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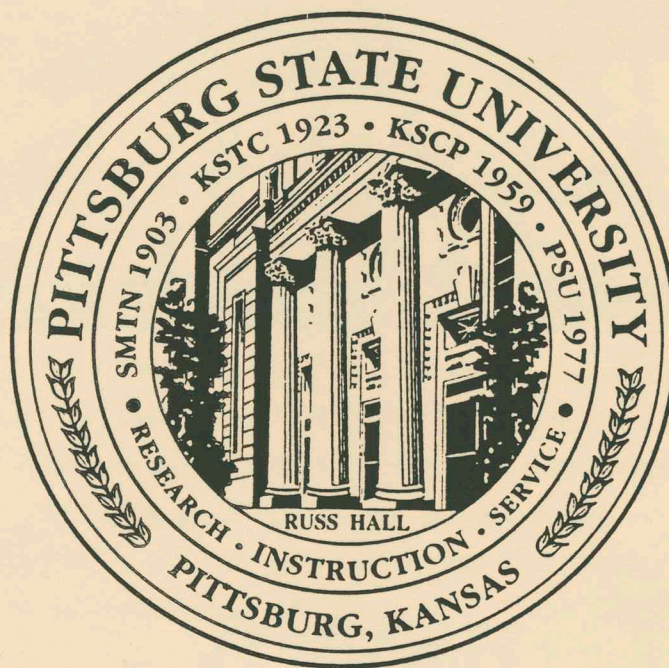
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PSU Homecoming
Musical

ASSASSINS

Music & Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim
Book by John Weidman

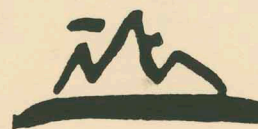


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STEPHEN SONDHEIM wrote the music and lyrics for *Assassins* (1991), *Into the Woods* (1987), *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981), *Sweeney Todd* (1979), *Pacific Overtures* (1976), *The Frogs* (1974), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *Follies* (1971), *Company* (1970), *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964), and *A Funny Thing Happened On The Way to The Forum* (1962) as well as the lyrics for *Do I Hear A Waltz?* (1965), *Gypsy* (1959), *West Side Story* (1957) and additional lyrics for *Candide* (1973). He won Tony awards for Best Score for a Musical for *Into the Woods*, *Sweeney Todd*, *A Little Night Music*, *Follies* and *Company*. All of these shows won the New York Drama Critics Award, as did *Pacific Overtures* and *Sunday in the Park with George*, the latter also receiving the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1985. His latest work, *Passion*, won the Emmy Award for Best Musical in 1994.

Stephen Sondheim was born and raised in New York City. He graduated from Williams College, winning the Hutchinson Prize for Music Composition. In 1983 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters and in 1990 he was appointed the first Visiting Professor of Contemporary Theatre at Oxford University.

JOHN WEIDMAN wrote the book for *Pacific Overtures*, music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, which was produced on Broadway in 1976. More recently he co-authored the new book for the 1987 Broadway revival of Cole Porter's *Anything Goes*. Since 1986 he has written for the PBS children's show, *Sesame Street*, receiving five Emmy Awards for Outstanding Writing for a Children's Program. He co-wrote *The Lion King* for Walt Disney Studios and is currently working on a new musical with Richard Maltby, Jr. and David Shire. John Weidman is a graduate of Yale Law School and a member of the New York Bar Association. He lives in New York with his wife and two children.

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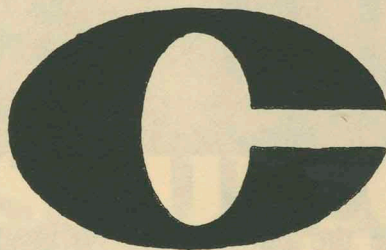
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SONDHEIM'S SINGSPIEL

Assassins is a black humor ballad to one of the most talked about phenomena of our time: guns. Their availability and power-giving authority can make instant celebrities of social failures on all levels, create anti-heroes and heroines with abrupt simplicity, and bring to ironic reality Andy Warhol's plastic phrase "famous for fifteen minutes." In no sphere of American society is the gun used more dramatically and iniquitously than in the murder or attempted murder of a President of the United States -- and those acts have occurred no less than nine times, four of them "successfully."

