SWEENEY TODD
THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET

MUSIC AND LYRICS BY
STEPHEN SONDHEIM

BOOK BY
HUGH WHEELER

DIRECTED AND CHOREOGRAPHED BY
JOSEPH W. RITSCH

MUSICAL DIRECTION BY
STACEY ANTOINE

SEPTEMBER 6-23, 2018
From the Dramaturg

THE CREATION AND EVOLUTION OF SWEENEY TODD

1795 The basic plot first appeared in a British magazine. In 1825, that story was re-told in another publication called Tell-Tale magazine. Although the main character was French in this version, many familiar aspects of the homicidal barber are included: he kills his customers and delivers the corpses to a woman who is renowned for her meat pies. The barber also gives her a string of pearls taken from one of his victims. The victim’s dog eventually guides police to a basement piled with gruesome remains.

1846 Sweeney appears in The String of Pearls, a serialized novel in one of London’s so-called “penny dreadful” newspapers in eighteen installments. In this treatment, the barber is now named Sweeney Todd and his barbershop is located on Fleet Street. We also have the first appearance of a sweet young girl named Johanna, the love interest of a sailor who is the hero of the story.

1847 The popularity of The String of Pearls led to Sweeney Todd’s first incarnation as a stage play, courtesy of a dramatist named George Dibdin-Pitt, adding a subtitle, The Fiend of Fleet Street. Without the protection of our modern concept of copyright laws and intellectual property, Dibdin-Pitt’s drama was reproduced many times in a variety of stageworks, some of which incorporated musical numbers.

1862 The next version to advance the plot came from a novel by Frederick Hazleton. In this work, Johanna, like the corresponding character in the musical, disguises herself as a man to search for her lover.

1936 A film about Sweeney Todd, directed by George King, starred an actor with the appropriate name of “Tod Slaughter” in the title role. By now, many of the familiar characters had coalesced into figures resembling those Sondheim would depict, including Mrs. Lovett, the apprentice Tobias and the corrupt Beadle.

1970 Christopher Bond’s 1970 drama transformed Sweeney to the status of a tragic character by creating a motive for his homicidal rage other than poverty and general depravity. Bond imagined Todd as a man betrayed by a corrupt justice system, adding the characters of Judge Turpin and Lucy, in addition to transforming Johanna into Todd’s daughter. Featuring cannibalism and graphic special effects including the slitting of throats, Sweeney Todd was strongly influenced by a genre of Parisian puppet theatre known as Grand Guignol. The theatre was opened in 1897 by Oscar Metenier, who was also its first stage director. His goal was to present dramas depicting life among the lower classes of French society, including the poor and homeless, prostitutes and criminals.

—Lisa A. Wilde
TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Play
About the Writers..................................................................................................................................................3
Structure & Sources...............................................................................................................................................8
References................................................................................................................................................................9

The Production
From the Director....................................................................................................................................................12
Creative Team........................................................................................................................................................14
Cast........................................................................................................................................................................18
Questions for Discussion.......................................................................................................................................19
Theater Etiquette...................................................................................................................................................19

About the Writers

BIOGRAPHY

Stephen Sondheim/Music & Lyrics. Stephen Sondheim was born on March 22, 1930, in New York City to Herbert
and Janet Sondheim. They both worked in New York’s garment industry; his father was a dress manufacturer and
his mother a designer. They divorced in 1942 and Sondheim moved to Doylestown, Pennsylvania with his mother. He
began studying piano and organ at a young age and was already writing songs as a student at George School. In Pennsylvania,
Stephen became friends with the son of Broadway lyricist and producer Oscar Hammerstein, who gave young Sondheim
advice and tutelage in musical theatre as well as serving as a surrogate father during this time of tumult in his teens.
Sondheim had penned a satire about his school, the musical By George!, which he thought his mentor would love and
asked for feedback. Hammerstein thought the project needed serious work and offered honest criticism, which Sondheim would later see as invaluable.

