

Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*:

A Study

by

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LIST OF MUSIC EXAMPLES

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PREFACE

Stephen Sondheim: An Introduction

Stephen Sondheim (b. 1930) has been the most influential and important composing figure in musical theatre since the latter half of the twentieth century. A mentee of Oscar Hammerstein II, Sondheim began his Broadway career working as a frustrated lyricist for *West Side Story* (1957) and *Gypsy* (1959), before finally tackling both music and lyrics for his own series of titles beginning with *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962) and *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964). It wasn't until 1970, however, with *Company*, that Sondheim was hailed for the first time as the new innovator of the American musical theatre. A string of controversial shows followed which included *Follies* (1971), *A Little Night Music* (1972), *Pacific Overtures* (1976), *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1979), *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981), *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), *Into the Woods* (1987), *Assassins* (1990), and *Passion* (1994).

Before the Sondheim era, musicals were seen as being light, frivolous forms of entertainment for middle class families. Even when some of these earlier shows attempted to deal with heavier themes and concepts, their endings were ultimately happy and left their audiences smiling. This conventional romantic ideology associated with the form was completely rejected by Sondheim beginning with *Company*, who, with his collaborators, chose to stimulate the minds of his audiences, placing relatable characters with real-life problems on the musical stage.

No two works of Sondheim's are similar in style or presentation, in spite of the general over-arching controversy attached to his canon. In general, most of his works fall

under the ‘concept musical’ idea, i.e. where music, text, dance, dialogue, design and direction all merge together to create a central theme or metaphor, and where a linear narrative plot is perhaps not deemed as important. While some of Sondheim’s musicals deal with linear plots more crucially than others, this is the general idea used for his catalogue. In spite of the acclaim received by Sondheim and his collaborators, the composer still faces criticism to this day, as it appears that audiences constantly find it difficult to connect with such heavy material in the confines of a Broadway musical. His music is at times unconventional, often merging complex rhythms with contrapuntal melodies, married with thought-provoking, complicated lyrics that root the characters depicted on stage in a reality and humanity, something that was practically unheard of in a musical. In this way, Sondheim truly is the most important figure in musical theatre of our time.

Aims of study

This thesis focuses on Sondheim’s 1979 work, *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (referred to simply as *Sweeney Todd* from now on), and serves as a brief study of the piece, examining its musical and dramatic significance. Sondheim’s score for *Sweeney* is one of his richest and most complicated, while the subject matter provides its own weight as an unusual plot for a Broadway musical. Rather than focusing on any one particular feature of the work, the thesis delves into various aspects of music, text, and character, and brings to light some of Sondheim’s most innovative compositional and textual devices. The controversial plot, rich book and stylistically interdependent almost sung-through score gives the work a unique quality that separates it from the other titles in Sondheim’s canon, and overall, from other works in the broader musical theatre catalogue.

Sondheim's appreciation in academia by both musicologists and theatre scholars has taken quite some time to develop because of the apparent stigma attached to the form. This dissertation ultimately responds to both the attention and the neglect given to this composer in the world of musicology.

Literature Review

In my studies, I have been aided by publications on Sondheim, both from a musical and theatrical point of view. Some of the titles that I found particularly helpful and insightful were Stephen Banfield's *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals*, which analyses the structural processes of the scores of Sondheim's musicals; Mark Horowitz's *Sondheim on Music*, which transcribes a series of recorded interviews with the composer about his compositional methods; and Geoffrey Block's *Enchanted Evenings*, which examines the development of the Broadway musical as we know it.

The material in these books assists my research in different ways. In some cases, it supports my arguments; in other cases, it gives way to the creation of new ideas. The aforementioned three books discuss the composer's music in detail, whereas Sondheim's own two personal books, *Finishing the Hat* and *Look, I Made A Hat*, discuss the lyrics of his songs in detail. In *Stephen Sondheim: A Casebook* (edited by Joanne Gordon), and *Reading Stephen Sondheim* (edited by Sandor Goodhart), no music is discussed. The essays found in these books simply analyse various literary themes and concepts found in the Sondheim catalogue.

Chapter Outline and Methodology

Chapter 1 of this thesis introduces *Sweeney Todd* to the reader. A discussion of the origins of the character as an urban legend leads to an examination of Christopher Bond's 1973 stage adaptation of the story, and eventually, a consideration of Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler's musical adaptation of that particular version. The chapter introduces the musical, by discussing some of the key themes and literary concepts found in the work. Historical and textual analysis is employed here.

Chapter 2 introduces the music of *Sweeney Todd*, and analyses the film influences found in the score, and the interesting use of the *Dies Irae* theme. The question of genre is also addressed. Music analysis is used here.

Chapter 3 analyses the characters of Sweeney Todd and Mrs. Lovett as well as the chorus, musically and textually, and examines Sondheim's use of leitmotif work in the score. Once again, music analysis is employed here.

The appendix provides a detailed synopsis of the show, as well as a list of musical numbers.

CHAPTER 1

Origins of Sweeney Todd

The British urban legend of serial killer Sweeney Todd, in basic terms, is the story of the Demon Barber of Fleet Street (London), who slits the throats of his innocent customers, and dispatches their corpses by sending them down a chute below his parlour, where, in later versions of the tale, the character of Mrs. Lovett assists in the disposing of the bodies by baking their remains into meat pies and selling them in her shop. The character of Sweeney Todd had been navigating the pages of serials, storybooks, and the confines of theatre and television, long before Stephen Sondheim ever put pen to paper. In fact, the legend of the Demon Barber has been intriguing audiences since the mid-nineteenth century. Although traces of its origins are difficult to establish—the story has been linked to a fourteenth century French ballad, a seventeenth century Scottish legend, and an eighteenth century Fleet Street court case¹—one thing for certain is that the first time the character appeared in his fully-fledged form was in Thomas Peckett Prest’s penny dreadful (or serial) *The String of Pearls* in 1846, having previously been mentioned fleetingly by Charles Dickens in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-4).² George Dibdin Pitt adapted Prest’s story for the stage as a melodrama in 1847,³ while more recent adaptations have appeared in novel-form in 2007 by Robert L. Mack and, briefly, in 2012 in Terry Pratchett’s *Dodger*.⁴

¹ Robert Kimball, ‘Sweeney Todd,’ in Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1991), p. xxvii-xxxix (p. xxx).

² Robert L. Mack, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. xvii.

³ Mack, p. 343.

⁴ Terry Pratchett, *Dodger* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), p. 126.

In film and television, the character has famously been portrayed by Tod Slaughter in 1936, and Ray Winstone in 2006,⁵ while the story has also been the subject of a ballet (and later, concert suite) by Malcolm Arnold in 1959, and a music hall-style song recorded by Stanley Holloway in 1956.⁶ Among the many stage adaptations of the story, the most significant version is that by Christopher Bond, written in 1973, which led to the 1979 Sondheim musical.

In Bond's (and Sondheim's subsequent) plot, innocent barber Benjamin Barker returns to London under the pseudonym Sweeney Todd, having been wrongly imprisoned for fifteen years in Australia. Once in London, he discovers from baker and former neighbour Mrs. Lovett that Judge Turpin, having sent Todd to prison, had proceeded to rape his wife, Lucy, driving her to suicide, and had adopted Todd's now fifteen year-old daughter, Johanna as his own. Todd decides to exact revenge on the Judge by killing him, and in preparation for such vengeance, establishes a new barbering business, to entice prospective customers, and eventually, the Judge. Lovett, ever the opportunist, decides she will join Todd in secret partnership, by baking his innocent victims' remains into her meat pies, confident their flavours will increase sales.⁷

Christopher Bond's Sweeney

The most significant aspect of Bond's 1973 retelling of the story of Sweeney Todd is that for the first time, the title character was given a motivation for behaving the way he does. Up to this point, authors and playwrights continued with the tradition of Todd being

⁵ Mack, p. 353.

⁶ Mack, p. 349.

⁷ For a detailed plot synopsis of the Sondheim musical, as well as a list of musical numbers, please refer to the Appendix.

portrayed as a stereotypical villain, i.e. an evil character that, in this case, kills for no reason. Bond's deeper exploration of the material meant that the play became a mixture of melodrama, with an examination of darker themes and emotions.

Bond was successful, it appears, in his attempt to alter the moral centre of the story, for he succeeded in making Todd, for the first time, the misunderstood, 'good' character, and made the audience see the story from his perspective. In doing so, Judge Turpin and his sidekick, the Beadle, become the villains, despite the fact that they are figures of supposed justice. This juxtaposition of character representation in the play gives extra weight to Bond's version of the story: Todd and Lovett represent the hardworking, mistreated working class society of London, while the Judge and Beadle symbolise the harsh, cruel authority figures, who abuse the justice system.⁸

Traditionally, melodrama as a genre makes it clear to an audience who is the 'good' character and who is the 'bad,' and so in Bond's attempt to readdress this theatrical form, the result is a melodrama of sorts. Even when Sweeney announces his plan for revenge in Act I, Scene 8 ('For now I find I have a taste for blood, and all the world's my meat')⁹, the audience continues to be encouraged to see his presumably understandable motivations for killing. Bond's Sweeney emerges, in true Shakespearean fashion, as a sort of tragic hero, in the style of Hamlet or Lear, a man who is perhaps 'more sinned against than sinning.' Bond's sophisticated language and clever character structure, as well as his subtle ironic touches made the play ideal for Sondheim to adapt.

⁸ The idea of a misunderstood hero can be seen in other works of musical theatre, for example *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986) and *Jekyll & Hyde* (1997), and in opera, for example, *Wozzeck* (1922) and *Peter Grimes* (1945).

⁹ C. G. Bond, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (London: Samuel French, 1973), p. 21.

