

2013

## Harmony, voice leading, and drama in three Sondheim musicals

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HARMONY, VOICE LEADING, AND DRAMA  
IN THREE SONDHEIM MUSICALS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Music

by

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December 2013

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*for Nanny & Jack*



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe a debt of gratitude to many people throughout this dissertation process. First, to my committee: my advisor Dr. Jeffrey Perry, for your insightful attention to every detail of my project, for serving as my confidant throughout this difficult project, and for helping to make me the best writer I have ever been; Dr. David Smyth, for inspiring me throughout my time at LSU to become a better music theorist; Dr. Brett Boutwell, for serving as my minor professor, and for being among the first to encourage my pursuit of Sondheim as a dissertation topic; and to Dr. Denise Egéa, my Dean's Representative, for serving on my committee, and your incredibly helpful input.

Next, I extend thanks to the whole music theory faculty at LSU, for putting their confidence in me in awarding me the Graduate School Fellowship and opportunities as a music theory Instructor and Teaching Assistant. The scholarship enabled me to pursue my doctoral degree, and provided me with some invaluable time in a classroom. I also want to thank my friends and family: to my grandmother Harriet Carroll, the most influential person in my life, for teaching me everything she knows; to my parents Roger and Nita Hudlow, without whom I would not be who I am today; and to Zach Hazelwood, Andrew Nicolette, Sam Stokes, and Jeff Yunek, my fellow Ph.D. students, for braving each stage of this doctoral program with me and providing support, empathy, and too many laughs to count.

Finally, nothing in my life would be possible without my loving wife Aleisa: for being the first person to introduce me to Sondheim's music when we were eighteen; for moving jobs as I moved schools; for withstanding the financial hardship of graduate school; and for giving me the greatest gift I have ever received: our son Jack. You truly are the star of this entire process, and I couldn't love you more.

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## ABSTRACT

This study presents an analytical approach to three works by American musical theater composer-lyricist Stephen Sondheim: *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Into the Woods*, and *Assassins*—each of which Sondheim developed largely at the Playwrights Horizons theater in New York. Using an eclectic, neo-Schenkerian approach that draws upon recent work by pop-rock and stage music analysts, it examines the intersection of melodic and harmonic events with dramatic occurrences in the text to determine how Sondheim heightens dramatic narrative within each song analyzed.

Sondheim's work has been a fixture of the upper echelon of the Broadway musical for over half a century. Countless authors have devoted their time to Sondheim's work, yet relatively few works of music scholarship are dedicated solely to Sondheim, and very little of this is strictly analytical in nature. This study seeks to contribute to filling of analytical void in Sondheim research. Since each musical score so brilliantly parallels the tone and setting of each show, Sondheim's fourteen musicals have very little in common with respect to surface musical style. Even within a single show, the composer's polystylistic approach to composition makes it difficult to pin down a singular "Sondheim style." The analytical approach in this study focuses on selected songs' deep-level musical structures and their interaction with dramatic events onstage, demonstrating that what makes Sondheim unique lies not in his melodies, form, harmony, or accompaniment patterns by themselves, but in how those elements integrate with one another and serve the dramatic narrative.

## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

American composer-lyricist Stephen Sondheim (b. 1930) creates music for the theater that underlines and advances the drama onstage. For Sondheim, music and drama seem to be synonymous terms. Sondheim once referred to himself as “essentially a playwright in song.”<sup>1</sup> This clearly shows that he views his contribution to each musical to be deeper than simply musicalizing words that tell a story. It is my view that structures deep within Sondheim’s music, which often coincide with dramatic high points in the show’s narrative, hold the key to our understanding exactly *how* his music functions as a narrative construction.

Sondheim’s musicals have enjoyed widespread acceptance among theater cognoscenti and music scholars alike, but few analytical studies of his music approach the works on primarily musical terms. In a 2000 article in the *Indiana Theory Review*, Steve Swayne provided an in-depth review of recent music scholarship (and some journalism) that discussed Sondheim’s work, a list comprising seven sources in total.<sup>2</sup> Since this article, Swayne has published his own full-length study of the various stylistic influences on Sondheim’s composition,<sup>3</sup> but little more music scholarship has been published on the composer over the past decade. While recent analytical scholarship has ventured deep into the worlds of popular music and musical theater, there is almost no published work that presents detailed analysis of Sondheim’s musicals from the perspective of the music theorist.

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1. Mark Eden Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 2nd edition (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 79.

2. Steve Swayne, “Sondheim: An American Composer Only a British Musicologist Can Love?,” *Indiana Theory Review* 21 (2000): 231–253. For the two most informed biographical sketches of Sondheim, see Meryle Secrest, *Stephen Sondheim: A Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011); Martin Gottfried, *Sondheim* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993).

3. Steve Swayne, *How Sondheim Found his Sound* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

The present study seeks to correct this dearth of detailed Sondheim analysis, using a Schenkerian analytical perspective to highlight intersections between music and drama in three musicals.

### 1.1: Scope Of Study

Sondheim's compositional output in the musical theater spans five decades, and he constantly redefines his surface aesthetic to adapt to the wide variety of subject matter that comprises his musicals—from fairy tales to gang violence, and American diplomacy in Japan to the history of American Presidential assassinations. It is immediately necessary to define what constitutes a Sondheim musical. For the purposes of this study, this definition includes all shows for which Sondheim provided the music *and* lyrics, excluding those for which Sondheim created lyrics only (*West Side Story*, *Gypsy*, *Do I Hear a Waltz?*) and musical revue productions based on collections of Sondheim's music (*Side by Side by Sondheim*, *Putting it Together*, *Sondheim on Sondheim*, etc.). This leaves the fourteen musicals for which Sondheim provided music and lyrics: *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962); *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964); *Company* (1970); *Follies* (1971); *A Little Night Music* (1973); *The Frogs* (1974, not produced in New York until 2004); *Pacific Overtures* (1976); *Sweeney Todd* (1979); *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981); *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984); *Into the Woods* (1987); *Assassins* (1991); *Passion* (1994); and *Road Show* (2008, a previous version entitled *Bounce*).

In the case of such prolific composers as Sondheim, monographs either approach his music either broadly (appraising all or most of it, for instance, for general stylistic markers) or narrowly (applying more detailed study to a smaller number of works). This dissertation intentionally falls into the latter category, principally as a reaction to recent music-analytic sources that examine Sondheim, which generally tend toward broad-scope analysis of his work as an attempt to codify elements of his compositional



style.<sup>4</sup> This study most significantly departs from previous analytical studies of Sondheim in that it focuses on just three musicals, using a Schenkerian approach to analyze the musical-dramatic symbiosis inherent in Sondheim's compositional style.

This dissertation's title, "Sondheim at Playwrights Horizons," describes the specific historical period that is the focus of the present study: the years 1984–1991, when three of Sondheim's musicals spent all or part of their gestation period in the Playwrights Horizons theatre in New York City. This period represents a time of major changes for Sondheim. First among these is the ending of Sondheim's long-time collaboration with producer/director Harold Prince. Prince produced Sondheim's first musical as composer-lyricist (*Forum*, 1962), began directing Sondheim's shows with *Company* (1970), and continued to produce and direct for Sondheim until *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981). When *Merrily* met with generally negative criticism (and a disappointingly short run), Sondheim and Prince ended a professional collaboration that had lasted nearly two decades and yielded five Tony Awards, four Grammy Awards, and four Drama Desk Awards.

With *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), *Into the Woods* (1987), and *Assassins* (1991), Sondheim collaborated with the production company at Playwrights Horizons (PH) theater in New York. *Sunday* and *Assassins* went through extensive workshop performances (with paid audiences) at PH, and *Woods* had a number of public readings there in its pre-production phase. *Assassins*, which never made it to a Broadway stage, had its limited run of full performances at the PH stage. It will be my goal in this study to show that Sondheim's post-Prince years, which he spent rebuilding his musical

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4. Peter Charles Landis Purin, "'I've a Voice; I've a Voice': Determining Stephen Sondheim's Compositional Style Through a Music-Theoretic Analysis of his Theater Works" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Kansas, 2011); Steve Swayne, "Hearing Sondheim's Voices" (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1999).

theater aesthetic through small workshop performances, yielded work of notable detail and artistic value. In the following sections of this chapter, I briefly review some existing Sondheim studies and outline my analytical methodology, and the fundamental importance of a Schenkerian approach to Sondheim's music.

### **1.2: Existing Sondheim/Musical Theater Literature**

Musical theater is a multidisciplinary endeavor requiring extensive collaboration between practitioners of theater, music, literature, and visual art. Authors who write about this genre often approach the subject from the viewpoint of only one of these artistic media (whichever best suits the author's experience and education). Since this dissertation concerns Sondheim's music, engaging all other components as ancillary, most of the sources discussed here represent the work of authors who focus on the music. Furthermore, since musical theater is such an approachable form of entertainment (while unquestionably containing much of lasting artistic value), much of the literature that focuses on the genre does not meet the standards of scholarly work. For the purposes of this literature study, I will only include those sources that are thoroughly researched, along with some that inhabit the zone between scholarship and journalism.

There are three essential books focusing primarily on Sondheim. The first (chronologically) is Stephen Banfield's *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals*, which constitutes the first full-length study of Sondheim's music by a musicologist.<sup>5</sup> Banfield provides a detailed account of Sondheim's compositional process, as well as a collection of analytical essays on each musical for which Sondheim served as composer-lyricist (which, by its publication date, included all shows up to *Assassins*). Steve Swayne's

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5. Stephen Banfield, *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993).

book *How Sondheim Found His Sound* examines each of Sondheim's influences—classical music, Broadway standards, cinema, and drama—and synthesizes a fully informed approach to Sondheim's music.<sup>6</sup> Mark Eden Horowitz's *Sondheim on Music* is a transcription of a series of taped interviews the author conducted with Sondheim himself.<sup>7</sup> Therein, Horowitz and Sondheim discuss primarily the composer's manuscripts and his motivation behind the various compositional decisions he has made throughout his career.

Joanne Gordon's *Art Isn't Easy* is one of a group of other works dedicated to Sondheim's work, none of which focus primarily on the music.<sup>8</sup> In this book, Gordon, a theater scholar, summarizes each of Sondheim's musicals from *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* to *Assassins*, and interprets the dramatic implications and themes throughout. Also in this category are two edited volumes: *Stephen Sondheim: A Casebook* and *Reading Stephen Sondheim*, each of which contains mostly non-musical writings about various literary themes in Sondheim's shows.<sup>9</sup> These collected essays represent the work of scholars and journalists from various disciplines and backgrounds; this diversity of authorship provides a cross-section of Sondheim's very broad critical audience.<sup>10</sup>

Some books attempt to place Sondheim's work into the broader context of the stage musical by comparing it to that of other composers from either the same tradition

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6. Swayne, 2005.

7. Horowitz 2010.

8. Joanne Gordon, *Art Isn't Easy: The Theater of Stephen Sondheim*, updated edition (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992).

9. Joanne Gordon, ed., *Stephen Sondheim: A Casebook* (New York: Garland, 1997); Sandor Goodhart, ed., *Reading Stephen Sondheim: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York: Garland, 2000).

10. My bibliography generally omits newspaper and magazine articles about Sondheim and his works (which easily number into the hundreds), unless they pertain directly to my analytical interpretation of a piece.

or the same period. The most recent of these, Larry Stempel's *Showtime*, is a comprehensive study of the American stage musical from its earliest beginnings in the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Here, Stempel mainly establishes Sondheim's place in the continuum of strictly American musical theater, while providing summary and critique of the composer's influence on the genre's development. Joseph Swain's volume of his own essays, titled *The Broadway Musical*, similarly traces the American musical's development, but with much more emphasis on the music itself than in Stempel's text.<sup>12</sup> Stephen Citron's *Sondheim and Lloyd-Webber* examines the lives and careers of Sondheim and his greatest contemporary, British musical theater composer Andrew Lloyd-Webber.<sup>13</sup> Citron endeavors throughout this text to compare the two composers' careers, the influence they may have had upon each other, and, more importantly, the musical theater world as a whole.

### 1.3: Analytical Methodology

The system of tonal music analysis pioneered by Austrian music theorist Heinrich Schenker (1868–1935) developed as a method of distilling tonal music to its most essential contrapuntal elements. Schenker's theory focuses on his conception of the *Ursatz*, or fundamental structure, the simple, linear backbone of even the most complex pieces of tonal music.<sup>14</sup> Schenker theorized that tonal composers expanded these fundamental structures as part of the compositional process. His analyses

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11. Larry Stempel, *Showtime: A History of the Broadway Musical Theater* (New York: Norton, 2010); Geoffrey Block, *Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical from "Show Boat" to Sondheim and Lloyd Webber*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

12. Joseph P. Swain, *The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2002).

13. Stephen Citron, *Sondheim and Lloyd-Webber: A New Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

14. Allen Cadwallader and David Gagné, *Analysis of Tonal Music: A Schenkerian Approach*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1–2.

(especially those completed in the latter portion of Schenker's life) depend on the concept of structural levels—foreground, middleground, and background—each often represented in parallel graphs that show the progressive elaboration from background to foreground.<sup>15</sup> The foreground level comprises pitches from the musical surface, with individual details becoming consistently fewer toward the background level; motivic elements of the background gradually develop through the middleground until reaching the final product.<sup>16</sup> There is no single middleground level, but rather any number of them between background and foreground. My analyses will focus on the middleground levels, where Sondheim's compositional fingerprint is the most essentially intact.

Schenker's theoretical and analytical methodology, though not widely acknowledged in Europe during his lifetime, became widely disseminated in the United States in the 1950s, partially in response to Allen Forte's 1959 introductory essay "Schenker's Conception of Music Structure," in which he outlines the foundational concepts and value of Schenker's theory.<sup>17</sup> By 1982, Forte writes of Schenker's previously controversial theory:

Now that Schenker's ideas have been quite widely disseminated, especially in the United States, and his concepts have gained wide acceptance, it is not necessary to offer an apologia for them. Suffice it to say that many musicians have discovered that Schenkerian principles . . . yield musical insights not obtainable from other methods of analysis.<sup>18</sup>

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15. Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition*, ed. and trans. Ernst Oster. (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 1977); *Five Graphic Music Analyses*, ed. Felix Salzer (New York: Dover Publications, 1969). These texts show Schenker's most mature theoretical approach. Each of these English texts is a posthumous edition. The originals were published in 1935 (shortly after Schenker's death) and 1933, respectively.

16. Allen Forte and Steven E. Gilbert, *Introduction to Schenkerian Analysis* (New York: Norton, 1982), 131.

17. Allen Forte, "Schenker's Conception of Musical Structure," *Journal of Music Theory* 3, No. 1 (1959): 1–30.

18. Forte/Gilbert 1982, 2.

In the decades since Forte's comments, Schenkerian analysis has become a staple of music theory curricula throughout the United States.<sup>19</sup>

Though Schenkerian analysis traditionally applies to repertoire of a relatively restricted time period and regional origin, Schenker's analytical concepts have been adapted to a wide variety of musical styles, including all types of commercial and popular music.<sup>20</sup> My analyses of Sondheim's music will follow in the post-Schenkerian tradition of popular music analysis of the past three decades, as well as other more methodologically eclectic analytical traditions of popular and musical theater music. Much like Forte's sentiment on the state of Schenkerian analysis in 1982, analysis of popular music needs no apology today. The following paragraphs will survey some recent literature in the field of popular music analysis from a Schenkerian perspective, as well as literature that focuses primarily on the musical theater genre.

Lori Burns asserts that popular music analysis may require adaptation of analytical methods that were designed to illuminate common-practice musical paradigms: "The potential exists in any theoretical system for bias, false judgment, or the ascription of privilege, but when the system was admittedly intended for a different allocation, the interpretive problems abound."<sup>21</sup> For this reason, Burns promotes adapting analytical systems—including Schenkerian analysis—when applying them to repertoire outside the systems' original scope of application.

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19. My assumed readership comprises those individuals with significant exposure to Schenkerian theory. For all others, Forte's 1959 article remains among the most useful introductions to Schenker's basic analytical principles and terminology. Also see chapter 2 ("Schenkerian Analysis") of Nicholas Cook, *A Guide to Musical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 27–66.

20. For a detailed list of every piece Schenker ever analyzed in print, see Larry Laskowski. *Heinrich Schenker: An Annotated Index to His Analysis of Musical Works* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1978).

21. Lori Burns, "Analytical Methodologies for Rock Music: Harmonic and Voice-Leading Strategies in Tori Amos's 'Crucify'," in *Expression in Pop-Rock Music: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays*, ed. Walter Everett (New York: Garland, 2000), 213.

Walter Everett's two-volume study titled *The Beatles as Musicians* examines every aspect of that band's musical output throughout their time together.<sup>22</sup> Everett confronts the incongruity of approaching "a body of popular music that was composed and performed by young men who did not read musical notation . . . with analytical methods only a musician with some degree of training could appreciate."<sup>23</sup> Herein lies an important distinction: in analyzing popular music, we study non-academic repertoire using, as Burns stated, methods that stem from academic music study. Everett, however, shows in this study that analyzing the Beatles using strictly common-practice analytical methods (Schenkerian, in this case) acknowledges this popular music as equivalent to art music—at least when the analyst adapts analytical paradigms to the repertoire in question. Next I will review several publications that analyze musical theater (or related repertoire) by thus adapting analytical methods designed for common-practice music.

Steven Gilbert adapts Schenkerian principles in analyzing instrumental and vocal music of George Gershwin.<sup>24</sup> In his book *The American Popular Ballad of the Golden Era*, Allen Forte provides Schenkerian graphs for several important songs for various composers of musical theater, Tin Pan Alley, and big band composers.<sup>25</sup> As an early proponent of Schenkerian analysis in the United States, Forte adapts the basic tenets of Schenker into a simpler format in order to eloquently highlight background structures

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22. Walter Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians: Revolver Through the Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) and *The Beatles As Musicians: The Quarry Men through Rubber Soul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

23. Everett *Beatles* 1999, viii.

24. Stephen E. Gilbert, "Gershwin's Art of Counterpoint," *The Musical Quarterly* 70, No. 4 (1984): 423–456.

25. Allen Forte, *The American Popular Ballad of the Golden Era, 1924–1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

within. More recently, David Carson Berry utilizes a Schenkerian approach to linear structures in the music of Irving Berlin, and Michael Buchler analyzes Frank Loesser's dramatic employment of modulation by means of reductive analysis.<sup>26</sup> In their article on Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, Andrew Davis and Howard Pollack adapt the concept of rotation to analyze the form of the opera/musical's opening number.<sup>27</sup>

Along with the Gilbert and Forte sources cited immediately above, the analytical approach in Edward Latham's *Tonality as Drama* aligns most closely with that in my analyses of Sondheim's music in this dissertation. Latham's goal is to analyze dramatic vocal music (in other words, opera or musical theater) in Schenkerian terms, considering the alignment of contrapuntal and harmonic events in the back- and middleground structures of each piece with dramatic events onstage—or "merging tonal and dramatic analysis."<sup>28</sup> For Latham, the intersection of linear analysis and dramatic/poetic analysis leads into yet a third dimension in which the characters who sing the song become the subject of analysis; this is to say that analyzing the interplay between tonality and drama leads to deeper understanding of the journey each character experiences while taking part in the music and the drama.

My aim in the pages that follow is to foster Latham's core concept of 'linear analysis meets dramatic analysis' within the scope of Sondheim's three musicals in the Playwrights Horizons era 1984–1991. Throughout each chapter, I endeavor to analyze selected songs both in terms of the voice-leading and harmonic processes that drive

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26. David Carson Barry, "Dynamic Introductions: The Affective Role of Melodic Ascent and Other Linear Devices in Selected Song Verses of Irving Berlin," *Intégral* 13 (1999): 1–62; Michael Buchler, "Modulation as a Dramatic Agent in Frank Loesser's Broadway Songs," *Music Theory Spectrum* 30, No. 1 (2008): 35–60.

27. Andrew Davis and Howard Pollack, "Rotational Form in the Opening Scene of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 60, No. 2 (2007): 373–414.

28. Edward D. Latham, *Tonality as Drama: Closure and Interruption in Four Twentieth-Century American Operas* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2008), 2.



their formal structure, and in terms of the dramatic implications of these musical processes. Ultimately I show, through adapted Schenkerian analysis, several instances in which Sondheim's compositional style hinges on his ability to enhance onstage drama through music.

#### **1.4: Clarifying Artistic Voice**

The goal of this entire study is to illuminate specific instances in which Sondheim's music underlines dramatic elements of each show, enhancing each song's narrative beyond the sum of the song's constituent parts (libretto, stage direction, music, etc.). Though Sondheim is the focus of this study, the three musicals discussed herein represent the work of dozens of contributing artists—including book writers, directors, music directors, orchestrators, etc.; thus clarification is required with regard to Sondheim's exact contribution to each musical. For the purposes of this study, only the music and lyrics will be fully credited to Sondheim. This is not to say that Sondheim is not responsible for the dramatic development of each show. Rather, the analyses that follow aim to highlight how background structures in Sondheim's compositions serve to *elevate* the contributions of the librettist and director.

#### **1.5: A Note About Source Materials**

For any full-length music-analytical study such as this dissertation, the analyst must pursue the most accurate musical source materials to serve as the artifact for analysis; for Sondheim's music, this means the commercially available piano-vocal scores (available through most retailers who sell vocal scores).<sup>29</sup> As is the case with the work of any living composer (especially one in such a commercially robust industry), each of Sondheim's fourteen musicals remains under copyright and the subject of strict

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29. Subsets of the selected material in the piano-vocal scores are available for some shows under the commercial label "vocal selections."

licensing rights for performance and reproduction. Obtaining performance editions of these scores requires institutional licensing credentials, as well as substantial rental fees and royalties. These performance editions, however, are not necessarily the most informative musical artifacts for Sondheim analysis.

Furthermore, Sondheim the composer follows a practice that is rather conventional in musical theater: his complete, finished score comprises only the vocal melody and piano accompaniment, with only occasional notes about his desired orchestration.<sup>30</sup> Sondheim orchestrated none of his fourteen musicals. This means that performance editions of Sondheim's musicals include conductor's scores that bear instrumentation, doubling, etc. that may not have resulted from the composer's original intention. Each of these piano-vocal editions was prepared from the composer's manuscripts (some musical discrepancies may exist between these scores and fully orchestrated performance scores); they therefore represent the most accurate and readily available sources for analytical purposes.<sup>31</sup>

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30. Banfield, 79–86. Banfield provides an orchestration table (his Ex. 2.12 on p. 83) that includes a list of instrumentation in the original production of each Sondheim musical between *Forum* and *Woods*.

31. In his recent dissertation on musical theater style, Brian D. Hoffman mentions another caveat with regard to the best source for musical analysis: which is the authoritative version of a piece of musical theater? Is it the workshop performance, the out-of-town readings, the final version in New York, or a small community theater performance? Analyzing piano-vocal scores is a simple way to avoid ascribing primacy to any one type of performance over another. See Brian D. Hoffman, "Elements of Musical Theater Style (Ph.D. Diss., University of Cincinnati, 2011), 15–17.