Stephen also worked as an assistant on Allegro, Hammerstein’s 1947 theatre collaboration with the composer Richard Rodgers. The experience had long-lasting effects on the young composer’s approach to his work. Sondheim attended Williams College, where he majored in music. After graduating from the school in 1950, he studied further with the avant-garde composer Milton Babbitt and moved to New York City. In the early 1950s, Stephen moved to Los Angeles, California, where he wrote scripts for the television series “Topper” and “The Last Word”. Returning to New York, he composed background music for the play The Girls of Summer in 1956. An acquaintance with director Arthur Laurents brought him into contact with composer Leonard Bernstein and choreographer Jerome Robbins, who were looking for a lyricist for
a contemporary musical adaptation of Romeo and Juliet. In writing the lyrics for West Side Story, which opened in 1957, Sondheim thus became part of one of Broadway’s most successful productions of all time. His next theatre project was to team up with composer Jule Styne to write the lyrics for Gypsy, which opened in 1959 with Ethel Merman as its star. After musical contributions to 1960’s Invitation to a March, Sondheim then wrote both lyrics and music to A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, a musical farce based on comedies by ancient playwright Plautus. It opened in 1962, ran for nearly 1000 performances and won a Tony Award for Best Musical.

Sondheim won several more Tony Awards in the 1970s for his collaborations with producer/director Harold Prince, including the musicals Company (1970) (a meditation on contemporary marriage and commitment); Follies (1971) (an homage to the Ziegfeld Follies and early Broadway); A Little Night Music (1973) (a comedy-drama based on Ingmar Bergman’s Smiles of a Summer Night), and Sweeney Todd (1979) (a gory melodrama set in Victorian London.) Sondheim became known for his witty, conversational lyrics, his seamless merging of words with music and the variety of his source materials. Pacific Overtures (1979) was partially inspired by haiku poetry and the Japanese Kabuki theatre and 1981’s Merrily We Roll Along was adapted from a 1934 play by Kaufman and Hart. In the 1980’s Sondheim collaborated several times with playwright/director James Lapine. Their Sunday in the Park with George (1984) was based upon the painting “A Sunday on La Grande Jatte” by Georges Seurat; Into the Woods (1987) is a collage of plots from classic fairy tales. Sondheim continues to combine various musical genres with sharp lyrical writing and unexpected subject matter; in the 1980s though, some of his work received less popular and critical acclaim. Assassins (1990) told the tales of nine presidential assassins in American history, and Passion, a 1984 collaboration with Lapine, was a melodramatic romance based on an Italian film. In 1990 he wrote the songs for the movie Dick Tracy starring Warren Beatty and Madonna and won an Academy Award for the song “Sooner or Later.” He has also been the subject of several revues, including Side by Side by Sondheim, Putting It Together and Sondheim on Sondheim in 2010. Secrest, Meryle. Stephen Sondheim: a Life. New York, NY: Random House Publishing, 1998.

—http://www.biography.com/people/stephen-sondheim-9488709

Hugh Wheeler/Book writer. Hugh Wheeler was born in Hampstead, London in 1912 and attended London University. He came to the United States when he was 22 and began writing mysteries under the pseudonyms of Patrick Quentin and Q. Patrick, first in collaboration and then on his own. After 20 years as a successful mystery novelist, in which he wrote or co-wrote 40 books and saw four of them turned into major motion pictures, Wheeler wrote his first play, Big Fish, Little Fish in 1961. Subsequently, he devoted his energies to writing for the theatre. His next play was Look, We’ve Come Through which closed shortly after it opened.

He also wrote screenplays such as Travels with My Aunt and the hilarious Black Flowers for the Bride. Shortly after his second play, Wheeler turned to musical theatre and wrote the book for Harold Arlen’s musical Softly. Wheeler’s fascination with the 1957 Ingmar Bergman film Smiles of a Summer Night proved to be a major turning point for him. As Sondheim recalled, the composer was discussing the possibility of a romantic musical with Harold Prince in 1971. Prince called Wheeler and they met together;
in the course of the conversation, Bergman’s movie came up. The result was A Little Night Music. The 1973 musical won six Tony Awards—for Sondheim, Wheeler, Prince, the actresses Glynis Johns and Patricia Elliott and the costumer Florence Klotz. His second Tony came a year later.

