Western University  
Don Wright Faculty of Music  
Music 2708B: Special Topics in Music: Musical Theatre II  
Talbot College Room 141 Mondays, 7:00-10:00 p.m.

Instructor: Prof. Kristina Baron-Woods  
Office: Talbot College 324  
Office hours: Tuesdays 2 - 6 pm, other times by appointment  
Email: kbaron3@uwo.ca

Teaching assistant:

Course Description:

This course will examine the musicals of Stephen Sondheim, arguably the most influential theatre composer and librettist of the late 20th century. Focusing on musicals from Company (1970) to Passion (1994), we will explore how the elements of music, lyrics, script, direction cohere in Sondheim’s musicals, and how he has pushed the boundaries of theatrical convention. We will see how scholars have perceived Sondheim’s musicals within a cultural, historical, and theatrical milieu. Finally, we will look at how Sondheim’s development of the genre influences composer-lyricists of today.

Learning Objectives:

Students will be expected to achieve a strong knowledge of the works of Sondheim through lectures, listening, and the course readings. Students will be expected to complete writing assignments using creative thinking and written language skills. Students will learn to critically evaluate performance aspects of theatre and apply this knowledge in a review of a live performance. Students will also work cooperatively to prepare a group presentation relevant to the course material.

Evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Attendance/Participation</td>
<td>Throughout the term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Meeting about research paper topic</td>
<td>To be arranged by March 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Group assignment: Character/Performer Analysis</td>
<td>January 29 and February 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Midterm examination</td>
<td>March 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Abstract for research paper</td>
<td>March 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Research assignment</td>
<td>April 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is no textbook for this course. Course readings (journal articles) will be available online through various databases. The musical examples will be on reserve and available for borrowing through the Music Library. You will also need to do some independent research with finding song and performance clips. I will provide a list for additional reading on the course OWL. Books on Sondheim and his contemporaries will be on reserve in the Music Library. You may also find the following websites helpful: www.sondheimguide.com; www.sondheim.com; and www.sondheim.org

We will attend a live performance of a contemporary musical production at The Arts Project in downtown London. Please be sure to budget for a theatre ticket (approximately $25).
Course Schedule

Week 1  January 8  Course Introduction and Sondheim’s life

Week 2  January 15  Sondheim as Lyricist
Watch: Gypsy.

Week 3  January 22  Group Research Session

Week 4  January 29  Presentations of Character/Performer Analyses Part 1

Week 5  February 5  Presentations of Character/Performer Analyses Part 2

Week 6  February 12  Interpreting a Classic Contemporary Musical
Attend: Performance and Artists’ Chat of Calithumpian Theatre’s Next to Normal at The Arts Project. Read: Articles posted on OWL.

Week 7  February 26  Innovations: The Concept Musical

Week 8  March 5  Midterm Examination

Week 9  March 12  Motivic and Murderous
*Deadline for meeting to discuss research topics.

Week 10  March 19  Revisioning Fairy Tales
*Abstract for research paper due.

Week 11  March 26  Revisioning a Fairy Tale Musical into a Movie
Week 12 April 2 Sondheim in the 90s
Read: Robert Finn, “Opera Everywhere: Columbus, OH -- Sondheim Passion,”
Watch: Passion

Week 13 April 9 Passing the Torch (Brown and Guettel)
Read: Scott Miller, “Inside Songs for a New World,” New Line Theatre Company
website. Posted on OWL. Watch: Songs for a New World (Archival video).

*Research assignment due

Research Assignment:

Write an essay of approximately 2000-2500 words (not including footnotes or bibliography) on any topic
pertinent to the course:

- May be about a Sondheim show, or show by any other composer/lyricist team contemporary to
  Sondheim, or influenced/inspired by Sondheim. No Lloyd Webber please, unless you can convince me
  there is a good and pertinent reason for it; e.g. you might want to argue that a particular show by Lloyd
  Webber is his attempt to be Sondheim-esque.
- May explore any aspect of Sondheim’s life or career
- May be related to music theory, musicology, or textual analysis; e.g. you could explore leitmotif in
  Sunday in the Park with George, or you could do reception history of Assassins
- May be a performance review of a live or filmed presentation of a Sondheim production; however, this
  review must go beyond a basic review of the type you wrote for Music 2701. You may not use the same
  version of a show that we discuss in class. Some ways to make a performance review suitable for the
  degree of scholarship I want to see in this class: you could write a comparative study between a staged
  or movie version, or two different staged versions; e.g. you could review a local production of Sweeney
  Todd and compare it to the Tim Burton film. You could explore parallels between a Sondheim show and
  another composer’s show on the same topic or originally written at the same time. You could investigate
directorial or design approaches to a show that are significantly different from the original concept.
- May be an essay outlining and assessing the current or available scholarship on Sondheim. Compare the
  approaches of biographies; or look into major gaps in the research and try to determine why they exist.

This paper constitutes a significant portion of your grade for the course. Therefore, it is multi-staged and you
will have an opportunity for discussion and support throughout the process.

1. Set an appointment time with me very early on to chat about your ideas for a topic, how you think you will
   approach the research, and what sources you might use. This appointment must be complete by March 12;
   however, I suggest you see me before Reading Week to get the process started.

2. An abstract (in the form of a paragraph or two) must be handed in by March 19. State clearly what you intend
   to argue or discuss and the main points you will use to prove your thesis. Also include a short reference list of
   your main sources. You may find this list expanding as you work; do not feel confined to only your original list.

3. Finally, your main paper will come out of all this preliminary work. It should display a strong sense of
   research and thought and be well-polished. Citations will be expected in footnote form, Chicago Style, and you
   will include a Works Cited list at the end. Please use 12-point font, Times New Roman or Garamond, with
   standard 2.54 cm (or 1”) margins.
Written and Oral Assignments Group assignment:

Character/Performer Analysis:

You will be assigned randomly to a group (Groups will be posted on OWL after the course-add deadline. Feel free to make initial contact through your own thread on the OWL forum.) You will need to organize your group and decide if you are meeting in person or virtually. You may find it useful to create a Facebook group.

Choose a character from any Sondheim show and let me know what character you want to do (so we are not all watching six different presentations on Momma Rose!)

Research that character using whatever resources you want to use: the more and varied the resources, the better. Find out what you can about Sondheim’s intentions for the character through radio, television, and print interviews.

Find audio and video clips of various actors performing the role.

Debate and determine who you feel is the “best” representation of that role.

The Presentation Aspect:

Prepare a presentation for the class of your research and findings.

The presentation can take whatever form you would like, but should include your audio or video evidence.

Creative presentations are welcome! Strive for being informative but entertaining.

All members of the group must be present at the presentation and must participate in some way.

One effective way to set up the presentation might be as a debate: each member of the team chooses an actor as his/her favourite and presents the merits of this performance. You might also assign one person as host or moderator. (There are many variations on this idea and we’ll talk about it more in class.)

Find the same song or scene across all your performers, if possible, so we can make strong comparisons. You may conclude that different performers do different aspects of the role better than the others. You might also find that the performers you like best are not necessarily the ones who appear to fit Sondheim’s descriptions best.

The group will be marked as a unit, so it is important to work well together and show equal interest and commitment to the project.

The only written aspect of this project that needs to be handed in is a list of all your sources: all books, journal articles, blogs, newspaper articles, etc. that are consulted, along with a list of all the different videos or sound recordings you use - what production they are from, company, year, etc. This should be organized as a Works Cited list. See the helpful handout in the Music Library “How to Cite Sources in Music.” Please write your Group number, character name, and all the names of your group participants on this document.