

# STEPHEN SONDHEIM

b. March 22, 1930

*“Art, in itself, is an attempt to bring order out of chaos.”*

Stephen Sondheim is hailed by The New York Times as the greatest artist in American musical theater. His most famous scores include “A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum,” “Sweeney Todd,” and “Into the Woods,” for which he wrote both lyrics and music, and “West Side Story” and “Gypsy,” for which he wrote the lyrics.

Sondheim was born in New York City, a son of wealthy dress manufacturers. As a result of his parents’ divorce, he grew up on the Upper West Side of Manhattan and on a farm in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

Sondheim had the good fortune of befriending Jimmy Hammerstein, son of the well-known lyricist and playwright Oscar Hammerstein II. Entering into an informal apprenticeship with his friend’s father, Sondheim found in Oscar Hammerstein an inspiring mentor as well as a surrogate dad.

At prep school in Pennsylvania, Sondheim wrote a comic musical about the students and faculty. Expecting accolades, Sondheim proudly showed his musical to Hammerstein, who told him it was the worst work he had ever seen, and then offered his help. Sondheim claimed he learned more in that afternoon than in his entire formal education.

Sondheim graduated magna cum laude from Williams College in Massachusetts in 1950 and went on to study composition with composer Milton Babbitt. He found initial success with “West Side Story” (1957), for which he wrote the lyrics. The unexpected rhymes and clever use of language that became Sondheim’s signature helped “West Side Story” win the 1958 Tony Award for Best Musical. In 1961, the musical was adapted for film and won 10 Academy Awards.

Sondheim’s groundbreaking musicals often tackle unconventional topics—like the Victorian murder-revenge story “Sweeney Todd” (1979) and the anti-fairy-tale “Into the Woods” (1986)—or have innovative structures like the nonlinear and plotless “Company” (1970) and the characterless “Pacific Overtures” (1976). Broadway performers such as Chita Rivera, Bernadette Peters, Ethel Merman, Angela Lansbury, Patti LuPone, Nathan Lane and Whoopi Goldberg have starred in his musicals.

Sondheim has won an Academy Award, a Pulitzer Prize, and seven Grammy Awards. A winner of more Tony Awards than any other composer, he was honored with a Tony Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008.

**With works including “West Side Story” and “Gypsy,” Stephen Sondheim is one of musical theater’s greatest lyricists and composers. He has won more Tony Awards than any other composer.**

