


# BUZZ EXTRA



May 16- July 8 :: [Click here for tickets](#)

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## FEATURED ARTICLES

### SPOTLIGHT

## YOU'LL HAVE A REAL GOOD TIME!

Let Stephen Sondheim entertain you and you'll have a real good time at PlayhouseSquare May 16 - July 8, 2012 for SONDEHEIM ON SONDHEIM The Revue Of A Lifetime, part of the KeyBank Broadway Series.

Produced by Great Lakes Theater as part of their 50th Anniversary season, SONDHEIM ON SONDHEIM, conceived by Ohio native James Lapine and directed by Sondheim authority Victoria Bussert, is an amazing glimpse into the life and art of Broadway's legendary composer.

On Sondheim

"In the world of American musicals, he is



“THIS WILL BE AN EVENING OF THEATER UNLIKE ANY...”

-Director, Victoria Bussert

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## FUN FEATURES

[The Latest from Broadway...](#)

[2012 Tony nominees are revealed...](#)

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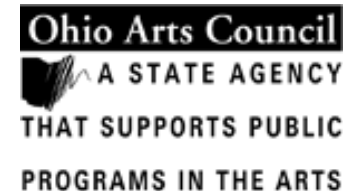


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indisputably the best, brightest and most influential talent to emerge during the last half century.” *New York Times*

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**ALL ARTICLES**

Home

You'll Have A Real Good Time

The Making of Sondheim

Anyone Can Whistle

Celebrating a Partnership

Talking

with Director Victoria Bussert

Talking with Pamela Meyers

Recommended Reading from

Cleveland Public Library

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[The Addams Family](#)

[Come Fly Away](#)

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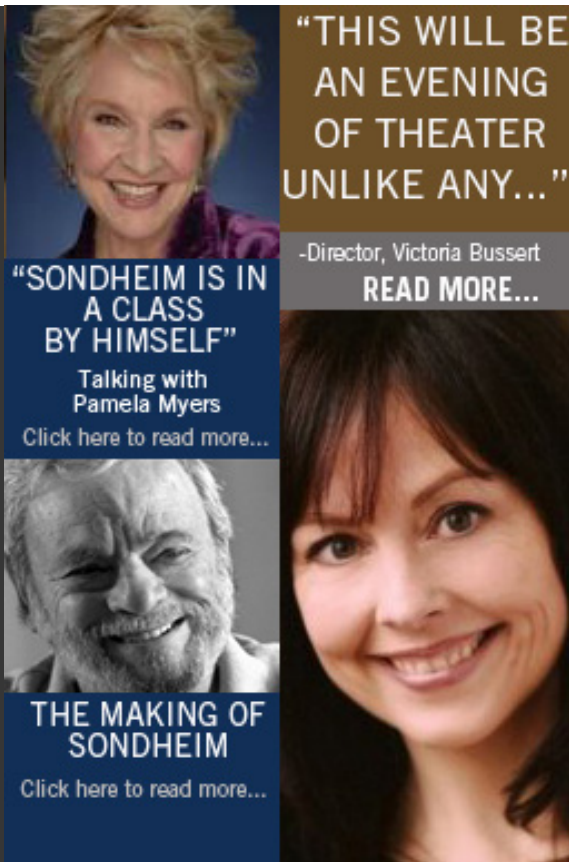
## FEATURED ARTICLES

### YOU'LL HAVE A REAL GOOD TIME



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“He’s traditionally lionized for his lyrics, but his unfailingly irresistible



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THE MAKING OF SONDHEIM  
[Click here to read more...](#)

## FUN FEATURES

[The Latest from Broadway...](#)

[2012 Tony nominees are revealed...](#)

[Scarlett Johansson to return to Broadway...](#)

[Hugh Jackman and Bernadette Peters to receive special Tony Awards...](#)

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melodies prove to be equally important to the enjoyment of SONDHEIM ON SONDHEIM." *Theater Mania*

"Thank God for Stephen Sondheim. Not just for his songs, but for his running commentary...funny, informative, occasionally self-deprecating and often deeply touching." *New York Post*

"The emotional truth found in the perfect blending of words and music." *The Associated Press*

"Who wouldn't want to spend an evening with Broadway's musical-theater Shakespeare discussing his work and dishing about his experiences? ... It's great fun to get them from the horse's mouth. An evening of your own with Steve? Grab it while you've got the chance." *Backstage*

### Synopsis

SONDHEIM ON SONDHEIM is a musical revue featuring not only eight actors, dozens of songs from Sondheim's legendary 50+ years and more than 15 shows on Broadway, but the man himself telling of his musical journey to becoming the greatest composer of the last century.