Stephen Sondheim's Sweeney

Sondheim, while in London in 1973, rehearsing for *Gypsy*, found himself at a production of Bond's *Sweeney Todd* one evening, by chance, at the Stratford East Theatre.¹⁰ The composer was immediately intrigued by Bond's play:

I had heard it was Grand Guignol, and it was something that just knocked me out ... Bond's new version was a tiny play, still a melodrama, but also a legend, elegantly written, part in blank verse ... It had a weight to it, ... It struck me as a piece that sings.¹¹

The subject matter of the story would suit Sondheim's style of writing, since he had become known in the theatre world for his dark musicals.

When he finally began working on the *Sweeney* material, Sondheim set out to write a sung-through work: 'I started it, trying to write everything myself because it was really all going to be sung ... it was going to be virtually an opera.'¹² Playwright Hugh Wheeler was brought on board at director Hal Prince's request, when Sondheim struggled to edit his own script, which was at this point, too long.¹³ Wheeler seemed to be the correct person for the project, since 'he had written mysteries and he was British and ... would understand the tradition of the play.'¹⁴ Although Bond's play diverted itself from earlier traditional versions of the legend, Wheeler remained convinced that he and Sondheim could make the character of Sweeney even more tragic: '... even [Bond's] version was that absolutely unreal, old melodrama where you boo the villain...'¹⁵ It was also Wheeler who encouraged Sondheim to add more music to the show, with eventually very few moments of the work

¹⁰ Craig Zadan, 'The 'Sweeney' Story,' in Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1991), p. ix-xxvii (p. ix).

¹¹ Zadan, 'The 'Sweeney' Story,' p. ix, x.

¹² Zadan, 'The 'Sweeney' Story,' p. xii.

¹³ Horowitz, Mark Eden, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*, 2nd edn. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010), p. 149.

¹⁴ Zadan, 'The 'Sweeney' Story,' p. xii.

¹⁵ Ibid.

being silent.¹⁶ Sondheim is quick to admit that the British ‘don’t take Sweeney Todd seriously’ and that Bond’s play was seen as something charming, humorous that served its purpose perfectly—to entertain—at the little theatre in Stratford East.¹⁷ It was therefore his intention to give the story more dramatic weight through the music:

Our production was larger in scope. Hal Prince gave it an epic sense, a sense that this was a man of some size instead of just a nut case. The music helps to give it that dimension.¹⁸

Sondheim felt that the Bond text would ‘sing’ in a musical format, because of the playwright’s use of both metered and non-metered dialogue speech patterns.¹⁹ For example, the characters of Anthony and Johanna both speak in a musical iambic meter language, i.e. where an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed syllable, creating a clear rhythm that can be understood as *da-DUM*. In a typical line of iambic meter, the rhythm would be as follows: *da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM*. Generally, iambic meter contains five *da-DUM* rhythms in a row. However, Bond does not always conform to this for logical reasons. An example of this in Bond’s text would be:

Johanna: Go not so soon (*da-DUM da-DUM*). What, will you leave me so? (*da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM*)

Anthony: I go to make us one (*da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM*).

Johanna: Then take this ring in token of my love (*da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM*)²⁰

Mrs. Lovett and the other lower-class characters speak in non-rhythmic dialogue (which, ironically, possesses its own specific out-of-sync rhythm). These characters employ more informal, colloquial language, for example:

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Larry A. Brown, ‘Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street,’ *Sondheim Notes*, <<http://larryavisbrown.homestead.com/files/sondheim/sweeneytodd.htm>>, [accessed 17 June 2014], (para. 17 of 42).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Stephen Banfield, *Sondheim’s Broadway Musicals* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 283.

²⁰ Bond, p. 17.

Mrs. Lovett: ... I found your razors upstairs when I was clearing out—to pay for the funeral, like. But I thought I'd hang on to them. (*She makes up to him*) I remembered how you treasured them, you see, and I always had a fondness for you and hoped you might come back one day and ... Well, never mind that for the present.²¹

Sondheim adopted this style of writing in his musical approach to these characters. For example, Mrs. Lovett's musical themes are almost always written in patter form, while Anthony and Johanna sing in more legitimate, lyrical styles. (Musical characterisation will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 3).

It appears, upon study of the two texts that Sondheim and Wheeler were careful in approaching the adaptation of Bond's play for the Broadway stage. In fact, very few drastic changes were made, as one can see in comparing various sections from both texts. For example, Mrs. Lovett's dialogue in her first scene in Bond's play found its way into Sondheim's 'musicalisation' of this scene – 'The Worst Pies in London' as seen below:

Bond's text:

Mrs Lovett's pishop

Todd enters

Todd (*calling*) Are you all asleep? Some food, here.

Mrs Lovett enters

Mrs Lovett Are you a ghost?

Todd starts for the door, fearing he has been recognized

Hey, don't go running out the minute you get in. I only took you for a ghost 'cos you're the first customer I've seen for a fortnight. Sit you down.

Todd sits, warily

You'd think we had the plague, the way people avoid this shop. A pie, was it?

Todd A pie—yes. And some ale.

²¹ Bond, p. 5.

Mrs Lovett (*getting the pie*) Mind you, you can't hardly blame them. There's no denying these are the most tasteless pies in London. I should know, I make 'em. (*She puts the pie on the table, then flicks a bit of dirt off the crust*) Ugh! What's that?²²

Sondheim's adaptation:

(... *After a beat, TODD moves toward the shop, hesitates and then enters. MRS. LOVETT does not notice him until his shadow passes across her. She looks up, knife in air, and screams, freezing him in his tracks*)

MRS. LOVETT: A customer!

(*TODD has started out in alarm. MRS. LOVETT sings*)

Wait! What's yer rush? What's yer hurry?

(*She sticks the knife into the counter*)

You gave me such a —

(*She wipes her hands on her apron*)

Fright. I thought you was a ghost.
Half a minute, can'tcher?
Sit! Sit ye down!

(*Forcing him into a chair*)

Sit!
All I meant is that I
Haven't seen a customer for weeks.
Did you come here for a pie, sir?

(*TODD nods. She flicks a bit of dust off a pie with her rag*)

Do forgive me if me head's a little vague —
Ugh!

(*She plucks something off a pie, holds it up*)

What is *that*?
But you'd think we had the plague —

(*She drops it on the floor and stamps on it*)

From the way that people —

(*She flicks something off a pie with her finger*)

Keep avoiding —

²² Bond, p. 3.

(Spotting it moving)

No you don't!

(She smacks it with her hand)

Heaven knows I try, sir!

(Lifts her hand, looks at it)

Ick!

(She wipes it on the edge of the counter)

But there's no one comes in even to inhale —

Tsk!

(She blows the last dust off the pie as she brings it to him)

Right you are, sir. Would you like a drop of ale?

(TODD nods)

Mind you, I can't hardly blame them —

(Pouring a tankard of ale)

These are probably the worst pies in London.

I know why nobody cares to take them —

I *should* know,

I make them.

But good? No,

The worst pies in London —

Even that's polite.

The worst pies in London —

If you doubt it, take a bite.²³

What we can see above is that Sondheim cleverly omits most of Sweeney's asides, and lines spoken to Mrs. Lovett in the scene, and instead, has Lovett sing all of the lyrics as if one train of thought simply leads into the next, without a pause or break. The decision not to separate Mrs. Lovett's dialogue here immediately makes the text more musical and continuous. One of the most obvious and critical changes Sondheim made to Bond's play, was the incorporation of an on-stage chorus: a group of singers depicted as the working class citizens of London who also act as narrators throughout the entire show, continuously commenting on the action. (The musical and dramatic use of the chorus is examined further in Chapter 3).

²³ Stephen, Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1991), p. 12, 13.

Themes and concepts

Sweeney Todd, unlike many Broadway works of the time, deals with many serious themes such as homicide, revenge, rape, injustice, cannibalism, all linked to a consistent metaphorical commentary on the varying classes in London at the time of the show's setting. Hal Prince's original concept and vision for the first Broadway production in 1979 was heavily influenced by the idea of the Industrial Revolution and its impact on London in the 1840s.²⁴ The show became an analogy for the audience: a lens through which to view the suffering of human beings. Prince's vision also evidently had a critical impact on the design of the show: Eugene Lee's set incorporated a gigantic dilapidated steel factory that was on stage for the entire evening. Prince was convinced that this factory 'turns out Sweeney Todds,'²⁵ in other words, it was this on-stage world that was responsible for creating the sense of defeat and hopelessness in people, strongly represented in all of the characters, but most importantly in Sweeney himself. To further comment on the notion of the Industrial Age, Todd is referred to at various points 'in mechanistic terms: "Sweeney pondered and Sweeney planned / Like a perfect machine 'e planned.'"²⁶ The character has, like his fellow Londoners, become a victim of Man, and of Life itself. The piercing sound of the factory whistle that haunts the show at various points (most frequently, when Todd kills one of his victims) also lends itself to the working class feel of the original production, representing the 'hard, pervasive sound of authority, of oppressive economic power.'²⁷

²⁴ Brown, para. 35 of 42.

²⁵ Brown, para. 37 of 42.

²⁶ Brown, para. 38 of 42.

²⁷ Howard Kissel, 'Sweeney Todd,' *Women's Wear Daily*, 12 March, 1979.

The show ultimately addresses the notion of serial killers in society. Do all serial killers have motives? Are they all ‘demons’? What psychological complexities have led to their deeds? *Sweeney Todd* makes the audience question this and makes one ponder about the path to murder and what drives such a character to such a place. These subversive ideas would have been more challenging to an audience in 1979, than they would be today. Although *Sweeney* opened on Broadway to generally positive reviews, audiences were quite astounded and, at times, disgusted, at the themes and characters it was suggesting existed. Today, our society is culturally and socially more comfortable with violence and gore, because of the casual depiction of such items on television and in films.