## CHAPTER TWO SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE

### 2.1: Introduction

The 1970s were the most successful decade of Sondheim's career. Highlighted by a collaboration with producer-director Harold Prince, the period 1970-79 saw him write five major Broadway musicals, four of which earned him both Tony Awards for best score and Drama Desk Awards for Outstanding Music and Lyrics (*Company*, 1970; *Follies*, 1971; *A Little Night Music*, 1973; and *Sweeney Todd*, 1979). Each show produced in this period enjoyed an initial run of at least five hundred performances (save for *Pacific Overtures*, which only had 193).<sup>32</sup>

Sondheim's last collaboration with Prince, *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981), however, was a failure (or, to use the industry term, 'flop') by most definitions of the word. Whether it was the seemingly incoherent storyline, overly sparse set design, cast mostly comprising actors with no experience on Broadway, insufficient pre-opening workshops, or some combination thereof, *Merrily* ran for only sixteen performances before its original Broadway production closed.<sup>33</sup> Like a few of Sondheim's shows, *Merrily* was a commercial failure, but an artistic success, from a compositional standpoint. One reviewer wrote of the show: "some of Mr. Sondheim's most powerful

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32. Craig Zadan, *Sondheim & Co.*, 2nd ed., updated (London: Nick Hern Books, 1990), 373-379.

33. The failure of *Merrily* was a devastating blow for Sondheim, by this time fifty-one years old. As a result of the brutality with which critics attacked his show, Sondheim even considered leaving musical theater altogether (claiming to be a 'dinosaur'): Meryle Secrest, *Stephen Sondheim: A Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 326.

work turns up in shows that fail.”<sup>34</sup> After the flop with *Merrily*, Sondheim and Prince parted ways and concluded their long, successful partnership.<sup>35</sup>

*Sunday in the Park with George*, Sondheim’s first collaboration with writer/director James Lapine, premiered in Broadway’s Booth Theater on 2 May 1984. A commentary about the importance and power of art, and what it means to be an artist, this show “marked a turning point for Sondheim on several fronts. It introduced him to new collaborators and a new way of working in the theater.”<sup>36</sup> This involved putting the show together piece by piece in a workshop production at Playwrights Horizons (Off-Broadway) during the summer of 1983. These workshop performances were given in front of a paying audience, and each night elements of the show were added, subtracted, or otherwise altered. Act II was only performed three times in this early production.<sup>37</sup> This pre-Broadway run marked the first time in which audience members’ feedback directly influenced the development of a Sondheim show, and it had marvelous results. The Broadway production went on to win numerous Drama Desk Awards, two Tony Awards, and the 1985 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

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34. Zadan, 280. Here, Zadan is quoting *New York Times* theater critic Frank Rich.

35. The two collaborated years later, when Prince served as a producer for another failed show entitled *Bounce* (2003), book by John Weidman. *Bounce* is not normally counted among Sondheim’s fourteen musicals as composer-lyricist, because he eventually reworked the show and titled it *Road Show*, which premiered Off-Broadway in 2008 (to considerably better critical reception).

36. Larry Stempel, *Showtime: A History of the Broadway Musical Theater* (New York: Norton, 2010), 544.

37. From André Bishop’s “Introduction” in Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine, *Sunday in the Park with George* (New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1991), 1–5.

### 2.1.1 *Sunday in the Park*: a Synopsis

Act I takes place in Paris, alternating between Georges Seurat's art studio and the Island of La Grande Jatte in the Seine River, in the years 1884–1886.<sup>38</sup> Throughout the act, Seurat spends time on the island sketching figures for his painting *Un dimanche après-midi à l'Île de la Grande Jatte*.<sup>39</sup> He never forms personal relationships with these people: they are only objects for him to paint (and they feel similarly ambivalent toward this frivolous artist). The only relationship that matters to Seurat is with his lover Dot, but she repeatedly finds him unable to completely love her; his art always comes first. As a result of Seurat's seclusion to the art studio, Dot leaves to start a new life in America with a baker named Louis (while pregnant with Seurat's child). Seurat is left alone with the singular goal of finishing his famous painting. The act's final curtain falls on Seurat as he admires the finished work.

Act II takes place in 1984, beginning in an American art museum.<sup>40</sup> The main character is Seurat's great-grandson, George (also an artist), who creates contemporary light sculptures called "chromolumens" for big-money arts grantors. Because of his familial connection to the artist, George has been commissioned to create "Chromolume #7" to commemorate the centennial of Seurat's famous painting. George is jaded with

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38. The story of *Sunday* is entirely fictional. Sondheim says: "as we researched Seurat's life, we became more and more excited. Here was this marvelous, mysterious genius. . . (Zadan, 297)." After doing extensive research into the life, work, and death of Georges Seurat, Sondheim and Lapine created a personality for a fictional man named "George," whose story is very loosely based on the nineteenth-century man. Act II is entirely fictional.

39. To avoid confusion of two characters named George in this chapter, I will refer to the 19th century George as 'Seurat,' and his 20th century counterpart as 'George.' Note that, in the show, Seurat's name is Anglicized, spelled 'George,' instead of 'Georges;' this highlights the parallel between the name-sharing protagonists of Act I and Act II.

40. Though not explicitly stated, this art museum is most likely Art Institute of Chicago. Characters attend a cocktail party in an adjoining room that contains Seurat's painting of La Grande Jatte, which has been in the permanent holdings of the Art Institute since 1926. Ownership and exhibition history for the painting can be accessed on the museum's web page for this work: Art Institute Chicago Permanent Holdings, <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/27992>, accessed 29 March 2013.

the contemporary art world: an artist needs both a fresh, new artistic voice and the ability to attract donors to fund the cause (the latter, he implies, are far more crucial). He laments: “Having just the vision’s no solution. Everything depends on execution. The art of making art is putting it together.”<sup>41</sup> George then makes his first ever trip to the island in Paris upon which so much of his family’s history is said to have taken place, to display “Chromolume #7” by invitation from the French government. Dot appears to him in a vision, apparently confusing George for Seurat; the pair sings the show’s climactic song “Move On,” in which Dot convinces George that he truly is an artist, and that he must put his life back together. George feels as one with his great-grandfather, and the musical ends as it started: with a blank white canvas, behind an artist. George reads from Seurat’s handwritten notes: “White, a blank page or canvas. His favorite. So many possibilities.”<sup>42</sup>

### 2.1.2 Preliminary Concerns

As is stated in Chapter 1, most of the scholarship on Sondheim lacks detailed theoretical analysis—with the occasional analysis of a portion of a song.<sup>43</sup> My primary goal with this project is to fill the void of analysis left by these scholars, who have contributed a great deal of insight into Sondheim’s artistic process. Before my analysis, I will briefly approach two major topics that often appear in writings about *Sunday*: the notion that the story is autobiographical; and the notion that Sondheim’s composition bears a resemblance to the pointillist painting style exemplified in Seurat’s work.

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41. Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine, *Sunday in the Park with George* [libretto] (New York: Applause Theater Book Publishers, 1991), 147. From now on, I will refer to this source as “Sondheim/Lapine *Sunday*.”

42. Ibid., 173–174.

43. The best exception to this generalization is the “Putting It Together” chapter in Steve Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 197–256, which contains an in-depth analysis of both music and text, in the context of a multi-influence framework.

For *Sunday*, Sondheim and Lapine constructed a fictional story that is inspired by real people (and a real painting), but some writers believe that the show may have an element of autobiographical correspondence to Sondheim's life. The prevailing notion is that Sondheim's life is characterized by artistic seclusion and lukewarm critical reception analogous to Seurat's. Meryle Secrest notes: "[with *Sunday*] Sondheim had found a subject whose parallels to his life were direct and unforced;" Joanne Gordon notes that Sondheim approaches his composition with a meticulousness similar to that of Seurat with his painting (but acknowledges Sondheim's reluctance to draw such a parallel).<sup>44</sup> Both authors invoke a connection between Sondheim's recent failure with *Merrily* and Seurat's reception among contemporary artists—the libretto mentions that Seurat never sold a painting during his life. When asked if he identifies with Seurat, Sondheim only acknowledges that the painting he musicalizes in *Sunday* inspired the music. "The more I got to know the painting, the more musical I felt."<sup>45</sup> Even though the composer does not openly admit to such a connection, a musical as personal and introspective as *Sunday* surely mandates such speculation.

Another concern for Sondheim scholars is whether the *Sunday* score contains elements of musical pointillism, as an explicit attempt at mimicking the pointillist style that Seurat pioneered in his painting of *La Grande Jatte*.<sup>46</sup> Since "pointillism" is a

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44. Secrest, 328; and Gordon, 264–265. There are also hints that the musical may contain vestiges of Sondheim's feelings about the politics in the musical theater world in Edward T. Bonahue, Jr.'s chapter "*Sunday in the Park with George* as 'Postmodern' Drama," in Joanne Gordon, ed., *Stephen Sondheim: A Casebook* (New York: Garland, 1997), 171–186.

45. Mark Eden Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 2nd edition (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 103.

46. The names assigned to musical style periods (Romantic, Baroque, etc.) often follow similar style trends in the visual and literary arts, but there is often lag between the approximate starting date of an art movement and that of the musical movement. Take, for example, the term "Impressionism." One of the first paintings labeled as such was Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* (a title of some dispute) from 1872, while Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* from 1894 is an early piece of music given the label. See: Grace Seiberling. "Impressionism." Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online. Oxford University Press,

conventional style label in both music and visual art, the chance of finding connections between Seurat's painting and Sondheim's score is higher than if the two pieces were otherwise unrelated. If perchance Sondheim's charge while composing the score for *Sunday* was to create a musical setting that would be complementary to Seurat's style, to what extent does he deliberately employ pointillist compositional techniques?

Seurat's pointillist technique played upon the human eye's remarkable tendency to perceive small amounts of bold colors as combinations thereof (e.g. a fleck of blue next to a dab of yellow would appear green from a distance; red and orange, red-orange). While the *Sunday* score is at first hearing not overtly pointillist (with many lush accompaniment patterns, and numerous lyrical melodies), Sondheim originally thought to form direct analogs between Seurat's style and his composition. He first attempted planning his score from this perspective:

Seurat had, on his palate, eleven colors and white. And I thought, eleven and one make twelve. And how many notes are there in the scale? Twelve. And I thought, ooh, isn't that interesting. So I thought I would utilize that in some way, shape, or form . . . I thought, wouldn't it be nice to do the musical equivalent, and then I realized it would make all the score minor seconds. This is not a good thing, because I would never be able to mix C with E; I'd have to mix C with D-flat, or C with B. I realized this was a dead end fairly soon, so I didn't do it.<sup>47</sup>

Though he did not compose the entire score in this way, Sondheim did create a motif based on this minor-second musical equivalent of Seurat's color juxtaposition: the "painting" motif, which appears first as the accompaniment figure in "Color and Light," shown in Example 2-1. The motif bears the label "painting" both because its separated, staccato style mimics the short, dabbing motion associated with pointillist painting, and

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<http://www.oxfordartonline.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/art/T040015>, accessed 2 May 2013; and Jann Pasler. "Impressionism." Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/50026>, accessed 2 May 2013.

47. Horowitz, 91–92.



[illegible]

Sondheim uses this juxtaposition of major and minor modes throughout the score, but most notably at structurally important cadences (Example 2-2); in these instances, he develops the basic  $\flat\hat{3} - \natural\hat{3}$  idea of the “painting” motif into an accompaniment figure that also makes it difficult to distinguish between modes at the cadence. As my later analysis will show, this final cadence at m. 90 in “Move On” is saturated with dramatic associations. Here Sondheim indeed utilizes some techniques that play off of Seurat’s pointillist sensibilities, but the relative isolation of these examples shows that the composer’s focus has drastically shifted away from the goal of creating a more fully pointillist piece of music (which is the sentiment exhibited in the quotation above).

19

89 90 91 92 93

Dot: (together...) I have to move on.

C: V — I / i ?  $\sharp\hat{3}$   $\flat\hat{3}$   $\sharp\hat{3}$   $\flat\hat{3}$

Example 2-2: “Move On,” Act I, mm. 89–93.

The melodies in “Color and Light,” “Putting it Together,” and others may resemble pointillism, but further speculation to this point can be fruitless unless one considers the full context of the songs, in which Sondheim relies on lyrical melodies to set the most dramatic segments of text. Eventually, we must come to terms with the fact that the score does not attempt trivial mimicry of Seurat; rather, as in the examples above, Sondheim’s achievement in this score may be in appropriating Seurat’s aesthetic to create a musical artwork that speaks in Sondheim’s native voice, while complementing the painting onstage.<sup>49</sup>

## 2.2: Unresolved Melodies: “I have to finish the hat.”

Over the course of Act I, in large, multi-section songs (including “Sunday in the Park with George,” “Color and Light,” and “The Day Off”), Sondheim presents a polystylistic aesthetic. No single song is a piece that works fully on its own; these songs

49. Citron disagrees here. He believes that Sondheim oversells the concept of matching Seurat’s style, and loses his voice in the process: “Unfortunately, much of the musical aspect of *Sunday in the Park with George* was stifled by Sondheim’s minimalist and repetitive accompanying figures. In trying to match the painter’s dots to close-knit motives, the music remains obsessively nervous, interesting for a few minutes because of its rhythmic jumpiness, but eventually strait-jacketed. It tries almost pathetically for moments of songfulness and lightness, as when Dot, powdering herself, sings about the Follies, or when she oohs about Louie the baker’s gooey cakes.” In Stephen Citron, *Sondheim and Lloyd-Webber: A New Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 297.

are so intertwined that none stands alone. But, as Seurat's painting nears completion, the painter's life begins to make sense. All three of the songs listed above span a wide emotional gamut, and problematize every aspect of Seurat's life—especially his relationship to others, and his personal priorities. In each song, we see the world through the eyes of a tortured artist who cannot function in a socially normal way. He sees the people with whom he interacts not as individuals, but as subjects for his art. Seurat's insulation from the outside world resonates beautifully in the final songs of Act I in *Sunday*, which Sondheim ties together into a triptych of songs that include some of Seurat's greatest emotional realizations in the musical's first half.

This triptych sets Seurat's artistic epiphany into a tripartite dramatic structure: Choice, Consequences, and Affirmation. In "Finishing the Hat," Seurat realizes that no one can satisfy him the way his art does; he chooses to pursue his art over all other things. In "We Do Not Belong Together," he reaps the consequences of this choice; he and Dot sever their romance permanently by the song's end. And in "Beautiful," through his mother's support, Seurat receives affirmation that his decision to remain alone, though difficult, results in art of uncompromising purity. This three-song cycle resolves the first act's dramatic tension, paving the way for Seurat to finish his great work of art. This culminates in the act's closing number "Sunday," which ends with a staging of the completed painting—and represents the first real melodic resolution in Act I.

The Act I triptych resolves dramatic tensions from the preceding dramatic unfolding, but each song's melody presents an unresolved *Umlinie*—the fundamental, descending melodic line essential to Schenkerian understanding of tonal music. This *lack* of melodic descent (resolution) is a driving force in this three-song set in *Sunday* because it subtly underlines the fact that Seurat's great painting is yet to be completed.

Unresolved Ursatz members do not suffice, however, to justify such a hermeneutic analysis of a whole two-act musical, as Edward T. Cone so rightly explains: “if a musical composition expresses anything at all, the importance of the expression must reside in its uniqueness to that composition, not in what the composition shares with a dozen others of the same genre.”<sup>50</sup>

Admittedly, Cone is referring to instrumental music (without text), and most of Sondheim’s music includes text. In music with text, and especially in a multi-disciplinary art such as musical theater, assumptions as to dramatic implications of any break from musical norms – such as the lack of melodic resolution – require less of a leap of faith on the part of the analyst. Factors external to purely musical concerns, like the libretto and stage directing, buttress hermeneutic analysis of Sondheim. If anything, such analysis is more powerful when applied to a dramatic vocal work like a Broadway musical.<sup>51</sup>

### 2.2.1 “Finishing the Hat”: The choice

In the first part of the Act I triptych, the song “Finishing the Hat,” shows the character Seurat as a socially inhibited man, for whom reaching his artistic goals was the most important item on his itinerary – at the expense of putting his personal relationships on hold until its completion. Seurat sings: “Finishing the hat, how you have to finish the hat. How you watch the rest of the world from a window while you finish the hat.”<sup>52</sup> Herein Seurat’s inability to remove himself from his art resonates in the task of finishing a hat on the canvas, which also informs a metaphor for his sole

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50. Edward T. Cone, “Schubert’s Promissory Note: An Exercise in Musical Hermeneutics,” *19th-Century Music* 5, No. 3 (Spring 1982), 234.

51. For more on the analysis of dramatic vocal music from a Schenkerian perspective, see Edward D. Latham, *Tonality as Drama: Closure and Interruption in Four Twentieth-Century American Operas* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2008).

52. Sondheim/Lapine *Sunday*, 65.

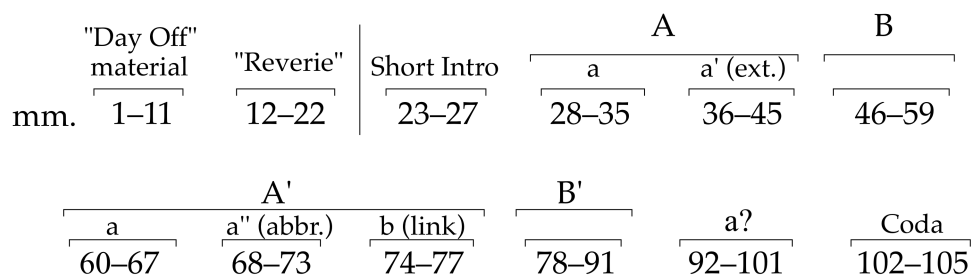
dedication to the completion of his art. To “finish the hat” means more than to complete a drawing in oil on canvas: it means to fulfill the artistic goal for which Seurat has found himself living a life of seclusion and chastisement.

In “Finishing the Hat” Seurat makes the choice to put his art above all else. He acknowledges a sobering fact for the first time in the musical: Dot is the woman he wants, but he is not the man that she needs. Until now, he has attempted rather fruitlessly to maintain a relationship with both his art and his lover, but he realizes in this song that he is only willing to be married to one of them. As Gordon observes, “Torn apart by two worlds, [Seurat] accepts that his attraction to the world of human emotion will always be subordinate to the absolute imperatives of his art.”<sup>53</sup> Sondheim constructs “Finishing the Hat” as a binary structure that makes the most of the contrast to which Gordon refers. My analysis shows that this song exhibits Seurat’s social dilemma at the middleground voice-leading level: A sections prolong a single melodic pitch B $\flat$  ( $\hat{3}$ ), which never reaches a stepwise resolution to tonic; meanwhile each B section attempts to charge this B $\flat$  by an energetic “restart” on  $\hat{8}$  (G-flat in a higher register), which is always thwarted by the A sections’ unrelentingly static B $\flat$ . These melodic features of the song also contribute to the overall emotion the text portrays.

As Example 2-3 shows, “Finishing the Hat” begins with a two-part introduction that merges musical material from “The Day Off” into the song’s main body, using the “Reverie” motif as linking material (Example 2-4 shows a model of this motif).

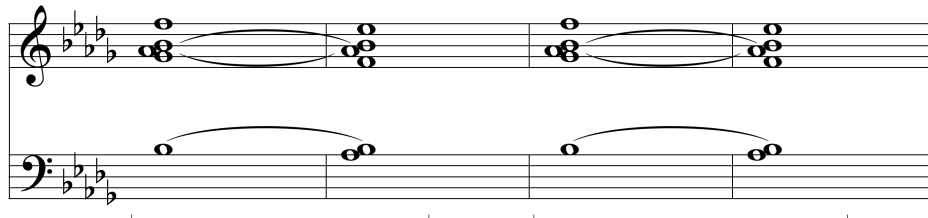
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53. Joanne Gordon, *Art Isn’t Easy: The Theater of Stephen Sondheim* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 279.



Example 2-3: "Finishing the Hat," form chart.

This motif, characterized by an oscillating chordal figure occupying the span of two whole notes, appears in most songs of the show. Steve Swayne notes that, although the first instance of the motif occurs on text that refers to Seurat, the motif generally accompanies a feeling of reverie (and is often not a direct reference to a character onstage).<sup>54</sup>



Example 2-4: "Reverie" motif.

In the main body of "Finishing the Hat" (mm. 28–91), Sondheim's binary structure (a simple ABAB rotation) accentuates Seurat's dichotomy in both register and text. In the A sections, Seurat explains his obsession with his work, which he never feels

54. Swayne, 236–237. The label is Swayne's own; it opposes Stephen Banfield's assessment that the motif represents George: Stephen Banfield, *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 376. Often occurring at shifts between sections of songs or scenes, the "Reverie" motif provides delineation of musical form throughout the musical. Indeed, future study of *Sunday* would benefit greatly from an account of each unique use of this motif throughout, as the hermeneutic implications thereof are numerous.

is complete while he is away from his studio; in the B sections, Seurat expresses how this obsession leads to a fragmented emotional life, and ultimately his losing Dot for good.

After the short recapitulation of past material in mm. 1–11 (during which Seurat flips through a book of sketches), the “Reverie” motif facilitates an initial ascent to the B-flat Kopfton, shown in Example 2-5. Sondheim hints at this initial ascent in m. 19 and m. 20, but each of these  $\hat{1}$ - $\hat{2}$  motions escape to the F below. The third attempt at ascent begins in m. 22, and the melody captures  $\hat{2}$  in m. 23, which finally reaches  $\hat{3}$  at the beginning of the A section. Here, Sondheim further develops the implications of the “Reverie” motif that defines mm. 12–22. When Seurat’s text suggests that no one could understand his artistic seclusion, he expresses his disappointment that Dot cannot understand him any longer – “but if anybody could.” Sondheim shows that Seurat, in falling increasingly deep into his work, has lost his principal supporter, but gained inspiration to sing the melody that follows.

18 19 20

Seurat: I had thought she un-der-stood. \_\_\_\_ They have nev-er un-der-stood, And no

21 22 23

rea-son that they should. \_\_\_\_ But if an-y-bo-dy could... \_\_\_\_

24 25 26 27 28

Fin-ish-ing the hat,

Example 2-5: “Finishing the Hat,” introduction, mm. 18–28.

“Finishing the Hat” is as idiosyncratic as the character of Seurat himself. Apart from the disruptive “Window” chord in mm. 33 and 41, the A section is harmonically static, and the Kopfton never traverses a stepwise descent. A descent would signify musical completion or finality, but Seurat’s painting of the Island is not complete. Seurat’s interactions and decisions show us that the goal of the entirety of Act I is the completion of this painting. Thus the main idea of “Finishing the Hat” (that Seurat’s life cannot move on whilst the task of ‘finishing the hat’ remains) resonates on a deeper structural level as the non-resolved melodic B $\flat$

As Example 2-6 shows, Seurat attempts in the B section to bring the melody to melodic resolution by initiating an eight-note descent from  $\hat{8}$ , only to be thwarted by the incessant  $\hat{3}$  that once again saturates section A’ (so the descent from  $\hat{8}$  simply prolongs  $\hat{3}$ ). In section B Seurat changes from contemplative text to that which outwardly expresses his frustration with himself: “you’re always turning back too late from the grass or the stick, or the dog or the light.”<sup>55</sup>

The musical score for Example 2-6 shows the melody and bass line for Section B, measures 46–58. The melody in the treble clef begins on G4 (labeled  $\hat{8}$ ) and descends stepwise through F#4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, and G3 (labeled  $\hat{3}$ ). A trill is marked on the final G3. The bass line in the bass clef consists of whole notes: G3 (IV), D3 (I), G3 (IV), D3 (I), F#3 (vi), G3 (IV), and D3 (I). Roman numerals are shown below the bass line. Measure numbers 46, 48, 50, 52, 54, and 58 are indicated below the staff.

