

April 15, 2023

7:30 pm

"Modern Broadway – A Symphonic Journey"

With Hosts Dustin and Dominique Luecke

Rodgers and Hammerstein/Bennett: Music from *Oklahoma*

Kander and Ebb/Ricketts: Music from *Chicago*

Schoenberg/Lowden: Music from *Les Misérables*

Webber/Lowden: "Memory" from *Cats*

Schoenberg/Custer: Music from *Miss Saigon*

INTERMISSION

Lerner and Loewe/Bennett: Music from *Camelot*

Schwartz/Ricketts: Music from *Wicked*

Menken/Custer: Music from *Beauty and the Beast*

Manuel-Miranda/Brubaker: Music from *Hamilton*

Sondheim/Lowden: "Send in the Clowns" from *A Little Night Music*

Webber/Custer: Music from *The Phantom of the Opera*

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These program notes are supplemented with information from *Broadway Musicals, Show by Show*, Ninth Edition by Stanley Green – Revised and Updated by Cary Ginell.

Rodgers and Hammerstein/Bennett: Music from *Oklahoma*

A recognized landmark in the evolution of the American musical theater, *Oklahoma* was the initial collaboration between Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. With choreography by Agnes de Mille, the production fused story, songs, and dances, while it depicted the pioneering men and women who had once tilled the land and tended the cattle of the American southwest.

Based on a 1931 play by Lynn Riggs called *Green Grow the Lilacs*, the musical is set in Indian Territory soon after the turn of the century. It opened on Broadway at the St. James theater and remained there almost six years. A movie version was created in 1955.

Kander and Ebb/Ricketts: Music from *Chicago*

Chicago is a 1975 American musical with music by John Kander, lyrics by Fred Ebb, and book by Ebb and Bob Fosse. Set in Chicago in the jazz age, the musical is based on a 1926 play of the same title by playwright Maurine Dallas Watkins.

The original Broadway production opened at the 46th Street Theater and ran until 1977. Bob Fosse directed and choreographed the original production, and his style is strongly identified with the show. It debuted in the West End in 1979, where it ran for 600 performances. *Chicago* was revived on Broadway in 1996, and a year later in the West End.

The 1996 Broadway production holds the record as the longest-running musical revival and the longest-running American musical in Broadway history. It is the second longest-running show ever to run on Broadway, behind only *The Phantom of the Opera*. *Chicago* surpassed *Cats* when it played its 7,486th performance. *Chicago* has been staged in numerous productions around the world and has toured extensively in the United States and United Kingdom. The 2002 film version of the musical won the Academy Award for Best Picture.

Schoenberg/Lowden: Music from *Les Misérables*

Les Misérables is something of a follow-up to the Royal Shakespeare Company's highly acclaimed non-musical dramatization of Charles Dickens' *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*. The story dealt with the theme of social injustice and the plight of the downtrodden that had inspired the earlier massive 19th century literary classic. Originally conceived in 1979, the pop opera gives dramatic life to Victor Hugo's sprawling 1,200-page novel of suffering and salvation during a tumultuous period of French history. *Les Misérables* was successfully launched in London in 1985, and then brought to New York two years later.

Webber/Lowden: "Memory" from *Cats*

Cats opened in London, England, on May 11, 1981. Charged with incredible energy, flare, and imagination, this feline fantasy has been staged in its Broadway version as even more of an environmental experience than its original. Composer Andrew Lloyd Webber began setting music to T. S. Elliot's poems in *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* in 1977. Later he arranged the music for concerts. The musical's song hit, "Memory," is sung by Grizabella, the faded Glamor Cat who, at evening's end, ascends to the cats' haven known as the Heaviside Layer. *Cats* surpassed the all-time longevity record for Broadway musicals, concluding its run after nearly 18 years and over 7,400 performances.

Last year, *The New York Times* reported on a one-hour version of the musical called "Cats: Young Actors Edition," adapted by iTheatrics for Concord Theatricals, and released to schools across North America. It is a "kid-friendly version" of the stage work. The songs are transposed to keys that are better suited for younger voices.

Schoenberg/Custer: Music from *Miss Saigon*

This musical opened on September 20, 1989. It was an updating of Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly* and is a modern operatic story showing the clash of two cultures. *Miss Saigon* was the first musical production to charge \$100 for the mezzanine seats.

INTERMISSION

Lerner and Loewe/Bennett: Music from *Camelot*

This was Lerner and Loewe's first Broadway undertaking following their spectacular success, *My Fair Lady*. The director of this Broadway production was Moss Hart. The cast featured, among others, Richard Burton as King Arthur and Julie Andrews as his Queen. Featuring the Knights of the Round Table, the show had the biggest advance sale in Broadway history up to that time. King Arthur's famous line is "once there was a fleeting wisp of glory called Camelot." The traveling company toured for a year and a half as well as a later run of almost three years. Interestingly a previous – and far more lighthearted – view of King Arthur's court was found in Rodgers and Hart's 1927 hit, *A Connecticut Yankee*.

Schwartz/Ricketts: Music from *Wicked*

Remember watching the film of *The Wizard of Oz* for the first time? How worried we were for the safety of Toto, the little dog in the film.

Well, this musical, *Wicked*, is loosely based on novelist Gregory Maguire's inventive exploration of *The Wizard of Oz*. Its full name is *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*, and it is told from the perspective of the witches! Interestingly, the origins of Toto, the Munchkins, the Tin Man, the Cowardly Lion, the Scarecrow, the Yellow Brick Road, and the Wizard are all explained! Music and lyrics are by Stephen Schwartz. The original cast album received a Grammy Award.