Leonard Bernstein asked the writer to provide a new book for his musical Candide, which had been a success as a recording but had been a disappointment on stage. With some new lyrics by Sondheim, the Wheeler book helped turn Bernstein’s Candide into a popular musical. Collaboration with Sondheim was revived again five years later for the 1979 production of The Ballad of Sweeney Todd. Wheeler wrote the book for the musical which garnered eight Tony Awards, including another for the composer and the writer. The same year, he wrote the book for Mozart’s Impressario, which was presented at the inaugural summer opera season at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. In 1981 Wheeler wrote the book for a musical based on The Little Prince, the novel by Antoine de Saint-Exupery; two years later he wrote another musical titled Bodo. This work was produced in workshop and a spokesman for the writer said he had been working on revisions at the time of his death in 1987.

REFLECTIONS ON MELODRAMA AND SWEENEY TODD BY STEPHEN SONDHEIM

The Nature of Melodrama

I have the feeling that melodrama has its own meaning for different people. Some think of melodrama as villains twirling mustaches and lashing young virgins to railroad tracks. In other words, something that is to be spoofed or is funny. I think that’s always implicit when someone says, “Oh, stop being so melodramatic about it.” There are others—and I am one of them—who think of melodrama simply as being high theater. Theater in whatever form you care to think of theater—what I am talking about is the kind of theater that takes place in an auditorium with a proscenium arch. Thus, for me, melodrama is theater that is larger than life—in emotion, in subject, and in complication of plot. I do not believe melodrama has to be bloody, although many people associate melodrama with blood. Actually there is a great deal of high drama that I consider to be melodrama. In spite of its simplicity of plot, Oedipus Rex, in my opinion, is very close to melodrama. It is a mystery with a stunning surprise solution (surprising for the hero, that is) and then it has a violent and bloody dramatic conclusion: Oedipus blinds himself. As far as I’m concerned, Sophocles’ play is merely a serious Grand Guignol.

Melodrama and Farce

Another aspect of melodrama that interests me is that it is the obverse side of farce, which is another favorite form of mine. We find the same qualities in both. Complications of plot, larger-than-life characters, grand gestures, and non-naturalistic acting are common to both melodrama and farce. The only difference is that in melodrama what we could call tragic events occur; events with truly unpleasant consequences. In farce annoying events happen with comic and generally happy consequences, although there are a number of farces that could be viewed as unpleasant, particularly in the 20th century, when writers started to create black farces, as, for example, Joe Orton did. The point is that melodrama and farce are essentially the same form, and they represent for me the heart of the theatrical experience. They offer what I do not find in other narrative media. I suppose that one might sometimes find it in novels, if one’s imagination is large enough. But not in the movies—movies are a reportorial form—and two-dimensional at that—and there is no direct communication with
the audience: the film is a presented object. Television is perhaps even one step further removed and, at the same time, one step closer to the spectator. It is a small, cozy form, and anyone attempting to do anything larger than life on television makes an absolute fool of himself. The theater is the one place where you can create larger than life, and melodrama and farce represent the extreme versions of theatricality.

**Earlier Sweeney Todd plays and Bond’s modern version**

Now I had never seen a good Grand Guignol melodrama, and *Sweeney Todd*, I must stress, is a special kind of melodrama: Grand Guignol (originally a character in the French puppet theater), which is always associated with lots of blood and outlandishness. All the Sweeney Todds that existed before Christopher Bond’s version were indeed bloody, although nowhere near as bloody as those one-act horror plays I saw in Paris. In fact, all these earlier *Sweeney Todd* plays were very boring and essentially overwritten one-act dramas with one or two central incidents and a great deal of padding. In the 19th century I imagine there was also liberal use of thunder sheet effects and lots of emoting, as opposed to acting. All the interest and suspense had to do with the scenic effects and with wondering whether or not somebody was going to get killed in the chair. Todd was merely a villain, and Mrs. Lovett was merely an accomplice—and a secondary one at that. There was no attitude or tone. It was simply a matter of seeing the villain get caught in the end. Christopher Bond humanized all the characters and gave the story motivation which had never existed before in the earlier versions of *Sweeney Todd*. Yet while enlarging the human dimensions of the play, Bond remained true to the melodramatic tradition. Everyone in Bond’s version is larger than life; the characters are not real people. The events are extraordinary, melodramatic in the sense that they are larger than life; in real life there may have been mass murderers and even ones who used razors—but their stories were not compressed and heightened in this way. *Sweeney Todd* is larger than life as a story and larger than life in technique. Take the matter of language. Hugh Wheeler, who adapted Bond’s play and prepared the libretto, pointed out to me that Bond had written half of his play in blank verse, but that the lines were not typed out as blank verse. All the speeches of the Judge, Todd, and the two young lovers are written in iambic meter, and the lower-class characters are given non-metered dialogue. This produces a very subtle effect when you read the play. Beyond the formality of the diction, there is a kind of stateliness in some of the characters that creates an odd juxtaposition with the rag-tag rhythms in the lower-class figures. Attention to details of this sort gives Bond’s *Sweeney Todd* greater depth than the usual melodrama, which is quite shallow. It is exactly this added dimension that we wanted in our musical version, and when Hugh and I first sat down to work on the piece, we were interested in retaining the same spirit that had attracted me to the play.
The Collaboration
Since I hadn’t wanted to do the piece alone, I asked Hugh Wheeler—with whom I’d had two lovely collaborations, three actually, or one and two halves. Hugh was also a mystery story writer and British born and therefore he understood the whole tradition. He was perhaps the only person in the United States to whom I could say, “Sweeney Todd” and who wouldn’t say, “Who’s that?” Hugh and I talked about it and wondered whether we could get away with doing the only thing that would be fun: treating Sweeney Todd seriously.