Overall, it appears that, from judging the origins of the story of Sweeney Todd, Sondheim and Wheeler owe much of their genius to Christopher Bond and his 1973 version of the legend. It was Bond who introduced additional characters and subplots to ensure that the audience was not going to simply see a one-dimensional serial killer on stage, murdering citizens of London for two hours. This foundational groundwork created by Bond in his play gave way to an even deeper understanding of the material by Sondheim and Wheeler, who, through the use of music and expression of song, managed to delve even further into the emotional and psychological depths of the characters. The next two chapters will focus more prominently on the music of *Sweeney Todd*, but always in relation to the drama and characters of the show. Thus, the discussion of the adaptation and musicalisation of Bond’s play by Sondheim as composer-lyricist will be further brought to light in the examination of the musical material of the show in depth.

CHAPTER 2

This chapter focuses on two primary aspects of the score of *Sweeney Todd*: the apparent film influences evident in the music and structure of the show, and the use of the *Dies Irae* theme. Ultimately, the show's connection to different genres is addressed, with a commentary on the interesting operatic and musical theatre qualities of the work.

The influence of film

Sondheim has stated that *Sweeney Todd*, subtitled 'a musical thriller,' is a response to his fond love of horror films (in particular the film scores of Bernard Herrmann), and his attempt to scare an audience,²⁸ and this is achieved by the constant use of music, both vocal and instrumental, throughout the work. Sondheim has admitted that the work is in fact an homage to Herrmann's style of composing.²⁹ The use of underscore and background music is critical to the plot of the show, as they add to the tension felt at various moments. Hal Prince's cinematic style of direction for the original Broadway production enhanced the filmic feel of the show, with his use of 'cross-cutting,'³⁰ which adds to the notion that this work may indeed be informally called 'a movie for the stage.'³¹

It has been acknowledged in the past that the key functions of music in film are to comment on the visual aspects, and also to heighten the emotion and intensity of the scene in question.³² In this sense, it seems clear as to why Sondheim was attracted by the medium

²⁸ Stephen Sondheim, *Finishing the Hat* (New York: Knopf, 2010), p. 332.

²⁹ Horowitz, p. 72.

³⁰ A film term used to describe the focus given to simultaneous action.

³¹ Sondheim, p. 332.

³² Douglas W. Gallez, 'Theories of Film Music,' *Cinema Journal*, 9 (1970), pp. 40-47 (p. 40).

of film, and was inspired by its use of music while creating the score for *Sweeney Todd*. The continuous use of music in *Sweeney* keeps the emotions of the characters on stage in focus at all times, ensuring that the story never falters. The music enhances the story, and creates an extension of the atmosphere, emotion and mood created at various points in the show. Film and theatre composer Maurice Jaubert once commented that: ‘The function of the film musician ... [is] to feel the exact moment when the image escapes from strict realism and calls for the poetic extension of music.’³³ This, in some ways, can be linked to the ‘logistics’ of a character singing in a musical. It has often been said that a character in a musical sings because the spoken word can no longer capture the emotion they are feeling. In film, music is used to intensify a character’s emotions and thoughts, when dialogue and imagery can no longer be an accurate representation of such feelings.

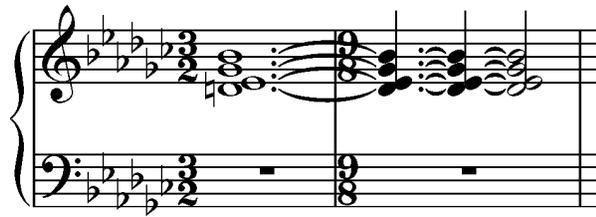
It is clear that Bernard Herrmann and Sondheim have a number of similarities as composers: they are both mavericks, making a mark on the musical world with their distinctive compositional voices, Sondheim, with his unusual influences as seen in *Sweeney*, and Herrmann, with his gritty reinvigoration of the American film score. A particularly significant Herrmann reference in the *Sweeney Todd* score is that of the inclusion of the so-called ‘Bernard Herrmann Chord,’ that is a chord used by Herrmann in each of his film scores. It has been identified as a tonic minor triad with added major seventh, with the seventh usually appearing in the bass of the chord. This chord is hidden in several of the *Sweeney* songs, including, for example, in the final chord at the end of one of the chorus refrains in ‘God, That’s Good!’ (Example 1).

³³ Gallez, p. 45.



Ex. 1: 'God, That's Good!', b. 70-73

The chord also appears in the reprise of 'Johanna,' sung by Judge Turpin, noticeably in the introduction to the song (Example 2).



Ex. 2: 'Johanna (Judge Turpin)', b. 1-1a

Another cinematic influence in the show is the use of underscore.³⁴ It is generally understood that, in the theatre, especially with a work as dramatic and large as *Sweeney*, an audience is in danger of 'remembering' that they are in a theatre if given the opportunity to do so. Therefore, underscore is a clever way of keeping the audience's attention and the suspense continuing throughout. It also made the original production more intimate, since

³⁴ Music that occurs under dialogue or accompanies moments of physical action.

Prince's direction was so lavish, and far from Sondheim's original 'chamber' vision for the piece.³⁵

A key use of underscore occurs in the final sequence of the show, at the end of Act 2 (Example 3). Anthony brings Johanna to Todd's parlour as a place of refuge, with neither realising the familial connection between Todd and Johanna. When Todd enters in a rage, Johanna attempts to escape. The scene is tense, and the music illustrates this wonderfully, with its quick, frantic passages of semiquavers and quavers. The use of accidentals, chromatics and changing time signatures are all typical musical features of horror film music underscore, certainly of Herrmann's time, where tension may be characterised by swiftly moving passages to ensure a feeling of discomfort. Note too the pause markings, that make the audience feel uncomfortable, as if we do not know what to expect next.

³⁵ The original intimate vision for the piece was later realised by chamber-style revivals of the show in 1993 at London's National Theatre directed by Declan Donnellan, and in 2005 on Broadway directed by John Doyle.

chapter). This point is justified further in the following discussion of the use of the *Dies Irae* (Roman Catholic Mass for the Dead) theme in the score.

The *Dies Irae*

Sondheim's use of the *Dies Irae* theme most likely comes from the influence, once again, of film music composers, since the theme has been used for many film scores, including Gottfried Huppertz's *Metropolis* (1927),³⁶ and Herrmann's *Citizen Kane* (1941).³⁷

Interestingly, most composers who use the *Dies Irae* do not address the use of it. It is, a lot of the time, a humorous homage to the melody that composers simply incorporate because of its well-known nature in the musical world. In *Metropolis*, for example, Huppertz uses the melody in a scene involving Death and the statues of The Seven Deadly Sins in a cathedral setting. The melody accompanies the haunting imagery and cinematography used in this scene. In *Citizen Kane*, the use of the melody is more related to character. Herrmann links the music to Kane's morality and the condemnation of his actions during the film.

While film composers have utilised the melody in their compositional processes, the chant has not been given the same attention in the musical theatre world. This is perhaps due to the fact that traditionally, musical theatre works are made up of separate musical numbers and songs, whereas films thrive on the continuous use of underscore and thematic background music. Sondheim's use of the theme relates to character development (Sweeney) and to the show's filmic influences, indicating a contemporary and unique use

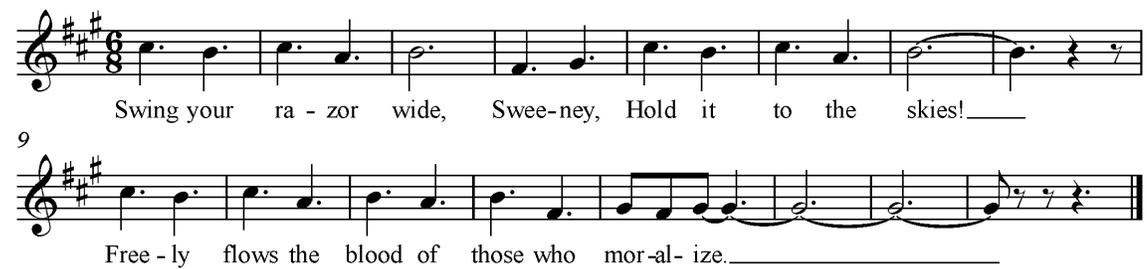
³⁶ Michael Long, *Beautiful Monsters: Imagining the Classic in Musical Media* (California: University of California Press, 2008), p. 194.

³⁷ Christine Lee Gengaro, *Listening to Stanley Kubrick: The Music in His Films* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2012), p. 194.



Ex. 6: 'The Ballad of Sweeney Todd,' b. 5-6

Notes 1 to 5 of the chant are seen again when the chorus sings together for the first time in the opening 'Ballad' ('Swing your razor wide, Sweeney...') (Example 7).



Ex. 7: 'The Ballad of Sweeney Todd,' b. 59-74

In 'My Friends,' the first duet between Sweeney and Mrs. Lovett, notes 1 to 4 of the chant appear first in an inversion ('these are my friends') and then in the original order ('how they glisten') (Example 8).



Ex. 8: 'My Friends,' b. 3-6

While the first two phrases (or first eight notes) of the *Dies Irae* are widely acknowledged as being integral to the *Sweeney* score, we are generally led to believe that Sondheim

abandoned the remainder of the chant. However, notes 12 to 15 in the third phrase of the chant appear in another theme, which occurs at the beginning of the published Prelude (Example 9) and again in ‘Epiphany’ (‘never see Johanna...’) (Example 10). The use of the theme here relates to the character of the Beggar Woman, and her ‘Alms’ leitmotif, which is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.



Ex. 9: ‘Prelude,’ b. 1



Ex. 10: ‘Epiphany,’ b. 41-44

The show’s connections to film leads me to another discussion of the work’s operatic tendencies, and how these both collide with and complement *Sweeney*’s position as a piece of musical theatre, written for the Broadway stage.

Questions of Genre: Opera or Musical?

