Academy Award, seven Grammys, a Pulitzer Prize and a Laurence Olivier Award. His prolific career began in 1954 when he wrote the lyrics for *West Side Story* alongside composer Leonard Bernstein. His first musical as both composer and lyricist was *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. From then on, Sondheim shaped his musicals according his own creative vision. He was among the first to write a concept musical, or a musical in which “there is a solid storyline but all major elements of these shows are linked in some way to the central subject” (Kenrick). This means the plot isn't necessarily about events taking place but the cause or effect of those events on human beings. Another important aspect of Sondheim's musicals is his didactic writing. Sondheim's didactic nature dictates his structural form in many ways. His music, lyrics and characters are all affected by his didactic nature. Didactic theatre is uncommon; many composers' chief goal is to entertain. For example Andrew Lloyd Webber's musicals are famous and even those who aren't musical theatre enthusiasts find his work entertaining. Nothing about Webber's shows challenges an audience member's world view or moral principles. Though the musical may have had beautiful moments that touched the soul, as many musicals do, nothing about the show was life changing. Sondheim's shows, on the other hand, challenge audience members to take a hard look at

themselves and the way they live. Sondheim fills his work with life lessons and universal truths that are meant to challenge his listeners. He gives the audience a chance to leave better than when they came in. Just as didacticism affects the structure of Sondheim's shows, so too didacticism affects the audience experience. He wants to tell everyone the lessons he has learned. He utilizes the medium of the musical because of its ability to connect to the audience. Lessons can be read in a book or taught in a classroom, but for some reason when they are performed on a stage they become more tangible and applicable. The lesson is not merely "nice is different than good," it is instead "that wolf seemed like a nice guy but then he ate Little Red." People who have seen *Into the Woods* understand this life lesson differently than those who are simply told not to trust strangers. They have expanded their worldview and been challenged by Sondheim's lyrics. The audience is not the only group affected by Sondheim; actors, directors and designers are all shaped by his didacticism throughout the creative process. Actors have personal encounters with Sondheim's work that challenge them to grow as actors and as human beings. No matter how someone participates in a Sondheim production, his didacticism teaches and transforms them. Through its effect on the structure of his shows, Sondheim's didactic nature challenges both the audience and the theatre community to seek personal growth.

How is it You Sing? (Sondheim's Music)

Sondheim's didactic content dictates his musical form. Once the theme or story of his show has been chosen, Sondheim begins working on the music and lyrics. For Sondheim, it is not first music then lyrics or vice versa, but the two aspects come together as he creates. His music is very much affected by the topic being discussed in the show. In his article "Sondheim's World," Matthew Gurewitsch discusses how Sondheim's music and lyrics interact with his style. The subject of the shows affects the style of music Sondheim writes.

In his music, Sondheim is a chameleon. *Follies* amounts to a tour d'horizon of classic show-tune styles of the 1930s and 40s. *Assassins* embraces gospel, bluegrass, country and Western, the marching-band idiom of 'Hail to the Chief' or John Philip Sousa, and bubble-gum music. In works like *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, *Sunday in the Park With George*, and *Passion*, Sondheim has shown a mastery of musical architecture on the grand scale, developing small motifs into organic structures that spread majestically over the canvas (Gurewitsch).

Sondheim fits the music to his subject because he believes content dictates form (Mcwhorter). The time period, the setting, the history of the character singing, all affect the musical form. "Broadway Baby" from *Follies* is sung by a woman as she remembers her days as a Folly Girl, so the music style must be of the time she was a Folly. *Assassins* follows the stories of those who assassinated or attempted to assassinate American presidents. These men and women were from various times in history and from a variety of social backgrounds and various countries and regions. To emphasize these differences, the music reflects their various time periods and regions. Even so, Sondheim thinks some of his shows could have embraced the "content dictates form" idea more entirely, such as Maria's "I Had a Love" from *West Side Story* being in her native tongue or *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*'s lyrics matching the shenanigans of the characters better (Mcwhorter). The greatest example of Sondheim fitting the music to the didactic content of a musical is the musical *Pacific Overtures*. The story is of the westernization of Japan in 1853, told from a Japanese point of view. Sondheim uses the Japanese style Kabuki in his musical score and writes in a minor key that resembles the Japanese pentatonic scale (Sutcliffe 489).