I believe that there’s a little of everything in all of us, and most people can understand and identify with any emotion; the writer simply must draw the audience into the feelings of the characters that he has created on the stage. Sweeney Todd, which after all is a melodrama about revenge, poses a problem for a lot of people who refuse to admit to themselves that they have a capacity for vengeance, but I think it’s a universal trait. I didn’t see any reason why we couldn’t do what Christopher Bond had done, which is to make Sweeney a tragic hero instead of a villain, because there is something of Sweeney in all of us, I believe.

Sweeney Todd is a play about obsession, and when a person is totally obsessed, everything else becomes irrelevant. In this sense, Sweeney is detached; the only interest from which he is not detached is his obsession: his revenge. The only time this detachment is dramatized on stage . . . is in the second-act sequence called “Johanna,” where a succession of victims comes into the barber shop; Sweeney sings dreamily and in a detached way while doing the most bloody things with his hands. That kind of schizoid split could be called detachment, and in fact, that is the word I used to describe to the actor how to play the scene. But most of all, I think of Sweeney Todd as a person so passionate on one subject that he has no energy for anything else. He is hot after one goal, becomes sidetracked because of circumstances, and goes crazy until suddenly another lucky chance happens and he is able to proceed along his path, destroying everything along the way. He is a man interested in only one thing, and he is animated only when he is in active pursuit of that goal. All the characters in the play are boxed in; they have one thing they want. That is characteristic of both melodrama and farce: the characters can be outlined by the one thing they want. In A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, Pseudolus wants his freedom, the hero wants the girl, the old man wants the young girl, the wife wants the husband, the pimp wants money, the old man wants his children: everyone is motivated entirely by one want. The same thing is true in Sweeney Todd. Everybody is obsessed by one thing: the Judge with his lechery, the Beadle with his authority, Mrs. Lovett with her greed, Sweeney with his revenge, the boy Tobias with a home, and the lovers with each other. Everybody wants one thing, they all clash, and there is a terrible collision. When the refuse clears, only two of them are left alive—the lovers. That’s part of the tradition of popular melodrama. The show must have some feeling of traditional form. You might argue that it would be more realistic to have the girl killed off, but the audience wouldn’t be as satisfied and they certainly wouldn’t feel for Sweeney. The ending should be formally satisfying.

Excerpted from extemporaneous remarks made by Stephen Sondheim to, and recorded by, Daniel Gerould on September 5, 1979.
Structure and Sources

EPIC THEATER

In the opening lines of the play, the audience is told:

“Attend the tale of Sweeney Todd
His face was pale and his eye was odd
He shaved the faces of gentlemen
Who never thereafter were heard from again
He trod a path that few had trod
Did Sweeney Todd
The Demon Barber of Fleet Street.”