Sweeney Todd has been described as being operatic or indeed as being an opera in the past, most likely due to both the almost sung-through nature of the score, and the classical inflections that the music possesses. Sondheim admits that, although not an admirer of

opera in general,⁴⁰ it was this genre that first came to mind, when thinking about adapting Bond's play for the musical stage, most likely due to the tragic nature of the story. In fact, the composer had initially spoken to John Dexter, a director at the Metropolitan Opera, about whether or not the piece would work as an opera.⁴¹ Critics have suggested that the show belongs in the opera catalogue because of its 'mosaic construction, rapidly shifting moods, recurrent leitmotifs and complex ensembles,' and that the work might consequently be more at home in the hands of an experienced opera company such as English National Opera rather than on the Broadway stage.⁴² These suggestions eventually led to the first stagings of the show by opera companies (Houston Grand Opera and New York City Opera) in 1984, both featuring direction by Hal Prince.⁴³ Sondheim showed a positive attitude towards these productions, stating that '[the show] is really an operetta, it requires operetta voices, that is to say the needs for the singers are slightly greater than the needs on Broadway but nowhere as great as the needs in grand opera.'⁴⁴

Sondheim uses an operatic style of songwriting in the score both in a mindful, purposeful, serious manner ('Epiphany' and 'Green Finch and Linnet Bird,' for example), and in the form of parody or pastiche. For instance, in the first act marketplace scene, Pirelli sings in an overtly operatic fashion, and adopts the stereotypical singing style of an Italian tenor. The dramatic, over-the-top style of singing by this character is used as a subtextual commentary on the character's hidden identity (he is a conman). Also, two of the show's principal choral musical numbers, 'Pirelli's Miracle Elixir' and 'God, That's

⁴⁰ Block, p. 352.

⁴¹ Banfield, p. 286.

⁴² Banfield, p. 287.

⁴³ *Sweeney Todd* has since been presented globally by various opera companies including Lyric Opera of Chicago, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, and at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, among others.

⁴⁴ Banfield, p. 290.

Good!’ both parody traditional opera chorus scenes. Sondheim further complicates proceedings, with Todd and Lovett both executing different singing styles, with the former’s vocal style bordering much more on the operatic and ‘classical,’ and the latter’s bordering on musical theatre. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Ultimately, what brings *Sweeney* out of the operatic world is its short but key amount of spoken dialogue. With some exceptions,⁴⁵ opera is traditionally sung throughout with no spoken dialogue. *Sweeney* does not officially utilise the operatic tradition of ‘recitative’⁴⁶ (although some of the sung sections at times resemble the technique), but instead conforms to the musical theatre tradition of spoken dialogue, followed by a song. What separates the show from other musicals is, as discussed earlier, its clear use of continuous background music or underscore, which links it to both opera and film. Unusually, the final moments of the show are oddly silent (the underscore stops), as Tobias lifts the razor to kill Sweeney, prior to the final ‘Ballad’ being sung.

To make a distinction between operas and musicals, the key feature to examine, according to author Geoffrey Block, is ‘whether *significant* dramatic moments are sung or spoken.’⁴⁷ Block draws upon a number of examples to further his point: in *Tristan und Isolde*, Isolde must sing to express her emotions after her lover dies. In *West Side Story* (another musical which has operatic connotations), Maria does not sing, but rather speaks, after her loved one, Tony, dies. If *West Side Story* were truly an opera, Maria would ‘have

⁴⁵ Most opera buffa or comic operas, e.g. *Carmen*, *The Magic Flute*, *Peter Grimes*, and the Gilbert and Sullivan light operas, contain portions of spoken dialogue, whereas more dramatic operas, e.g. works by Wagner, are generally sung through.

⁴⁶ In an opera or similar musical stage work, where words are sung in the style of speech.

⁴⁷ Block, p. 350.

no choice' but to sing.⁴⁸ In the case of *Sweeney Todd*, Todd discovers in the final scene that he has unknowingly killed his wife, disguised as the Beggar Woman. In simultaneously discovering the deceit of Mrs. Lovett, and the body of his dead wife, both principal characters sing to each other, in a dramatically and musically operatic style. After killing Lovett, Todd sings once again to himself, about the loss of his wife ('There was a barber and his wife...'). This may indeed point *Sweeney* more in the direction of opera than musical. Howard Kissel has argued that 'if "operatic" simply means "the highest form of theater, a way of capturing all the energy, all the emotional rhythms of the drama in music" ... then *Sweeney Todd* is indeed operatic.'⁴⁹

Ultimately, it is clear that the curious crossover of styles and genres evident in *Sweeney Todd* are all linked by Sondheim's innate skill for writing for character. A discussion of the work's filmic and operatic influences cannot be addressed without mentioning the central idea of character writing. The use of leitmotifs, as we will see in the next chapter, is a concept seen frequently in both opera and film, and now, Sondheim has introduced the technique to the realm of musical theatre, in order to further develop his characters. Chapter 3 begins with a detailed musical and textual analysis of the two principal roles, Sweeney Todd and Mrs. Lovett, before delving into the use of leitmotifs and the role of the chorus in the show.

⁴⁸ Block, p. 350.

⁴⁹ Joanne Gordon, *Art Isn't Easy* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1990; repr. 1992), p. 253.

CHAPTER 3

The topic of musical characterisation is a popular choice of examination when taking the musicals of Stephen Sondheim into consideration. This composer is most certainly the most musically and dramatically aware of all musical theatre writers where character is concerned. Actors—specifically performers not overly experienced in the musical theatre field—have for decades expressed their joy and fascination regarding Sondheim’s genius in writing for character, as it provides them with so much weighted performing material, emotionally and psychologically. Tempi, key signatures, time signatures, rhythm, dynamics, melody, and text all interplay with each other in the songs of Stephen Sondheim to ensure an emotional journey is cemented for the character in question. These traits are discussed in detail below, with the roles of Sweeney Todd and Mrs. Lovett, and the chorus.

Sweeney Todd

Sweeney Todd is the protagonist and the principal male character of the musical. Once known as barber Benjamin Barker, the character returns to London at the start of the story, under the pseudonym Sweeney Todd, in order to seek revenge on the Judge and Beadle, who mistreated him. Although Todd is essentially a man who carries out immoral actions (namely homicide), he is, as discussed in Chapter 1, written with complicated motivations in Sondheim’s musical. The audience is encouraged to warm to the character and to see him as misunderstood rather than evil. Todd is characterised dramatically as a man tortured by society and unjustly punished by the law, further affected by the loss of his wife and daughter. These emotions stir in him a need for vengeance and a thirst for blood, which

drives him to near-insanity. This trait is justified, however, by his obvious love for his family, and by the depiction of the man he once was. What begins as a reason to piece his family back together, soon becomes a maniacal killing spree that slowly allows the character's emotions and psyche to disintegrate before the audience.

Sweeney Todd is written, fundamentally, as a traditional leading man, with elements of the character's musical personality owing their roots to both musical theatre and opera, further emphasising the crossover of genres that the work possesses. The role is a typical portrait of the conventional tragic 'leading man' type that was established in the dramatic operas of Verdi, Puccini and Wagner, but also in the tradition of the dramatic musical theatre founded by Rodgers and Hammerstein. Indeed, the character's vocal style is relatable to the alpha male stock leading men role types in the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon, such as Curly and Jud (*Oklahoma!*), Billy Bigelow (*Carousel*), and Emile De Becque (*South Pacific*).

Sondheim wrote the role with a trained musical theatre type of bass-baritone voice in mind.⁵⁰ The composer develops the vocal style of the character over the course of the work, as the story and character grow. Thus, the musical characteristics of the role accompany the dramatic aspects of the story in interesting ways. Todd sings a wide range of musical styles throughout the piece, including recitative, lullaby, aria, and musical comedy. The rather uneven, unpredictable musical style of the role reflects the character's mentally and emotionally unhinged nature. There are also many moments in the show where Todd is quiet and simply reacts to other characters and their actions. This mainly

⁵⁰ The earlier musicals by composers such as Rodgers and Hammerstein, Lerner and Loewe, Frank Loesser, etc., often required their principal characters to be classically trained singers because of the vocal demands. Secondary roles tended to verge on the comical side, where singing, or at least, a trained voice, was not deemed as important.

occurs in the musical numbers of Mrs. Lovett, to be discussed at a later stage. Todd's silence heightens the intensity and never-ending psychological complexity of the role.

When we first encounter Todd in 'No Place Like London,' he is brooding and cynical about the world, as suggested by the lyric he sings to the naïve Anthony: 'You are young, / Life has been kind to you. / You will learn.'⁵¹ The music, having begun with an optimistic sound, now mellows, and darkens, suggesting Todd's complex mood. In this first musical number, Todd sings in a quasi-recitative style, so that it appears that the character is half-speaking, half-singing. It simply would be inappropriate for Todd to sing in a full-throated manner at this early stage, for he appears to be nervous and uneasy. The character returns to this recitative-style of singing at various points in the show, however it is mostly heard in this first musical number, signifying the dramatic intensity of the character at this point. Although part of this song builds to an emotional, fuller sounding climax, the character generally sings in his lower register (Example 11).

mp

There's a whole in the world like a great black

2
pit, And the ver-min of the world in-hab-it it, And its mor-als are-n't

3
worth what a pig could spit, And it goes by the name of Lond-on.

4

Ex. 11: 'No Place Like London,' b. 202-204

Sweeney next sings when he discovers his old set of silver straight razors from his barbering youth. Now, returning to them fifteen years later, he fondly cradles them and

⁵¹ Sondheim, Wheeler, p. 7.

sings emotively, as if reunited with an old acquaintance. Todd, while clutching the razors, realises that these will be his tools to take revenge on those that mistreated him. In this sense, they represent both his past and his future. It will be the first of two instances in the show where the character sings hauntingly to an object. The second is in ‘God, That’s Good!,’ where he sings to his new barber’s chair, another item reflecting the theme of vengeance. ‘My Friends,’ the song Sweeney sings to his razors, is written in a minor key, and bears a simple rhythmic pattern, much like a lullaby. Sondheim is keen, therefore, that the song should have a trance-like, hypnotic quality, as opposed to the earlier style of conversational singing that we saw in ‘No Place Like London.’ Todd begins to show a different, slowly developing, more lyrical vocal style here. His mentality has softened too, upon discovering the razors, and the fact that the song resembles a lullaby suggests to the audience that we are perhaps, seeing a glimpse of the man he once was. The gently descending melody symbolises Todd’s growing confidence as he lives in hope of being reunited with his wife and daughter (Example 12). The irony in this particular song is also startling to our ears: Sweeney is singing a lullaby to his would-be weapons of murder.

p sempre dolce

These are my friends. See how they glis- ten. See this one shine, How he

7

Piu mosso
mp

smiles in the light, My_ friend, My faith-ful friend.