Sondheim's ability to connect the music to his subject matter is very important in his quest to teach. For an audience member to learn a lesson, the show itself must be entertaining. If an audience member is bored, the message is lost. The music helps create the entertainment. "The Worst Pies in London" from *Sweeney Todd* is an entertaining song. The music is fast paced and upbeat. Together with the lyrics, the song is quite humorous, and is the first song in the show to make the audience laugh. The style of music fits with the rest of the show and helps maintain the setting as well as being entertaining. No lesson is taught in the song, its purpose in the show is character development and pure fun. An upbeat song for entertainment purposes followed by a slower song with a moral is a better formula to keep the audience engaged.

The theme or lesson of a show guides Sondheim in his musical composing, but so do the characters. "He starts from character, aiming to set the situation, the tone, the mood clearly. Then he tries to mold the material into a score, with thematic developments and transformations" (Sutcliffe 490). Whatever lesson is being taught in a given scene or by a character is the driving force behind musical composing. For example, in "I Know Things Now" from *Into the Woods*, Little Red Riding Hood has just been rescued from the belly of the wolf. She then reflects to the audience on what she has learned. She says of the wolf "he made me feel excited-/well, excited and scared" (Sondheim 35). The music reflects this paradoxical statement and even though she has just undergone a disturbing event, Little Red sings a tune that trips along to a happy tune. During the section of the song when Little Red is describing being eaten by the wolf, the music becomes sinister. But as soon as she escapes in her story, the music is upbeat again. Sondheim uses this happy melody to show Little Red's resiliency. Throughout the entire show, Little Red bears a great deal of loss, deals with it and then grows through it. Sondheim recognizes her character trait and presents it in his music. The upbeat melody, in contrast to Little Red's

traumatic experience, exemplifies her positive nature. Another example is Bobby's song "Being Alive" in *Company*. It begins as a bitter expression of what Bobby thinks marriage would be like with someone sitting in his chair, ruining his sleep, knowing him too well. The music underneath is melancholy until he changes around the words of the song and begs for what he has just been saying he doesn't want. The music becomes triumphant as Bobby asks for someone to "crown him with love."

By reflecting a character's feelings, the music teaches a lesson alongside the lyrics. Bobby's change in lyrics from "this is what I don't want" to "this is what I want more than anything" would be only empty words without the music behind them. The music convinces the audience that Bobby means what he is saying with its beep swells and triumphant leaps. For Little Red, the music helps develop her character; she matures and yet remains innocent. Red's song prepares the audience for the other lessons she will learn in the show (such as no one is alone) whereas Bobby's is the final conclusion of his years of searching. Both songs teach a lesson in and of themselves through the lyrics, but the music aids the lyrics and the characters to teach. Music inspires and touches the soul in a way nothing else can. It is powerful and creates connections between the characters on the stage and the people in the audience.

I Can Read Greek (Sondheim's Lyrics)

Music is not the only aspect of "I Know Things Now" or any other Sondheim number that is affected by his didacticism. His lyrics are filled with life lessons and universal truths. Little Red sings "Do not put your faith/ In a cape or a hood-/ They will not protect you/ The way that they should-/ And take extra care with strangers,/ Even Flowers have their dangers./ And though scary is exciting,/ Nice is different than good" (Sondheim 35). Sondheim is teaching the audience three lessons through Little Red's story up to this point in the show: Do not rely on

items that bring comfort or seem to protect, they may fail you; people or things that may seem perfectly safe may actually have hidden dangers; and not all people who seem nice are good. These lessons can be applied to anyone's life.

Into the Woods' final number "No One is Alone" teaches a lesson that is different than that of "I Know Things Now" but no less important. The Baker, Cinderella, Jack and Little Red sing this song after they have all lost people who were important to them. The song is about human connectedness, how all people affect one another. "You move just a finger,/ Say the slightest word,/ Something's bound to linger,/ Be heard./ Someone is on your side,/ you are not alone" (Sondheim 130-131). Sondheim is observing the human desire to affect others; the need for community. This song is sung as an encouragement to all people everywhere that they are not alone. Although not didactic in the same way as "I Know Things Now," "No One is Alone" teaches a valuable lesson on the importance of human connectedness. The lyrics are encouraging and poignant. The music is inspiring in its layering of musical phrases and the four part harmony of the singers. Even Sondheim's music supports the lyrics that have so much to teach.