### Awards

Among the many awards and honors Sondheim has received are:

- Eight Tony Awards (more than any other composer, including one for lifetime achievement)
- Seven Drama Desk Awards
- Six Olivier Awards
- One Obie Award
- Eight Grammy Awards
- One Academy Award
- A Pulitzer Prize
- The UK Critic's Circle Award for Distinguished Services to the Arts
- Kennedy Center Lifetime Achievement Award
- Induction into the Songwriters Hall of Fame
- American National Medal of the Arts

### Did You Know?

Sondheim has often been seen and heard in popular culture.

.....  
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**ALL ARTICLES**

Home

.....  
You'll Have a Real Good Time

.....  
The Making of Sondheim

.....  
Anyone Can Whistle

.....  
Celebrating a Partnership

..... Talking  
with Director Victoria Bussert

.....  
Talking with Pamela Meyers

.....  
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Watch These Videos to See Sondheim Sung By:

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- [The Simpsons' character Krusty the Clown](#)

An avid puzzle fan, Sondheim has written a movie mystery script with Anthony Perkins called ***The Last of Sheila***.

Sondheim in Film

His music has been featured in *Dick Tracy*, *The Birdcage*, *Sleeping With The Enemy*, *Terms of Endearment*, *Airplane!*, *Postcards From The Edge*, *Death To Smoochy*, *Grumpier Old Men*, *Reds*, *In And Out*, *The Fisher King*, *Ella Enchanted*, *Last Holiday*, *Analyze That* and *Anger Management*.

Sondheim on TV

Sondheim's music has also been featured on trendy TV shows such as: *Glee*, *Smash*, *Ugly Betty*, *The Simpsons*, *Six Feet Under*, *Friends*, *The Wonder Years*, *The Muppet Show*, *Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Quantum Leap*, *Good Times* and *The Brady Bunch*.

Desperate Sondheim

Marc Cherry, the creator of the popular TV show *Desperate Housewives*, is a Sondheim fan. In tribute, for the first eight seasons of the show, Cherry titled more than 150 episodes after Sondheim songs, shows and lyrics. Titles have included: "Every Day a Little Death" (from *A Little Night Music*), "Love Is In the Air" (from *A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum*), "The Ladies Who Lunch" (from *Company*), "I Remember That" (from *Evening Primrose*), "Dress Big" (from *The Frogs*), "The Gun Song" (from *Assassins*), "My Two Young Men" (from *Road Show*), "Is This What You Call Love" (from *Passion*), and "School of Hard Knocks" (from *Climb High*). For a complete list of Sondheim titled episodes, click [here](#).

Sondheim's books:

*Look, I Made A Hat*

*Finishing The Hat*

Sondheim Biography

*Stephen Sondheim, A Life* by Meryle Secrest

For more on Stephen Sondheim go [here](#).

Or

Check out the Top 10 Moments of Sondheim Genius [here](#).

Broadway Buzz

While there are no live Broadway Buzz Pre-Show Talks for SONDHEIM ON SONDHEIM, you can watch Joe Garry's insights on the show at [wclv.com](#).

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# sondheim ON SONDHEIM



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### THE MAKING OF SONDHEIM



Stephen Joshua Sondheim was born in New York City on March 22, 1930.



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[The Latest from Broadway...](#)

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His mother, Janet Fox Sondheim (called "Foxy"), was a fashion designer and his father, Herbert, was a dress manufacturer.

### The Piano Lessons

Stephen began studying piano at age seven. He told biographer Meryle Secrest, "My father would sit me at the piano bench and have me put my hand on his little finger, which played the melody over the top," and that led to weekly piano lessons. "At the end of each year we would have to give recitals for all the little kids. I had a very fleet right hand, so one of the first pieces I would play was 'The Flight of the Bumblebee' by Rimsky-Korsakov. My father and mother used to take me out of bed at cocktail time if they had clients; they'd drag me out in my pajamas to play 'The Flight of the Bumblebee.' I took lessons for about two years. I don't remember why I stopped, but I am very right-handed and at the piano my left hand is really a lump, very difficult to make work except for oompah, oompah."