Ex. 12: ‘My Friends,’ b. 3-14

The most effective use of musical writing for the character of Sweeney Todd occurs near the end of the first act, in the song ‘Epiphany.’ The song is performed directly after

Todd's opportunity of slashing the Judge's throat is marred, and his emotions are on the edge. Truly written as a sung soliloquy, or aria,⁵² 'Epiphany' gives Sondheim an opportunity to merge all of Todd's vocal styles in one piece, amplifying the character's shattered mind at this point in the story (Example 13). The composer conveys Todd's darting thought process, as he switches from loving father and husband ('My Lucy lies in ashes' / And I'll never see my girl again...⁵³) to deranged murderer ('I will have vengeance, / I will have salvation!'⁵⁴) within seconds. What begins as a personal attack on those around him soon transforms into a universal anthem about the brutality of capitalism, where the only escape is death ('...the lives of the wicked should be – / Made brief. / For the rest of us, death / Will be a relief – / We all deserve to die'⁵⁵).

dolce *cantabile*

I will have ven - geance, I will have sal - va - tion!

5 *f*

Who, sir? You, sir? No one in the chair, come on! Come on! Swee-ney's wait-ing!

8

I want you bleed-ers! You, sir! An-y-bod-y! Gen-tle-men, now don't be shy! Not

11 *mp* *cresc. poco a poco* *ff*

one man no, Nor ten men, Nor a hun - dred can as-suage me, I will have you!

Ex. 13: 'Epiphany,' b. 50-64

⁵² The song is really Todd's only solo number apart from a couple of lines sung by Mrs. Lovett at the start. All of his other musical material is shared with other characters.

⁵³ Sondheim, Wheeler, p. 80.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Sondheim, Wheeler, p. 79.

The final lines of ‘Epiphany’ show the use of the role’s higher vocal register as the song comes to a climax. The character never quite achieves this sense of vocal power in the show before or after this section of ‘Epiphany,’ as this is truly when he is at his most emotional. The final lyric, ‘I’m alive at last, / And I’m full of joy!,’ suggests a triumphant state of mind in the character, as he builds to the final F[♯] (Example 14).

a tempo *cres. poco a poco*

And my Lu - cy lies in ash - es And I'll nev - er see my girl a - gain, But the
 5 *f* work waits, I'm a - live at last, *ff* And I'm full of joy!_____

Ex. 14: ‘Epiphany,’ b. 71-80

Mrs. Lovett

Mrs. Nellie Lovett is the female lead character in the show, and partner-in-crime of Sweeney Todd for much of the story. A resourceful woman driven by opportunity and practicality, she constantly manipulates and uses the other characters to get what she wants. When she first meets Sweeney, she recognises him as Benjamin Barker, and proposes that he move in above her pie shop, and work as a barber again, in order to exact revenge on the Judge. What initially appears as an act of kindness soon emerges as an act of obsession: Lovett is deeply in love with Todd, although he is not aware of her feelings. She hides her emotions, instead teaming up with him, hoping that their working relationship will eventually blossom into a romantic one.

Although Lovett is initially presented as the archetypal harmless gossip, it is clear that her lack of any redeeming qualities leads us to believe that she is the true villain of the piece. She begins as a seemingly simple, chatty, disorganised woman, but as the show continues, she becomes increasingly evil, manipulative and immoral. It is Mrs. Lovett who instigates all of Sweeney's actions: it is she who gives him his razors, who cautions him to prolong his revenge, who concocts the plan of cannibalism, who proposes marriage to him, who heartlessly locks Tobias in the bake house, and who, ultimately, from the start, forms the path to her and Sweeney's death, by deceiving him about her knowledge of his wife's existence. What makes all of these manipulative elements to her character so utterly convincing and interesting is that most of these moments are musicalised. The songs 'Poor Thing,' 'Wait,' 'A Little Priest,' 'By the Sea,' 'Not While I'm Around' and the final musical sequence all involve Mrs. Lovett singing, while planning her own motivations.

Mrs. Lovett is written, both textually and musically, as a foil to Sweeney, to highlight the differences in the nature of the characters: Todd is quiet, pensive, suffering in silence, singing internally, and emotively, while Lovett is loud, brash, and often singing while carrying out an action or task. Vocally, Sweeney, as discussed, sings in a more legitimate, lyrical style with operatic and classical tendencies, whereas Lovett is written with a more musical comedy style in mind, albeit with more dramatic dimensions. Her musical sequences often involve quick, patter-type passages, and comic moments.⁵⁶ The musical comedy style of the character's singing is really the only representation of such a

⁵⁶ It is interesting that, though the score of *Sweeney Todd* features many parallels to opera, the role of Mrs. Lovett is truly uncharacteristic of any operatic writing style.

style in the show, since Sondheim infused more classical and operatic inflections into the singing of the other characters, Todd, Anthony, Johanna, Pirelli, and the Beadle.⁵⁷

In Mrs. Lovett's introductory musical number, 'The Worst Pies in London,' Sondheim establishes one of the character's key features, that is, the use of gesture in song. In 'Worst Pies,' Lovett chats to Todd without stopping; all the while she is baking a meat pie. The composer has written into the score each action that Lovett must perform, at times, in perfect conjunction with the rhythm of the music (Example 15).⁵⁸ Sondheim has remarked that the impulsive, unpredictable nature of the character led him to write a song with irregular form, that includes a refrain-like section ('These are probably the worst pies in London...') as well as a fast patter, recitative-type verse. He avoided conventional metre and rhyme, to further express the wandering mind of Lovett.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ The different singing styles of the two principal characters has led to the diverse pairing of performers from different worlds to play these roles in various productions of the show. Opera singers Bryn Terfel and Rod Gilfry have played the title role in the past opposite actresses from the worlds of musical theatre and film, e.g. Maria Friedman, Caroline O'Connor, Emma Thompson, etc. The role of Mrs. Lovett has generally not been performed satisfactorily by opera singers, as the heavy 'trained' sound of singing of the mezzo-sopranos or contraltos who have undertaken the role has often clouded the comic and the dramatic aspects of the character. The role of Sweeney benefits from a trained singer who can also act, however the role of Lovett, which demands a great skill of comic timing for instance, benefits even greater from an experienced actress who can also sing. The dramatic weight involved with both roles is simply too great to entrust to singers alone.

⁵⁸ Interestingly, the 2005 Broadway revival omits all of Lovett's pie-making action in this song, focusing instead, solely on the text.

⁵⁹ Sondheim, p. 339.

(Slams a lump of dough on the counter and begins pounding it)

Meat what it is (*grunt*) when you get it (*grunt*) Nev-er (*grunt*) thought I'd live to see the day men-'d think it was a

3
Treat find-ing poor (*grunt*) an - i - mals (*grunt*) wot are dy - ing in the street. Mrs. Moo-ney has a

5
pie shop, Does a bus - 'ness, but I no - tice some - thing weird: Late - ly all her neigh - bors'

7
cats have dis - ap - peared. Have to hand it to her. (*grunt*) Wot I calls (*grunt*) en - ter - prise, (*Rolls the dough*)

9
(*grunt*) Pop - ping pus - sies in - to pies. Would n't do in my shop. Just the thought of it's e - (*Pounds the dough*)

11
nough to make you sick. And I'm tell - ing you, them pus - sy - cats is quick. (*Again*) *rit.*

Ex. 15: 'The Worst Pies in London,' b. 39-50

The song 'Poor Thing' immediately follows 'Worst Pies,' and involves Mrs. Lovett describing to Todd the events of his wife Lucy's rape. Lovett's passionate retelling of the story is perfectly matched with the music. The vocal line still carries a conversational style, but the music rises in intensity, as the story becomes more gruesome. The song 'Wait' involves Lovett attempting to calm the anxious Sweeney, as he impatiently waits for the arrival of the Beadle. Here, Lovett is practical ('All good things come to those who can wait') but sly and manipulative, as she almost hypnotises Sweeney into a more relaxed mood. The song also provides an ample opportunity for Sondheim to develop the vocal range of Lovett, who, unusually so, uses her higher register and overall, a more lyrical

style.⁶⁰ The example depicted below best shows the emotional arc of the song. The line ‘Now goes quickly. / See, now it’s past!’ referring to the passing of time, and the irrelevance of one moment and its difference from another, is the central message of the song, and is perfectly measured in both music and text. The music rises in intensity in an upward scale motion as the passing of time is vocally illustrated (Example 16).

Slow, love, slow... Time's so fast... Now goes quick - ly. See,
 4 now it's past!... Soon will come, Soon will last. Wait.

Ex. 16: ‘Wait,’ b. 68-74

After the dramatic explosiveness of ‘Epiphany,’ the finale to Act I, ‘A Little Priest,’ provides a broad musical comedy opportunity for both Mrs. Lovett and Sweeney. The decision to end the first act with a humorous musical number was a conscious decision by Sondheim, who was keen to assure the audience that comedy was just as important as tragedy in this interpretation of the story. The duet represents the musical consummation of the two characters at this point in the show. Up until now, they have been singing more or less on their own.⁶¹ The song, therefore, has subtextual sexual undercurrents that can be addressed through the music. A disturbing romance, it appears, is blossoming before our

⁶⁰ The role calls for a mezzo soprano or contralto, with a stronger use of the singer’s lower register and ‘belt’ voice.