The various forms Sondheim's lyrics take in his shows are dictated by his didactic nature. In *Pacific Overtures*, Sondheim writes predominantly in Haiku in his lyrics and abstains from his usual amount of word play (Sutcliffe 489). The use of Haiku, a Japanese poetic form, in combination with the kabuki style music creates an overall tone of traditional Japanese theatre. If the lyrics had been in the American vernacular, the power of the music would have been lost. The music and lyrics work together to establish more believable settings and characters. Japanese characters singing in Haiku to kabuki style music creates a more believable characterization. This unification of music and lyrics creates continuity in *Pacific Overtures*, as well as in other Sondheim productions. *Sunday in the Park with George*'s short words and

sporadic notes across the score reflect the pointillism of Seurat. The dark melodies and pejorative words of *Sweeney Todd* assist in setting the threatening mood. Sondheim combines music and lyrics to strengthen his shows' believability. One way to build believability in a show is through music and lyrics that fit the time, place, and people singing. The audience must accept the plot, the characters, and their problems in order to hear a lesson. Sondheim can set a scene, create believable characters and teach lessons simultaneously.

Sondheim loves words and plays with them in his lyrics. His songs are filled with paradoxes, puns, terminal, internal and self-perpetuating rhymes, as well as minimal-pairs, "two terms that vary in a single phonological feature, often a very subtle one" (Gurewitsch). The minimal pair is one of Sondheim's hallmarks in his lyrics. In *A Little Night Music*, the maid Petra sings "It's a very short road/ From the pinch and the punch, / To the paunch and the pouch/ And the pension" (Wheeler 307). The words *pinch*, *punch*, *paunch*, *pouch* and *pensions* all share the beginning "p" sound and the end "cha" sound. In the middle, however, they differ in their vowel sounds. The words all convey different ideas that together contrast the carefree life Petra has now, full of pinching young men and bar fights, to the life she could have if she married the Miller's son, a life of money worries and potbellies. The slight differences in the word sounds are like the differences between lives for Petra. They may seem like slight changes, but they are truly vast. "Pinch" and "pension" sound close but draw very different responses. Similarly, marriage may seem like a slight shift in her life, but it would cause many changes. Petra is teaching the audience members to weigh their options, to consider carefully what they may choose to do in the future. She says young women ought to celebrate everything that passes by and not to pass on the good times offered now. Sondheim, through his word play, is teaching

audience members to seek the subtleties in their lives. Nothing is black and white, there is a wide array of options and some of them may seem as similar to one another as “paunch” and “pouch.”

Sondheim uses paradoxes frequently in his lyrics to play with ideas and truth. The opening number of his farce *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, “Comedy Tonight,” is full of paradoxes. “Something familiar,/ Something peculiar,/ Something for everyone- a comedy tonight!/ Something appealing,/ Something appalling,/ Something for everyone- a comedy tonight” (Wheeler 13)! In addition to being paradoxes, one may note “familiar” and “peculiar” are minimal pairs as well as are “appealing” and “appalling.” These paradoxes establish early that the musical is a comedy; these lines are laughable. It seems counterintuitive for something to be both commonplace and odd at the same time. But the show proceeds to present an odd story through very predictable characters such as the lovers, the clown, the sidekick, the wise old man, etc. The story that falls into so many stereotypes in plot progression has an interesting setting (Ancient Rome) and fascinating characters. It appeals to the audience with stock characters while at the same time touches on some rougher subjects such as prostitution and slavery. The well-known stock characters make the show accessible; the audience immediately decides who it trusts, who it is rooting for, and who it wants to lose. Sondheim turns the expected on its head by making the protagonist a slave who the audience likes and dislikes at the same time. He is a horrible slave, unfaithful to his master, who lies, causes trouble and does it all for his own interest. But for some reason, he is lovable and the audience hopes he gains his freedom. The master and mistress are unfaithful to one another and are not very likable. The brown-nosing attendant to the master winds up partners with the slave without meaning to, getting caught up and confused in his shenanigans. The lovers, who seem the guiding force of the story at the beginning, become one of the many plot points and not the

main focus. The paradoxes of Sondheim's opening lyrics are reflected in the rest of the plot. The good become the bad, the important the ignored, and the slave free. Perhaps what Sondheim teaches in *Forum* is to not draw conclusions too early about people. Or perhaps there is no moral and it is merely "comedy tonight;" a lesson itself on the need for escapism and entertainment.