Example 2-6: “Finishing the Hat,” Section B, mm. 46–58.

55. Sondheim/Lapine *Sunday*, 66.



This outward expression manifests on the surface as the sudden leap to  $G\flat$  ( $\hat{8}$ ), which quickly descends twice through the upper notes of the scale, but halts upon  $\hat{3}$  by the end of section B. The melody at the end of section B (mm. 56-59) resembles A so closely that only a change in harmony signals the end of B (a Plagal cadence at m. 58, with a two-measure reintroduction before A').

Sondheim's choice to dissolve the B melody back into A shows that the A section (text and melody) prevails, emphasizing that Seurat's dedication to his art supersedes any attempt the artist makes to express his emotions verbally. Example 2-7 shows the middleground structure of "Finishing the Hat," in which Seurat's two attempts to break through the barrier of the prolonged  $\hat{3}$  give way to A section material, and correspondingly to Seurat's resolution that his work in the art studio justifies a nonfunctioning social life.

The image displays a musical score for the middleground of "Finishing the Hat." It consists of two systems of staves. The top system features a treble clef and a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The melody is written on a single staff, with a dashed line indicating a continuation from measure 22 to measure 98. The bottom system features a bass clef and the same key signature. The bass line is also written on a single staff, with a dashed line indicating a continuation from measure 22 to measure 98. Above the top staff, there are three instances of the symbol  $\hat{3}$  positioned over measures 28-46, 58-78, and 98. Measure numbers 22, 28, 46, 58, 78, and 98 are printed below the staves. The score is enclosed in a rectangular box.

Example 2-7: "Finishing the Hat," middleground.

In "Finishing the Hat" Sondheim redefines (or rather reimagines) what melodic resolution means for the musical theater audience. Is resolution defined as a melody's ultimate stepwise descent to  $\hat{1}$ ? Perhaps. But for now, resolution means Seurat's contentment with sacrificing his last vestiges of emotional ties to the outside world—

represented here as the two exclamatory leaps to  $\hat{8}$  in sections B and B'. In "Finishing the Hat," resolution refers more to Seurat's decision to put work over play until the painting is done, until the hat is finished. As the start of a three-song triptych, this piece creates a local aesthetic of compromised incompleteness (which settles for  $\hat{3}$ , instead of  $\hat{1}$ ), and resolves at least one major problem in the show. "Finishing the Hat" shows us that Seurat chooses art over life, lest he lose both otherwise.

### 2.2.2 "We Do Not Belong Together": The consequences

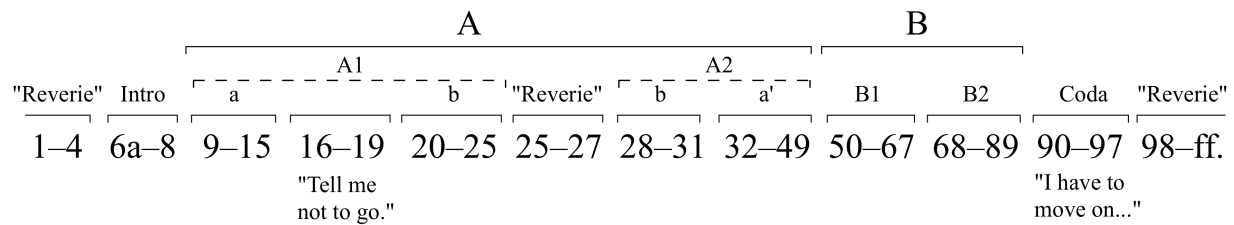
In the second member of the Act I triptych, "We Do Not Belong Together," we see the immediate consequences of Seurat's decision to sacrifice love for his art. Here, Seurat speaks with Dot in absolute terms about their relationship's termination. She knows their relationship has been doomed from the start, but continues to lament Seurat's inability to fully commit to place his love for her before his art. In this song's three-part structure, we see the reality of Seurat's seclusion, and the emotional toll it takes upon his estranged lover. As Joanne Gordon says: "In this confrontation between the voluble Dot and the taciturn George [Seurat], Sondheim explores the pain caused by conflicting human needs."<sup>56</sup> The conflict between Dot's need for the full attention of her lover and Seurat's need for artistic autonomy results in a song in which pain is a chief ingredient.

As Example 2-8 shows, the form of "We Do Not Belong Together" comprises two principal parts. The bifurcated part A functions as introductory material for part B, which contains the song's primary melodic material (or song proper). In part A, Dot pleads to Seurat: "You could tell me not to go. Say it to me. Tell me not to go." In her

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56. Gordon, 282.

vulnerable state, Dot presents Seurat with a final ultimatum, which she knows he cannot accept. Seurat refuses to oblige Dot's demands.



Example 2-8: "We Do Not Belong Together," form chart.

In part B, Dot sings the primary melody (shown in Example 2-9) as she proclaims that her relationship with Seurat is beyond salvage, and that she must move on – thus ending their relationship for good.

The musical score shows measures 50 through 53. Measure 50: Dot sings 'You are com-plete, George.' with a piano accompaniment of eighth notes. Measure 51: Dot sings 'You are your own —' with a piano accompaniment of eighth notes. Measure 52: Dot sings 'We do not be-long to-geth-er. —' with a piano accompaniment of eighth notes. Measure 53: The melody continues with a piano accompaniment of eighth notes.

Example 2-9: "We Do Not Belong Together," start of primary melody, mm. 50-53.

The following analysis shows that Sondheim's voice leading techniques in "We Do Not Belong Together" help emphasize the drama within the scene. In part A1, Dot establishes the Kopfton as she sets the terms for the conversation with Seurat; in part A2, Seurat's mirrored echo of Dot's material prolongs the Kopfton through a series of melodic fragments that emphasize neighbor notes and reaching over; and in part B Dot reassumes control of the conversation, reassumes the Kopfton, and completes the song

as a solo. But, even her resolution to “move on” does not have the power to bring the song to rest on  $\hat{1}$ .

Example 2-10 shows that part A’s voice leading serves an expressly auxiliary function: the text therein leads up to Dot’s proclamation at m. 50, and the music affirms that the conversation between her and Seurat only prolongs the consequences of his choice to let her leave. The introductory section, which ends at m. 16, shows an initial ascent to  $\hat{5}$ , which arrives upon Dot’s text “You could tell me not to go,” over the first C-major tonic triad in the song. In m. 20, Dot reaches down one octave on text that instructs Seurat on what to say in order to win her back. Seurat takes over at m. 25, on the B-natural marked with an X.<sup>57</sup> In m. 28 he reassumes the melodic line Dot sang in m. 20, with text that assures her that he cannot oblige her emotional needs. The pivot tone B returns in m. 32, where it is the first note over the elongated predominant that spans mm. 32–49; this II chord changes to V one beat before m. 50, the arrival of which completes a II-V-I progression that affirms the structural tonic in part B.

Example 2-10: “We Do Not Belong Together,” part A, mm. 9–50, middleground.

57. Here, the aforementioned “Reverie” motif stalls the song’s meter and harmonic rhythm for three bars. In this way, Reverie facilitates the change of voice between Dot and Seurat, and helps to delineate the song’s form.

In this opening portion of “We Do Not Belong Together,” Sondheim thus confirms that the initial conversation between Seurat and his love only prolongs a certainty: that no matter the apparent negotiability of their circumstances in the scene, Dot will leave as a direct result of his seclusion.

Example 2-11 shows that part B comprises two periods that prolong the Kopfton G, and attempt partial descents of the fundamental line, each taking place appropriately at the end of the period (50–66, and 68–89, respectively). The second of these demands special analytical attention. Here, after several phrases in which she attempts to do so, Dot sings decisively that she and Seurat will never belong together; she then proceeds toward a final PAC in C Major, a cadence that never comes. Instead, Sondheim writes an interruption in m. 89 that (much like that in a sonata-form movement at the end of the development) renders the V chord in m. 87 into a backward-relating dominant, and signals a restart of the Ursatz beginning in m. 90.<sup>58</sup> Thus despite her best effort, Dot’s melody remains unresolved, as does the painting of the Sunday afternoon for which Seurat sacrificed their relationship.

Example 2-11: “We Do Not Belong Together,” part B, mm. 50–89.

58. For more on the principle of interruption, particularly in relation to sonata-form movements, see James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

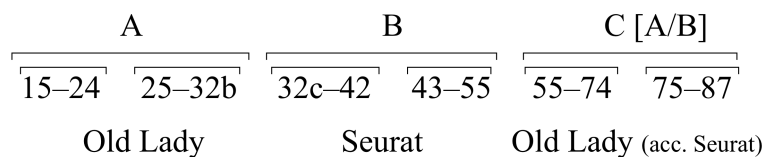
In “We Do Not Belong Together,” the two main characters in Act I part ways. In part A, the couple discuss in concrete terms the conditions of their separation, and as Example 2-9 shows, their conversation sets the foundation for Dot’s final goodbye by prolonging the Kopfton and delaying the first authentic C-Major cadence until m. 50. In the song’s conclusion, Dot attempts to finally sever all ties with Seurat, but even with her resolute text her melody never gets the opportunity to fully resolve; instead, she traverses a pair of blocked descents to  $\hat{1}$ , and is thwarted in her attempt at a closing PAC by the interruption in m. 89. Her avoidance of resolution shows that, though Dot is leaving him in this song, Seurat’s incomplete painting (the reason no melodies in Act I actually resolve) lingers in the musical background. The second part of the Act I triptych ends with an even more charged non-resolution than does “Finishing the Hat,” but herein resolves the dramatic tension of Seurat’s lingering relationship woes. With Dot out of the picture, Seurat can concentrate on his painting, and the final song in the cycle affirms his choice to leave the world behind.

### 2.2.3 “Beautiful”: The affirmation

After Seurat and Dot part ways, the artist seems to be left wondering about the wisdom of his choice of art over love. To resolve the dramatic tension of Seurat’s self-doubt, Sondheim provides the final song in the triptych, “Beautiful,” which sets Seurat’s conversation with the Old Lady—whom we now know is his mother. She insists that the Island of La Grande Jatte is losing its beauty because it is constantly changing, becoming more modern. Seurat insists that change is beautiful, and that a view of modern buildings can be just as aesthetically pleasing as the old views of trees. In “Beautiful,” Seurat brings comfort to his mother because he is able to see (and artistically impress) beauty in all things. By song’s end, despite her advancing mental

frailty, she acknowledges that her son makes everything more beautiful merely by making it into art. In this way, we see that Seurat's choice of art over relationships actually provides great benefits to the ones he loves, and to the world at large.

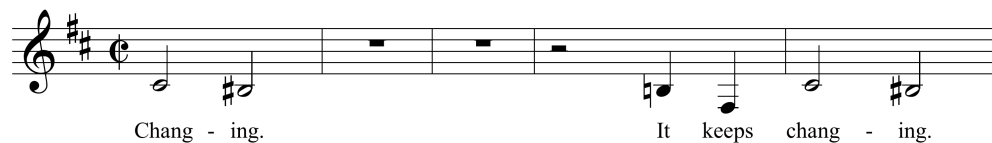
"Beautiful" exhibits a three-part structure (Example 2-12): part A comprises the Old Lady singing solo; part B is Seurat alone; and part C is a duet (with Seurat accompanying his mother in obligato). In Ex. 2-12 the inscription C [A/B] indicates that thematic material from both parts A and B constitute the material in part C.



Example 2-12: "Beautiful," form chart.

Sondheim assigns each character an individual melodic idea, reproduced in part in Example 2-13. In part C, he brings together the Old Lady's shorter, more spaced out motives with Seurat's melody to create the duet.

Part A, Old Lady, mm. 5–9



Part B, Suerat, mm. 32c–34



Example 2-13: Principal melodic ideas in "Beautiful."

As Example 2-14 shows, the Old Lady's melody in part A begins, like the two previous songs in the triptych, with a stepwise initial ascent to the Kopfton, but this time the Kopfton appears one octave too high, a problem which she corrects by the end of the section. The first pitch, C#, functions as an incomplete lower neighbor note to  $\hat{1}$ , which ascends stepwise until m. 25. There, the upper neighbor pitch B establishes the Kopfton  $\hat{5}$ , but through downward arpeggiation of the tonic triad, this same upper neighbor forces the Kopfton down one octave on the Old Lady's final melodic pitch in m. 31 (on the word "Beautiful"). Thus the initial ascent from the initial C# through the major pentachord bounded by tonic and dominant scale steps establishes the fifth scale degree as the primary melodic tone, but its obligatory register is one octave lower.<sup>59</sup>

Example 2-14: "Beautiful," part A, mm. 5-31.

59. Register is not a primary focus of this study, but Sondheim's masterful employment of register here underlines the Old Lady's increasingly emotional expression about the world changing around her. Her emotions are at their height at the apex of her melodic line (m. 25), where she sings the text "Sundays disappearing all the time;" she comes to rest an octave lower (m. 31) on the text "when things were beautiful," where she takes solace in her memories of a better time long past.



Example 2-15 provides a voice-leading reduction of the remainder of the song, parts B and C.<sup>60</sup> In Part B, Seurat sings in A major until m. 37, where the A-major pedal at m. 32 is reinterpreted as part of a V-IV-I progression back into D major (culminating at m. 55); therefore Seurat's solo section is harmonically dependent on the song's outer sections, which are structured by his mother. The B section is also melodically dependent on parts A and C. Seurat prolongs the Old Lady's opening C# throughout the section, and his deviation from this pitch beginning in m. 43 (over IV) simply facilitates his move to a consonant pitch in D-major (the F# in m. 55). The Old Lady reassumes her melody at m. 55, and the remainder of the song is structurally identical to part A, with the exception of Seurat's obligato lines (not graphed here).

Example 2-15: "Beautiful," parts B and C, mm. 32-ff.

"Beautiful" tells the story of an elderly woman's struggle to retain her grip on her past, and her son's valiant attempt to raise her spirits in a changing world. In part A, she outlines her grievances with these changes while in part B Seurat attempts to calm her, and in part C she recognizes that life is more beautiful because of her son's artistic

60. "S" marks Seurat's starting place, and "O.L." marks where the mother re-enters. For graphing purposes, melodic pitches are notated one octave above sounding pitch; when Seurat ascends to F# in m. 55, his mother re-enters on the C# below. The Old Lady sings every melodic pitch graphed after m. 55.

vision. This affirmation of Seurat's artistic dedication is perhaps the ultimate goal of the Act I triptych. He knows that he has sacrificed a great deal for his art, and he truly feels the pain of Dot's departure. But his mother is the first person to tell Seurat that his art makes the world a better place, and thus resolves perhaps the final dramatic tension in the musical's first half: Seurat's self-doubt as an artist in a world that does not accept him.

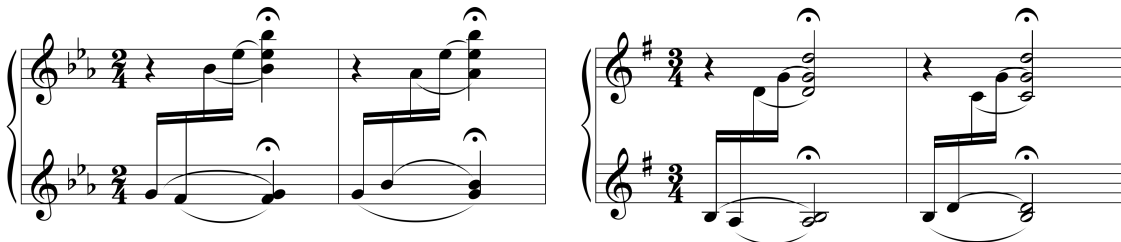
#### 2.2.4 "Sunday": Resolution

In the Act I triptych, Sondheim and Lapine come to a verdict on the principal dramatic problems from the show's first half, but each song patently avoids coming to *melodic* resolution because of Seurat's inability to move on with his life as long as his great painting remains unfinished. In "Finishing the Hat," Seurat's seclusion from the outside world becomes complete, resolving the tension the audience experiences between his "real" life and his life in the art studio. In "We Do Not Belong Together," the tension between Seurat and Dot comes to an end. And in "Beautiful," we discover from Seurat's mother that his decision to put his artwork above all else was the right one. By not bringing melodic/harmonic closure to the songs within the triptych, however, Sondheim has implanted unease into the three-song cycle. The resolution Act I so desperately needs finally comes in the closing number "Sunday," in which Seurat finishes his painting *Un dimanche après-midi à l'Île de la Grande Jatte*.

Melodic resolution comes at long last at the beginning of "Sunday," which opens in the same way as the musical's first number. In order for us to understand the weight of the melodic resolution in "Sunday," we must first compare this song's opening with corresponding elements in the beginning of "Sunday in the Park with George," where Sondheim places an unresolved melody (the resolution of which does not come until the melody becomes the primary tune in the act's closing number). Both songs begin

with the same motif, but in different keys—in E♭ Major (Example 2-16; see a), then G Major (Example 2-16; see b). This motif accompanies characters reciting design elements one per measure as the arpeggiating chords slowly transform over a span of several measures.<sup>61</sup> After this chord progression in “Sunday in the Park with George,” a fanfare-like figure features prominently for several bars (Example 2-16; see c);<sup>62</sup> here, the melody ends on  $\hat{6}$  over an E♭-major tonic triad, without resolving to a tonic triad pitch. This horn call eventually becomes the principal melody in the song “Sunday.”

a: “Sunday in the Park,” mm. 1–3.      b: “Sunday” [Act I], mm. 1–3.



c: “Sunday in the Park,” unresolved horn call, mm. 9–16.



Example 2-16: Common ideas in “Sunday in the Park with George” and “Sunday.”

Before actually resolving this fanfare melody in “Sunday,” Sondheim briefly alludes to a melodic reinterpretation of “Finishing the Hat” that will occur in Act II, and

61. “The arpeggio is the musical objective correlative of the palette,” Gordon, 267. Following Gordon’s analogy, I label this the “palette” motif.

62. I use the term “fanfare” for this topic for two reasons. First, the figure is usually played on a brass instrument (horn in the original cast audio and video recordings). Second, the opening melodic minor sixth begs comparison to notes that can be played by a keyless bugle, trumpet, or horn (which explains why most performances feature brass instruments on this melody).

uses this three-measure melodic fragment to link the arpeggiated chords (Ex. 2-16, see a and b) with the song's primary melody. This linkage, shown in Example 2-17 combines the texture of the arpeggiated chords with the overall melodic identity of the melody from "Finishing the Hat" (leaps from  $\hat{5}$  to  $\hat{5}$ , settling on  $\hat{3}$ ) in the right hand's upper line.

<sup>63</sup>In m. 17, the "Finishing the Hat" motif restates the  $\hat{3}$  Kopfton that the song of the same name prolongs (and never resolves, as we saw). Rather than remaining on this B (instead of the original song's B $\flat$ ), the subsequent statement of the motif in m. 18 resolves stepwise to the local tonic G. The 3-line descends a second time in m. 19 (this time with the modal  $\flat\hat{3}$ ) as part of an inward wedge gesture that ends with a root-position G-major tonic triad – the beginning of "Sunday" proper.<sup>64</sup>

Example 2-17: "Sunday" [Act I], mm. 17–20.

63. The "Finishing the Hat" motif becomes "Putting it Together," from Act II; we can see the similarity between the two melodies in this example from Horowitz, 99.

64. Act I does not have a root-position, block-chord tonic triad (even with an added ninth, as is the case here) until m. 20 of "Sunday," and this tonic lasts for several bars (!). Every other tonic triad in Act I is more ambiguous because of figuration (as in "Finishing the Hat"), extended harmonies (as in "We Do Not Belong Together"), or numerous non-chord tones (as in "Beautiful"). Sondheim states that the 'palette' motif is supposed to create a sense of cadential delay or suspension, since chordal roots are consistently absent in the bass (Horowitz, 113-114). Thus the arrival at m. 20 is supposed to sound like a resolution of previous musical tension.

There is no authentic cadence at m. 20 of “Sunday,” but the melodic closure caused by the linear cadence in Example 2-17 foreshadows the resolution of a melodic tension that is prolonged for most of Act I—which comes at the end of “Sunday.” For the remainder of the song, Sondheim prolongs a dominant pedal for such an extended period that the deep-level structure projects an authentic cadential bass motion on the deep middleground level (Example 2-18).

Example 2-18: “Sunday” [Act I] analysis.

In Example 2-18, a partially chromatic descending bass line establishes the D pedal by m. 33. Beginning in m. 38, a fully chromatic bass descends in contrary motion to the melody’s stepwise ascent, solidifying this dominant pedal at the same time the 5̂ Kopfton is reached in m. 44. The span between mm. 44–68 comprises a prolonged subdominant neighbor, which accompanies solos and small ensemble segments that gradually build registrally and dynamically until the final tonic arrival in m. 68. The Kopfton descends to 1̂ first over this dominant pedal (in the lower choral voice), a problem that Sondheim corrects by repeating the wedge gesture from mm. 17–20. Here, the wedge gesture presents for a final time a principal tonal problem of Act I: the minor-

major ambiguity related to the “painting” motif. When  $\hat{1}$  arrives at m. 69, over dominant pedal, the Urlinie partially re-descends, this time with  $\flat\hat{3}$ , instead of  $\sharp\hat{3}$ . Thus the wedge idea resolves the melodic tension in the Act I triptych (at the beginning of “Sunday”), and also facilitates real melodic resolution at the end of “Sunday.”

In “Sunday,” for the first time, all of the protagonists from Act I (besides Seurat) step out of character to take part in the chorus; finally, the audience sees each of these individuals in the role that Seurat intends, at least according to Dot: objects to be placed on his canvas where he sees fit. In the 1986 film of the musical, Seurat constructs the scene in his painting of *Un dimanche après-midi* using the actors (who willingly submit to his whim) as moveable objects upon the ‘canvas.’<sup>65</sup> The Kopfton descent in mm 68–69 occurs at the point in time when everybody is in the correct place (almost). At the last moment (i.e. during the wedge gesture), Seurat makes a final adjustment to Dot’s position onstage, and a frame descends from the rafters (coinciding with the bass arrival on tonic). The painting finished, the song finally resolves, and the curtain falls on Act I.

### 2.2.5 The Act II Triptych

There are a number of correspondences between the two acts of *Sunday*, and this stretches beyond the intentional casting correlations—the same man playing both Seurat and George, the same woman playing Dot and George’s grandmother, etc. Parallels may also be drawn between songs paired by their musical elements, as well as by their dramatic function. As Sondheim acknowledges to Mark Horowitz, these pairings include “Sunday in the Park with George” and “It’s Hot Up Here” (noting the similarity in form and thematic material); “Color and Light” and “Chromolume #7” (noting the predominance of the aforementioned “Painting” motif in each); and

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65. *American Playhouse: Sunday in the Park with George*, DVD, originally directed by James Lapine, directed for television by Terry Hughes (1985; USA: Image Entertainment, 1999).