Wicked surpassed *Les Misérables* to become Broadway's fifth-longest running show. Moreover, this musical has broken box-office records around the world, holding weekly-gross-takings records in Los Angeles, Chicago, St. Louis, and London. The London, Broadway, and both North American touring productions simultaneously broke their respective records for the highest weekly gross. In the final week of 2013, the Broadway production broke this record again, earning \$3.2 million. In 2016, *Wicked* surpassed \$1 billion in total Broadway revenue, joining *The Phantom of the Opera* and *The Lion King* as the only Broadway shows to do so. Additionally, in 2017, *Wicked* surpassed *The Phantom of the Opera* as Broadway's second-highest grossing musical, trailing only *The Lion King*.

Menken/Calvin H. Custer: Music from *Beauty and the Beast*

The producer of this work is Walt Disney Productions. The story of the witch turning a prince into a beast who can only be returned to his princely state by learning to love and be loved has been with us since the 18th century. *Beauty and the Beast* is the stage version of the Walt Disney animated film, with five new songs by Alan Menken and Tim Rice. If it is at all possible for humans to resemble cartoon characters, the actors resemble the cartoon version with some degree of success.

Manuel-Miranda/Brubaker: Music from *Hamilton*

This musical was inspired by the biography *Alexander Hamilton* written in 2004 by Ron Chernow. Ever since it opened during the summer of 2015, *Hamilton* has been the "hot ticket" on Broadway, with theater fans eager to be in "the room where it happened." The key to its success is solely due to the brilliance and imagination of Manuel Miranda, who not only wrote the music, but also starred in the title role during the initial months of the show's Broadway run.

Sondheim/Lowden: "Send in the Clowns" from *A Little Night Music*

With a Salute to Stephen Sondheim ... "The career of Stephen Sondheim, the celebrated songwriter who recently passed away, spanned decades and encompassed 20 major productions," reads the *New York Times* on November 30, 2021. The Times created a selection of Sondheim's 20 best songs. Happily, "Send in the Clowns" from *A Little Night Music* of 1973 made the list!

The *Times* goes on to say, “Mr. Sondheim’s music was always recognizable as his own, and yet he was dazzlingly versatile. His melodies could be deceptively, disarmingly simple, like the most famous of his individual songs, “Send in the Clowns,” from *A Little Night Music*. Interestingly, the entire musical score was composed in $\frac{3}{4}$ time or “waltz time.”

Overall, he wrote both the music and the lyrics for a dozen Broadway shows. Five of them won Tony Awards for best musical, and six won for best original score. “Send in the Clowns” won the Grammy for Song of the Year in 1975. This show toured for a year and was added to the repertory of the New York City Opera in 1990. Earlier a film version, released in 1978, starred Elizabeth Taylor, among others.

Sondheim felt he was less of a songwriter than a playwright: he wrote very short plays and set them to music. Yet, what distinguished Mr. Sondheim’s lyrics was that they were character-driven, expressing emotional ambivalence, anguish, or deeply felt conflict. “Send in the Clowns” does just that.

His mother was a friend and neighbor of Dorothy Hammerstein, whose husband was the lyricist, Oscar Hammerstein II. Stephen, who had begun studying the piano at 7, spent many hours at the Hammerstein family residence, since he was friends with their son, Jamie. Oscar Hammerstein became Sondheim’s mentor and tutor. Stephen Sondheim states, “It was because of my teenage admiration for him that I became a songwriter.”

After a great deal of study, tutoring, mentoring and graduation from Williams College in Massachusetts, Sondheim got his first job through the agency representing Hammerstein. The rest is history!

The story of Sondheim’s tutelage under Oscar Hammerstein II is the basis for the rigorous dedication with which Sondheim passed that tradition on. He quietly and faithfully nurtured generations of theater composers and lyricists. “Sondheim was always concerned about the future of the art form, and he wanted it to survive,” said director Lonny Price, who played one of the leads in one of Sondheim’s original Broadway productions.

The New York Times continues, “Sondheim cultivated the field by founding the Young Playwrights Festival, and for years he was president of the Dramatists Guild Council. It was part of Sondheim’s gift to understand not only the encompassing job description of a great artist but also his singular effect on his colleagues – how even a few words of appreciation, encouragement, or moments of attention, could prove enduring sustenance over the length of a career.”

In 1993, Mr. Sondheim received the Kennedy Center Honors for lifetime achievement, and in 2015 he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama. In 2008, he was given a Tony Award for lifetime achievement.

Stephen Sondheim died on Friday, November 26, 2021, at the age of 91.

Webber/Custer: Music from *The Phantom of the Opera*

The basis of the Broadway musical is a novel written in 1910 by turn-of-the-century French novelist Gaston Leroux, called *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra*. Webber discovered that Leroux's work was a genuinely romantic and moving tale. *The Phantom of the Opera* opened in London in 1986 where it won a resoundingly affirmative reception for its cast, staging, and scenic effects, including a chandelier that descends from the auditorium ceiling and crashes on stage! A presold hit with an \$18 million advance, the show made Webber the first composer to have three musicals running simultaneously in London and New York. The other two: *Cats* and *Starlight Express*. *The Phantom of the Opera* is the most financially successful musical to date and has been shown around the world, including productions in Toronto, San Francisco, Hamburg, Sydney, and two American touring companies.