Assassins is a paradox in and of itself. The musical is about the people throughout history who have attempted and/or succeeded in assassinating a United States President. The show glorifies these men and women with dark humor and powerful songs. In this glorification, however, it is made obvious how wrong these people really were. The Balladeer, the man who sings a type of narration for many of the assassins, comments on why they did what they did. In the "Ballad of Booth," as Booth says he killed Lincoln for the sake of his country, the Balladeer says he killed him because of his own poor performance on the stage. Sondheim uses this kind of paradoxical back and forth with the characters to give multiple sides to every story. Sondheim wants the audience to know he does not support what these assassins did, but he wants them to know that they were real people. They had real faults and issues just like anyone else, just like any member of the audience. It's a challenge to the audience not to be so narrow minded and judgmental, but instead to be willing to hear other viewpoints and opinions from people. Through his paradoxes, he challenges audience members to examine what their assumed truths are. An audience member may walk into *Assassins* thinking anyone who would kill another human being is evil, but Sondheim asks him to question his inherited idea. Sondheim plays in the grey areas of ideas and truth and utilizes paradoxes to help him explore that grey area.

On the Steps of the Palace (Sondheim's Characters)

The singers of Sondheim's lyrics, his characters, are always "defining terms, defining themselves, defining alternate existences" (Gurewitsch). On the whole, they are self-aware

characters. The main character of Sondheim's *Company*, the New York bachelor Bobby, has three major solo numbers throughout the show where he examines his feelings about marriage as they change. The first, "Someone is Waiting," is about his dream girl, a mixture of all his married friends' wives. The next one, "Marry Me a Little," shows he is beginning to want the girl he has dreamed of, but he still has a limit on what he wants her to be. The final song, "Being Alive" is an anthem in which he decides he wants the good and the bad that would come with being married. He recognizes that relationships with other human beings are necessary to his existence. These songs allow the audience to witness the growth of a character and learn a lesson from him. Perhaps, by watching Robert grow in his personal life, and seeing him struggle through his fears and issues, members of the audience can do the same. It is possible that someone who has seen *Company* has had the exact same questions as Bobby. Watching him make decisions and decide to seek love after all he has been through might be the push someone needed to do the same in his own life. Watching a character develop on stage also may give audience member the feeling that he is not alone. Knowing someone like Bobby has struggled with the same issues may encourage an audience member to seek the same resolution as Bobby.

In life, lessons are often learned through mistakes. When an audience member sees a show in which a character makes a mistake, he or she can learn from that character's mistake. A great example of this is another number from *Into the Woods*. The Baker's Wife sings "Moments in the Woods" after she has had a passionate moment with Cinderella's Prince. He has left her and she begins reflecting on the moment. She is amazed by what she has just done and immediately puts it into perspective. It was only a moment, one moment in her life, now she must move on "Back to life, back to sense,/ Back to child, back to husband,/ No one lives in the woods./There are vows, there are ties,/ There are needs, there are standards,/ There are

shouldn'ts and shoulds"(Sondheim 112). She "lets the moment go" but doesn't forget about it because a moment is special (Sondheim 113). "Oh, if life were made of moments,/ Even now and then a bad one-!/ But if life were only moments,/ Then you'd never know you had one" (Sondheim 112). In the end, the moment makes her realize what is truly important to her: her husband and her son. This song teaches the audience a valuable lesson: treasure the important people in life, be content with blessings and don't go chasing after something else. Because the audience witnesses the Baker's Wife's temptation, surrender, repentance and judgment (she is stepped on by a giant after she completes her song), members of the audience can learn from her mistake.

Unwrap your Candy Wrappers Now (The Audience Experience)

The audience is the reason theatre happens. At some point in a noisy pub or a penthouse apartment someone wrote on a napkin, legal pad or computer an idea he thought another human being might enjoy. When a show is being written, created, designed and performed, the number one goal is to entertain the audience. Sondheim is no different from any other writer of the theatre; he wants to entertain his audience. But he won't leave it at that. Sondheim recognizes the great power theatre has and uses it to teach in conjunction with his entertainment. Some might say he is too didactic, but Sondheim himself has said his primary goal is to entertain. He writes what he would like to see performed and then crosses his fingers that the audience will agree with him and like it as well (Sutcliffe 487). Something about going to the theatre brings people together. It is a shared experience to sit in a dark room with ten people or maybe 2,000 people and watch the same story. Going to see a play or a musical is a communal experience. But the sense of community doesn't end when one walks out the theatre door. Six months after seeing a production, two people who saw the same show the same night may meet and rekindle the magic