“Finishing the Hat” and “Putting it Together.”<sup>66</sup> In light of this information, and considering my analysis of the Act I triptych above, the next logical step would be to examine a corresponding triptych in Act II, with the final three songs “Children and Art,” “Lesson #8,” and “Move On” (as well as the reprise of “Sunday”).<sup>67</sup>

The theme of the first triptych is Seurat’s journey into what it means to devote one’s self completely to art; the second triptych follows George in a similar path to self-discovery. George constantly doubts the importance of his own art, and is therefore hesitant to believe that he is descended from such a celebrated artist as Seurat. In “Children and Art,” Marie (George’s grandmother) finally convinces him of the heritage he so relentlessly denies, thus partially resolving the tension of George’s self-doubt. In “Lesson #8,” George reads his great-grandfather’s writings, which allow him to form a personal connection to Seurat’s artistic ideals; in forming this relationship, he further affirms his ancestry. In “Move On,” Dot appears to George in a vision, addressing him at once as George and as Seurat, and urges him to move forward, and leave his past behind him. The reprise of “Sunday” brings Act II’s first melodic resolution, allowing George the strength to move forward at last. The dramatic role of each triptych is to bring the main character into an emotional space conducive to

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66. Horowitz, 99.

67. If these three songs make up the Act II triptych, what of the documented correspondence between “Finishing the Hat” and “Putting it Together,” only the former of which I am including in a triptych model? The two share a common melodic motive, but the latter does not actually take place in a triptych in Act II. The songs in the Act I triptych share multiple characteristics, most importantly their ordinal placement (as the final three songs in the act) and their vocal forces (solo or duet): neither description befits “Putting it Together.” In the published vocal score, “Putting it Together” comprises seventeen separate parts (accounting for a whopping 47 of the total 246 pages), and, while George sings mostly solo in parts XI–XVII, the context of this solo within the scene (which does not stop) gives the appearance of a company number—rather than a solo work of itself. This is not to say that “Putting it Together” has no viability as a standalone song. In his index of Sondheim recordings, Horowitz (404–405) lists eleven individually available commercial recordings of the song, apart from the two major full-cast recordings of the musical.

creating the best art they can manage. See Example 2-19 for a comparison of the musical elements of these three-song cycles, showing how each resolves with “Sunday.”

Title	Voices	Dramatic Action	Key/Kopfton	Cadence	Resolution
“Finishing the Hat”	Seurat	Seurat chooses art over Dot.	G $\flat$ M / $\hat{3}$	Mel: $\hat{3}$ Harm: IV–I	No
“Do Not Belong Together”	Dot, Seurat	Dot leaves Seurat.	CM / $\hat{5}$	Mel: $\hat{5}$ Harm: V    I	No
“Beautiful”	Old Lady, Seurat	Old Lady affirms Seurat’s choice.	DM / $\hat{5}$	Mel: $\hat{5}$ Harm: IV–I	No
“Sunday” [I]	Company	Painting is completed.	GM / $\hat{5}$	<b>Mel: [<math>\hat{1}</math>]</b> <b>Harm: [V–I]</b>	<b>Yes</b>
“Children & Art”	Marie	Marie convinces George of his lineage.	D $\flat$ , CM / $\hat{5}$	Mel: $\hat{5}$ Harm: V–I	No
“Lesson #8”	George	George first relates to Seurat.	E $\flat$ M / $\hat{3}$	Mel: $\hat{2}!$ Harm: V–I	No
“Move On”	Dot, George	Dot helps George move on.	BM / $\hat{5}$	Mel: $\hat{5}$ Harm: IV–I	No
“Sunday [II]”	Company	Painting returns, George is at peace.	GM / $\hat{5}$	<b>Mel: [<math>\hat{1}</math>]</b> <b>Harm: [V–I]</b>	<b>Yes</b>

Example 2-19: Comparison chart of both the Act I and Act II triptych.

### 2.2.6 Summary

In each song of the Act I triptych, Sondheim uses elements of voice leading and harmony to advance the dramatic implications of the action within the scene in which the song takes part. As my graphs above illustrate, “Finishing the Hat,” “We Do Not Belong Together,” and “Beautiful” exhibit very similar structures. Each song reaches its Kopfton through an initial stepwise ascent from  $\hat{1}$ ; each final cadence is non-authentic (either Plagal or interrupted, as in the case of “We Do Not Belong Together”); and each song takes at least a brief excursion from the tonic area in order to strengthen that tonic—“Finishing the Hat” prolongs the predominant in each B section (mm. 46–57, 78–



97), “We Do Not Belong” prolongs the supertonic triad mm. 20–32, and “Beautiful” journeys to the dominant key area during Seurat’s solo (mm. 32–55). Sondheim constructs each song in this way to create unity among the members of the triptych.

Each member of the three-song cycle allows dramatic tensions to come to rest, while never allowing real melodic resolution; this relates to Seurat’s obsessive preoccupation with finishing his painting of the Island of La Grande Jatte. This obsession manifests as these unresolved melodic lines, the resolution of which does not come until the end of Act I in the song “Sunday” (during which the painting finally comes into form onstage). Act II also contains a similar triptych that facilitates George’s self-acceptance; he similarly finds resolution in the tune “Sunday.” Ultimately, “Sunday” is the great unifying factor between Seurat and his great-grandson George. The song brings all dramatic and melodic tension to a close (in both acts).

## CHAPTER THREE INTO THE WOODS

### 3.1: Introduction

After a successful Broadway production of *Sunday in the Park with George* in 1984, Sondheim and librettist/director James Lapine set their sights on a new project, one involving setting multiple fairy tales into a Broadway musical. This project would eventually become *Into the Woods*. *Into the Woods* began as a series of workshop performances at Playwrights Horizons theatre in New York City. The show then went into a full production across the country, at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego, California, in December of 1986, before premiering on Broadway on 5 November 1987. The show's initial run spanned two years and 764 performances, closing on 3 September 1989.<sup>68</sup>

#### 3.1.1 *Into the Woods*: a Synopsis

*Into the Woods* is a modern fairy tale mash-up that combines classic fairy tales with new characters in a story that explores the merits of wishing, and what it means to live happily ever after. The principal classic fairy tale characters include Cinderella, Rapunzel, Little Red Riding Hood, Jack (of Beanstalk fame), alongside minor characters Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, the Big Bad Wolf, princes, evil stepsisters, and others. Each major character has a wish, the pursuit of which governs their actions throughout Act I. Cinderella wishes to free herself from the bonds of servitude in her own home, and to attend the prince's three-day festival (where she will win his affections and marry him). Jack and his Mother wish for prosperity in hard times. Red Riding Hood

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68. Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine, *Into the Woods* [libretto] (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1987), frontispiece. For the remainder of this chapter, I will refer to this source as "Sondheim/Lapine *Woods*." *Sunday in the Park with George* was Sondheim's first musical that began with workshop performances like this; that musical was also workshopped at Playwrights Horizons, in 1983. See the introduction to Chapter 2 of this dissertation for more on this.

wishes for her independence. Rapunzel wishes for freedom from her imprisonment high in a tower. The characters all believe they will live happily ever after, if they could only achieve their wish.

Lest this show with so many familiar characters lack a central, unifying story element, Sondheim and Lapine had to create a new fairy tale to provide the narrative backbone for the musical; this is the story of the Baker and his Wife. The Baker and his Wife are a young married couple whose greatest wish is to have a child. At the start of Act I, the Witch (the final original character) informs the couple that, years ago, the Baker's father had stolen six magic beans from her garden. In response, the Witch took the Baker's sister (Rapunzel) as her ward, and she placed a spell on the Baker's bloodline so that anyone who lived thereafter would be barren forever. In order to break the spell, the Baker must bring four items to the Witch: "One: the cow as white as milk [which belongs to Jack], Two: the cape as red as blood [belonging to Red Riding Hood], Three: the hair as yellow as corn [Rapunzel's], Four: the slipper as pure as gold [Cinderella's]."<sup>69</sup>

Throughout Act I, the Baker and his Wife block, coerce, and otherwise deceive the other characters in order to placate the Witch and get the child they have always wanted. They trick Jack into selling his white cow for beans; the Baker attempts to steal Red Riding Hood's red cape, which she later gives to him for saving her and her granny from the Wolf's belly; his Wife violently cuts Rapunzel's hair; and she repeatedly attempts to steal Cinderella's slipper. They eventually procure all four items, breaking the spell and unintentionally returning the Witch to her former beauty (and ridding her of her magical powers in the process). The other characters' wishes come true at their own peril: Jack must climb a beanstalk and face a terrible giant in the sky; Cinderella

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69. Sondheim/Lapine *Woods*, 16.

must endure the pursuit of the predatory young prince; Red Riding Hood must face the deadly wolf's attack; and so on. Regardless of what it took to pursue their wish's fulfillment, by the end of Act I, each character believes that, their wishes now reality, they will live happily ever after.

Act II opens some time later, and shows us what happens after "happily ever after." Here we see, now that every character has what they wanted, that they are no happier than they were before. Also, each of them must now live with the consequences of the actions they took in pursuing their wishes in Act I. The giantess, whose husband died chasing Jack in Act I, comes down to earth to exact revenge on her husband's murderer. She destroys most of the characters' houses, including the royal palace where Cinderella resides, and vows to kill every living person until she finds and kills Jack for what he did. This results in all the characters eventually banding together, becoming a true community for the first time. Jack's Mother, the Baker's Wife, and Rapunzel fall victim to the giantess' rampage, before the remaining characters work together to slay the giantess. The remaining characters must piece together their lives, and continue living with new insight into what it means to be truly happy.

The ultimate lesson of *Into the Woods* is one of community responsibility. In Act I, the characters take whatever course of action that leads to their wish's fulfillment, no matter whose lives are affected by those actions. Not until everyone is in mutual danger (in Act II) does every character fully realize their own responsibility for the peril in which they find themselves: their actions and their fates are forever interconnected. Perhaps Sondheim and Lapine's greatest achievement with *Into the Woods* is causing audiences to revisit the fairy tales of their childhoods with a new perspective, one that resonates with some version of the old saying: be careful what you wish for, because it just might come true.

### 3.2: Motifs

In *Into the Woods*, Sondheim constructs many of the melodies from short, very recognizable motifs that repeat consistently throughout the show. During a series of interviews that commemorated Sondheim's donating his manuscripts to the Library of Congress, the composer told Mark Horowitz that he defines these short musical ideas as "absolutely traditional leitmotifs."<sup>70</sup> The motifs refer to everything from wishing, to magic beans, to individual characters (such as Rapunzel's song). Though they do not ascribe Wagnerian prominence to the motifs in *Woods*, authors who have written on the musical acknowledge that the motifs are so numerous and common as to be essential to the musical's overall style and aesthetic. Joanne Gordon notes "motifs are used, repeated, and transformed throughout the piece," adding that Sondheim integrates these motifs uniquely for each character into a musical style that fits them.<sup>71</sup> Stephen Banfield dedicates a segment of his *Woods* chapter to discussing some of these motifs in terms of their interval content.<sup>72</sup> Stephen Citron opines that the degree to which Sondheim saturates the musical with these short motifs can even become tedious for listeners: "Sondheim's short motifs, developed and varied as they are . . . add up to a somewhat tiresome, almost tuneless evening."<sup>73</sup> Regardless of the effect they impress

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70. Mark Eden Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 81.

71. Joanne Gordon, *Art Isn't Easy: The Theater of Stephen Sondheim*, updated ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 307. Here, Gordon alludes to Sondheim's use of stylistic *register*. She implies that Sondheim places each character's sung text in a style that befits his or her socio-economic status or personality. For a short primer on musical analysis in regard to stylistic register, see Robert Hatten, "On Narrativity in Music: Expressive Genres and Levels of Discourse in Beethoven," *Indiana Theory Review* 12 (Spring–Fall 1991), 75–98.

72. Stephen Banfield, *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 395–401.

73. Stephen Citron, *Sondheim and Lloyd-Webber: A New Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 305–306.

upon listeners, the motifs in *Woods* constitute a significant portion of the musical material in the show.

Sondheim assigned names to each of the motifs in *Into the Woods* according to what they signify; foremost among them is the motif labeled “Wish,” which comprises the first notes sung in the show. Sondheim states: “. . . because the opening of a theme is like the opening of a show—it’s the identifying moment. It’s: How do the notes start? In Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony, the octave leap in the slow movement says everything, and then everything comes out of that.”<sup>74</sup> Here, he acknowledges that the opening interval of the “Wish” motif directly generates the rest of the motifs in the show, and that the motif itself may have given birth to structural elements of entire songs.

This section of my study seeks to substantiate the direct influence of this Ur-motif on the entire form of *Into the Woods*. Sondheim states that his motifs do not develop or transform over the course of the show; rather, they function as building blocks for melodies throughout.<sup>75</sup> This is to say that the motifs remain more or less intact from the beginning of the show to the end. To address this, I will begin by briefly identifying how each of the motifs in *Woods* germinates from the “Wish” Ur-motif over the course of the Act I prologue. I show that Sondheim systematically develops elements of the short Ur-motif to create increasingly distinct and characteristic melodies.

Sondheim claims that these motifs do not develop in and of themselves throughout the show, but I contend that aspects of the musical’s structure reflect the “Wish” motif, especially at lower voice-leading levels. Poundie Burstein’s writing about Schubert offers a helpful Schenkerian analog to Sondheim: “. . . there is no reason why

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74. Horowitz, 82.

75. Sondheim states that with *Woods* “I decided to use musical ideas not as developmental *leit motifs* [sic], but in the functional way you would use modular furniture. The same theme becomes an inner voice, an accompaniment, a counterpoint. It may be fragmented, but it is not really developed.” In Nina Mankin, ed., “The PAJ Casebook #2: Into the Woods,” *Performing Arts Journal* 11, No. 1 (1988): 60.

fragmentation should be considered essential to development. Schubert's lyrical method of exploring the inner workings of themes by developing them through expansion is no less logical a procedure."<sup>76</sup> Here fragmentation refers to the method of systematically dismantling motifs in order to project a strong developmental narrative, most often associated with Beethoven. With *Into the Woods*, Sondheim often falls into Schubert's camp, in that he *expands* rather than conventionally *develops* motives. I show, through a detailed analysis of the song "Hello, Little Girl," that Sondheim noticeably composes out elements of the Ur-motif on the song's surface, as well as at its deepest structural levels. I conclude that, though Sondheim claims that the entire musical is not generated from a single motif, expansion of the "Wish" Ur-motif plays an essential part in governing this song's form and deep-level voice leading.

### 3.2.1 Motifs in "Prologue"

*Into the Woods* begins with a lengthy opening number that introduces several of the show's principal characters; most of the motifs in the show first appear in this introduction, titled "Prologue." A series of more than a dozen individual, short songs, "Prologue" sets all pertinent background information for each major character's story onstage. "[Librettist James] Lapine admits his biggest surprise was that the audience was not as familiar with the actual fairy tales as he had originally imagined they would be, so a lot of time had to be spent telling the details of those stories in a prologue."<sup>77</sup> The prologue also achieves the unintended effect of compelling audiences into supposing that the concocted story of the Baker and his Wife may have been a classic fairy tale like the rest.

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76. Burstein, Poundie, "Lyricism, Structure, and Gender in Schubert's G Major String Quartet," *The Musical Quarterly* 81, No. 1 (Spring 1991), 53.

77. Craig Zadan, *Sondheim & Co.*, 2nd ed., updated (London: Nick Hern Books, 1990), 340.

Example 3-1 shows Sondheim's master list of motifs for *Into the Woods*, as transcribed by Horowitz, the first of which is the "Wish" motif—the Ur-motif to which Sondheim refers in the interview (shown in greater detail in Example 3-2). Cinderella sings the first notes in *Woods*, on the text "I Wish," characterized by an ascending whole step, followed by an ascending-fourth leap; note that the entire motif spans the interval of a minor seventh (indicated by the slur in Ex. 3-2). These two characteristic intervals (especially the former) account for the generation of each of the ensuing motifs in the prologue.

**Motifs**

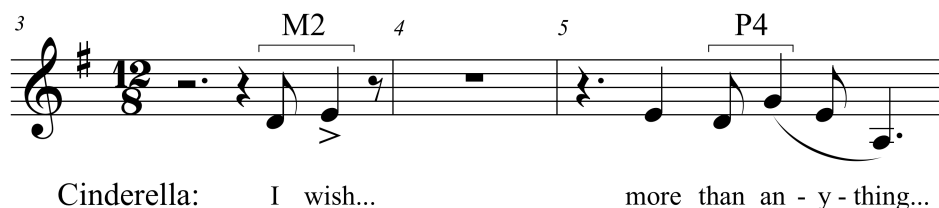
The image displays a collection of musical motifs from the musical *Into the Woods*, transcribed by Horowitz. The motifs are organized into six horizontal staves, each representing a different character or scene. The motifs are labeled as follows:

- Wish** (ALL): A motif in G major, 12/8 time, starting with a whole note G and a half note V<sub>13</sub>.
- Woods** (ALL): A motif in G major, 12/8 time, starting with a whole note G and a half note V<sub>13</sub>.
- I wish** (C): A motif in G major, 12/8 time, starting with a whole note G and a half note V<sub>13</sub>.
- Birds** (C): A motif in G major, 12/8 time, starting with a whole note G and a half note V<sub>13</sub>.
- Beans** (J): A motif in G major, 12/8 time, starting with a whole note G and a half note V<sub>13</sub>.
- Vamps** (J): A motif in G major, 12/8 time, starting with a whole note G and a half note V<sub>13</sub>.
- G'bye** (J): A motif in G major, 12/8 time, starting with a whole note G and a half note V<sub>13</sub>.
- Wish Child** (B,BW): A motif in G major, 12/8 time, starting with a whole note G and a half note V<sub>13</sub>.
- Spell is in my house** (B,BW): A motif in G major, 12/8 time, starting with a whole note G and a half note V<sub>13</sub>.
- Child** (B,BW): A motif in G major, 12/8 time, starting with a whole note G and a half note V<sub>13</sub>.
- 4 Things** (B,BW): A motif in G major, 12/8 time, starting with a whole note G and a half note V<sub>13</sub>.
- MTM [Maybe They're Magic]** (B,BW): A motif in G major, 12/8 time, starting with a whole note G and a half note V<sub>13</sub>.
- Wish** (JM): A motif in G major, 12/8 time, starting with a whole note G and a half note V<sub>13</sub>.
- Cow** (JM): A motif in G major, 12/8 time, starting with a whole note G and a half note V<sub>13</sub>.
- Jack** (JM): A motif in G major, 12/8 time, starting with a whole note G and a half note V<sub>13</sub>.
- (cf wolf)** (JM): A motif in G major, 12/8 time, starting with a whole note G and a half note V<sub>13</sub>.

Example 3-1: Horowitz's transcription [partial] of motifs from *Into the Woods*.<sup>78</sup>

78. Horowitz, 82. On this list, abbreviated words and initials refer to the character that initially states the motif. For instance, "C" refers to Cinderella; "J," Jack; "BW," Baker's Wife, etc. Other annotations are Sondheim's labels for the motifs ("Beans," "G'Bye," etc.). The "Wish" motif is not to be confused with the motif Sondheim labels "I Wish" (Shown in Example 3-3), which is the second generation of the Ur-motif, sung a few measures afterward, which shares pitch content with the Ur-motif, but exhibits a different rhythmic profile. This is the only instance in which Sondheim's labels are slightly confusing.

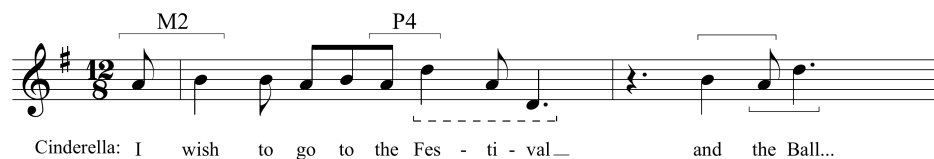




Example 3-2: “Wish” motif, Prologue (Part I), mm. 3–5.

Example 3-3 shows several of the most prominent motifs in *Woods*, annotated to show their similarity to the original “Wish” motif. Each of them contains the two most characteristic intervals of the Ur-motif, each with a slightly different rhythmic profile. In the aforementioned “I Wish” motif (Ex. 3-3; see a), Sondheim moves the ascending major second so that its second note lands on a strong beat instead of the weak metric placement in the original. Note that here “I Wish” is identical to “Wish” in pitch content, transposed up a fifth. Later in the prologue, Sondheim sets the Baker’s cautionary exclamation to his wife, “The Spell is on My House” (Ex. 3-3; see b) almost identically to “I Wish,” with the exception of removing the intermediate pitch that divides the descending minor seventh (indicated by dotted brackets) into two smaller intervals. With “Jack’s Mother’s Wish” (Ex. 3-3; see c), Sondheim returns to the initial rising major second and subsequent ascending fourth and develops the “Wish” motif’s rhythmic profile; the descending minor seventh motion is replaced by progressive expansion of the perfect fourth leap—by thirds, first to a major sixth, then to an octave. The “Things” motif (Ex. 3-3; see d) follows the former motif with a steady iambic rhythm and expanding upward leaps—this time increasing in size by step from perfect fourth, to fifth, then major sixth.

a: "I Wish" motif, Prologue (Part I), mm. 15–16.



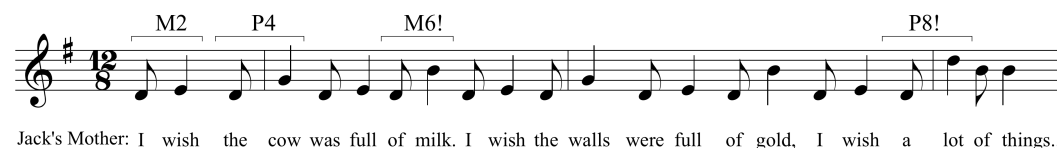
Cinderella: I wish to go to the Fes - ti - val and the Ball...

b: "The Spell is on My House," Prologue (Part VII). mm. 8–10.



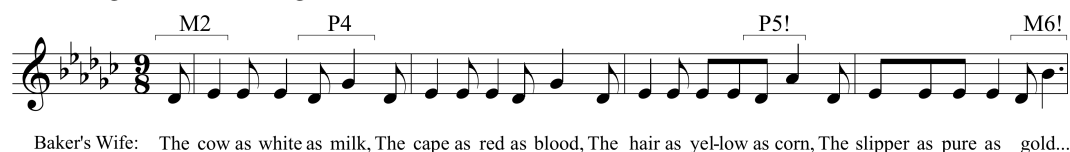
Baker: The spell is on my house... On - ly I can lift the spell.

c: "Jack's Mother's Wish," Prologue (Part I), mm. 47–50.



Jack's Mother: I wish the cow was full of milk. I wish the walls were full of gold, I wish a lot of things...

d: "Things" motif, Prologue (Part VII), mm. 18–21.



Baker's Wife: The cow as white as milk, The cape as red as blood, The hair as yel-low as corn, The slipper as pure as gold...

### Example 3-3: Alterations of "Wish" from Prologue.

The next two generations of "Wish" employ more stepwise motion (Example 3-4); each contains the characteristic major second and perfect fourth from the Ur-Motif. Cinderella, charged by her stepmother with the task of picking a pot of lentils from the ashes of the fireplace, sings to the birds requesting their help. This "Birds" motif (Ex. 3-4a) begins similarly to those in Example 3-3, with an ascending major-second neighbor, followed by a perfect-fourth leap (m. 71). This time, however, Sondheim fills in the fourth by step before spinning the motif in a more lengthy melody for Cinderella's song. This filled-in fourth becomes the starting point for the show's title song, the "Woods" motif (Ex. 3-4b). "Woods" combines the ascending fourth with the iambic rhythm from

“Jack’s Mother’s Wish” and “Things” motifs; thus it represents the most developed of the motifs on Horowitz’s list, as it contains elements of second-level versions of the Ur-motif as its main components (the filled-in fourth and iambic rhythm).

a: "Birds" motif, Prologue (Part I), mm. 71–74



Cinderella: Birds in the sky, Birds in the eaves, in the leaves, in the fields, in the castles and ponds...