⁶¹ Although ‘My Friends’ is technically a duet, neither Todd nor Lovett sing directly *to* one another, nor do they acknowledge the other one’s singing, as they do in ‘A Little Priest,’ etc.

eyes suggested by the danse macabre waltz rhythm.⁶² The song also shows Todd's constant thirst for vengeance, and Lovett's practical opportunistic traits, subtly hidden in refrain-like passages, where the characters come together to celebrate their new plan:

TODD:
The history of the world, my love—

MRS. LOVETT:
Save a lot of graves,
Do a lot of relatives favors...

TODD:
—is those below serving those up above.

MRS. LOVETT:
Everybody shaves,
So there should be plenty of flavors...

TODD:
How gratifying for once to know—

BOTH:
—that those above will serve those down below!⁶³

One of the finest sections of vocal writing in the score appears in the final scene, as Todd confronts Lovett, after realising that he has just killed his wife. Lovett attempts to cover her tracks, and explain to him her reasoning for initially deceiving him. Musically, Sondheim heightens the drama here with references to the two characters' previously heard musical numbers. Lovett sings a portion of 'Poor Thing' while Todd returns to a theme he had sung in 'Epiphany.' Lovett then picks up the 'Epiphany' theme, as Todd sings a section of 'A Little Priest,' before hurling her to her death into the huge bake oven. The counterpoint and collision of themes here is extremely effective, and leads me to my next point: the use of leitmotifs within the score.

⁶² Paul M. Puccio, Scott F. Stoddart, "It Takes Two": A Duet on Duets in *Follies* and *Sweeney Todd*, in *Reading Stephen Sondheim: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Sandor Goodhart (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 121-129 (p. 125).

⁶³ Sondheim, Wheeler, p. 86.

Leitmotifs

The specific type of detailed motif work used by Sondheim in the *Sweeney* score is innovative for a musical, since the technique is generally linked more to opera and film. Each character has his or her own theme (however subtle or subconscious) that is used, re-used, adapted, and developed throughout the work. The appearance of a musical leitmotif may refer to the appearance of a character, or may, on a more abstract level, reflect a character's train of thought or mindset at a particular moment.⁶⁴ Among the many leitmotifs in the score are three primary themes that will be discussed now: Sweeney's 'mad' motif, Mrs. Lovett's 'when you get it' motif, and the Beggar Woman's 'Alms' motif.

Sweeney's leitmotif is generally heard in moments of madness, and consists of a series of intervals (seconds, fourths, fifths and sixths), normally played in quaver motion, but at times, in semiquaver motion. The swift pace of the melody relates to the cogs turning in Sweeney's head. It has also been described by the composer as his 'Stravinsky motif,' not because Stravinsky actually used this theme in any of his works, but rather that 'it has a Stravinsky texture,'⁶⁵ with its high-pitched, dissonant sound. The theme is heard prominently in the accompaniments of 'No Place Like London' (Example 17), 'Epiphany' (Example 18), and in a sparer, more static manner in 'God, That's Good!' (Example 19). It is also seen in some of the incidental and underscore music (Example 20) throughout the score.

⁶⁴ Banfield, p. 303.

⁶⁵ Horowitz, p. 128.



Ex. 17: 'No Place Like London,' b. 256-257

MRS. LOVETT: All this running and shouting. What is it now, dear?

TODD: I had him. . . and then. . .

MRS. LOVETT: The sailor busted in. I saw them both running

mf

Ex. 18: 'Epiphany,' b. 1-3

MRS. LOVETT: (*To customer*) Ex - cuse me.

(*To Tobias*) Dear, see to the cus-tom-ers.

TODD: (*Leaning out of the window*) Psst! Psst!

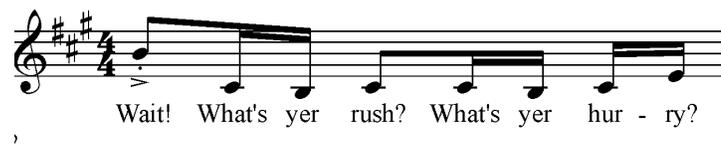
mp

Ex. 19: 'God, That's Good!,' b. 92-93

ff

Ex. 20: 'Pirelli Death Underscore,' b. 72

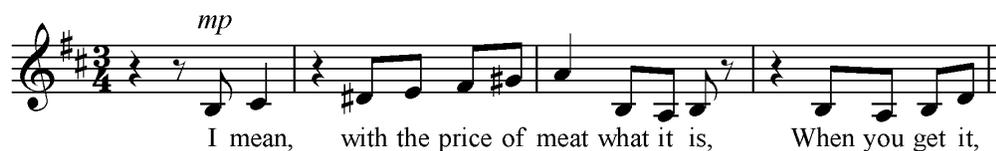
Mrs. Lovett's leitmotif is characterised by the recurring appearance of a descending minor seventh interval. First heard in the abrupt opening phrase of 'The Worst Pies in London' (Example 21), the theme reappears in the same song, in the reiteration of the opening section, this time with the text 'when you get it' (Example 22). Having been heard again in a slower, gentler fashion in 'My Friends,' Lovett repeats the motif in 'A Little Priest' with the same words ('when you get it'), as heard in 'Worst Pies' (Example 23). It can also be heard in the opening section of Lovett's Act 2 number, 'By the Sea' (Example 24) and in the final death sequence. The pattern here is that the leitmotif is generally heard in moments of inspiration, where the character has an idea to do something, or is trying to engage another character.



Ex. 21: 'The Worst Pies in London,' b. 2



Ex. 22: 'The Worst Pies in London,' b. 39



Ex. 23: 'A Little Priest,' b. 21-24



Ex. 24: 'By the Sea,' b. 2-3

The 'Alms' motif, characterised by a descending minor second interval and inspired by the previously discussed *Dies Irae* theme, is generally used to suggest the relationship between the Beggar Woman and Lucy to the audience, i.e. that they are the same person. The theme is first heard in the opening bars of the published organ prelude in a chordal arrangement (Example 25). It is first heard in its vocal version, sung by the Beggar Woman, in the opening scene, with the words 'Alms! Alms! For a miserable woman...' (Example 26). Sweeney makes vocal reference to the motif as he sings about Lucy in 'Epiphany' (Example 27) again with alternative rhythmic notation. It is also seen in much of the scene change music in Act 2, hinting at the constant presence of the Beggar Woman, and the ending that will unfold. The motif is then heard when Sweeney discovers the dead body of his wife in the final scene (Example 28). Here, the use of the motif is linked to a type of film underscore, which dramatises a moment of terror or shock, to signal to the audience how the character is feeling, and how large a moment it is in the context of the overall story. It is as if the character has been leading to this moment all along, and the audience is aurally anticipating it. Todd also sings the word 'Lucy' to the half step motif once again, as he cradles his dead wife in his arms (Example 29), all the while the theme itself is played in the accompaniment.



Ex. 25: 'Prelude,' b. 1-4



Alms... Alms... for a mis-ra-ble wom-an__

Ex. 26: 'No Place Like London,' b. 28-29



And my Lu - cy lies in ash - es

Ex. 27: 'Epiphany,' b. 71-73



Ex. 28: 'Final Scene (Part I),' b. B



Lu- cy...

Ex. 29: 'Final Scene (Part I),' b. 5

Ultimately, Sondheim's use of the leitmotif technique in this score once again relates the work to both film and opera, for this compositional feature is a popular method

of writing in both genres, relying heavily on character and thematic development.⁶⁶ In *Sweeney Todd*, the leitmotifs undergo musical developments as the story progresses. Themes and motifs are altered or joined to neighbouring motifs when two or more characters are engaged in the same scene. Thus, the music is very much intertwined with the dramatic aspects of the piece. The leitmotifs are also powerfully independent at times, suggesting certain elements of storytelling to the audience on their own, but at other times, simply supporting the primary music and text on stage. The motif technique unifies the work overall by operating as a form of association for the audience. The leitmotifs musically speak to the audience without the use of text a lot of the time, which is an extremely forceful aspect of Sondheim's compositional process for this score. The fact that one does not have to depend on words one hundred percent of the time makes the technique all the more effective and commanding. Its connection to film and opera once again blurs the boundaries with regard to this work, and highlights further the complex nature of *Sweeney Todd* as a Broadway musical.

The Chorus

The chorus is generally believed to be a staple of the musical theatre form, with the roots of its inclusion dating back to earlier theatre concepts, namely opera and operetta. The role of the chorus in *Sweeney Todd* is a crucial one. The chorus takes on many forms during the course of the show. The opening prologue, 'The Ballad of Sweeney Todd,' features the entire company (i.e. chorus and principal characters) singing to the audience as a Greek

⁶⁶ In film, Bernard Herrmann and John Williams use leitmotifs in their scores, and in opera, Wagner, Debussy, Schoenberg and Berg all used the technique in their scores.

Chorus.⁶⁷ Here, a random chorus member ('Man') begins the song, before everyone joins in, commenting on the story to which the audience is about to bear witness. They also explain the central catalytic motivations of the title character, which will affect all other characters over the course of the evening:

MAN:
Attend the tale of Sweeney Todd.
His skin was pale and his eye was odd.
He shaved the faces of gentlemen
Who never thereafter were heard of again.
He trod a path that few have trod,
Did Sweeney Todd,
The Demon Barber of Fleet Street.

ANOTHER MAN:
He kept a shop in London town,
Of fancy clients and good renown.
And what if none of their souls were saved?
They went to their maker impeccably shaved
By Sweeney,
By Sweeney Todd,
The Demon Barber of Fleet Street.

...

COMPANY:
Swing your razor wide, Sweeney!
Hold it to the skies!
Freely flows the blood of those
Who moralize!⁶⁸

The Greek Chorus style of writing returns for each of the succeeding 'Ballads.'

The chorus retreats to a more conventional Broadway format for the two large crowd scenes in both acts: 'Pirelli's Miracle Elixir' and 'God, That's Good!' Both musical numbers are fashioned in the same manner: a principal character (Tobias) beckons the chorus to come closer to listen to what they are selling (hair restorer in the first act, meat pies in the second), and the chorus joins in, musically and dramatically, with the scene.