When his father left his mother for another woman and was unable to get custody of Stephen, the young boy did not have much contact with his dad.

Foxy moved herself and 10-year old Stephen to Doylestown, Pennsylvania where he met the man who was to become one of his greatest influences.

### Oscar Hammerstein

Stephen told author Stephen Schiff about his childhood, "My mother was very angry at my father for leaving her, and she used me as a whipping boy. And she also had a set of values that even at that age I knew were suspect, in that she liked celebrities and money a lot. And, in a way, it was lucky for me, because I never would have met the Hammersteins if she hadn't liked celebrities.

They had a son my age, Jamie, and we became fast friends, and that's how I sort of got adopted by them." Sondheim told *The Telegraph* that Hammerstein was his surrogate father, saying that if he would have been a geologist, "I would probably have been a geologist."

It was a double birthday treat for young Stephen and Jamie to see the New Haven pre-Broadway premiere of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel*. Then during *South Pacific*, Sondheim first met Hal Prince, his future collaborator. Sondheim's love of musical theater was born.

.....  
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**ALL ARTICLES**

Home

.....  
[You'll Have a Real Good Time](#)

.....  
[The Making of Sondheim](#)

.....  
[Anyone Can Whistle](#)

.....  
[Celebrating a Partnership](#)

.....  
[Talking with Director Victoria Bussert](#)

.....  
[Talking with Pamela Meyers](#)

.....  
[Recommended Reading from](#)

[Cleveland Public Library](#)

.....  
Talking

### Hammerstein School

When 15-year old Stephen wrote an original show called *By George* for school, he asked Hammerstein to critique it. Sondheim told *The Telegraph*, "I asked Oscar to read it, as if it had just crossed his desk and from an unknown writer. And he said, 'well, its terrible. It doesn't make any sense. And you want to know why it's terrible? I didn't say it's untalented, but let's just look at the first page direction: what does this mean? How do you do that on the stage? Is this character going to sing this song having just said that line?' ...Everything went 'wham' and I understood what Hammersteinish musical theater was about. And from then on I wrote Hammerstein-type musicals, meaning to attempt to tell stories, attempt to deal with character, attempt to do the kind of work that he was doing. The principles of everything I've written ever since can be traced back to that afternoon."

Hammerstein continued this tutoring of young Stephen by asking him to write four shows and critiquing them. Sondheim told the *Paris Review* that Hammerstein gave him these four assignments: "Take a play that you like, that you think is good, and musicalize it. In musicalizing it, you'll be forced to analyze it.

Next take a play that you think is good but flawed, that you think could be improved, and musicalize that, seeing if you can improve it.

Then take a nonplay, a narrative someone else has written-it could be a novel, a short story-but not a play, not something that has been structured dramatically for the stage and musicalize that.

Then try an original."

Sondheim continued to learn from his mentor and his affection for Hammerstein remained until Oscar's death in 1960.

### Life after Oscar

According to Sondheim's biographer, he "just wanted to study composition, theory and harmony...wanted to write for the theater." He spent the first few years out of Williams College in Massachusetts auditioning songs and writing for the TV show *Topper*. Then he wrote a show called ***Saturday***

## **Night.**

### Big Break

It was *Saturday Night* that got Stephen noticed by Arthur Laurents. Laurents heard some of Sondheim's lyrics and liked them, so he recommended the 25-year old to Leonard Bernstein. Bernstein, Laurents and Jerome Robbins were working on a new show called *West Side Story*.

Sondheim recalls, in his book ***Finishing The Hat***, his audition for Bernstein, "I played him a few songs from *Saturday Night*. He listened intently, then asked me, 'have you got something more poetic?' I had indeed, but I told him no, I had only conversational lyrics to offer...Lenny shrugged politely and said he'd let me know within a week whether or not Comden and Green would be available to work on the show...When Lenny phoned a week later and invited me to join the crew, I duly leapt."