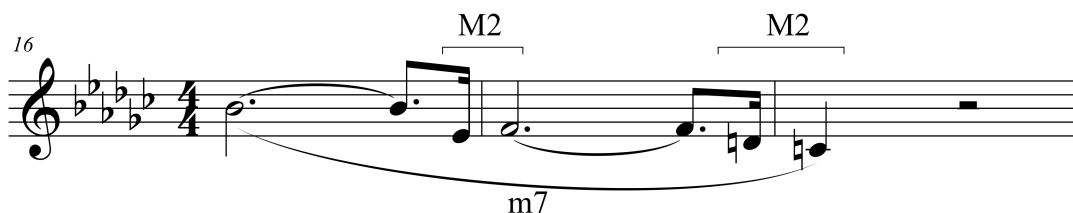
b: "Woods" motif, Prologue (Part II), mm. 1–2.



LRRH: In - to the woods, it's time to go, I hate to leave, I have to, though.

Example 3-4: Next-level alterations of “Wish,” filling in the P4, from Prologue.

The final, and probably the most recognizable motif from *Into the Woods*, is the motif labeled “Beans,” the last generation of the Ur-motif. Example 3-5 shows that the major second’s prominence from the “Wish” motif remains in “Beans.” Comprising the notes of a B-flat major pentachord (i.e. the first five steps of the major scale), all three major seconds in that pitch collection are expressed within “Beans” (E♭/F as an ascending step, D-C as a descending step, and B-flat/C inverted as a descending m7).



Example 3-5: “Beans” motif, Prologue (Part III), mm. 16–18.

This five-note “Beans” motif—which is distinguished by being the only one in the show that appears in an instrument before it appears in a voice—signifies the five magic beans that the Baker finds in his father’s coat pocket; he trades them with Jack, who then uses them to grow the beanstalk that leads him to the giant’s house in the sky. Sondheim states: “these five notes become the basis for a great deal of music in the show.”<sup>79</sup> This stands to reason, since many of the problems in the show can be traced back to the magic beans originally stolen by the Baker’s father. This is a strong dramatic parallel between the motif and object it depicts: the beans beget problems for each character, and the “Beans” motif begets many songs sung by the characters dealing with those problems.

The “Wish” motif appears in each of the forms introduced in “Prologue,” and a few more, through the course of the entire musical (both in vocal melodies and in the accompaniment). As noted above, although Sondheim denies that the motifs develop as the show progresses, he also claims that “Wish” serves as a foundational building block for the musical style of the show (much in the way that *wishing* acts as the impetus for each character’s actions through Act I).<sup>80</sup> The next section of this subchapter, a detailed reading of the song “Hello, Little Girl,” seeks to address this idea that “Wish” may be understood as generating the fundamental structure of individual numbers from *Into the Woods*.

### 3.2.2 “Hello, Little Girl”

In the midst of the woods, Little Red Riding Hood encounters a Wolf (the ‘Big, Bad’ Wolf), who seems quite interested in the little girl’s plans. When he learns that she

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79. From James Lapine and Stephen Sondheim, *Into the Woods: A Conversationpiece* (New York: Music Theater International [Production Video]), 18:00–19:30.

80. Horowitz, 82.

is alone on a trip to her grandmother's house, the Wolf begins to ponder the possibilities of a dinner menu that includes the innocent child and her defenseless old granny. In this scene's song "Hello, Little Girl," there is a stylistic dissonance between the words that the Wolf intends to fall upon Red Riding Hood's ears, and those that he secretly whispers to himself. The song thus alternates between two surface styles, each aligned with a different conversational register of the Wolf. On one hand, the wolf sings to himself, planning his meal, anticipating the pleasure he will take in savoring each bite; here, the mode is minor, and the style is increasingly tense and dissonant. On the other hand, when the wolf sings to Red Riding Hood, attempting to get close enough to strike, he does so in a positive, major-mode, style (both in text and relatively consonant harmonies). The constant interchange of styles defines form in "Hello, Little Girl"; Sondheim's compositional technique results in a song that thrives on this contrast, rather than becoming disjointed by it.

My analysis considers the ways in which Sondheim uses key, modulation, and polystylistic contrast to augment the drama within this scene. The song's structure comprises a series of step-up modulations through an ascending-fifth progression in the melody. Each modulation evokes the prominent ascending major second in the Ur-motif (Ex. 3-2) and each ensuing motif in the "Prologue." The song's deep middleground structure expresses this whole step by means of a prolonged neighbor note, C, to the song's opening B $\flat$ . Sondheim uses this deep-level continuity to bridge the gap between the song's two disparate styles; to connect the opening key of B $\flat$  and the ending key of E $\flat$ ; and, most importantly, to elevate the meeting between Red Riding Hood and the Wolf to the level of artful music drama.

Intro	A1	B1	A2	B2	A3	Coda
mm. 1-19	20-31	32-47	48-55	54-63	64-76	76-93
Wolf to self		Wolf to RRH	Wolf to self	Wolf to RRH	Wolf to self	Wolf to RRH
[Style]	Blues	Vaudeville	Blues	Vaudeville	Blues	
[sees girl] Mmm!	<p>Look at that flesh, Pink and plump. Hello, little girl...</p> <p>Tender and fresh, Not one lump. Hello, little girl...</p> <p>This one's especially lush, Delicious.... Mmmh...</p>	<p>Hello, little girl, What's your rush? You're missing all the flowers. The sun won't set for hours, Take your time.</p> <p><i>Mother said, 'straight ahead,' Not to delay, Or be misled. cont'd</i></p>	<p>Grandmother first, Then Miss Plump... What a delectable couple:</p> <p>Utter perfection One brittle, one supple –</p>	<p>– One moment, my dear!</p> <p><i>Mother said, 'Come what may, Follow the path And never stray.'</i></p> <p>Just so, little girl Any path. So many worth exploring.</p> <p>Just one would be so boring... And look what you're ignoring...</p>	<p>Think of those crisp, Aging bones. Then something fresh on the palate.</p> <p>Think of that scrumptious carnality twice in one day!</p> <p>There's no possible way To describe how you feel When you're talking to your meal!</p>	<p><i>Mother said Not to stray. Still, I suppose, A small delay... Granny might like A fresh bouquet... Goodbye, Mr. Wolf.</i></p> <p>Goodbye, Little Girl. And Hello.</p>
B <sup>b</sup> m		FM	Gm	GM	Am	E <sup>b</sup> M

**Bold** = Wolf  
*Italics* = Red Riding Hood

### Example 3-6: “Hello, Little Girl,” form chart.

Example 3-6 shows the form and key relationships of “Hello, Little Girl,” and how those align with the scene’s text. The form comprises a verse-chorus-like rotation (ABABA) with an introduction and coda. Each of the song’s formal units underlines Sondheim’s awareness of the action onstage: the A–B rotations reflect the alternation between the Wolf’s soliloquy and his conversations with Red Riding Hood (and the Introduction and Coda coincide with the two characters’ meeting and parting, respectively).<sup>81</sup>

“Hello, Little Girl” alternates between two distinct surface styles—A and B sections in Example 3-6—which shows the Wolf’s attempt to talk out of both sides of his

81. Each shift between the sections in my form chart also constitutes a certain change onstage. For instance, A1 depicts the Wolf’s first impression of Red Riding Hood: that she looks absolutely delicious. He must talk to her. When he interrupts her jaunt through the woods, the key changes, the style changes; in the filmed version of the show his posture even changes. This is a characteristic of all good composers in the musical theater: the song’s structure reflects the scene’s dramatic structure so clearly that the two become a single vehicle to deliver the story. See: *Into the Woods*, DVD, directed by James Lapine (1991; USA: Image Entertainment, 1997).

mouth. Stephen Banfield refers to the Wolf's two distinct styles as the "sultry, climactic blues style" (A sections) and the "more innocent vaudeville style" (B sections).<sup>82</sup> The blues style sets the Wolf's monologue, in which he describes in detail his homicidal intentions.<sup>83</sup> The vaudeville style sets text that the Wolf sings directly to Red Riding Hood. It comprises lighter, more consonant, and decidedly major-mode elements; the Wolf intends to lure the little girl into his grasp with positive, encouraging sounds.

The musical path traversed in the song's prolonged melodic line goes hand-in-hand with the developmental arc of the scene; this arc follows an *ascending* linear progression on a high structural level that defines the gradual rise in dramatic tension created by the Wolf's increasingly destructive discourse. Despite the scene's polystylism, Sondheim uses voice leading generated from the musical's "Wish" motif to organically connect the song's otherwise disjointed blues and vaudeville styles. The remainder of this chapter traces the prolongation of melodic pitches in each formal section of "Hello, Little Girl," and shows how the "Wish" motif governs elements of the song's composition on various structural levels throughout.

The A1 section of "Hello, Little Girl" (see Example 3-7) presents a meandering vocal melody with frequent direction changes, leaps that are often larger than a fifth, and numerous arpeggios. One element adds coherence to the melody: the constant energetic push toward a B $\flat$ 3 reference pitch.<sup>84</sup> The ascending perfect fourth and descending minor third in the melody provide a melodic focus on this pitch,

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82. Banfield, 384-5. The chord progression in A1 is rather static—eight measures around a B $\flat$  pedal, followed by four measures of E $\flat$ . If this progression were to continue, it could create the standard blues: [I-I-IV]-I, IV-IV-I-I, V-IV-I-I.

83. The relaxed, swung-eighth-note style as heard in the cast recordings implies that the Wolf is disconcertingly comfortable in these homicidal proceedings.

84. Note here that the Wolf's part is printed in treble clef, but performed an octave lower.

underlining the B $\flat$  tonal center. The descent from D $\flat$  to B $\flat$  shown in Example 3-7 is a local-level prolongation of B $\flat$ . The B $\flat$ 3 prolonged in A1 is the closest thing this song has to a Kopfton, and represents the first of many steps in an ascending line that governs the song's remaining sections.

Wolf:    Look at that flesh,            Pink and plump.    Hel - lo, lit-tle girl...  
           Ten - der and fresh,           Not one lump.     Hel - lo, lit-tle girl...

Example 3-7: "Hello, Little Girl," mm. 20-27.

In B1, the style shifts to the vaudeville topic in which the Wolf attempts to convince Red Riding Hood to lead him to Grandmother's house. The accompaniment style drastically shifts here, but the vocal melody is similar to that of A1: downward arpeggios, numerous leaps, and constant iterations of a single pitch (in this case, C4, a step up from the previous B $\flat$ 3). As Example 3-8 shows, Red Riding Hood interjects between the Wolf's two phrases, insisting that she must stay the course to her grandmother's house, with an upper neighbor figure (on the pitches C and D, mm. 38–39) that represents a permutation of the "Wish" motif's characteristic major second. The Wolf's melody constantly refers to the pitch C, and now the neighbor note in Red's



interjection prolongs that pitch as well.<sup>85</sup> Though Red says she is attempting to break contact with the Wolf, her melody emphasizes and prolongs the Wolf's C, as if her naïve curiosity will not allow her to ignore the Wolf entirely. Here, the "Wish" motif (as an upper neighbor) serves the rather sinister function of keeping the little girl's mind engaged so the Wolf can resume coaxing her into his deadly grasp.

32 33 34 35

Red

Wolf

Hel - lo, lit - tle girl, What's your rush? You're miss-ing all the flow - ers. - The

36 37 38 39 40

R.

"Wish"

Moth - er said, "Straight a - head," Not to de - lay or be mis - led.

W.

sun won't set for ho - urs, Take your time. But slow,

Example 3-8: "Hello, Little Girl," mm. 32–40, showing prolonged melodic pitches.

Example 3-9 shows the resulting step-up modulation in the melody between A1 and B1, which can be heard as a transfer of the ascending whole step from the "Wish" motif to a deeper structural level. In his 2008 article about Frank Loesser's music, Michael Buchler shows that direct modulations such as this can serve dramatic functions within the scene, aside from the surprise, jolting effect associated with so-

85. This is to say that, throughout Red's interruption, C remains the principal melodic pitch for the whole of section B1. Her pitch D serves to emphasize that pitch, rather than divert from it.

called “truck driver” modulations.<sup>86</sup> This modulation in “Hello, Little Girl” fulfills such a dramatic purpose: it accompanies a shift between speculation and practice (of murder, that is). The Wolf in A1 sings to himself, admiring the delicious appearance of this little girl, but in B1 he begins his attack. The style shift from blues to vaudeville is an attempt to “pull the wool” over the girl’s eyes, thus the “Wish” motif has another dark role in this song: perhaps it is to facilitate the Wolf’s macabre wish for a fresh meal?

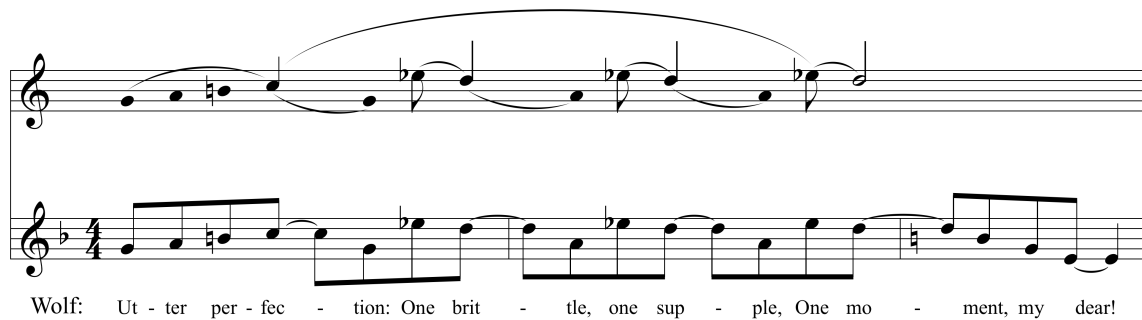


Example 3-9: “Hello, Little Girl,” Step-up modulation between A1 and B1.

Following the established voice-leading pattern, one would expect section A2 to prolong the pitch D, but this is not the case. Section A2 is in the key of G minor, and since it has been truncated and reassembled piecemeal from material in A1, the pitch G does not receive the referential support that Bb and C did in A1 and B1, respectively. Example 3-10 shows that, to correct this, leading into B2, the local tonic G ascends to recapture the prolonged C of section A1, skipping three times to the pitch Eb, and finally settling on the new pitch D, after reaching over it in mm. 52–53. Here in the text, the Wolf seems to be getting carried away in fantasizing about how his victims will taste. His malicious energy manifests as these frenetic leaps to Eb; capturing the D locally

86. Michael Buchler, “Modulation as a Dramatic Agent in Frank Loesser’s Broadway Songs,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 30, No. 1 (Spring 2008): 35-60.

resolves the E $\flat$ , while the change to G major (and back to vaudeville style) prevents the little girl from realizing that the Wolf is preparing to strike.



Wolf: Ut - ter per - fec - tion: One brit - tle, one sup - ple, One mo - ment, my dear!

Example 3-10: Reaching Over, "Hello, Little Girl," mm. 52-54.

Example 3-11 shows another stage in the pattern in which consecutive formal sections in the song represent steps in the melody's upward trajectory. We see that the Wolf's soliloquy in section A2 does not take part in the stepwise melodic ascent (B $\flat$ -C-D), but rather ducks below, as if the Wolf were hiding his secret plans from the conversational register that Red Riding Hood can perceive. Sondheim thus uses the "Wish" motif to increase the song's melodic energy through step-up modulations, while also using it to cover up the Wolf's whispers to himself (in this case: the step spanning from B1 to B2).



"Wish" Whole Step

"Wish" Whole Step

20 28 32 48 54

Example 3-11: Two step-up modulations in "Hello, Little Girl," mm. 20-54.

In the ensuing A3 section, the Wolf's melody (in A minor) functions just as in A2, by occupying the space *below* the D prolonged in B2, and reaching over the D to attain E $\flat$  as an important melodic tone for a brief time (mm. 70-73). Instead of E $\flat$  becoming the new prolonged melodic tone, however, the melody reaches over it to establish the Wolf's climactic F in m. 75. This F comes to rest on the downbeat of m. 76, where it unsettlingly functions as an added ninth in the E $\flat$  tonic chord. This completes a prolonged ascending fifth-progression that connects the Wolf's first pitch B $\flat$  to his climax on F.

In Example 3-12 (see A2 and A3) we see that each time the Wolf stops singing to Red Riding Hood and whispers to himself, his melody does not take part in the stepwise ascent that moves the song forward. Instead it reaches under that ascending line—as if hiding from the little girl's notice—and each upward step in the fifth progression parallels the increasing tension the text projects. When the Wolf can no longer contain himself, the song's prolongational structure breaks down: the E $\flat$  in A3 barely attains bass support, and the F in m. 75 is only consonant with a B $\flat$  bass note that is one eighth note long. This E $\flat$ -F dyad (the Wolf's own "Wish" whole step) does not align exactly with the established pattern of ascending whole steps, and it loses the preceding bass support; thus "Wish," in the destructive hands of the Wolf, functions to redirect the song's voice-leading pattern.

5-prg.

20 28 32 48 54 64 70 75 76

[A1] [B1] [A2] [B2] [A3]

Example 3-12: “Hello, Little Girl,” middleground.

In the song’s coda (Example 3-13), the Wolf and Red part ways, but only after their return to the initial tone  $B\flat$  – this time as  $\hat{5}$  in  $E\flat$ , instead of  $\hat{1}$  in  $B\flat$ . This begins with Red’s interjection (the same as in Example 3-8), which functions as a neighbor-note figure on  $\hat{5}$ – $\hat{6}$  in  $E\flat$ . This neighbor, as before, affirms the Wolf’s ensuing pitch; this time, after the two say goodbye to one another, the Wolf picks up the neighbor note C and resolves it to  $B\flat$ , returning the prolonged  $B\flat$  to its original register by way of an octave leap on the words “And hello” (another descending-M2 “Wish” parallel).

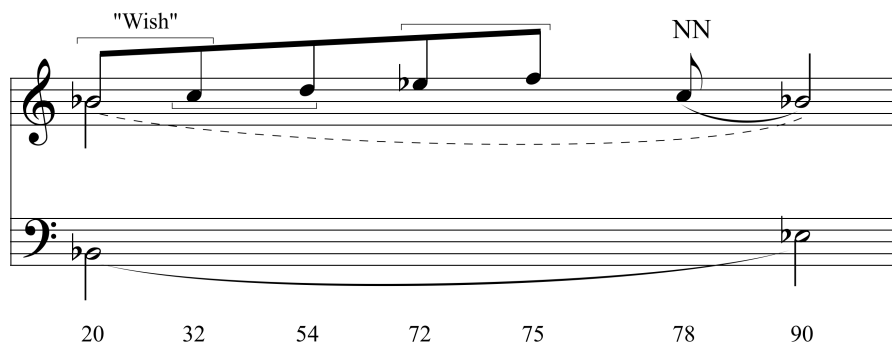
Red: Moth-er said not to stray, Still, I sup-pose, a small de-lay... Gran-ny might like a fresh bou-quet...

Good - bye, mis - ter Wolf. Wolf: Good - bye, lit - tle girl.

And Hel - lo... (orch.) (Wolf Howls)

Example 3-13: “Hello, Little Girl,” coda, mm. 78–ff.

As Example 3-14 shows, the ascending fifth progression functions to prolong B $\flat$  throughout the song – as well as to push the song’s tension upward with the increasingly evil intentions of the Wolf – only to resolve as  $\hat{5}$  in the new key of E $\flat$ . Sondheim’s carefully embedded iterations of the “Wish” motif guide the deep-level melodic structure of “Hello, Little Girl” through step-up modulations, and at an even deeper level, as a long-term upper-neighbor embellishment (effected by Red Riding Hood) that spans the song. The neighbor note never allows Red to suspend her curiosity about the Wolf, providing instead a dark foreshadowing of Red’s impending fate. This upper neighbor prolongs the B $\flat$  and provides a smooth return to that pitch in the end, over E $\flat$  harmony. Although the Wolf has returned to his melodic starting point, in traversing this tension-filled fifth-progression he has changed both the song’s key and the little girl’s mind about whom she can trust. The “Wish” motif, in its new sinister role, has thus facilitated his infiltration of the little girl’s defenses.



Example 3-14: “Hello, Little Girl,” Deep Middleground.

### 3.2.3 Summary

*Into the Woods*, Sondheim’s eleventh show as composer-lyricist, displays the deft hand of the classically trained composer, both in the motifs that so organically grow out

of a single Ur-motif, and in their constant adaptation throughout the musical. In “Prologue,” we observed that the “Wish” motif precipitates several motifs in succession, each of which saturates the musical. In “Hello, Little Girl,” we saw how Sondheim’s masterful expansion of “Wish” drives many aspects of the song’s composition: in Red’s neighbor-note figure; in terms of key, in the form of dramatically charged step-up modulations; and on the deep middleground level, where this neighbor-note function and step modulations govern the song’s voice-leading. In a very real way, wishing drives the entire musical.

In a musical with so many familiar and well-developed characters, the question often arises as to which of them is the protagonist. In this respect, Sondheim offers Mark Horowitz a simple solution: “*wishing* is the key character.”<sup>87</sup> In Act 1, the characters do whatever it takes to fulfill their wishes; in Act 2, they come to the realization that these wishes were only momentary, selfish desires, the pursuit of which put their entire community in peril. Wishing drives the drama, and Sondheim sees to it that the “Wish” motif drives the music, creating a total artwork that brings the audience into a fairy tale world, where people conventionally go to escape real life, and challenging their commitment to the age-old quest for “happily ever after.”

### 3.3: Three Songs of Self-Discovery

*Into the Woods* is a show that approaches the fundamental idea of wishing from a moralistic standpoint by raising questions about the value of pursuing one’s dreams. One question that Sondheim and Lapine pose to audiences is: should wishes indeed guide one’s behavior, and if they do, what are the possible ramifications for those who act upon their selfish desires? Each character in Act I uses all resources available to them in order to achieve their particular wish, but each is confronted with the

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87. Horowitz, 83.

consequences of their pursuit. They are each forever changed on a fundamental level by their actions in Act I. In Act II, every character must band together in order to clean up the messes they left for one other on the way to what they thought would be “happily ever after.”

In this subchapter, I will discuss three songs from Act I, each of which chronicles the serendipitous self-discovery that one of the characters faces along the journey to wish-fulfillment through the music-compositional factors that underlie the process. Apart from the unifying factor of self-discovery, each of these songs shares melodic and formal similarities. Banfield notes “upon their return [from the journey], Little Red Riding Hood, Jack, Cinderella, and the Baker’s Wife all sing songs about what they have learned about themselves that share variants of the same accompanimental vamp and . . . also share a melodic opening of two short upbeat notes rising from  $\hat{3}$  to  $\hat{5}$ ”<sup>88</sup> (see Example 3-15). Banfield refers here to the songs “I Know Things Now” (sung by Red); “Giants in the Sky” (Jack); “On the Steps of the Palace” (Cinderella); and “Moments in the Woods” (the Baker’s Wife). As Banfield notes, all these songs but the latter share the opening  $\hat{3}$ – $\hat{4}$ – $\hat{5}$  melodic gesture; the characters who sing the three songs connected by this opening gesture (Red, Jack, and Cinderella) undergo their personal transformations in Act I, before mortal peril consumes their world, in the form of the rampaging giantess.