Traditionally, in a Broadway musical, the chorus acts as a support unit to the principal

⁶⁷ Untraditional in conventional musicals, the only early appearance of a Greek Chorus in musical theatre was in Rodgers and Hammerstein's unsuccessful *Allegro* (1947).

⁶⁸ Sondheim, Wheeler, p. 1, 2.

characters, singing in unison or harmony, in a full-throated manner, often accompanied by an elaborate dance, resulting in a ‘showstopper’ for the audience. Sondheim had always felt that the chorus in these earlier shows, while beautiful sounding, lacked any kind of real logic, since each person within the group was singing the same thing. For example, in *Oklahoma!*, we are to assume that the entire group of guests at Skidmore’s ranch believes that ‘The Farmer and the Cowman / should be friends,’ and in *South Pacific*, we assume that the entire group of sailors believes that ‘There is Nothing Like a Dame.’ Sondheim believed that it was only truly appropriate for a chorus to sing the same words at the same time if they had come to this conclusion individually.⁶⁹

In *Sweeney Todd*, Sondheim achieved the practicality of this idea when he created a different style of writing for his chorus, forming individual character-types within the group. Thus, while not named principal characters, the members of the chorus all have a sense of individuality about them, so that when they each come to sing the group sections that have the same text, we feel that they have come to these words with specific motivation. In ‘Pirelli’s Miracle Elixir,’ instead of the entire chorus exclaiming how wonderful the hair product is, we have various men and women stating their opinions on whether or not they will buy the elixir, and then ‘without violating the principle’⁷⁰ (as Sondheim puts it), we see the chorus singing identical words as a group, as by the end of the song, they are all generally unhappy, and demand to see Pirelli. Below is an example of the overlapping textual setting heard in ‘Pirelli’s Miracle Elixir’:

1ST MAN:
Let me have a bottle.

2ND MAN:

⁶⁹ Sondheim, p. 345.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Make that two.

(1ST MAN *buys bottles for both, gets chance*)

3RD WOMAN:
Come to think of it, I could get some for Harry ...

4TH WOMAN:
Nothing works on Harry, dear. Bye bye.

TOBIAS:
Go ahead and feel, mum.
Absolutely real, mum...

2ND MAN (*To 1ST MAN*):
How about a beer?

1ST MAN:
You know a pub?

2ND MAN:
There's one close by.

1ST WOMAN (*To 2ND WOMAN*):
You got all the hair you need now.

3RD MAN:
That's no lie.

4TH MAN:
Pass it by.

2ND WOMAN:
I'm just passing by.⁷¹

In 'God, That's Good!', Mrs. Lovett's business is thriving. The song is a repeat of the idea used for 'Pirelli's Miracle Elixir,' and has the same ironic tones built in: Tobias (now working for Mrs. Lovett), once again, is selling a product to the citizens of London that he believes is wholesome, but underneath, is false. Frequently during the song, the customers, unaware of the source of the pie filling, demand to have 'more hot pies.' Once again, Sondheim strategically characterises each individual customer: 'the demanding one, the envious one, the freeloader, the drunk, etc.—so that the actress playing Mrs. Lovett would have different colors to play, everything from flattery to annoyance, rather than

⁷¹ Sondheim, Wheeler, p. 32, 33.

merely repeating general greetings differentiated only by a variety of rhymes.⁷² In the final section of each ‘refrain’ passage in ‘God, That’s Good!,’ Sondheim separates the syllables of various words and combines them into a large choral passage, to suggest the growing number of customers entering and leaving the shop, enjoying the flavours of Lovett’s pies. An example of such a refrain is depicted below:

CUSTOMERS (*Starting with their mouths full, gradually swallowing and singing clearly*):
God, that’s good that is de have you
Licious ever tasted smell such
Oh my God what perfect more that’s
Pies such flavor
...
God, that’s good!!!⁷³

In Sondheim’s other musicals, he manages to create similar innovative uses of the chorus. For example, both *Company* and *Into the Woods* explore the themes of relationships, and the dual themes of independence and interdependence, with the former placing a particular emphasis on the idea of community and togetherness. Both works involve a large ensemble of principal characters that also acts as the chorus, when they sing together as a group. In *Into the Woods*, the Narrator acts as the Greek Chorus, remarking on the action directly to the audience. As stated previously, Sondheim justifies the idea of a group of people singing the same text (as in the opening of both *Company* and *Woods*), as each character has come to a similar, valid conclusion in his or her own way, i.e. the characters that must venture into the woods each have their reasons for doing so, and the characters all want ‘Bobby [to] come on over for dinner.’

Overall, it appears that Sondheim’s innate sense of writing for character is essential to *Sweeney Todd*, and is one of the most memorable and admirable aspects of the work. The

⁷² Sondheim, p. 366.

⁷³ Sondheim, Wheeler, p. 106, 107.

fact that it is difficult to extract any musical number from the score to be performed out of context speaks volumes about the intrinsic, complex connection that the score has to character.

CONCLUSION

While it is simply impossible to examine all of the components of *Sweeney Todd* in such a confined word count, I do feel that I have chosen the various aspects of music, text, and character that best define the significance of this particular musical theatre work. The discussions that have taken place in this dissertation have added to the existing assumption that *Sweeney Todd* is Stephen Sondheim's true masterpiece, a work that contains his richest score and his most daring plot. The exceptionality of *Sweeney Todd* as a musical may be measured by its status in the performing arts world (it is without doubt the most performed Sondheim work, on both professional and amateur levels) and the composer's growing status in the academic world. I hope that this thesis has added to Sondheim's positive reception in the world of musicology, and hope that others are inspired to pursue further areas of research based on the composer's work in the future.

After examining various elements relating to the book, score and characterisation of *Sweeney Todd*, it is clear that each aspect is interdependent. The music is the engine of this work, and thus controls the dramatic and comedic moments established by the book. The text is underlined by the music in many instances. The audience hears music in the opening prelude before any spoken dialogue is uttered. 'The Ballad of Sweeney Todd' is sung in a narrative fashion by the entire company as part of the Act 1 Prologue, once again bringing music to the fore. The characters' motives, emotions and thoughts are all often illustrated by the music, whether in underscore or incidental manners, or in song. Thus, to gain an insight into the genius of Sondheim's writing in *Sweeney Todd*, it only now seems fair to have considered many different aspects of the show, rather than focusing on one particular

element (i.e. music or text alone). This thesis has given the work a singular voice that proves its worth and brilliance in the musical theatre sphere, and gives further amplification to the genius of Stephen Sondheim.

This study of *Sweeney Todd* may also bring to light further scholarly opportunities for academics interested in this field of musicology. Sondheim's love for film may be expanded on in a singular examination of the 2006 film version of *Sweeney Todd*, and its interpretation of the theatre version. Another suggestion might be to examine Sondheim's writing style for male and female characters, with perhaps an incorporation of the recently established musicology-based masculinity and feminist theories. These theories have been utilised frequently in opera studies, but have rarely been explored in the musical theatre realm. Consequently, a study may be undertaken in examining the role of women in Sondheim's musicals, a topic that may be linked to the composer's complicated relationship with his mother as a child. *Sweeney Todd* and *Into the Woods* are both ideal works to explore in relation to this theme, since both shows deal with parent-child relationships.

Overall, I hope this thesis has proven in some form that Stephen Sondheim has truly justified his position as the most influential composing figure in musical theatre in the latter part of the twentieth century, and now in the current century, and that *Sweeney Todd* is a significantly unique musical theatre work for the ages.

APPENDIX A

Synopsis of the Sondheim musical

Prologue

Setting: the burial of Sweeney Todd. The company assembles to sing ‘The Ballad of Sweeney Todd,’ as two men dump the body of Todd in a shallow grave. The company invites the audience to ‘attend the tale.’ Todd rises from his grave, summoned by the company.

Act I

It is 1846. Anthony Hope, a cheerful, optimistic young sailor has returned to London, joined by the mysterious man he rescued at sea, Sweeney Todd. A harmless Beggar Woman sexually proposes the two men, and appears to recognise Todd. Todd meanwhile lectures Anthony on the cruelty of the world that the sailor is seemingly unaware of, by describing the tragic story of a young, innocent barber, his beautiful wife, and the lustful judge who unjustly punished him and sent him to prison.

The two men part, and Todd encounters Mrs. Nellie Lovett in her pie shop on Fleet Street. Lovett laments about her declining business in these tough, economic times. When Todd enquires about the empty upstairs apartment, Lovett proceeds to tell him how the previous tenant, a barber named Benjamin Barker, was wrongly exiled by the immoral Judge Turpin, because of the Judge’s desire for Barker’s wife, Lucy. Mrs. Lovett also reveals how, once

Barker had been transported to Australia, the Judge and his faithful associate, Beadle Bamford, lured Lucy to the Judge's home, where he raped her. Todd, reacting explosively and emotionally, confirms Mrs. Lovett's suspicions that he is in fact Benjamin Barker, back from Australia. She tells Todd that his wife had poisoned herself and the couple's infant daughter, Johanna, became a ward of the Judge. Todd, eager to exact revenge on the Judge and Beadle, is handed his old set of silver straight razors that Mrs. Lovett has kept hidden for fifteen years, encouraging him to live above her shop and become a barber again.

The scene transitions to Kearney's Lane, where Anthony, roaming the streets of London, notices a beautiful blonde girl sitting on her windowsill, singing. The Beggar Woman reappears, telling Anthony that the girl in the window is Johanna, Judge Turpin's ward. Anthony, unaware that Johanna is Todd's daughter, becomes infatuated with her and pledges to pursue her. The Judge and Beadle enter, and warn Anthony not to trespass on the property again. Anthony swears to rescue her from her vile circumstances.