These lines frame the narrative; the audience is immediately aware it is watching a play being put on by performers. The lyric also removes any suspense as we are told from the outset what happens. While using narrators is not a contemporary device, twentieth-century playwrights used specifically to distance the audience from the emotion or even, in this case, the melodrama of the plot. Early twentieth-century German playwright and philosopher Bertolt Brecht in particular worked to codify the idea of the alienation effect, in which the audience was always aware of the theatricality of the event in order to focus on critical thought and political action rather than getting lost in their emotional responses. Brecht was opposed to realism and used direct address, masks, historical distance and superimposed titles as theatrical conventions to instruct the audience and create a forum for critical thought and debate.

In Rep Stage’s production, this epic theater effect is created by the convention of contemporary British street artists coming together to put on a production of the play in a back alley.

LEITMOTIFS

Leitmotifs are a characteristic of both opera and musical theater; a particular musical arrangement is introduced and connected to a specific character. Melodies, accompaniment figures, rhythmic patterns and chords are introduced, fragmented, developed, reprised and interwoven throughout the entire score, each of them representing a different character, mood or aspect of the story.

PENNY DREADFULS

Story papers, also known as penny dreadfuls, penny horribles, penny awfuls, penny numbers and penny bloods began in the 1830s and became immensely popular because they cost only one penny. These books were the result of cheaper printing methods and replaced the old single broadsheets that accompanied any scandalous or gruesome news story, which had also sold for a penny. Originally created as a cheaper alternative to mainstream fiction for working class adults (Charles Dickens’s illustrated novels sold in monthly parts for a shilling), by the 1850s the serial stories were often aimed at teenagers. For the first time the children of the lower classes were learning to read, thanks to the universal education instituted by the British Parliament; therefore, publishers quickly found ways to entertain this new demographic of customers. Penny dreadfuls usually featured lurid, sensational, exciting tales with lavish illustrations, some in color. Many of the subjects were
taken from popular novels; some were historically
based; others were about famous criminals. Some
highly successful tales boasted a weekly sale of 30,000
copies. One of the longest running series followed the
exploits of Dick Turpin, highwayman, which continued
for 254 episodes. Although there were countless
copies of these story papers printed, very few original
copies exist, because the colorful covers were ideal for
papering the walls of a poor family’s rooms where they
faded under coal soot and tobacco smoke. George A.
Sala (1828-95), a respected journalist, started off as a
penny blood writer; he described them as “a world of
dormant peerages, of murderous baronets, and ladies
of title addicted to the study of toxicology, of gypsies
and brigand chiefs, men with masks and women with
daggers, of stolen children, withered hags, heartless
gamesters, nefarious roués, foreign princesses, Jesuit
fathers, gravediggers, resurrection-men, lunatics and
ghosts.” Many famous authors contributed to the
series, among them, Bram Stoker and Wilkie Collins. It
was in The String of Pearls that Sweeney Todd made his
first appearance.

References

CLASS AND POVERTY

Designed to reduce the costs of poor relief, the 1832 Poor Law Act placed the workhouse (provided by a union of parishes)
at the center of provision, with the guiding principle of ‘less eligibility’—that workhouse conditions should be worse than
the lowest living standards of the independent labourer—as its central tenet. Those entering the workhouse would find life
there harsh, monotonous and characterized by the intent of improving the inmate’s moral character. It was felt that local
resources should be used more effectively and costs would be further reduced as paupers would be deterred by the appear-
ance of the workhouses and knowledge of the harsh treatment of their ‘inmates’. In 1848 Lord Ashley referred to more than
thirty thousand ‘naked, filthy, roaming lawless and deserted children, in and around the metropolis’. Many destitute children
lived by stealing, and to the respectable Victorians they must have seemed a very real threat to society. The population of London increased from 675,000 in 1750 to 900,000 in 1800. The housing constructed in a rush after the Great Fire in 1666 was poorly constructed and insufficient for the population growth resulting in terrible living conditions and constantly crumbling housing. Crime rates rose from 5,000 a year in 1800 to 20,000 a year in 1840. By the end of the century, perceptions of criminals had shifted from being a characteristic of the lower class to being a symptom of mental illness.

At the middle of the century, people still believed that social class was pre-ordained and did not need to be addressed: ‘God had put people in their place in life and this must not be interfered with because the life after death was more important’.