of the evening. They both recall the power of the lead actress's vocals, the awesomeness of the set design and the chorus boy who slipped up just a bit in "The Glamorous Life." The connection that is created the day one sees a performance can exist for years to come. It is in this way that Sondheim stands out. Kate Anderson, Residence Life Director at Milligan College who has seen two Sondheim shows, *Into the Woods* and *Company*, sums it up well: "Sondheim in some ways is not as easily relatable as, say, Rodgers and Hammerstein. His musicals don't have the traditional format or happy ending where everything is wrapped in a bow. *Company* takes real life problems that you are trying to escape and puts them on stage. It isn't the most normal thing to like, so I appreciate when other people enjoy it as well." Sondheim's didactic nature affects the audience differently than other shows. More often than not they do not have happy endings and even if they do they are not perfect; something or someone is always lost. These losses bring the audience together.

Many times, it a character may be lost. Audience members watch characters grow and change throughout a Sondheim show and they create strong attachments to them. When things don't end happily, an audience member feels it deeply. If the character they have come to know has died or two of the characters they like are not speaking to one another, it can be upsetting. Commonly, audience members will talk with another about these losses or issues and find solace in one another's agreement. It's the same in real life: when two people are in agreement about the situation of a third and possibly fourth party, they form a close bond. This same bond can be formed with fictional characters if they are given souls, and Sondheim certainly gives his characters soul. Brooke Hildebrand, audience member of ten Sondheim shows, says one of her favorite characters is Benjamin Barker, the true name of Sweeney Todd. He is a villain, a murderer, and yet as an audience member she found herself rooting for him, a great example of

how Sondheim makes his characters so believably human. Barker has been transported by an evil Judge who wanted Barker's wife for his own. At the beginning of the show, Barker returns for the Judge's blood. The audience feels the injustice and his love for his wife, pain at her loss, and love for his daughter, Joanna. When Barker begins murdering people in his barber shop and having his love Mrs. Lovett bake them into pies, the audience seems to accept his sense of justice and tenacity to take the law into his own hands. In this way, Sondheim asks the audience to meditate on what is good, what is evil, and what is justice. Hildebrand says of Sondheim's work, "I believe everyone learns something about both the consistency and the unpredictability of human nature while confronted with a Sondheim piece. He is a master of exploring and observing the human condition and how people feel/ behave." This can absolutely be seen in the tale of Sweeney Todd/Benjamin Barker. Kristin Morris, another Sondheim audience member and performer, says the "moral tension" of Sondheim's work creates a bond between audience members. This discovery and experience of humanity's condition and morality is Sondheim's didactic nature revealing itself through his lyrics via his characters.

The lessons Sondheim gives his characters to teach are the lessons they themselves have learned and demonstrated through their own growth. These lessons are taught through Sondheim's lyrics. Audience members build connections to lyrics because they watch them affect someone on stage and apply them to their own lives. As Cinderella and the Baker sing "Witches can be right,/ Giants can be good" (Sondheim 131) a line from "No One is Alone," teaches a lesson in perspective and acceptance. This lesson is more special because the audience knows why Cinderella can say a Witch can be right. They have seen her grow as a character and her growth has mirrored their growth. This growth brings audience members together. Sondheim's audiences are drawn together by a passion for his music and lyrics as well. Anyone

who is a true lover of Sondheim's work will find an instant friend in someone else who enjoys his work because they have both been changed by the same show.

Finishing the Hat (The Creative Experience)

Performing in or directing a Sondheim production is a unique experience. Actors and directors choose how they want to handle Sondheim's work just as they do with any other show. Performers must decide if and how Sondheim's didactic nature will affect their performance. Many actors who have performed in Sondheim's shows say they didn't sing a song differently because it was didactic but the didacticism did affect them. In order to sing a song in character, the performer must exist in the song and let it penetrate him. The lines of a song are just as fundamental to characterization as lines of dialogue. All singers feel connections to songs they sing, but Sondheim numbers affect performers differently. For one thing, Sondheim's songs are difficult musically. The accompaniment is often not playing the same notes the singer is singing and frequently the singer's line has an atypical rhythm. Many actors who have performed in Sondheim shows say they were challenged musically and grew as a singer because of the music. The topics of Sondheim's numbers challenge actors to grow as well. The song "Losing my Mind" from *Follies* is a cry for love lost with a difficult rhythm but simple note arrangement. The trick of the song is to create colour and emotion within the confines of low notes in a small range. The effect is a beautiful ballad sung straight from a broken heart. Bernadette Peters sang this song in the recent Broadway revival of *Follies*. In an interview with Jesse Green about her role as Sally she said, "When you're trying to find a character like Sally, it can permeate you. It's hard to wash it off at the end of the show. Now that she's under my belt, I can do that a little better, but ... Sometimes, if you're lucky, you make such startling discoveries about yourself. Those stay with you for a while" (Green). This well-known Broadway actress, who has been in