In the following analyses, I will show that each character, in recounting stories of trial and subsequent self-discovery, presents the most personally challenging part of their story in the contrasting middle section of a song in ternary form. The middle section of a song, at least as Sondheim constructs it, is a musical segment that is

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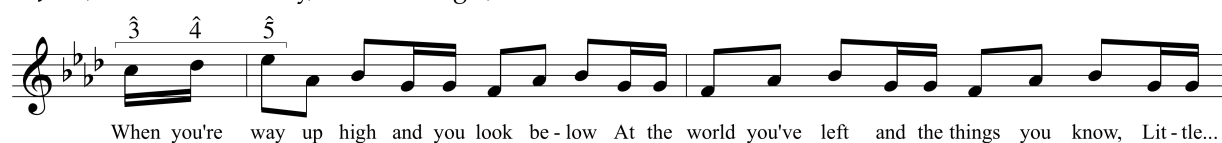
88. Banfield, 385.



a: Red Riding Hood, "I Know Things Now," A1, mm. 10–13



b: Jack, "Giants in the Sky," Patter Song 1, mm. 8–9



c: Cinderella, "On the Steps of the Palace," A1, mm. 25–28



Example 3-15: Ascending melodic gesture in three songs from *Into the Woods*.

significantly more dissonant, less diatonic, and more harmonically ambiguous than the opening and closing section. I conclude that each character's moment of self-discovery occurs during this compositional middle section, and that at the end of each such section each character re-enters local diatony as a fundamentally changed human being.<sup>89</sup> From a voice leading perspective, each middle section prolongs the Kopfton, which is only able to descend after the character undergoes the trial recounted within. In this way, Sondheim shows the transformation that each character undergoes in their personal struggle—from a less mature person to one who is more aware of themselves and the world around them—and creates musical structures that parallel, and therefore heighten, the drama within each scene.

89. In each of these middle sections, Sondheim employs different compositional devices to create character-developing tonal ambiguity, which makes it difficult to assign a generic label to them as a group. But all three songs share several major characteristics: divergence from diatonic key, return to the key (or similar key, in Jack's case), and notable lack of tonal center for the duration of the middle section.

### 3.3.1 “I Know Things Now”

In keeping with the Brothers Grimm version of the story of Little Red Riding Hood, Sondheim and Lapine take the little girl’s character on a journey through the woods and into the Big, Bad Wolf’s stomach, and her subsequent rescue.<sup>90</sup> The principal difference in the *Into the Woods* version is that the Baker, instead of a huntsman, comes from the woods to rescue the wolf’s victims.<sup>91</sup> When Red realizes that her straying from the path, against her mother’s direct instructions, is the cause of her precarious situation, she comes to the understanding that her actions have consequences, and that she cannot trust just anyone she encounters in the woods. Red recounts her emotional journey in the woods in the song “I Know Things Now,” and the song’s structure parallels the girl’s journey from naïve child to savvy (and even slightly bloodthirsty) young adult.

Sondheim highlights the emotional transformation in “I Know Things Now” by diverting Red’s melody into a dissonant, less harmonically stable section that traverses a composed-out octatonic scale as it recounts her dangerous encounter with the Wolf. After this melodically dissonant interlude, Red emerges on the other side singing the same tuneful melody as before, but she realizes that she is no longer a child, but an adult who is more aware of the dangers in the world around her.

Example 3-16 shows the formal layout of “I Know Things Now.” Intro and Coda sections contain melodic material borrowed from the earlier song “Hello, Little Girl.” This material, which functioned as Red’s interruption figure between the Wolf’s phrases,

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90. This is in opposition to Charles Perrault’s 17th-century version of the story, which “ends with the ‘wicked wolf’ throwing himself on Little Red Riding Hood and gobbling her up.” See Maria Tatar, ed., *The Annotated Brothers Grimm* (New York: Norton, 2004), 140.

91. This is one way in which the show’s authors create a place for their concocted character of the Baker in the classic fairy tale (which increases the chance that the audience will welcome the Baker as an indispensable member of this fairy tale musical).

establishes the home key of C major in the Intro and affirms that key in the Coda.<sup>92</sup> In section A1 Red sings a tonally closed, diatonic melody in C major. In this section, she describes her meeting with the Wolf initially leaving her both excited and scared. But, in section A2, the little girl recounts the moment in which the Wolf bared his teeth as he prepared to strike. Accordingly, A2, which until now was an almost exact repetition of A1, diverts to a tonally ambiguous section labeled B in Example 3-16; thus the label “A2 denied” shows that the melody in A2 is not allowed to (locally) resolve, because of the emergence of the B section, in which Red tells the story of the Wolf’s strike.

Intro	A1	A2 denied	<b>B</b>	Rescue	A3	Coda
1–9	10–20	21–27	28–35	36–39	40–51	52–57

Example 3-16: “I Know Things Now,” form chart.<sup>93</sup>

Example 3-17 shows a voice-leading reduction of sections A1 and A2 of “I Know Things Now.” In A1, Red’s melody is completely diatonic, and the  $\hat{5}$  Kopfton is prolonged through neighbor notes in the melody, as well as 6-Zug in the bass. This first section reaches a full authentic cadence, allowing A2 to recapture the Kopfton through the ascending-third figure shown in Example 3-15. The musical material in A2 is essentially identical to A1, until the  $\flat\hat{6}$  (labeled in Ex. 3-17 with an exclamation point) that appears in the melody in m. 25. This  $A\flat$  mode mixture serves as the catalyst in halting harmonic resolution for the rest of A2. The bass 6-prg does not reappear, and no

92. See my analysis of “Hello, Little Girl” in Chapter 3, section 2 of this dissertation.

93. In each form chart in this chapter, the dashed brackets and bold, italicized formal label (in this case “**B**”) indicate the section of the song in which the harmonic and melodic material is the most nebulous, uncertain, or otherwise unstable—precipitating to each character’s *transformation*, or moment of epiphany being described in the text.

cadence is reached; instead, the mode and melody shift dramatically at m. 27 into the dissonant section in which Red recounts her deadly encounter with the Wolf in her grandmother's house (part B).

The musical score shows a reduction of 'I Know Things Now.' The Treble staff contains a melody with various intervals and a '6-Prg' (sixteenth note) marking. The Bass staff shows a constant pedal tone C. The score is divided into measures 10, 13, 14, 18, 19, 21, 25, and 27. A 'Part B' label is at the end of the Treble staff.

Example 3-17: "I Know Things Now," A1-A2 reduction.

Part B of the song has no discernible tonal center, only a constant pedal-tone C that provides reference throughout this harmonically ambiguous section (see Example 3-20). Above this tonic pedal, Red's melody leaves its consistent phrasing behind, in favor of a frenetically ascending melody. As Example 3-18 shows, this melody traverses an ascending octatonic scale ( $OCT_{2,3}$ ) from  $C^4$  to  $C^5$  in mm. 27–35.<sup>94</sup> After traversing text wrought with such fear and adrenaline, Red emerges from the energizing octatonic scale ascent in part B having reached over the Kopfton. The potential energy gained by the octave ascent parallels Red's fear as the Wolf swallows her.

Finally, the Baker comes to rescue Red and her grandmother, in the four-measure section labeled "Rescue" in Example 3-16, relieving the child's horror, and bringing part B to resolution. Example 3-19 shows that Sondheim achieves this resolution by interpolating four measures of  $A\flat$  major (over its dominant pedal), in which the melody

94. For more detailed work on octatonic collections, especially in the music of Igor Stravinsky (with which Sondheim would certainly have been familiar), see Peter C. van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); and Peter C. van den Toorn and Dmitri Tymoczko, "Stravinsky and the Octatonic: The Sounds of Stravinsky," *Music Theory Spectrum* 25, No. 1 (Spring 2003), 167–202.

OCT<sub>2,3</sub>

28  
But he drew me close And he swal-lowed me down, Down a dark slim-y pather where lie

31  
se-crets that I nev-er want to know, And when ev-ry-thing fa-mil-iar seemed to

32  
dis-ap-pear for-ev-er, At the end of the path, was Gran-ny once a-gain! So we wait... 36

Example 3-18: "I Know Things Now," part B, octatonic ascent.

captures  $\hat{5}$  in m. 37, transfers it down an octave in m. 38, and ascends stepwise  $\hat{5}-\hat{6}-\hat{7}$  over the local dominant seventh in m. 39. Here, Red proclaims: "we're back at the start." Then, through a pivot-tone modulation, Sondheim reinterprets  $\hat{7}$  in  $A\flat$  major as the Kopfton  $\hat{5}$  in C major, (back at the start, melodically and harmonically). Musically, the Baker's rescue accompanies the little girl's salvation from of the harmonic instability of part B. Thus the Baker has rescued Red and her grandmother from the Wolf's stomach, and the pivot-tone modulation associated with this rescue recaptures the Kopfton after a long-term digression, allowing Red to safely approach melodic resolution in part A3.

36 37 38 39 = C: 5!

Ab: V C: I

[So we] wait in the dark un-til some-one sets us free, And we're brought in-to the light, And we're back at the start. And I know things

Example 3-19: Red's Rescue and pivot-tone modulation, mm. 36–40.<sup>95</sup>

In this song, Red Riding Hood goes through a traumatic experience (being eaten) that transforms her from a trusting child into a realistic young adult, and the song's voice-leading structure underlines this dramatic narrative. Example 3-20 shows the deep middleground structure that governs "I Know Things Now," in which the song's opening Kopfton does not find resolution until the final statement of Red's part A material. The Kopfton delays its descent when A2 is denied, and Red ascends an octave in part B by way of the octatonic scale. This registral energy gain underlines Red Riding Hood's frenetic text in part B; the Kopfton may only return in its original register after the Baker's rescue (over the dominant pedal of the flat submediant).

In "I Know Things Now," Sondheim sets up a precedent to which both of the remaining songs of self-discovery will conform: a dissonant tonic-departure point in the middle of the form that leaves the character forever changed. Each of these songs enacts the character's transformation into a more mature person, or a person who knows things by the end of the song that they "never knew before" (this phrase, in some variation, occurs in all three songs). Sondheim masterfully enhances these

95. Red's vocal melody in this example is not reduced. Rather, stems and flags have simply been removed in order to more clearly show the third-progression in A-flat major during this rescue segment.

Example 3-20: “I Know Things Now,” middleground.

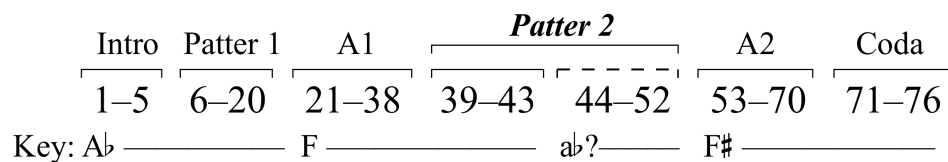
transformations by creating musical analogues, in the form of harmonically unstable interior sections. In Cinderella’s song, this middle section leads her melody back to the home tonic—as is the case with Red Riding Hood’s song. But, in Jack’s case, the transformation actually alters the song’s key.

### 3.3.2 “Giants in the Sky”

Jack tells the story of his journey into the sky, climbing the beanstalk, in “Giants in the Sky.” In this song, Jack changes from a child filled with wonder at a brand new world he has discovered into a thief who sees the dangers (and opportunities) of the world perhaps for the first time. The following analysis will show that Sondheim creates Jack’s musical transformation through a dramatic half-step modulation by way of a dissonant, harmonically ambiguous transformation of previously consonant material (patter song 2). This ascending half-step modulation correlates directly with Jack’s shift of mindset. In the initial keys of A-flat and F major, he expresses the emotions of childlike wonder; the tumultuous transition to the final key of F# major leaves the melody, and Jack, forever changed.

As Example 3-21 shows, “Giants in the Sky” constitutes a two-part rotational form—comprising patter song sections, alternating with principal melodic sections

(labeled A1 and A2). The song begins in A $\flat$  major, with an introduction a section that evokes patter song style (incipit shown in Example 3-15b), in which Jack sings with child-like wonder about his initial impression of being high in the clouds at the top of the beanstalk.<sup>96</sup> After a direct modulation to F major, section A1 presents the song's principal melody. Jack describes the hospitality he receives from the giant's wife: "And she gives you food and she gives you rest, And she draws you close to her giant breast, And you know things now that you never knew before, Not till the sky!"<sup>97</sup>



Example 3-21: "Giants in the Sky," form chart.

Example 3-22 shows that the first patter song section establishes the tonic melodic pitch F by way of the 5–6 voice-leading technique (mm. 8–17). The  $\hat{6}$  in A $\flat$  major transfers down one octave as the suspended fourth over F's dominant triad in m. 17, and becomes reinterpreted as  $\hat{1}$  in the home key of F major at m. 21 (the beginning of section A1). Jack's first patter song, then, tells the beginning of the story of his journey into the sky, while also facilitating the shift to the song's home key of F. When F major arrives, Jack recounts his positive experience with the giantess. The song reaches what appears to be melodic resolution in m. 37 on Jack's text "not till the sky," but the boy

96. In operetta, such as the music of Gilbert and Sullivan (and the famous example "Major General's Song," from their 1879 comic opera *The Pirates of Penzance*), rapid iteration of comic text generally characterizes the patter song style; here, Jack's innocent excitement replaces humor as the driving force of the fast text. Notable examples of patter song from Broadway are, from Kander and Ebb, "The Money Song," from *Cabaret* (1966), and "We Both Reached for the Gun," from *Chicago* (1975); as well as from Sondheim in "Not Getting Married Today," from *Company* (1970).

97. Sondheim/Lapine *Woods*, 43.



will soon experience a traumatic event that will negate this Kopfton descent. Jack will then need to re-approach this melodic resolution in an altered version of the tonic key.

Example 3-22: “Giants in the Sky,” Patter 1 and A1, mm. 8–37.

In the second patter song section (Example 3-23), Jack describes the moment the giant arrives home to find him alone with his wife, which signals the arrival of the major trial in Jack’s journey into the sky (the transformative event in his story). At m. 44, the key changes to A $\flat$  minor (though not a harmonically stable expression of this key), as he sings: “When your heart is lead/ And your stomach stone,” and at this moment he realizes that he must steal what he is able to steal and promptly flee. At this point, one’s expectation may be that the remaining measures of patter song 2 will lead to F major’s dominant in the same way that patter song 1 managed. Instead, Sondheim only provides an outline of a G dominant seventh at m. 52, which shifts directly into the key of F $\sharp$  major at m. 53—the start of A2, a half step higher than before. As Example 3-23 shows, this G $\flat$  functions as a tritone substitution in F $\sharp$  major, effectively replacing the dominant seventh in that key. Here, Sondheim shows that, though Jack may have attempted to reiterate the patter song material with the effect of returning to F major, the boy’s traumatic experience with the giant has transformed him—and thus the key of his melody, at the interval of a half step.

Example 3-23: “Giants in the Sky,” Patter 2, mm. 39–53.

Example 3-24 shows a deep middleground-level reduction of the entirety of “Giants in the Sky.” Here, we see that Patter 1 establishes the melodic pitch F, which becomes the tonic in the song’s home key of F major, while Patter 2 establishes the same pitch F to be reinterpreted as the leading tone of F# (i.e., as E#). The song has one home key: a generic F, expressed first as F major, then as F# major. As Michael Buchler observes in Frank Loesser’s music, many upward modulations do not constitute a true change of key (in the Schenkerian sense), but rather a dramatically charged upward step of the same Ursatz components that are expressed in the home key.<sup>98</sup> For this reason, the Urlinie in section A2 does not function as  $\#3-\#2-\#1$  (labels which imply a true change of key), but as  $\uparrow 3-\uparrow 2-\uparrow 1$  (labels borrowed from Buchler), or simply raised versions of the original scale steps.

Ultimately, Jack’s song reflects the character’s fundamental transformation by way of this half-step alteration of the Ursatz. In the harmonically ambiguous middle section (Patter 2), Sondheim shows that Jack’s dangerous trial with the giant changes the boy’s view of the world for good. In A1, he sings about how he sees the world in the

98. See Buchler 2008.

Example 3-24: “Giants in the Sky,” middleground.

sky with such awe; in A2, he sings about how he appreciates the world he left behind (his home) all the better because of the danger he flees in the sky. Through the compositional devices outlined above, Sondheim shows in “Giants in the Sky” that the boy Jack is forever changed after the journey to the sky that nearly cost him his life.

### 3.3.3 “On the Steps of the Palace”

The final song of self-discovery in Act I is Cinderella’s song “On the Steps of the Palace,” a formal diagram of which appears in Example 3-25. The song finds Cinderella, after her third night at the Prince’s ball, trapped on the steps of the palace (snagged by the Prince’s cunning, who spread pitch on the stairs to stop the maiden’s fleeing for a third consecutive night). The material in mm. 1–24 comprises a repetition of Cinderella’s previous song “A Very Nice Prince,” a duet with the Baker’s Wife, which takes place after Cinderella’s first evening at the prince’s three-day festival. In “A Very Nice Prince,” the audience first learns that Cinderella may have become disenchanted with the prince—despite her wish at the beginning of the show to attend the festival.

"Nice Prince"	A1	A2	<b>B</b>	A3 truncated	"Nice Prince"
1–24	25–37	38–58	59–74	75–85	86–109

Example 3-25: “On the Steps of the Palace,” form chart.

By reprising the material from “Nice Prince” at the beginning of “On the Steps of the Palace,” Sondheim shows that Cinderella is still apprehensive about whether to reciprocate the prince’s affections. With new melodic material in parts A1 (incipit in Example 3-15c) and A2, Cinderella finally confronts the root causes of her trepidation about marrying the Prince, namely her fears that she will not make an adequate princess, and that the prince may not really love her. In part B this trepidation hits critical mass, initiating (via a passage rife with harmonic tension) Cinderella’s transformation from the indecisive young woman into one ready to shoulder the responsibility of life as a princess. Cinderella’s primary conflict in “On the Steps of the Palace” is the unresolved tension brought on by her refusal to confront her fears of marrying the prince. My analysis shows that Sondheim depicts this conflict as a tonal problem that Cinderella solves when she arrives at her decision.<sup>99</sup>

Cinderella’s problem takes the form of the  $\flat\hat{6}$  that takes part in the subversion of the song’s attempted authentic cadence at the end of section A1 (Example 3-26). The Kopfton  $\hat{5}$  in the soprano becomes agitated by the appearance of the  $B\flat$  (the root of the  $\flat VI$ ) in the bass in m. 33, forcing this  $\hat{5}$  into a reactive upward leap (coming back to  $\hat{5}$  in

99. Here, I do not mean “tonal problem” as Schoenberg defined it. For this song, which is far too short to exhibit these types of long-reaching thematic development, the ‘tonal problem’ is more like a ‘tonal irritant,’ which brings an imbalance to the otherwise diatonic song, and the resolution of which is necessary in order for the song to achieve a normative authentic cadence. See Severine Neff, “Schoenberg as Theorist: Three Forms of Presentation,” in *Schoenberg and His World*, ed. Walter Frisch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 60.

m. 36). Here B $\flat$  takes the place of a more normative dominant seventh chord, diverting Cinderella's melodic line to  $\hat{4}\hat{7}$  and  $\flat\hat{6}$ , and preventing resolution of the Kopfton. This Kopfton stasis parallels Cinderella's text in A1, in which she discusses her trepidation about returning the prince's affections. Section A2 constitutes a nearly direct repetition of A1, with different text, and an extension of this B $\flat$ -driven cadential avoidance.

Example 3-26: “On the Steps of the Palace,” Part A1, mm. 25–36.

Example 3-27 shows a reduction of the remainder of “On the Steps of the Palace,” including sections B, A3, and the final “Nice Prince” material in mm. 86–ff. In part B (mm. 59–74), Cinderella notes that her current predicament constitutes the first big decision in her young life. Instead of confronting the decision head-on, she decides to “run along home, and avoid the collision [decision]”<sup>100</sup> at m. 75. She attempts to restart her A material; thus mm. 75–85 greatly resemble part A1 (Ex. 3-26 above). But, at the top of the octave progression common to each A section, the Kopfton has locally transformed from  $\hat{5}$  to  $\flat\hat{5}$ , and Cinderella's A3 melody stalls on the melodic pitch B $\flat$ . This  $\flat\hat{6}$  has effectively stopped her again from completing an authentic cadence, and the lack of resolution means that the princess-to-be must make a decision. The tonal

100. Sondheim/Lapine *Woods*, 63.

problem itself thwarts her attempt to flee, and only in resolving the problem (i.e., making the right decision) can she bring her melody to resolution.

At m. 86, the melodic and accompanimental material from the beginning of the song, material from “Nice Prince,” returns, and the  $\flat\hat{6}$  finally breaks its hold on Cinderella’s melody, becoming  $\sharp\hat{6}$ . Thus the tonal problem finds resolution at the point in the song where Cinderella makes her decision. From this very moment, the Kopfton is allowed to descend, and the bass supports this descent for the first time in the entire song, leading to the first authentic cadence in the song’s home key. This cadence confirms Cinderella’s decision to finally allow the prince to pursue her.

Example 3-27: “On the Steps of the Palace,” part B to end, mm. 59–106.

### 3.3.4 Summary

In each of these three songs from Act I of *Into the Woods*, the characters discover something about themselves that they never knew before. Sondheim employs elements of harmonic ambiguity and diversion from diatonic melody to highlight the transformation each character undergoes at the height of their personal trial. In part B of “I Know Things Now,” Red Riding Hood recounts the moment she is eaten and subsequently rescued. The octatonic ascent parallels the little girl’s horrific encounter with the Wolf, and her rescue (symbolized by the reinterpretation of  $A\flat: \hat{7}$  as the

Kopfton C:  $\hat{5}$ ) brings her back to reality. In “Giants in the Sky,” Jack’s near-fatal encounter with the giant transforms the song’s key with an ascending half-step modulation that correlates with Jack’s change of mindset after his trial in the sky. And Cinderella, in “On the Steps of the Palace,” is plagued by a looming decision (signified throughout the song by a tonal problem). Only upon facing her fears and deciding to allow the prince to fully pursue her does the tonal problem resolve.

Apart from the similar dramatic function served by each of the three songs of self-discovery, Sondheim ties them together by a common compositional method—namely employing a tumultuous middle section to represent the drastic changes each character experiences in their own confrontations. The interrelatedness of these songs is made most explicit in the 2002 Broadway Revival Cast Recording of *Into the Woods*, in which new lines from Red Riding Hood and Jack are interpolated into the end of the “On the Steps of the Palace,” just before final resolution in m. 106.<sup>101</sup> The three characters finish the song together, each recounting that they “learned something that they never knew before,” the dramatic thread that ties the three songs together. Example 3-28 compares Cinderella’s original text with the interpolated text from the 2002 recording.