As far as the later comment is concerned, this is clearly demonstrated in a hymn published in 1848 by Cecil Frances Alexander:

The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them, high and lowly,
And order’d their estate

MENTAL ILLNESS

Large Victorian public asylums haunt the history of psychiatry. They were hailed as places of refuge for some of society’s supposedly most vulnerable men and women. These buildings were called ‘lunatic asylums’, and later renamed ‘mental hospitals’. They earned a reputation as dehumanising, prison-like institutions. Before asylums, the burden of keeping the mentally unstable individuals rested almost entirely on loved ones. “Mad” people who could not be kept at home wandered free, begging for food and shelter. In Europe, a few small Christian institutions dedicated to sheltering the insane emerged in the early Middle Ages.

London’s St. Mary’s Bethlehem Hospital (now called Bedlam) was the most famous although it did not hold more than two dozen inmates until the 1620s. A growing market economy in the 1600s and 1700s saw “service professions” emerge. Those who worked in them did thankless jobs, formerly handled at home or by the church, and included undertakers, private tutors and “madhouse” keepers. Families paid for secrecy and discretion, and these private institutions left few records. Some keepers adopted management techniques developed by Renaissance horse-masters to control stubborn horses. Finally, in 1790, William Tuke, a Quaker businessman, founded the York Retreat, the first asylum to shun physical restraint and coercion. Its influential methods became known as moral treatment, which relied on constant surveillance. Women were frequently assigned to asylums for a range of conditions, from postnatal depression to alcoholism and senile dementia, and even for social transgressions such as infidelity.
Anyone who could persuade two doctors to sign certificates of insanity could put away inconvenient or embarrassing relatives in a madhouse. Women, with lower social status, less power and money, were more vulnerable. While great strides have been made, one can’t dismiss entirely the Victorian efforts to understand the mind. Indeed, compared with the early asylums—rough, brutal places where the most disturbed patients were chained in windowless rooms with straw bedding—the mid-Victorian era was positively progressive. Theories that still hold today, such as the value of occupational therapy, were becoming fashionable in Victorian times. It was here that the shift away from the idea of control from without and towards control from within via treatment.

—http://broughttolife.scicemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife/themes/mentalhealthandillness/mentalstitutions

BARBERS

Barbers are one of the world’s oldest professions. By the Middle Ages barbers were not only cutting hair and shaving, but also pulling teeth, dressing wounds and performing simple operations. Up until the 18th century the barber surgeons duties consisted of not only cutting hair and shaving but picking out lice from hair, pulling rotten teeth, lancing abscesses, setting bone fractures and very often bloodletting. Bloodletting was an important practice, as it was believed that as a person ate and digested food, it was turned into blood. If an individual had an excess of blood, all sorts of ailments would follow, so bloodletting was deemed an important purifying technique. Many physicians thought this cutter’s art beneath them, so left it to the barbers. In the eighteenth century, barbers expanded their work into the making, powdering and caretaking of wigs.

WARDS AND GUARDIANS

The nineteenth-century courts were infamously corrupt and slow, working to extract as much money in fees as possible, as described by Charles Dickens in his novels. Adoption was not a common practice; instead the guardianship of “wards”—children or individuals unable to take care of themselves—was awarded by the courts. The guardians then obtained all of the ward’s financial assets as well as the ability to arrange a female ward’s marriage. For a judge to select himself as a guardian was clearly corrupt but probably not uncommon.
From the Director

“At the top of the hole sit the privileged few,
Making mock of the vermin in the lower zoo,
Turning beauty into filth and greed.
I too have sailed the world and seen its wonders,
For the cruelty of men is as wondrous as Peru.”
—Stephen Sondheim

Totalitarianism, patriarchy, a struggling working class, diminished empathy and the dire pursuit of righting injustices… Victorian England or present day United States?

As a theatre maker I always ask “why this play/musical now?” Sometimes the answer is indeed “just because” but that was not the case with Sweeney Todd. This brilliant Sondheim/Wheeler musical has always been a favorite of mine, and very much on the top of my list to direct. Structurally I am drawn to the tension in the piece as it is both epic and intimate, presentational and naturalistic, dark and humorous. I am excited by work that can be successful in its oppositions, but I am also intrigued in how the work vibrates with me in a very modern way.