### More Shows

This led to writing lyrics for another Arthur Laurents show, *Gypsy*. Then, he had the opportunity to write both music and lyrics for *A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum*. This was followed by music and lyrics for *Anyone Can Whistle*, lyrics for *Do I Hear A Waltz* with music by Richard Rodgers, and finally music and lyrics for *Company*.

Music and lyrics for *Company* led to music and lyrics for *Follies*, *A Little Night Music*, *Pacific Overtures*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, *Sunday In The Park With George*, *Into the Woods*, *Assassins*, *Passion*, *Road Show* and *The Frogs*. The genius of Sondheim had arrived and grew with each show.

"Look, I made a hat, where there never was a hat."

82 years old, Sondheim is currently working on a new musical with David Ives. How will he do it?

"Bit by bit,  
Putting it together...  
Piece by Piece-  
Only way to make a work of art.  
Every moment makes a contribution;  
Every little detail plays a part.

Having just a vision's no solution,  
Everything depends on execution:  
Putting it together-  
That's what counts!

...


He's an original..."

Lyrics from "Putting It Together" from *Sunday In The Park With George*

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### ANYONE CAN WHISTLE

Ben Brantley of *The New York Times* has said Sondheim is "great not because he's a wizard with rhyme, rhythm and key changes. It's because he senses and conveys the darker currents of pain and loneliness that swirl beneath even the shiniest surfaces."

Many of Sondheim's musicals do not follow the traditional boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl, happily ever after story. His shows are usually, according to *The New York Times* critic Frank Rich, about "the aching ambivalent and often thwarted desire to connect with someone."

The following lyric excerpts and video links will illuminate the reflections of Brantley and Rich and give you another look at the non-traditional Sondheim and his songs.

The Princes of *Into the Woods* proclaim:

"Agony!

Beyond power of speech,

When the one thing you want

**Is the only thing out of your reach."**



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Sally, star of **Follies** wonders:  
"You said you loved me,  
Or were you just being kind?  
**Or am I losing my mind?**"

The Judge of **Sweeney Todd** is surprised when his love interest finds it:  
"Strange...  
When I offered myself to her,  
She showed a certain reluctance."

The two daughters in **Gypsy** wish their mom had a steady beau, only to find:  
"Momma gets married  
And married  
And married  
**And never gets carried away."**

Dot in **Sunday In The Park With George** realizes:  
"You are complete, George,  
You are your own.  
We do not belong together.  
You are complete, George,  
You all alone.  
I am unfinished;  
I am diminished  
With or without you.  
We do not belong together."

Several of the assassins in **Assassins** proclaim:  
"Take my blood and my body  
For your love.  
Let me feel fire,  
Let me drink poison,  
Tell me to tear my heart in two,  
If that's what you want me to do."

Anita of **West Side Story** warns Maria:  
"A boy like that wants one thing only  
And when he's done, he'll leave you lonely."

.....  
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**ALL ARTICLES**

Home

.....  
You'll Have a Real Good Time

.....  
The Making of Sondheim

.....  
Anyone Can Whistle

.....  
Celebrating a Partnership

.....Talking  
with Director Victoria Bussert

.....  
Talking with Pamela Meyers

.....  
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He'll murder your love.

He murdered mine."

Hapgood in **Anyone Can Whistle** describes his feelings:

"I need you more than I can say.

I need you more than just today.

I guess I need you more than you need me."

The men of **Company** share the truth of their marriages that

"You're always sorry,

You're always grateful,

You hold her thinking

I'm not alone.

You're still alone."

Sondheim told Frank Rich, "I understood what that emotional, not so much disconnection or dysfunction, but aloofness or reserve was. Or perhaps fear." And he reflects that in his lyrics from *Into the Woods*,

"Agony!

Oh, the torture they teach!

What's as intriguing-

Or half so fatiguing-

As what's out of reach?"

Richard Corliss in *Time Magazine* has said of Sondheim, "He is still the great chronicler of married life in all its ambiguities ('Sorry-Grateful' from *Company*), cynicism ('Now You Know' from *Merrily*) and bitterness ('Could I Leave You?' from *Follies*). His lyrics sing and sting, as his characters soar and collapse."

A song, cut from *Company*, called "Happily Ever After" sums it all up:

"Someone to bleed you of all the things

You don't want to tell.