numerous other Sondheim productions (including originating two roles in his shows), was influenced emotionally and personally by his lyrics and his character. Sondheim affects performers both musically and morally. Brooke Hildebrand says performers of Sondheim's work begin to see the world in grey instead of black and white, "It's almost like being a philosophy student, and indirectly, Sondheim is the wise professor. More aware of the human condition." Sondheim's didactic nature may not affect the creative performance of one of his numbers, but it certainly affects the lives of those who perform his numbers.

A director has a different decision to make when faced with Sondheim's didacticism; he can choose to emphasize it or merely let it reveal itself. The best choice is the latter. "Truth will out," as the saying goes; and Sondheim is full of truth. If emphasized too much, the didactic nature can become cheesy and overly pedantic, which is not at all what Sondheim intended. Stefanie Davis, director at Perry Meridian High School in Indianapolis, Indiana, was the assistant director for a 2007 production of *West Side Story*. She says the lessons were intentionally not emphasized because, "Lessons are between the show and the audience." The performers and directors focus on characters, objectives, obstacles, and story and the rest happens in the house. However, actors need to know what they are teaching or else the content can be lost. A director's job is to make sure the actors know what it is they are conveying. Melissa Walsh, choir and musical director at Perry Meridian, directed a 2012 production of *Into the Woods*. She stresses the importance of the students understanding what it is they are saying. If the actress playing Little Red does not fully understand the content of "I Know Things Now," the lesson can be lost on its way to the audience. It is important for the actor to have an encounter with the song's purpose before performing it, and it is part of the director's role to

facilitate that encounter. The director of a Sondheim show walks a fine line of conveying the lessons encompassed in the show without emphasizing them too strongly and appearing preachy.

There is a bond between performers and directors who have performed in Sondheim's shows. During the rehearsal process, actors and their director encounter the lessons together and tackle them together. It is common for casts to become close during a production because of all the time spent together, but Sondheim casts can be even closer because of the lessons learned and the personal growth that can occur. Similarly, when those who have acted in a Sondheim show meet someone else who has performed in a Sondheim show there is an immediate connection. These performers can also develop an instant connection with someone who has seen a Sondheim show. Within the theatre community, those who have performed or been part of the creative process for a Sondheim show have a special bond with one another because of Sondheim's didactic nature.

Final Waltz

Stephen Sondheim is the great sage of American musical theatre. He imparts wisdom to his audience and the theatre community to grow in their personal lives. His didactic nature, seen in his lyrics, music and characters, affects audience members and those involved in the creative process. He puts into song some of the hardest decisions human beings have to make. What does it mean to be good? What does it mean to be evil? Should I be alone? What is love? Are the "good old days" really gone? Were they really good? What is comedy and why do humans desire it? What is art? What will artists suffer for their art? Sondheim makes these questions accessible by creating likeable characters and real life situations and then adding music. He doesn't claim to have figured everything out, but he teaches what he can and challenges when he may. Through this challenging and teaching, he creates strong bonds between people. Whether it be fellow cast

members or two strangers who bond over a CD of Sondheim's music at the library, people are drawn together by Sondheim. No other composer has had such an influence in the personal lives of theatre goers and performers. He challenges growth and gives the tools to the audience through his lyrics. "Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day, but teach a man to fish and he will eat for a lifetime," is an old saying that can be applied to Sondheim. Other composers give audiences a fish (cheap entertainment) and send them on their way, but Sondheim teaches audience members how to live. They leave the theatre better than they were when they entered and they audience members can continue to grow if they let Sondheim's lyrics penetrate time and time again. Sondheim teaches and does it through a medium perfectly structured to create community and inspire personal growth. His style, form and music work together to create pieces of art that are meant to teach while entertaining. Sondheim's lessons have had real impact upon audience members and the theatre community. They have been inspired to look for the night smiles, listen for waltzes, learn to whistle, finish a hat, enjoy entertainment, have a dream, be alive, view people from different perspectives and to be careful the things they say for someone is always listening to the lessons they teach.

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