The scene shifts to a nearby marketplace, where renowned 'Italian' barber, Adolfo Pirelli, and his simple-minded boy assistant, Tobias, pitch a miracle hair loss restorer to a gathering crowd. Todd and Mrs. Lovett, witnessing the pitch, expose Pirelli as a conman, and Todd proves this by challenging the Italian to a shaving competition. Pirelli tries to woo the crowd with his grandiose presence and bravado, but he is no match for Todd, who wins easily. The scene comes to a close with Todd inviting the Beadle for a complimentary shave.

The action moves forward several days. Todd is getting anxious in his parlour, waiting for the Beadle's arrival, however Mrs. Lovett urges him to be patient, and the revenge will be sweeter. Anthony, meanwhile, enters the shop and describes his recent romantic encounter with Johanna to the barber, and requests to use Todd's shop as a safe retreat for the girl when he rescues her from Turpin's house. Todd agrees to the plan, motivated at the prospect of being reunited with his daughter. Once Anthony leaves, Todd has another visitor, Pirelli, who arrives to blackmail him. The faux-Italian conman reveals himself as Daniel O'Higgins, an Irish immigrant who served as apprentice to Todd fifteen years ago. Before O'Higgins can do anything, Todd strangles him and dumps his body into a trunk in the barbershop. Tobias, having been downstairs in the pie shop with Mrs. Lovett, returns to Todd's parlour in search of his master, but Todd tells him that he has been called away unexpectedly. Once Tobias leaves, Todd finishes off O'Higgins, by slitting his throat.

The scene moves to Judge Turpin's house, where Anthony and Johanna plan to elope together, with the Judge having previously announced his intention to marry his young ward. The Judge, in the city with the Beadle at the same time, is advised by his cohort to visit Sweeney Todd's barbershop in order to improve his appearance for better winning Johanna's reluctant affections.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Lovett has distracted Tobias's attention with food and drink, as the Judge enters Todd's barbershop upstairs. Eager to advance on his revenge, Todd prepares to carry out the deed, but does so by carefully calming the Judge. Just as Todd is about to put the razor to the Judge's throat, however, Anthony explosively enters, exclaiming his news of

eloping with Johanna to Todd. The Judge storms out of the shop vowing never to return, and Todd drives Anthony away, descending into a furious fit of madness and vengeance, broadening his anger's target to all of humanity. He plans on taking vengeance on any innocent man now, until he gets to the Judge. Mrs. Lovett, however, is worried about how to dispose of O'Higgins' body, which is still in the trunk upstairs. Ever the opportunist, she suggests baking the remains of the corpse and all forthcoming corpses of Todd's victims, into her meat pies, an idea which enthuses Todd. The two delight about the potential flavours that will ensue from the meat, and demonically laugh together about their ingenious plan.

Act II

Mrs. Lovett's pie shop has become a thriving business in the city, with Tobias now acting as assistant, waiting on its many customers. The Beggar Woman suspects Mrs. Lovett as a devil-woman, and continues to hang around the pie shop, attempting to discourage potential customers. Todd, in the meantime, has acquired a brand new specially designed mechanical barber's chair that allows him to kill someone in the barbershop, and send the body down a chute directly into the pie shop's basement bake house, where Mrs. Lovett dismembers their bodies for pie filling.

Todd, as he methodically slits the throats of innocent customers, laments that he may never be reunited with Johanna, all the while Anthony roams the streets, singing of his endless love for her. Mrs. Lovett, after a day of hard work, describes her ideal future to an unresponsive and uninterested Todd, which involves marriage and a cottage 'By the Sea.'

Anthony discovers that the Judge has sent Johanna to Jonas Fogg's lunatic asylum nearby, and, with the aid of Todd, plots to rescue her by posing as a wigmaker intent on purchasing the hair of the inmates. Todd, eager to see the plan come to fruition, sends a letter to notify the Judge about Anthony's plan, in order to lure the Judge to his shop.

Tobias, worried that Todd is misleading Mrs. Lovett, ensures her that 'Nothing's gonna harm you, / Not while I'm around.' Lovett, agitated when Tobias notices that her purse is the purse that belonged to Pirelli, decides to secretly lock the boy in the bake house, by focusing his attention on learning to work the meat grinder and oven. Returning to her parlour, Mrs. Lovett encounters Beadle Bamford, who unexpectedly visits, complaining about the smoke and stench coming from the pie shop's chimney. Todd arrives just in time, and offers the Beadle a free shave in the meantime. The Beadle follows Todd upstairs to the barbershop, where he is murdered and sent down the chute to the bake house. Tobias, becoming suspicious of the situation, stumbles upon the Beadle's dead body in the bake house, and reacts hysterically.

Anthony arrives at the asylum to rescue Johanna, but the asylum's director, Fogg, attempts to stop them. Johanna grabs Anthony's pistol and shoots Fogg, as the two flee the asylum and head for Todd's barbershop. Todd and Mrs. Lovett search for Tobias in the sewers below the bake house, but abandon the search when the Judge approaches. Anthony encourages Johanna to remain in the empty barbershop while he searches for a coach in the streets. The Beggar Woman enters the shop, and encounters Todd, who, anxiously

anticipating the Judge's arrival, frantically slits her throat, and sends her down the chute just seconds before the Judge enters.

Todd attempts to calm the Judge once again, by telling him that Johanna is repentant, and by giving him a quick face massage and some cologne before reuniting with her. Todd at last ferociously slashes the Judge's throat, having revealed to him his true identity. Just as Todd sends the Judge's corpse down the chute, he catches Johanna as she attempts to escape, having witnessed the scene of the murder. However, she manages to escape, just as Todd is distracted by the screams of Mrs. Lovett in the bake house below.

In the bake house, Mrs. Lovett is alarmed to find the body of the Beggar Woman, who has haunted her all this time. Todd storms in, and as he drags the Beggar Woman's body over the oven, he realises in dread that she is in fact his wife, Lucy. He now also realises that Mrs. Lovett had deceived him, and that she was aware of Lucy's existence. Mrs. Lovett pleads guilty to Todd, insisting that she lied to him because she was sparing his feelings, because she loves him. Todd waltzes Lovett over to the oven, and pretends to be calm and forgiving, before hurling her into the fire and slamming the doors shut. Todd returns to his wife's lifeless body, cradling her in his arms. Tobias, who has gone insane from shock, reemerges from the shadows. Picking up Todd's razor on the ground, he slits the barber's throat, killing him instantly. Anthony and Johanna enter with some policemen, as Tobias drops the razor and begins to turn the handle of the meat grinder, claiming that there is much work to be done.

Epilogue

All of the dead bodies rise from the ground, as the entire company gathers one final time to sing 'The Ballad of Sweeney Todd.' The company tells the audience that the need and capability for revenge is within us all.

APPENDIX B

List of Musical Numbers

Act I

Prelude – *Organ*

Prologue: The Ballad of Sweeney Todd – *Todd, Company*

No Place Like London – *Anthony, Todd, Beggar Woman*

The Worst Pies in London – *Mrs. Lovett*

Poor Thing – *Mrs. Lovett*

My Friends – *Todd, Mrs. Lovett*

The Ballad of Sweeney Todd – *Company*

Green Finch and Linnet Bird – *Johanna*

Ah, Miss – *Anthony, Johanna, Beggar Woman*

Johanna – *Anthony*

Pirelli's Miracle Elixir – *Tobias, Crowd, Todd, Mrs. Lovett*

Pirelli's Entrance – *Pirelli*

The Contest – *Pirelli, Tobias*

The Ballad of Sweeney Todd – *Members of the Company*

Johanna – *Judge Turpin*

Wait – *Mrs. Lovett, Beggar Woman*

Pirelli's Death – *Pirelli*

The Ballad of Sweeney Todd – *Three Tenors*

Kiss Me (Part I) – *Johanna, Anthony*

Ladies In Their Sensitivities – *Beadle*

Kiss Me (Part II) – *Johanna, Anthony, Beadle, Judge*

Pretty Women – *Judge, Todd, Anthony*

Epiphany – *Todd, Mrs. Lovett*

A Little Priest – *Mrs. Lovett, Todd*

Act II

God, That's Good! – *Tobias, Mrs. Lovett, Todd, Company*

Johanna – *Anthony, Todd, Johanna, Beggar Woman*

By the Sea – *Mrs. Lovett, Todd*

Wigmaker Sequence – *Todd, Anthony, Quintet*

The Letter – *Quintet*

Not While I'm Around – *Tobias, Mrs. Lovett*

Parlor Songs – *Beadle, Mrs. Lovett, Tobias*

Fogg's Asylum / Fogg's Passacaglia – *Company*

City on Fire! – *Lunatics, Johanna*

Searching (Part I) – *Mrs. Lovett, Todd, Beggar Woman, Lunatics*

Searching (Part II) – *Anthony, Johanna, Beggar Woman*

The Judge's Return – *Todd, Judge*

Final Scene – *Todd, Mrs. Lovett*

The Ballad of Sweeney Todd - *Company*

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ABSTRACT

Stephen Sondheim is by far the most influential figure in the development of musical theatre in the latter half of the twentieth-century, and now, in the twenty-first century. An early mentee of Oscar Hammerstein II, Sondheim is a composer and lyricist who approached the Broadway musical structure with innovative methods and techniques, leading to many subversive and controversial works. Sondheim's 1979 masterpiece *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, is a perfect example of how this composer re-approached the musical theatre form.

This thesis serves as a brief study of *Sweeney Todd*. The examination of various aspects of music, text and character brings to light this work's significance in the musical theatre world. The study begins with a commentary on the origins of the Sweeney Todd story, and the 1973 retelling by Christopher Bond, which led to the 1979 Sondheim musical. An examination of the work's film influences is carried out, along with Sondheim's innovative use of the *Dies Irae* theme as part of the score. The study then analyses the principal characters of Sweeney Todd and Mrs. Lovett and the chorus, from a musical and textual standpoint. A detailed plot synopsis of the show, along with a list of musical numbers is presented in the appendix.

This thesis conforms to the house style of the NUI Maynooth Music Department.