That's happily ever after

Ever, ever, ever after -

In hell."

For more Sondheim lyrics go [here](#).






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### CELEBRATING A PARTNERSHIP



In addition to being the first time SONDHEIM ON SONDHEIM is



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## FUN FEATURES

[The Latest from Broadway...](#)

[2012 Tony nominees are revealed...](#)

[Scarlett Johansson to return to Broadway...](#)

[Hugh Jackman and Bernadette Peters to receive special Tony Awards...](#)

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performed outside New York City, this engagement offers the unique chance for PlayhouseSquare (the nation’s largest performing arts center outside of New York City) and Great Lakes Theater (one of the nation’s pre-eminent regional theater companies) to collaborate on a production.

“It has been a joy to work with such a distinguished group to bring this special regional premiere to our audiences,” said PlayhouseSquare Senior Vice President of Theater Operations Gina Vernaci. “The inventiveness of Great Lakes Theater has been dazzling Clevelanders for a half a century. It has been a joy to work alongside of this talented group as we ballyhoo their 50th anniversary.”

“We are thrilled to collaborate with the extraordinary team at PlayhouseSquare, led by Art Falco and Gina Vernaci, to produce *Sondheim on Sondheim* as part of the KeyBank Broadway Series,” said Great Lakes Theater Producing Artistic Director Charles Fee. “In addition to affording our region’s audiences the opportunity to experience the genius of one of our nation’s greatest composer-lyricists, this joint production also affords us a chance to celebrate our 30-year partnership with PlayhouseSquare as a resident company. We’re grateful for PlayhouseSquare’s support over the years as partners, mentors and friends. Our three decades of work together is proof positive that great things are made possible in our community through creativity and collaboration. We look forward to welcoming the PlayhouseSquare Broadway Series family to our Hanna Theatre home.”

.....  
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**ALL ARTICLES**

Home

.....  
[You'll Have a Real Good Time](#)

.....  
[The Making of Sondheim](#)

.....  
[Anyone Can Whistle](#)

.....  
[Celebrating a Partnership](#)

.....  
[Talking  
with Director Victoria Bussert](#)


.....  
[Talking with Pamela Meyers](#)

.....  
[Recommended Reading from  
Cleveland Public Library](#)

# BUZZ EXTRA



May 16- July 8 :: [Click here for tickets](#)

 PlayhouseSquare

## FEATURED ARTICLES

### TALKING WITH DIRECTOR VICTORIA BUSSERT

"The creative vision of director Victoria Bussert...captures the imagination, command attention and thoroughly entertain." *News Herald*

Director of the Music Theatre program at [Baldwin-Wallace College Conservatory](#) and a resident director at [Great Lakes Theater](#) is not all that keeps Bussert busy. She has directed productions for opera, regional theater, national and international tours, as well as being guest faculty for North Carolina School for the Arts and her alma mater Northwestern University.

A leading expert on Sondheim, Bussert has directed all of Sondheim's shows except *Sunday In The Park With George* and *Road Show*.

*Buzz Extra* caught up with Bussert as she was preparing for the first regional production of SONDHEIM ON SONDHEIM.

EXTRA: So, how did you get started with Sondheim?

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## FUN FEATURES

[The Latest from Broadway...](#)

[2012 Tony nominees are revealed...](#)

[Scarlett Johansson to return to Broadway...](#)

[Hugh Jackman and Bernadette Peters to receive special Tony Awards...](#)

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BUSSERT: I actually started my professional career directing Sondheim. I was working with Gerald Freeman, former Artistic Director of Great Lakes Theater. He hired me right out of graduate school. He was my directorial mentor. He put me on his own personal payroll as long as I turned down any directing jobs until he thought it was the right one to start my professional career. Then out of the blue, I was offered the Chicago premiere of *Pacific Overtures* and he said, "that's the one." I didn't know *Pacific Overtures* and because Gerald told me to take it, I took it without reading it. Then I found out several other prominent Chicago directors turned it down because it was so difficult. I spent nine months doing research on Japan and Japanese American relations. I made my debut with that show and it ended up winning the Jeff citation for best musical that year in Chicago. From that point on, I was absolutely insane about doing any Sondheim.

EXTRA: Have you ever met Sondheim?