Cinderella:	And you’ve learned something, too,
<b>Red:</b>	<b>And I’ve learned something, too,</b>
Cinderella:	Something you never knew,
<b>Jack:</b>	<b>And I’ve learned something, too</b>
<b>All:</b>	<b>That I never, never, never knew before,</b>
<b>Jack:</b>	<b>In the land of the giants.</b>
<b>Red:</b>	<b>That day in the woods.</b>
Cinderella:	On the steps of the palace.

Regular: Sondheim’s Original Lyrics  
**Bold:** Lyrics added in 2002

Example 3-28: Interpolated lyrics, “On the Steps of the Palace,” 2002.

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101. Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, 2002 Broadway Revival Cast, (Nonesuch: CD, 2002).

With the joined forces of these three characters, this production shows more than any other that *Into the Woods* is less a story about fairy tales than a story of the human experience of growth and self-discovery that each classic story represents.



## CHAPTER FOUR ASSASSINS

### 4.1: Introduction

*Assassins* (1991) is the third and final musical on which Sondheim collaborated with the Playwrights Horizons company in Off-Broadway New York City. This show, unlike *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984) and *Into the Woods* (1987), never made the leap to Broadway. *Assassins*, the product of Sondheim's second collaboration with librettist John Weidman (the two had completed *Pacific Overtures* in 1976), ran for only seventy-three performances, including previews (which started 18 December 1990). The official opening night for the musical was 27 January 1991; the brief run ended on 16 February, slightly less than three weeks later.<sup>102</sup>

#### 4.1.1 *Assassins*: an Overview

*Assassins* focuses on the stories of every individual who has attempted (successfully or unsuccessfully) to murder the President of the United States, from John Wilkes Booth to John Hinckley, and how those stories echo familiar tropes of American individualism.<sup>103</sup> Rather than being an indictment of assassins as somehow 'other' in the pantheon of the American experience, *Assassins* explores the nature of the common ties between our nation's presidential assassins, and how that group of people is not so different from anyone else in the pursuit of the American Dream. The musical unfolds in non-linear time, and it takes place in a combination of historically representative

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102. Stephen Sondheim and John Weidman, *Assassins* [libretto] (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1991), frontispiece. For the remainder of this chapter, I will refer to this source as "Sondheim/Weidman *Assassins*."

103. On the scope of the show, Sondheim states: "The show first started with the idea of assassination through the ages, starting with Julius Caesar. Then we realized that was unwieldy, so we decided to restrict it to American assassinations, but we included ones like Harvey Milk. John [Weidman] wrote a whole Harvey Milk scene. Then we decided *that* was unwieldy, and we would restrict it entirely to presidents." From Mark Eden Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 69.

scenes and fabricated scenes. In the historical scenes, Sondheim and Weidman recount events as they happened, through fictionalized versions of the assassins themselves; in the fabricated scenes, the assassins' characters interact with one another outside linear time—for example, the conversation in Scene 11 between Sarah Jane Moore (b. 1930) and Charles J. Guiteau (d. 1882). Because of this non-linear use of time, along with Sondheim's musical-revue-style approach to composing therein, *Assassins* falls into the category of concept musical.<sup>104</sup>

Scene 1 opens in a carnival-style shooting gallery; Leon Czolgosz enters, followed by the Proprietor of the gallery. The Proprietor invites Czolgosz, obviously troubled, to take a gun from his hand, singing "Hey, pal—feelin' blue? Don't know what to do? Hey, pal—I mean you—Yeah. C'mere and kill a President."<sup>105</sup> This final line (among the first words in the musical) is intended to shock and unsettle audiences, as a warning that an evening of surprises lies ahead. One by one, each assassin enters the scene, and the Proprietor ensures each of them that their problems can be solved by violence, singing his trademark line "Everybody's got the right to be happy." When John Wilkes Booth enters, the Proprietor refers to him as their pioneer; Booth, the supposed inspiration for all American assassins, leads the lot in a rousing chorus of the song "Everybody's Got the Right."

Historical scenes in *Assassins* (all of which precede the Kennedy assassination) focus on accurately recounting events, but interpreted with artistic freedom by Sondheim and Weidman. For example, in Scene 2, John Wilkes Booth pleads for the audience's sympathy, for them to understand why his assassinating Abraham Lincoln

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104. The term 'concept musical' very broadly refers to any musical in which a central theme or topic (concept), rather than a narrative, is the most important feature.

105. Sondheim/Weidman *Assassins*, 5–6.

was a virtuous, pious act; all the while, the Balladeer (a folk-type singing narrator) reacts with the utmost skepticism, insinuating that Booth had selfish reasons for killing the President. Scene 4 recounts Giuseppe Zangara's attempt to assassinate President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt in Miami in 1933; here, Sondheim composes a company number, making it clear that the spectators at the scene were more interested in having their photographs and names make it into the newspaper than they were about the assassin's intended message. Other historical scenes recount the assassinations of President James Garfield by Charles Guiteau, and of President William McKinley by Leon Czolgosz (both of which also include commentary from the Balladeer).

The characters of the most recent attempted assassins (those since Kennedy's murder) provide a window into the modern incarnation of political murder, as well as some much-needed comic relief. Sam Byck, who, in 1974 planned to hijack a commercial airliner to crash into Richard Nixon's White House, rarely sings in the show. Instead, Byck occupies two entire spoken scenes by himself: one in which he sits on a park bench, ranting to his tape recorder about the unfairness of life, addressing composer Leonard Bernstein; another, in which he rants to the recorder in his car on the way to the airport. John Hinckley, who shot Ronald Reagan in order to win fourteen-year-old Jodie Foster's love, is a pitiful young man. He sings a sympathetic ballad to his beloved Jodie, as a duet with Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme (singing to convicted murderer Charles Manson). And the junk-food-obsessed Sarah Jane Moore, who, like Fromme, attempted to shoot Gerald Ford in September 1975, provides slapstick comic relief.

Scene 16, the show's penultimate scene, takes place on November 22, 1963, at the Texas School Book Depository in Dallas, Texas.<sup>106</sup> Lee Harvey Oswald sits eating his

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106. André Bishop, director of Playwrights Horizons, writes about this scene: "The moment late in the show when the Dallas Book Depository set was revealed—the only completely detailed setting in a

lunch, and John Wilkes Booth enters the scene. In this alternate world of *Assassins*, Booth directly influences Oswald, systematically forcing his hand, convincing him to assassinate John F. Kennedy. Booth promises Oswald the immortality that is associated with infamy, saying: "All your life you've wanted to be part of something, Lee. You're finally going to get your wish."<sup>107</sup> Suddenly, the other assassins appear to Oswald. Those who preceded Oswald promise him a place within their legacy, and those who followed him claim that they were inspired, at least in part, by Oswald and the others. The group of assassins implores Oswald: "We admire you... We're your family... You are the future... We're depending on you... Make us proud..."<sup>108</sup> Oswald takes his rifle, crouches, and takes his shot.

The four successful assassins each receive a scene dedicated to his story, but occurring in the order: Booth (1865), Czolgosz (1901), Guiteau (1881), and Oswald (1963). Booth's scene logically leads off, since he serves as the pioneer, the model by which American assassins are subsequently measured. Oswald's placement at the end of the show likely has a twofold reason. First, Kennedy's death would have been the only event of the four presidential assassinations that will have occurred during a large number of audience members' lifetime (the show premiered twenty-eight years after the event), so it will have had a very strong emotional effect on audiences at the premiere. Second, and more importantly, the Oswald scene acts as a counterbalance to Booth's scene at the show's outset.

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spare, abstract design—and we saw a thin figure in a T-shirt and jeans staring sullenly out the window, listening to country-and-western music. We realized that this was Lee Harvey Oswald, and that there would be a Kennedy scene after all. This moment inevitably evoked gasps of surprise and occasionally horror." From Sondheim/Weidman *Assassins*, ix.

107. Ibid., 96.

108. Ibid., 102.

In Scene 1, Sondheim and Weidman evoke an intentional comparison between the lyric “Everybody’s got the right to be happy,” and the line from the Declaration of Independence: “. . . all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” The distinction between the right to *be* happy and the right to *pursue* happiness is an important one, the nuance of which the assassins in the show will never have fully grasped. In *Assassins*, Sondheim and Weidman show that each killer is a product of the same quintessentially American upbringing, and that each of them bears a sense of entitlement associated with the Declaration’s implication that to be happy is to be a successful participant in the American experiment. In other words: “*Assassins* dramatizes the unpopular thesis that the most notorious killers in our culture are as much a product of that culture as the famous leaders they attempted to kill.”<sup>109</sup>

*Assassins* explores the plausibility and veracity of the American Dream, while “taking a cold look at America’s musical sustenance and the illusory dream it has represented over two centuries.”<sup>110</sup> The show demands that each audience member reconsiders his or her initial judgment of the assassins, suggesting that to discover the personalities behind the killers leads each person who experiences *Assassins* to formulate a new, more nuanced understanding of the people who carried out these horrific acts—regardless of whether this new understanding conveys with it any mercy or forgiveness. The show’s librettist John Weidman best describes the goal of *Assassins* with respect to audience reaction:

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109. Joanne Gordon, *Art Isn’t Easy: The Theater of Stephen Sondheim* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 318.

110. Stephen Banfield, *Sondheim’s Broadway Musicals* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 56.

We don't ask the audience to sympathize with these characters; we don't ask the audience even to empathize with them. We simply ask them to see them as being more multi-dimensional and complicated than they are if we simply see them as a group of murderers who...are usually described as crazy people, freaks, outside the American experience.<sup>111</sup>

#### 4.2: Two Ballads

*Assassins* is at its heart a musical revue that approaches various tropes related to the pursuit of happiness and the idea of the American Dream. Though the musical's eight songs bear little resemblance to one another in regard to style (since they span styles from many American musical traditions), Sondheim places three songs in a group by their title, each bearing the designation 'ballad.' Each ballad is dedicated to telling the story of a single historical assassination: those of Abraham Lincoln, assassinated in 1865 by John Wilkes Booth; James Garfield, assassinated in 1881 by Charles Guiteau; and William McKinley, assassinated in 1901 by Leon Czolgosz. These three events bear two important distinctions. The first is that each of these assassins was, for lack of better term, successful; the second is that each assassination occurred at least ninety years before *Assassins* premiered, thus very few audience members at the musical's premiere bore direct recollection of the events as they occurred. For these reasons, among others, Sondheim tells the stories of these three men through the character of the Balladeer.<sup>112</sup>

The Balladeer's voice is unique in *Assassins*. This fictional character simultaneously functions to report historical events surrounding each assassination, and to represent the American people's reactions to these horrific events. Most of the Balladeer's music occurs in these three ballads (with the addition of his responsorial,

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111. From *Assassins: A Conversationpiece* (New York: Music Theater International [Production Video]), 3:55–4:15.

112. For my current analysis, I omit discussion of "The Ballad of Czolgosz," primarily because it is the only ballad that does not include a dialogue between the Balladeer and the assassin—it is, rather, a solo song by the Balladeer. This dialog, and the music-dramatic implications thereof, are an integral part of my analytical viewpoint in the other two ballads.

narrative role in “Another National Anthem,” a company number involving all the assassins in the show). Herein he recounts events according to the historical canon, adding his own commentary (especially in “The Ballad of Booth”). In this way, the Balladeer acts both as storyteller in the folk tradition, and as the voice of the American people in reaction to the murders—in effect, the Balladeer is a modern-day Greek Chorus.<sup>113</sup>

In the following essay, I show how features of each ballad’s voice-leading and harmony underline the Balladeer’s message about each assassination. In “The Ballad of Booth,” Sondheim employs SLIDE operations that eschew normative melodic resolution in the home key—a resolution that never comes since the American people will never find closure for the national tragedy of Lincoln’s assassination. “The Ballad of Guiteau,” juxtaposes an ascending melodic arc and polystylistic contrast to tell the story of the assassin’s increasing anxiety (and waning resolve) as he approaches the gallows to pay for his crime.<sup>114</sup> I show that these two very different songs communicate the same basic idea: as individuals in pursuit of the American Dream, the assassins’ stories deserve to be told, but the Balladeer, as a proxy for the American people, acts as the ethical judge and jury in deciding the true effect of each assassination on the United States—at least according to the Sondheim/Weidman viewpoint character of the Balladeer.

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113. The libretto describes the Balladeer as a “Woody Guthrie/Pete Seeger-style folk singer”: Sondheim/Weidman *Assassins*, 4.

114. Sondheim employs polystylism here much in the same way as Schubert did in *Erlkönig*, where alternation of mode, surface rhythm, vocal register, and accompaniment style divide the poetic voice within the poem. See Edward T. Cone, “Some Thoughts on *Erlkönig*,” in *The Composer’s Voice*, ed. Edward T. Cone (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974): 1–19.

#### 4.2.1 “The Ballad of Booth”

At the opening of the song “The Ballad of Booth,” the audience encounters John Wilkes Booth in the barn where he perished on the night of 26 April 1865, after his flight following his assassination of Abraham Lincoln.<sup>115</sup> This multi-part musical number involves the Balladeer and Booth in singing roles, both in solo and duet configurations. With the permission of the Balladeer (who serves as a sort of liaison between history and the modern-day musical theater audience), Booth attempts to convince the audience of his lofty motives for assassinating the president. Two prominent features of this song’s voice leading promote a dramatic subtext of skepticism concerning Booth’s nobility in murdering Lincoln. First, the Balladeer’s initial skepticism of Booth’s motives manifests as a chromatically charged SLIDE progression, which breaks from the diatonic folk idiom in which the Balladeer tells Booth’s tale, and never allows for the descent of the Kopfton. Second, Booth’s soliloquy reaches a tonal interruption that denies him melodic and harmonic resolution, subverting the emotionally charged middle section of the three-part song. Booth’s side of the story ultimately takes a back seat to what the Balladeer sees as the true, rather paradoxical, outcome of Booth’s actions: “Hurts a while / But soon the country’s / Back where it belongs / And that’s the truth / Still and all... / Damn you, Booth!”<sup>116</sup>

Example 4-1 shows the structure of “The Ballad of Booth.”<sup>117</sup> Each of the four dramatic sections of this song, labeled with Arabic numerals 1–4, aligns with a shift in

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115. Sondheim and Weidman seem uninterested in conspiracy theories that contradict history-textbook accounts of each assassination (scenarios such as Booth faking his own death and living into old age). This includes the Kennedy assassination, the led-up to which comprises the musical’s penultimate scene; in the world of *Assassins*, Lee Oswald acted alone.

116. Sondheim / Weidman *Assassins*, 22–23.

117. The designations “Part I,” “Part II,” and “Part III” are taken from the published piano-vocal score, in which the song divides into three separate parts. For each part, the measure numbers restart at



textual perspective within the song. In section 1 (Introduction), the Balladeer, alone on stage, begins to tell Booth's tale from a third-person perspective. In section 2, Booth's Plea begins; here the Balladeer and Booth decry (together, but on the assassin's behalf) the moral crimes Lincoln supposedly perpetrated against the Confederate States of America. In section 3, Booth's Soliloquy, the assassin introduces a hymn-like melody in which he reflects about "How the country is not what it was/where there's blood on the clover/How the nation can never again/be the hope that it was."<sup>118</sup> Booth apparently shoots himself at the end of section 3, and the Balladeer is left alone to tell the rest of the story. He concludes the song by commandeering Booth's "Damn you, Lincoln" motif (C1, C2), using this tune to condemn the assassin instead. The Balladeer, speaking for the American people, proclaims to Booth: "Lots of madmen have had their say/But only for a day."<sup>119</sup>

(Part I)				(Part II)					(Part III)		
1: Introduction				2: Booth's Plea Begins			3: Soliloquy		4: Conclusion		
A (Intro)	B1	B2	B3	C1	D1	C2	E	D2	B4	C3	A (Coda)
"Someone tell the story." Balladeer calls for attention.	Banjo song. Tale of Booth.  [SLIDE Prg.]			"Damn you, Lincoln!"	Booth's ballad.	"Damn you, Lincoln!"	Booth's hymn.	Booth's ballad.	Banjo song. Tale of Booth.  [SLIDE]	"Damn You, Johnny!"	"Listen to the Stories." Balladeer's summary.
8mm.	1-15	16-37	38-46	47-55	1-8	9-13	14-47	48-69	1-17	18-25	26-38
Balladeer				Balladeer, for and w/Booth	Booth	Balladeer, for and w/Booth	Booth		Balladeer		
E	F#				Bb		B	F#		Db	Ab

Example 4-1: "Ballad of Booth," form chart.

number 1, hence the measure numbers in the form chart seem redundant. In this chart, each uppercase letter A-E denotes a different musical topic Sondheim explores in the show; each topic repeats at least once, apart from Booth's hymn, or letter E.

118. Sondheim/Weidman *Assassins*, 20

119. Ibid., 22. Booth's suicide, which is counter to historical record, is only implied. Just before the shot rings out, the assassin points a pistol to his temple, the stage goes dark, and the gun goes off.



relationship “that preserves the third of a triad while changing its mode.”<sup>121</sup> The highly chromatic nature of the SLIDE, unidiomatic for the banjo-song folk idiom in the song’s B sections, disrupts the otherwise diatonic framework of the song, which marks the SLIDE as a dramatically charged harmonic event.

Example 4-3 shows the first instance of the SLIDE progression in “The Ballad of Booth;” This non-diatonic compositional device marks the Balladeer’s skeptical indictment of Booth’s true motivation for assassinating Lincoln.<sup>122</sup> Booth claims lofty political and idealistic motives for his crime (which he enumerates in an unsung monologue later in this scene), but the Balladeer has a different opinion. In m. 12, upon the first SLIDE, he suggests that Booth’s act may have been retribution for the loss of his singing voice, or that Booth was under the influence of alcohol. Finally, in m. 15, after the Balladeer suggests that Booth simply “killed a country . . . because of bad reviews [of his stage acting],” the tonic major triad returns, and the Balladeer recaptures the Kopftón  $\hat{3}$ . Such chromatic harmony does not exist elsewhere in “The Ballad of Booth” (or in *Assassins* as a whole, for that matter). With this chromatic progression, Sondheim adds harmonic and melodic weight to the Balladeer’s skepticism (again, as representation of that of the American people) about what truly motivated Booth’s violent act.

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121. David Lewin, *Generalized Musical Intervals and Transformations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 178.

122. Robert Hatten states: “Markedness deals with one dimension of musical meaning, that which arises from difference . . . The marked term is more narrowly defined and distributed, and, significantly, it has a correspondingly narrower realm of meaning than the unmarked term;” from Robert S. Hatten, *Interpreting Gestures, Topics, and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 11. In this case, ‘term’ refers to elements of harmony, namely SLIDE. In this example, ‘rhythmic reduction’ refers to the simplification of surface rhythms shorter than those notated. All voicings retain from those of the published score.

10 Balladeer You who had ev-'ry-thing, What made you bring a na-tion to its knees? Some say it was your voice had gone. —

Accomp. (Rhythmic Reduction)

SLIDE

11 A# E#

12 A E

13 Some say it was booze. — They say you killed a coun - try, John, be - cause of bad re - views. —

SLIDE

14 G# D#

15 G D

3

Example 4-3: First SLIDE in “The Ballad of Booth.”

Example 4-4 shows a reduction of section B1 of “Booth,” highlighting the prolongation of the Kopfton by way of a descending, chromatic perfect fourth in the bass from mm. 10–15. The vocal melody’s local descent from 2–7 (shown more fully in Ex. 4-2), represents only a local resolution of the Kopfton; here, where the Balladeer begins to tell Booth’s story, the song’s diatonicism reflects the Balladeer’s benign objectivity. When he voices his skepticism in m. 10, the melody then reaches over to  $\hat{6}$  over subdominant harmony, continuing downward stepwise during the dual SLIDE progressions.

Each of the sections labeled with the letter “B” in Ex. 4-1 contains the same SLIDE progression, at the same pitch level and in the same key; each introduces new

skepticism about Booth's motivations. In B4, the final "B" statement, the Balladeer's condemnation reaches a new height. Here, he suggests that Booth's actions not only fell short of cementing his own hero status, but also raised Lincoln to historical proportions that he may not have reached if he had lived out all of his days in office: "But traitors just get jeers and boos/Not visits to their graves. While Lincoln, who got mixed reviews/Because of you, John, now [in modern times] gets only raves."<sup>123</sup> As in the previous "B" statements, the Kopfton never descends. Rather, the song's key changes, leaving this Kopfton to linger with no resolution. (The song ends in the key of A-flat major, also without Schenkerian melodic resolution.) Perhaps Sondheim says by way of the chromatic SLIDE progression that, though "[assassination] hurts a while/But soon the country's/Back where it belongs,"<sup>124</sup> something is fundamentally altered when someone assassinates the President (in this case, future prospects of resolution for this song's Kopfton?). The SLIDE device thus breaks the diatonic frame of "The Ballad of Booth," in that way that assassination breaks the frame of normalcy in American life.

In section 3 of this song, Booth sings a hymn (labeled “E” in Ex. 4-1) and a second statement of his ballad topic (D2) in which he professes his undying sentimentality for the dream that was the Confederate States of America, beginning and ending with the line: “The country is not what it was.”<sup>125</sup> Booth’s final statement, at the end of D2 constitutes the assassin’s final attempt to bring his story to some sort of resolution (by achieving melodic resolution). Shown in Example 4-5, Booth’s melody reaches up to  $\hat{8}$  in m. 65, and descending a nearly complete octave-progression, until m. 70.<sup>126</sup> When Booth utters his final words, a six-four chord and root-position dominant support descent of the Kopfton by step, and the libretto directs that Booth holds a gun to his head, the music stops, the stage goes black, and a single gun shot rings out (suggesting that Booth takes his own life). The gunshot is a very concrete representation of Schenkerian interruption in m. 70; with this interruption, Sondheim demands that Booth relinquish the floor, disempowering the assassin’s final message, and returning the Balladeer’s banjo song to its original starting position (with B4).

Thus in the “Ballad of Booth” Sondheim achieves balance between quotation of many American folk styles and high-brow compositional device. He utilizes the SLIDE operation to draw particular attention to the flimsiness of Booth’s façade of idealism, suggesting that the assassin’s true motive was to simply be remembered after his successful career began to wane. In part 3 of this song, Sondheim uses the technique of interruption to bring Booth’s soliloquy to an end, echoing the fact that the assassin’s

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125. Sondheim’s gift for poetic lyrics is perhaps most obvious in this line. Booth’s murderous act, which he intended to avenge the ravaged Confederate States of America (the country which is ‘not what it was’), ensures that the United States of America will indeed never be the same again.

126. Note that my stemming in the melody and bass in mm. 65–68 suggests that the motion from vi to IV ultimately constitutes a composed-out B-major triad, or a predominant that Sondheim composes out by way of parallel tenths, leading to the dominant six-four in m. 69.

Example 4-5: “The Ballad of Booth,” D2, 64–69.

sentiments, however heartfelt they may be, are only localized, short-range events that have little significance in the big picture of American history. Sondheim shows in “The Ballad of Booth” that, especially in a song saturated with traditional diatonic harmony, deft employment of chromaticism interruption elevates traditional folk idioms to the level of artful, dramatic music.

