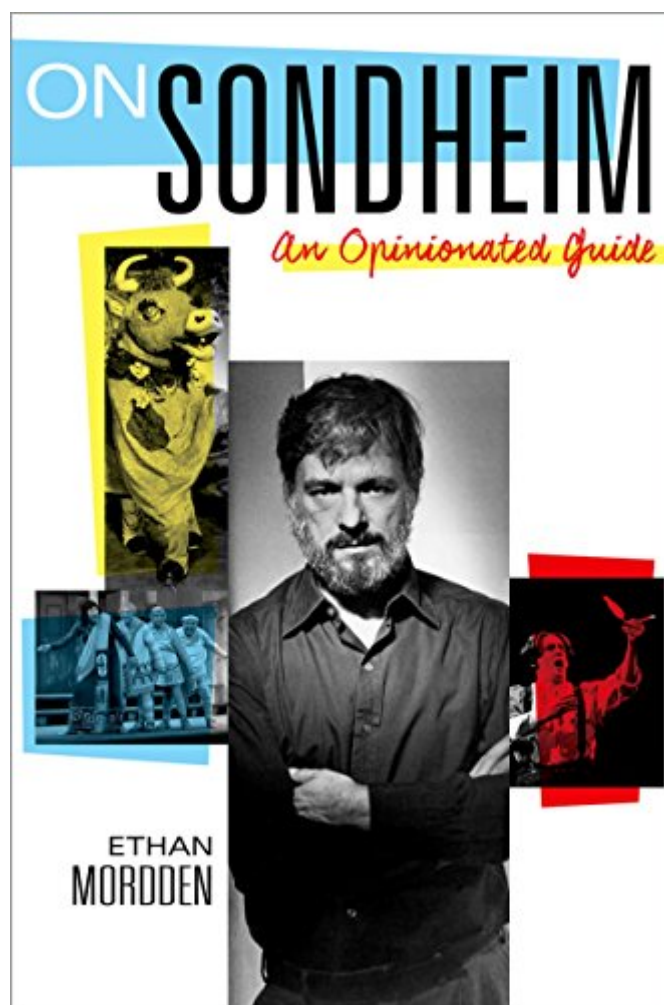


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# On Sondheim: An Opinionated Guide



## Synopsis

In *On Sondheim*, renowned author Ethan Mordden takes the reader on a tour of Stephen Sondheim's work, arguing for the importance and appeal of the composer-lyricist in American theater and, even more, in American culture. Over the course of eighteen shows, Mordden demonstrates that Sondheim is a classical composer who happens to write musicals. Sondheim has intellectualized the musical by tackling serious content usually reserved for the spoken stage: nonconformism (in *Anyone Can Whistle*, 1964), history (in *Pacific Overtures*, 1976), and cannibalism as a metaphor for class warfare (*Sweeney Todd*, 1979). Yet his work combines complex music and intellectual plots with a masterly skill for the fabric of theatre. His shows are all intensely theatrical, produced with flair and brilliance, whether in the lush operetta of *A Little Night Music* (1973) or the quixotic fairy-tale magic of *Into the Woods* (1987). Mordden provides fresh insights and analyses of every Sondheim show, from his first hit (*West Side Story*, 1957) to his most recent title (*Road Show*, 2008). Each musical has a dedicated chapter, including articles on Sondheim's life and his major influences, and comprehensive bibliographical and discographical essays place the Sondheim literature and recordings in perspective. Writing with his usual blend of the scholarly and the popular - with a wicked sense of humor - Ethan Mordden reveals why Stephen Sondheim has become Broadway's most significant voice in the last fifty years.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As usual, Mordden writes with impeccable authority, wit, and style on the most important figure in late 20th century musical theater. Indeed, if there is a better writer on the subject, I've never heard of, let alone read, him/her/it. What is most impressive is the exhaustive amount of information he manages to cram into such a slim (albeit closely spaced) volume. Two things, though: Meryl Secrest's bio of Sondheim is an almost unreadable work and there is CERTAINLY room for a better one, and, in the discography I find no mention of "Putting it Together" (Goodtimes entertainment 05-81268) the British (and Broadway) revue modeled on the same structure as "Marry Me A Little" starring Carol Burnett, George Hearn, John Barrowman, Ruthie Henshall, and... Bronson Pinchot?! If you have any interest at all in musical theater, read this... and all the other Mordden (I'm always so proud to spell that correctly) works on the subject

Opinionated indeed! Despite being a Sondheim fan for almost 50 years, seen all the shows, attended his lecture, read all the books, I have still gained added insight into the composer, his work and his process from this short book. I always enjoy Mordden's style even if I don't always agree with him. Highly recommended.

This is like having a nice, long, lively conversation with a fellow that knows it all, when it comes to Broadway. I've absolutely loved many Sondheim shows for years, and disliked a couple of them. Some books on him become so forced and abstracted that ON SONDHEIM is a relief. It's highly informative and still enjoyable to read.

Mordden knows that of which he writes, and is not shy about giving his opinions. He comments tersely about each Sondheim piece. Unfortunately it is difficult often to distinguish between fact and opinion. I don't mind as I have been following Mr. Sondheim for over thirty years and can readily discern the difference. Unfortunately, I think the reader has to bring too much knowledge to the exercise in order fully appreciate the writing and (often excellently reasoned) opinions.

Mordden's is a solid overview of Sondheim's career, from his early days under the tutelage of Hammerstein to his revisions of ROAD SHOW. The wonderful thing about Mordden is that he

doesn't pull punches - if he thinks something (or someone) is garbage, he'll say so. On the downside, his erudition can be a little off-putting at times - a few too many classical and other references dropped throughout the text. But putting that aside, ON SONDHEIM is a must addition to every Broadway collection.

Enlightening and moving insights into the mind, life, and talents of a musical genius of our time. Hard to find much on him, in the way of books. THIS is WELL worth the read. Enjoy...and learn while you do.

If you have read any of the author's other volumes in the history of the American Musical Theatre - you knew this book was inevitable. As always - perfection.

worth the time and an interesting read the musical genius mr Sondheim has his musical work clearly discussed by Ethan Morden

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