BUSSERT: Very briefly, a couple of times. He is the one person I just become speechless with. He is my idea of a rock star. I have such admiration for the work he's done. It is extraordinary how he's changed the face of musical theater.

EXTRA: Sondheim has said about himself that he is a dinosaur because musicals have changed. What do you think about that?

BUSSERT: I don't feel that is the case. So many new musicals have used Sondheim as inspiration. His musicals are written in such a layered form that it will be many, many years before his vehicles become dated in any way. There's always more to discover. They're so emotionally and intellectually truthful that there's nothing that dates them.

It's interesting that *Company*, set in the early '70s with an orchestration that has an early '70s sound, still, in terms of authenticity with relationships and marriage, is just as modern as anything written today.

EXTRA: How did Great Lakes Theater choose this show?

BUSSERT: Gina Vernaci (of PlayhouseSquare) was really the driving force behind this. She had seen it in New York and was really intrigued and delighted by it. To see Sondheim in his environment on video and hear

.....  
[Sondheim on Sondheim Links](#)

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**ALL ARTICLES**

Home

.....  
[You'll Have a Real Good Time](#)

.....  
[The Making of Sondheim](#)

.....  
[Anyone Can Whistle](#)

.....  
[Celebrating a Partnership](#)

.....  
[Talking  
with Director Victoria Bussert](#)

.....  
[Talking with Pamela Meyers](#)

.....  
[Recommended Reading from  
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him talk about the pieces and then actually see what he is talking about. It's like being invited into his living room and getting to listen to an artist talk about how they create. Listen to a master! A window into an artist's life that we never get to see.

EXTRA: How did this show originate?

BUSSERT: The original intention of this show was not to be performed on Broadway; it was to be a birthday present for Stephen Sondheim. But then Barbara Cook got involved, and Vanessa Williams and Tom Wopat... then suddenly what was meant to be a tribute to Sondheim ended up being a Broadway show.

And what is interesting with our journey, we are the first theater outside of New York to do this show. And all this material has been put together for us to tackle as an outside theater.

The lyrics that had been changed for those original performers had to be changed back since we were not going to be referencing Cook and Wopat. Lapine and Sondheim had to sign off on that.

EXTRA: What about Sondheim being a character in the show via the videos? In New York, there were all those TV screens.

BUSSERT: We came up with a completely different design concept. It is the same video, but the way we are showing it will have a very different look from the New York production.

EXTRA: So Sondheim will still be a character.

BUSSERT: Yes, the video will remain unchanged. But I can remember seeing on TV a special about the making of the original Broadway cast album of *Company*. That video featured Pam Myers at 20 years old with Sondheim correcting her on "Another Hundred People." I thought, you know what would be really fun? To get that clip of Sondheim correcting Pam when she was 20 and then leading it into her actually singing it today. And since we have Pam performing it here, only our Cleveland audiences will get to see that. Two hours and 20 minutes of Sondheim's greatest hits.

EXTRA: As an artist-educator, what do you think makes Sondheim a teaching tool for young aspiring actors?

BUSSERT: His characters are revealed not only with the lyrics that he writes, but also with the actual music that plays under them. A great example is in *Sweeney Todd*. There is this song called "Not While I'm Around." First, young innocent Tobias sings it. Then Sondheim has Mrs. Lovett do a reprise of it where she sings the same melody but the orchestra has totally changed the orchestration underneath her. It has become far more ominous and dissonant because she has discovered she may have to get rid of Tobias if he finds out about Sweeney Todd.

Sondheim gives you character information in so many different ways. In Sondheim, the actual notes are speaking the character's truth, not always the lyrics because we don't always speak our truth. But because the music is the heart of the character, the music is always speaking the truth. This is a wonderful way for students to discover the multiple layers that go into creating really great music theater.

This will be an evening of theater unlike any that we will have experienced here in Cleveland. There are very few shows like this. I can't think of anywhere the composer is speaking for himself to us. It is a very unique opportunity to look into the world of what it is to be an artist. It brings the work to life in an entirely new way.


For more information on Bussert go [here](#).