#### 4.2.2 “The Ballad of Guiteau”

At the end of scene 11 of *Assassins*, Charles J. Guiteau approaches President James Garfield at the Baltimore & Potomac Railroad Station in Washington, D. C., on 2 July 1881. Guiteau asks the President if he can become the United States ambassador to France. Garfield laughs, turns, and walks away; Guiteau pulls a handgun from his pocket, pursues the President, and a single gunshot rings offstage. Scene 12 opens as Guiteau approaches the gallows to hang for Garfield’s assassination. The scene’s song, “The Ballad of Guiteau,” is a polystylistic exchange between the Balladeer and Guiteau. The following analysis shows that Sondheim exploits the contrast between three American folk styles to highlight an ascending linear progression that spans the song. This linear progression parallels Guiteau’s trip up the steps to the gallows, and each

upward step accompanies his increasingly ineffectual attempts to prolong his fate. The Balladeer eventually commandeers Guiteau's jovial cakewalk tune and brings the ascending progression to its terminus, ensuring firsthand that the assassin is able to stall the hangman no longer.

a. Hymn Topic, mm. A-E (opening).



b. Waltz Topic, mm. 5–11.



c. Cakewalk Topic, mm. 52–55.



Example 4-6: Principal topics in “The Ballad of Guiteau.”

“The Ballad of Guiteau” comprises three distinct musical styles, melody incipits of which appear in Example 4-6, in order of their first appearances.<sup>127</sup> Stephen Banfield refers to this song as “a kind of minstrel show potpourri of gospel hymn and cakewalk,” referring to Guiteau’s topics (Ex. 4-6; see a and c).<sup>128</sup> Example 4-7 shows that Sondheim arranges these topics into a three-part rotation of Hymn-Waltz-Cakewalk (“A” representing Hymn; “B,” Waltz; and “C,” Cakewalk), until the fourth rotation, which omits the Waltz. This omission occurs when the Balladeer interrupts the established A-

127. For perhaps the most in-depth discussion of topics, their definitions, and their meaning, see Hatten, 2004.

128. Banfield 2004, 56.



B-C (Hymn-Waltz-Cakewalk) rotation and commanders Guiteau's cakewalk topic and brings the perpetual cycle to an end.<sup>129</sup>

Rotation 1			Rotation 2			Rotation 3			Rotation 4 (Partial)	
A1	B1	C1	A2	B2	C2	A3	B3	C3	A4	C4
Hymn "Going to the Lordy."	Waltz Balladeer tells the tale of Guiteau.	Cakewalk "Look on the bright side."	Hymn "Going to the Lordy."	Waltz Balladeer resumes the tale of Guiteau.	Cakewalk "Look on the bright side."	Hymn "Going to the Lordy."	Waltz Balladeer resumes the tale of Guiteau.	Cakewalk "Look on the bright side."	Hymn "Going to the Lordy."	Cakewalk "Look on the bright side, not on the sad side."
17 mm.	1–51	52–66	67–71	72–122	123–137	138–141	142–175	176–179	180–201	202–223
Guiteau	Balladeer	Guiteau		Balladeer	Guiteau		Balladeer	Guiteau		Duet
C	F	D		F#	E♭		G	A♭		E♭

Example 4-7: "The Ballad of Guiteau," form chart.<sup>130</sup>

The melody traverses a path featuring melodic common tones that link the Hymn and Waltz topics. By requiring the Balladeer to take part in these common-tone modulations, Sondheim allows Guiteau to set up the melodic-harmonic ground rules for the entire song; by contrast to the derision that underlies so much of the Balladeer's stance in the "Ballad of Booth," this sets up a tone of respect, in which the Balladeer follows the assassin's lead. Example 4-8 shows the first instance of the common-tone connection between Hymn 1 and Waltz 1. Guiteau's final pitch C,  $\hat{1}$  in the song's opening key, becomes  $\hat{5}$  in the closely related key of F major; this pitch is the Balladeer's first and last pitch in Waltz 1, and the pitch receives constant referential attention throughout the waltz melody (only a small portion of which is displayed here).

129. For a concise introduction to the tenets of rotational theory, see Warren Darcy, "Rotational Form, Teleological Genesis, and Fantasy-Projection in the Slow Movement of Mahler's Sixth Symphony," *19th-Century Music* 25, No. 1: 49–74.

130. Note that the opening section "A1" has the rehearsal letters A–Q in lieu of measure numbers.

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is in 4/4 time and the bottom staff is in 3/4 time. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The top staff has a melodic line with lyrics "I am go-ing to the Lord-y..." and an accompaniment line with lyrics "(accomp.)". The bottom staff has a melodic line with lyrics "Come, all ye Christ-ians and learn from a sin-ner. Char-lie Gui-teau." and an accompaniment line. Above the top staff, there are labels "Hymn 1" and "Waltz 1". Above the bottom staff, there are labels "(5)" and "3". Above the top staff, there are labels "C: 1" and "= F: 5".

Example 4-8: "The Ballad of Guiteau," common tone between Hymn 1 and Waltz 1.

Example 4-9 shows the end of the Balladeer's Waltz 1 section, and the beginning of the first Cakewalk, in which Guiteau interrupts the prolonged melodic tone C (still  $\hat{5}$  in F major) to enter the distantly related key of D major. This melodic interruption accompanies a harmonic interruption: the four-bar dominant of F major in mm. 48–51 suddenly jumps to the tonic D-major triad in m. 52—but this is not to be confused with a deceptive cadence. In the major mode, the deceptive cadence is typified by a V–vi progression, with the implication that a V–I cadence will eventually follow, resolving the tension left by the tonic substitution; in this case, Sondheim replaces the vi triad with  $\flat VI$ , and F-major never returns. Within this Cakewalk 1 section, Guiteau further disempowers the prolonged melodic C by relegating it to the role of  $\flat \hat{7}$  in the new key of D major.

Sondheim establishes the next step in the song's prolonged ascending line during the second statement of the Hymn topic, mm. 67–70, where he replaces the  $C\flat$  with the  $C\sharp$  that becomes the Balladeer's reference pitch in the Waltz 2 key of  $F\sharp$  major (see Example 4-10). In Cakewalk 1, Guiteau sets forth a normative hypermeter of four-bar

40 **Waltz 1** 41 42 43 44 45 46 47

Balladeer: Faced with dis - as - ter, his heart would beat fas - ter, his smile would just grow, \_\_\_\_\_ And he'd

48 **Cakewalk 1** 49 50 51 || 52 53 54 = D: 5♯

say: \_\_\_\_\_ Guiteau: Look on the bright side, Look on the bright side. Sit on the right side of the Lord.

F: V \_\_\_\_\_ D: I!

Example 4-9: “The Ballad of Guiteau,” interruption starting Cakewalk 1.

units, comprising two eight-bar phrases (mm. 52–59 and 60–67). Instead of bringing the Cakewalk to cadence in m. 67, however, Sondheim truncates the tune by one measure (presumably omitting the final words “of the Lord”), and interpolates a short Hymn statement in place of the final Cakewalk measure.<sup>131</sup> According to the libretto, Hymn 2 takes place one or two steps higher up the gallows than the opening of the song, so the shift from C $\flat$  to C $\sharp$  represents unabashed text painting on Sondheim’s part. But more importantly, Guiteau’s reluctance to finish the Cakewalk (a poem about faith in the Lord) may also indicate that the assassin is not yet ready to face the hangman; thus the step up in the prolonged melodic line represents Guiteau’s attempt to postpone his inevitable fate.

Example 4-11 shows a middleground reduction of the sections that comprise the first two steps of the ascending melodic line C $\flat$ –C $\sharp$ .<sup>132</sup> On this middleground level, we

131. For more on phrase rhythm, hypermeter, and interpolation, see the foundational source on the subject: William Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1989).

132. In this example the melody in the upper staff represents a simple distillation of each character’s principal melodic lines (with Guiteau’s stems up, the Balladeer’s stems down), with my voice-leading reduction graph on the grand staff below.

Example 4-10: "The Ballad of Guiteau," Cakewalk 1 through Waltz 2.

see that Sondheim composed out this chromatic ascent by interpolating the key of D major in Cakewalk 1. By inserting this D-major section, he avoids the parallel ascending fifths that would otherwise result between the soprano  $C\flat-C\sharp$  and the bass  $F\flat-F\sharp$  (shown with flagged notes with open note heads in the bass clef). With this smooth voice leading, Sondheim underlines Guiteau's attempt to insidiously delay his execution by restarting the Hymn-Waltz-Cakewalk cycle. This delay, while obviously

Example 4-11: "The Ballad of Guiteau," Hymn 1 through Waltz 2.

only temporary, offers valuable insight into Sondheim and Weidman's estimation of the assassin: they show that the self-aggrandizing man Charles Guiteau is truly more interested in prolonging his execution than he is in spreading the word of God or justifying a politically-motivated assassination.

Example 4-12 shows a melodic reduction of "The Ballad of Guiteau," highlighting the relationship of each sung part to the prolonged melodic line, which centers on the three ascending pitches  $C\flat$ – $C\sharp$ – $D$ . As we have seen, in Cakewalks 1 and 2, Guiteau undercuts the prolonged pitch, interrupting the preceding dominant, and ascends one half-step higher by the end of the cakewalk. In the third Cakewalk, however, he ascends immediately to the next chromatic pitch  $E\flat$ , and sings an even shorter version of the Cakewalk tune. The final statement of the Hymn topic cements  $E\flat$  as the next reference pitch for the Balladeer's Waltz topic. But, instead of compliantly returning to the Waltz, the Balladeer assumes the Cakewalk tune himself (Cakewalk 4), returning the prolonged melodic line to  $D$  in m. 202.

With this final Cakewalk, the Balladeer shows that he will no longer stand idly by while Guiteau delays his fate upon the gallows. Whereas Guiteau had effectively interrupted every authentic cadence for the entirety of the song (mm. 52, 129, 176), here the Balladeer insists on finally reaching the cadence in  $G$  major that Guiteau interrupted at m. 176. With this, the Balladeer finishes the Cakewalk tune with the final words that Guiteau was never able to sing "...of the Lord!"<sup>133</sup> Once the melody ascends toward the final cadence in  $G$  major—the Balladeer's final pitch higher than Guiteau's by a fourth—the scene goes black, and the gallows' trap door falls, ending Guiteau's life. By

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133. As stated above, Guiteau truncates each statement of the Cakewalk, and is never able to speak the implied final phrase "of the Lord."

taking over the Cakewalk topic and finally bringing it to cadence, the Balladeer ensures that Guiteau's sermon on the gallows comes to an end.

The musical score is presented in three staves: Composed-out Line, Balladeer, and Guiteau. The first system covers measures 1 to 119. The Composed-out Line features a melodic line with notes C: 1̂, = F: 5̂, D: 7̂, and = F#: 5̂. The Balladeer and Guiteau parts include Hymn 1, Waltz 1, Cakewalk 1, and Hymn 2. The second system covers measures 123 to 228. The Composed-out Line features a melodic line with notes Eb: 7̂, = G: 5̂, and a Final Ascent (!) with notes 5̂ (!), 6̂, 7̂, and 8̂. The Balladeer and Guiteau parts include Cakewalk 2, Hymn 3, Cakewalk 3, Hymn 4, Cakewalk 4, and a Final Ascent. Chord symbols and measure numbers are provided throughout.

Example 4-12: "The Ballad of Guiteau," melodic reduction.

In "The Ballad of Guiteau" Sondheim utilizes polystylistic rotational form to show the psychosis of a snake-oil-salesman/preacher/assassin, and lengths to which he would go in order to attempt to defer his inevitable fate at the gallows. Through common-tone connections, the Balladeer complies with Guiteau's established melodic pitches, allowing the assassin to speak his part. Each time the Balladeer attempts to reach a cadence, however, Guiteau forestalls harmonic closure and diverts the song into another three-part rotation. In the final rotation, Sondheim allows the Balladeer (the American people) to take control of the song's voice leading, and to bring the assassin off of his soapbox and into his noose. "The Ballad of Guiteau" is thus a narrative of the

assassin's final moments, as well as a commentary on the futility of his late-term pontification.

#### 4.2.3 Summary

Clearly, *Assassins* is not intended to be an historical account of American history in a historically precise sense; rather, it is an account of the American experience. Each of these three songs relates to very common emotions that we all feel, and Sondheim shows us that perhaps we are not that different from these assassins (regardless of how discomforting that insight may be for the audience). As Stephen Banfield says of Sondheim's artistic voice: "Sondheim's articulation of the ambiguities and dualities of our times quite simply help us to live, and his insights, torturous as they often are, surely earn him a place in the pantheon of human modernism."<sup>134</sup> A musical that is so heavily reliant on American folk idioms confronts Sondheim with the challenge of imposing his own compositional voice onto the music, and avoiding any sense of the derivative, the imitative, or the trite.

The ambiguities and dualities to which Banfield refers are nowhere more poignant than in *Assassins*, in which Sondheim constantly treads the line between objectifying (or dehumanizing) his assassins, and sympathizing with them. The Balladeer acts to temper these distinctions, offering Sondheim a voice through which to articulate the palpable emotion each American feels about assassination as an institution. In "The Ballad of Booth," the Balladeer shows his skepticism about Booth's lofty ideals; and in "The Ballad of Guiteau," he personally puts an end to the assassin's pious rant. As brash as the Balladeer may seem in this light, this musical still approaches each assassination from the viewpoint that these assassins could just as well be any one of us, had we made a few more selfish decisions. *Assassins* thus allows the

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134. Banfield, 8.

audience to step outside their initial emotional reaction (most likely one of revulsion) and into the shoes of the assassins themselves, but it never apologizes for them. Instead, Sondheim's musical leaves the audience to make their own decisions about what is right and what is wrong, daring them to make the right choices where Booth, Guiteau and company made the wrong ones. By dragging the audience into the emotional space occupied by the characters in such a way, Sondheim upends the traditional notion of the tragic hero. Herein perhaps we see the ultimate achievement of *Assassins*: audiences must bear some of the characters' emotional burden, assimilating their flaws, empathizing with them, killers inspired by the American Dream.



## CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION

The four analytical essays in chapters 2–4 in this study have illustrated through an eclectic analytical methodology how Stephen Sondheim’s compositional language intersects with the drama playing out onstage. Adapting the Schenkerian analytical approach recently taken by analysts of popular and stage music, I explored the deep-level structures that govern groups of songs from each of three musicals in Sondheim’s Playwrights Horizons period.<sup>135</sup> Sondheim’s music, universally acclaimed by scholars of musical theater, has been the subject of comparatively little scholarly music analysis.<sup>136</sup> Until now, a Schenkerian perspective the composer’s music has been absent from the canon of Sondheim scholarship. This dissertation is my attempt to prove the value of such a perspective.

In Chapter 2, I explore the parallels between the three-song cycle, or triptych, in the first act of *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984) and its subject Seurat’s artistic process. Throughout Act I, the fact that Seurat’s painting *Un dimanche après-midi à l’Île de la Grande Jatte* remains unfinished causes the artist to suspend the advancement of all aspects of his life that take place outside his studio. As my analyses show, this suspension manifests musically as a lack of Urlinie descent for the entirety of Act I. In

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135. These recent analysts include Michael Buchler, “Modulation as a Dramatic Agent in Frank Loesser’s Broadway Songs,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 30, No. 1 (2008): 35–60; Walter Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians: Revolver Through the Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), and *The Beatles As Musicians: The Quarry Men through Rubber Soul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); David Carson Barry, “Dynamic Introductions: The Affective Role of Melodic Ascent and Other Linear Devices in Selected Song Verses of Irving Berlin,” *Intégral* 13 (1999): 1–62; Allen Forte, *The American Popular Ballad of the Golden Era, 1924–1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Stephen E. Gilbert, “Gershwin’s Art of Counterpoint,” *The Musical Quarterly* 70, No. 4 (1984): 423–456; and, more peripherally, Nicole Biamonte, “Triadic Modal and Pentatonic Patterns in Rock Music,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 32, No. 2 (2010): 95–110.

136. Recent examples of Sondheim analysis include Stephen Banfield, *Sondheim’s Broadway Musicals* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993); Steve Swayne, *How Sondheim Found his Sound* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); and Peter Charles Landis Purin, “‘I’ve a Voice; I’ve a Voice’: Determining Stephen Sondheim’s Compositional Style Through a Music-Theoretic Analysis of his Theater Works” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Kansas, 2011).

the course of the Act I triptych—“Finishing the Hat,” “We Do Not Belong Together,” and “Beautiful”—Seurat realizes that he must choose his art over all else. Throughout the triptych, Sondheim interrupts or inhibits descent of the Urlinie while Seurat confronts the reality of devoting himself fully to his art. Resolution only comes at the end of Act I with the song “Sunday,” during which Seurat finally finishes his masterpiece. In so doing, his looming artistic goal has come to fruition, and Seurat bids goodbye to his love, Dot, and moves on into his life of romantic solitude.

In Chapter 3.2 I show how a single “Wish” Ur-motif develops into a series of motifs that saturate *Into the Woods*. My analysis demonstrates that the ascending step from the “Wish” motif is embedded into the deep middleground structure of the song “Hello, Little Girl,” where the motif drives melody, modulation, and harmony throughout. I conclude that wishing (as represented by the “Wish” motif), from a voice-leading perspective, serves as the dramatic impetus for this song, and, to a large extent, the entire musical.

Chapter 3.3 focuses on a set of three solo songs in which Sondheim underlines each character’s personal transformation by traversing a turbulent, non-diatonic middle section. In “I Know Things Now,” a composed-out octatonic scale in the song’s B section represents Little Red Riding Hood’s realization that the Wolf, and much of the outside world, cannot be trusted. In “Giants in the Sky,” Jack realizes through a dangerous encounter in the second Patter Song section that he must grow up and face the consequences of his actions; the resulting modulation from F major to F# major underlines that self-discovery, that Jack will never be the same after his trip up the beanstalk. And in “On the Steps of the Palace,” Cinderella’s self-discovery comes at the very moment that she allows herself to be emotionally available to the Prince—when

the non-diatonic  $\flat\hat{6}$  corrects itself to  $\sharp\hat{6}$ , allowing the Urlinie to descend. I conclude that Sondheim employs these various non-diatonic materials in each song's middle section to parallel each character's journey of self-discovery.

Chapter 4 examines how Sondheim buttresses dramatic narrative by applying chromatic devices to two diatonic folk ballads in *Assassins*. In "The Ballad of Booth," the chromatic SLIDE progression in the Balladeer's banjo song colors his skepticism about Booth's motivation for murdering Abraham Lincoln. When Booth has the chance to tell his own story (his soliloquy in hymn style), his melody is interrupted; in this way, Sondheim shows that the assassin's apparent plea for the audience's sympathy falls upon deaf ears. In "The Ballad of Guiteau," the assassin attempts to prolong his own execution, leading the Balladeer through a series of half-step modulations, and through a rotation of three distinct surface styles. Throughout, a chromatically ascending prolonged line parallels Guiteau's steady trip up the gallows. The Balladeer finally breaks the rotational pattern, re-establishes the previous key, and assumes Guiteau's ascending line. By ending the rotation and preventing further modulation, the Balladeer forces Guiteau to face his comeuppance, and the assassin meets the hangman at last.

Throughout this dissertation, I have shown that Sondheim's compositional vocabulary, varied as it may be, consistently serves to highlight drama onstage. My focus on the intersection of melody and vertical harmony that is primary in any Schenkerian approach has been indispensable in determining the principal structural elements of each song analyzed. I assess the relationship between deep-level structures and the corresponding text, and the resulting analytical graphs represent my assessment of Sondheim's artistic contribution to key songs from each musical.

Sondheim's compositional style varies quite widely from show to show. In that respect, I believe that this is a result of Sondheim's innate gift for pairing musical events with dramatic events onstage—which is to say that Sondheim's style changes with the style of the libretto: Japanese folk adaptations in *Pacific Overtures*; a dissonant, film noir style to accompany the dark, murderous tale of *Sweeney Todd*; a quasi-pointillist or impressionist style to correspond with Seurat's artistic sensibilities in *Sunday in the Park with George*; golden-era Broadway sounds in *Follies*; or American folk idioms in *Assassins*. In each case, Sondheim's music becomes a sort of character in the musical, directly underscoring the show's setting, tone, and style. To finish a quote I used in part in Chapter 1, Sondheim says: "essentially I'm playwright in song, and . . . playwrights are actors. And what I do is I act."<sup>137</sup> Sondheim's music is as integral a part of the show's unfolding drama as any character or scene.

Sondheim's compositional style clearly adapts to the tone and setting of each musical, but polystylism permeates nearly every scene of each musical—as with the blues-vaudeville rotation in "Hello, Little Girl" from *Woods*; or the multiple folk style reprises in both "The Ballad of Booth" and "The Ballad of Guiteau" from *Assassins*. The apparent stylistic adaptation to which I refer renders Sondheim into a veritable stylistic chameleon, which fact provides a unique challenge to the analyst in determining a singular "Sondheim style." It was with this caveat in mind that I formulated my analytical approach in this dissertation. By discerning the structure underlying Sondheim's sonic surface, one may look beyond the distinctions of style (Japanese, impressionist, etc.) to deeper structural levels where we are able to more

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137. Mark Eden Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 79.

clearly see the ways in which Sondheim transformed traditional structural paradigms in the service of his magnificently descriptive music.

The middleground level, which has been the focus of the bulk of my study, reveals what is perhaps Sondheim's most singular stylistic component: dramatic congruity within his music, or aspects of songs that directly align with concurrent theatrical events within the scene. A Schenkerian approach shows Sondheim's use of middleground-level support for various character-driven events in each musical—namely Seurat's unfinished business in *Sunday*; the importance of a "Wish" and the transformation of a child into an adult in *Woods*; or the emotions of the American people as characterized by the Balladeer in *Assassins*. The analysis of Sondheim's music alone provides insight into the composer's virtuosity as a composer, but considering that music in dramatic context yields far more fruitful results.

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### **Sondheim Audio and Video Recordings (In alphabetical order by title)**

*Assassins*. 1991. CD. Original Off-Broadway Cast Recording. RCA Victor 60737-2-RC.

*Assassins*. 2004. CD. Broadway Revival Cast Recording. PS Classics PS-421.

*Into the Woods*. 1988. CD. Original Broadway Cast Recording. RCA Victor 6796-2-RC.

*Into the Woods*. 1997. DVD. Directed by James Lapine. Performed by Bernadette Peters and Joanna Gleason. USA: Image Entertainment.

*Into the Woods*. 1991. CD. Original London Cast Recording. RCA Victor 60752-2-RC.

*Into the Woods*. 2002. CD. Broadway Revival Cast Recording. Nonesuch Records 79686-2.

*Sunday in the Park with George*. 1984. CD. Original Broadway Cast Recording. RCA Records RCD1-5042.

*Sunday in the Park with George*. 1999. DVD. Directed by Terry Hughes. Performed by Mandy Patinkin and Bernadette Peters. USA: Image Entertainment.

*Sunday in the Park with George*. 2006. CD. London Cast Recording. PS Classics PS-640.

## VITA

Adam Hudlow is a native of Shreveport, Louisiana. He received his Bachelor of Music in trumpet performance from Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, Louisiana in 2007; his Master of Music in music theory from University of Houston in 2009; and expects to graduate with his Doctor of Philosophy in music theory from Louisiana State University in 2013, with a minor in musicology. Hudlow has presented his Sondheim research throughout the south-central United States, and has taught music theory, aural skills, and music fundamentals at Louisiana State University and University of Houston. He currently resides in Alexandria, Louisiana and serves as adjunct instructor of music theory and aural skills at Northwestern State University.