It all begins with the Prologue, right out of the gate we as an audience are beckoned by a group of players to go on this journey with them as they tell the cautionary tale of history’s most notorious barber. I was really interested in who these players were and why their story needed to be told. Who are these characters today, in this very moment, and how are their lives parallel to the motifs of this Penny Dreadful inspired musical?

What is the driving force behind Sweeney’s brutal behavior? Corruption, the injustice of a false imprisonment, the breaking up of family, the loss of one’s home and business… again, sound familiar? As you can see this tension between the present and the past kept resurfacing for me in a very haunting way. This was the major impetus to take Victorian Fleet Street and smash it against the streets of modern East London.

As we know, history repeats itself, even with the cautionary tales of the past to warn us of our possible demise. What is the warning of this Brechtian style melodrama of a musical? What gift of social commentary does it give us? Sondheim himself has been quoted saying the piece has no underlying message. Is this still true in 2018? Have we reached a moment in our modern world where the “eating of the rich” has become much less a metaphor and more of a dire pursuit of social justice? Attend the tale of Sweeney Todd… perhaps you will find answers there.
Street Art

Street art, graffiti and tagging have been a significant form of social and political protest, particularly as these works often appear overnight and are anonymous or pseudonymous as in the cases of two famous street artists, Basquiat and “Banksy.” These installations, murals or images seem to pop up overnight and are impossible to prosecute because of the artists’ anonymity. Currently, in Europe, much of the protest art is focused on Trump and his policies.
Creative Team

**Director and Choreographer:** Joseph W. Ritsch

**Music Director:** Stacey Antoine

**Scenic Designer:** Joseph W. Ritsch

**Costume Designer:** Sarah Cubbage

**Lighting Designer:** Conor Mulligan

**Sound Designer:** Mark Smedley

**Properties Designers:** Joseph W. Ritsch and Seth Schwartz

**Dialect Coach:** Tonya Beckman

**Wig Designer:** Janine Sunday

**Assistant Director:** Taylor Rieland

**Associate Set Designer/Consumbale Props:** Mollie Singer

**Associate Music Director:** William Scaletta

**Assistant Costume Designer:** Benjamin Weigel

**Stage Manager:** Jennifer Schwartz and Julie DeBakey Smith

**Assistant Stage Manager:** Amanda Reandeau
SET DESIGN, By Joseph W. Ritsch
ASSOCIATE SET DESIGN, Mollie Singer
COSTUME DESIGN, By Sarah Cubbage
The Production
SWEENEY TODD
THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET

The Production

Cast

V. Savoy McIlwain
(SWEENEY TODD)

Jade Antoinette Jones
(MRS. LOVETT)

Nigel Reed
(JUDGE TURPIN)

Suzanne Lane
(JOHANNA)

Noah Israel
(ANTHONY HOPE)

Benjamin Lurye
(THE BEADLE)

Justine Icy Moral
(BEGGAR WOMAN/PIRELLI/JONAS FOGG)

John Taos Foster
(TOBIAS RAGG)
Questions for Discussion

1. Select an important moment from the musical. This should be a moment that has more than one person in attendance. For example, the first meeting between Sweeney Todd and Mrs. Lovett or the shaving contest between Sweeney Todd and Pirelli. Pick one character and note, from the character's perspective and attitude, what transpired during and after the moment. Students may use what is provided by the playwright/lyricist but should be encouraged to expand the character. Explanations of emotion, physicality and the impact of the moment should be noted. Write a short monologue describing the moment from the character’s perspective.

2. Identify some similarities between Victorian England and contemporary USA policies in regards to poverty, homelessness and mental illness.

3. Musicals traditionally open with some kind of “I want” song. Identify that song or songs in this musical and discuss how they are used to unexpected effect.

Theater Etiquette

Attending the theater will be a positive experience for everyone if you observe a few simple courtesies:

- Turn off and put away all electronic devices prior to entering the theater.
- Taking photographs and video recording in the theater is prohibited.
- Do not place your feet on the seat in front of you.
- The actors onstage can see and hear the audience just as well as the audience can see and hear them. Please refrain from talking or moving around during the performance as it can be distracting to the actors, as well as to other audience members.
- Feel free to respond to the action of the play through appropriate laughter and applause. The actors enjoy this type of communication from the audience!
- Have fun! Attending theater should be an enjoyable experience.