# BUZZ EXTRA

# sondheim ON SONDHEIM



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### TALKING WITH PAMELA MYERS

Pamela Myers has appeared on TV, in film and on stage. Nominated for a Tony award for Best Featured Actress for Sondheim's original Broadway show *Company*, Myers also has appeared in Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*, *Salute to Sondheim*, *Sunday In The Park With George*, *Into The Woods*, *Sondheim: A Musical Tribute*, and *Gypsy*.





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EXTRA: You are an Ohio native?

MYERS: I am, I live in Cincinnati. I come and go though, since my agent is in New York.

EXTRA: Were you the first graduate of [the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music](#)?

MYERS: Yes. I came into the conservatory as a voice major. I had taken all the classic music courses, and then they took me out of Italian and put me in a ballet class, a modern dance class and an acting class. I went in thinking I was going to get a Bachelor of Music in voice, but came out with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Music Theatre. They started the music theatre department when I was a junior. In those days, we didn't have senior showcases but I chose to give a senior recital. It just so happened that a prominent Broadway conductor was at school giving a seminar. He saw my recital and recommended me to his agent in New York.

I went to New York on spring break and auditioned for the agent. He took me on and immediately had me audition for an Equity (union) theatre in Maine that summer. That's how I got my Equity card. After the summer, I went straight to New York and got a job in a musical revue in a nightclub. While I was there, I auditioned for *Company*. It took about three months.

EXTRA: What's it like to work with Sondheim?

MYERS: The guy is a genius; I'm convinced of that. So unbelievably bright and insightful. Everything he writes is so smart. He knows exactly what he wants and he tells you, but is very complimentary when he likes it. I'm very floored about what he'd written about me in his book. It was very flattering.

EXTRA: Tell us a little about *Company*.

MYERS: *Company* was my first Broadway show. It was all new to me. We previewed in Boston for a month and every day it was something new. I had never done an original show.

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.....  
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EXTRA: Since it was original, was the show workshopped?

MYERS: No. It was done as an out-of-town try out. When it first started, I was in the second act with "Another Hundred People." Then that song went out of the show for a night. Then they reshuffled the show and put the song in the first act. They shifted the vignettes around in the show. We had three different endings, different songs. But at some point, they finally had to freeze the show and that is when the critics came in to review it.

EXTRA: How did the critics react to the show?

MYERS: I remember during *Company*, the critics were baffled and not particularly nice, saying the show was so cold. But the thing is, it isn't. It is very emotional and real. This was the first musical that was really described raw emotions. Putting marriage in such a cold light. But when you listen to "Being Alive," it's not cold at all! The emotions are just realistic. It was all very new then. We had language on the stage that of course is run of the mill today. I remember my character said "son of a bitch" and "bastard" and the audience just gasped.

*Company* has been very wonderful for me over the years. It was just the right time and the right place. I made a lot of friends in that show. One of my dearest friends is Donna McKechnie. We met in that show and now it's been over 40 years. I was just in New York and I usually stay at her place. We took Elaine Stritch to dinner. Love her!

EXTRA: There have been many Sondheim revues, what makes **SONDHEIM ON SONDHEIM** different?

MYERS: He's in it! That's the most special thing because frankly, hearing him talk about his work and how he goes about it is riveting. I saw the show in New York and was amazed.

This is the first production of the show outside of Broadway and they are adapting it a little. I'll be doing the songs Barbara Cook did with some variation. Victoria (the director) met with James Lapine (the author) and I believe they are putting "Another Hundred People" in for me.

EXTRA: What other songs will you be singing?

MYERS: I'm singing "Send In The Clowns" and "Everything's Coming Up Roses." I get quite attached to the characters emotionally. I love doing them all. And after you're done, you feel like you've moved the audience. Audiences will hear stories about the songs and be surprised at how many songs they recognize.

EXTRA: What's the great thing about Sondheim?

MYERS: Everybody has always waited with baited breath for the next thing that he writes. He's in a class by himself. If people take the time to really listen to his lyrics, they will get a lot more from it. He is very insightful about relationships and he tells it all in this show.

Did You Know...

Pamela Myers told her alma mater the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music the seven secrets to having a career with a second act:

- Be a character actor.
- Be flexible.
- Be a self-starter.
- Keep yourself in shape.
- Don't take it personally.
- Pace your life.
- Have a work ethic.

Watch Pamela Myers' show stopping number ***Another Hundred People*** [here](#).

*Photo Credit: Stewart Talent*