So is such a somber, even morbid subject good material for a musical? Many thought not when Stephen Sondheim's Assassins opened off-Broadway on the night of January 27, 1991. Time magazine said it was "pointless as satire . . . sparse and almost forgettable in its musical elements"; the ever-caustic New Yorker pronounced the show "predictable, familiar, inane," then mocked the "sententiousness of its style" (translation: using too many pompous words like "sententiousness!"); and critic Frank Rich, writing in the New York Times said the show was "slender and sketchy . . . a nasty anti-musical." Rich concluded his review with a sort of sawdust-socialism opinion about Sondheim's "conviction there is a shadow America, a poisoned, have-not America, that must be recognized by the prosperous majority if the violence in our history is to be understood and overcome."

Almost all the reviews of this unique production failed to evaluate the Sondheim show as part of a theatrical tradition, including the idea of tragedy as entertainment, springing from the eighteenth century's English ballad operas and the European singspiels (comic operas). One common denominator in this tradition has been an emphasis on social and political criticism of the power base, particularly from an "outlaw" bourgeois viewpoint. For example, the hero of John Gay's The Beggar's Opera is a highwayman, and the plot of Mozart's The Marriage of Figaro is anti-establishment, as are the characters and plot of Kurt Weil's updated opera about beggars, The Three-Penny Opera, and that American tribal love-rock musical, Hair, to list only two modern examples.

Not only does Assassins continue the ballad-opera tradition, it also includes the very American models of the vaudeville burlesque and the musical review. Both the opening and closing scenes are black humor commentaries on the American Dream: free enterprise, the right to be what you want to be in life (successful, fulfilled, admired), and the right to individuality and political conviction. If the ingredients for this dream include violence, that is certainly as American as the flag. In fact, the show is made up of short scenes, almost all of which help define the American Dream -- including a few surreal nightmares -- and often served up with gallows wit. For example, the scene between Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme and Sara Jane Moore, both would-be assassins of President Ford, is a delicious satire on commonplace robots who are unintellectual, quasi-mystical, searching for father figures, amoral, and casually violent -- in other words, characters from any daily police blotter in America. In contrast to this is the (imagined) scene between the feminist and anarchist Emma Goldman and the oddly sympathetic Leon Czolgosz, assassin of President McKinley. It is an ironic and sad love scene which humanizes two characters seeking violent options to solving social problems: the irony is how love is a very human, individual matter that has little to do with larger social issues or causes. Another serious scene with comic touches (Booth reading Variety , for example) gathers all the male assassins in a timeless bar, a perfect symbol of men gathering to drown their sorrows in drink, or to blot out reality in companionship with birds of the same dark feather. The radio in the bar suggests both the world celebrity of such men and the media feeding frenzy which accompanies crimes and scandal in America.

Sondheim uses a balladeer throughout the musical as another nod to an American tradition, to show how great (even infamous) deeds are reflected upon, interpreted, and certainly preserved in simple, often simplistic, songs. But a demeaning reality about history being condensed to ballads is that it robs those being sung about of their individuality and reduces their complexity to sing-song rhymes. So, in one of the final scenes of the show the subjects of such ballads, the assassins, turn on the balladier and force him out of their lives.

The assassins in this show band together in a death-house camaraderie, forming at the end a savage and satiric chorus to indite what

is wrong with the American Dream: that America has created its own monsters by a reckless misdirection of human values, that a piece of the pie is all that matters in a world increasingly indifferent -- even hostile -- to individual self worth and personal responsibility. In such a world more Booths, Hinckleys and Oswalds will surely be spawned. The assassins sing -- but are we listening?

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AND THEN CAME SONDHEIM

Stephen Sondheim was born three years after the production of what many consider the first modern American musical, Show Boat (1927), music by Jerome Kern and lyrics by a man who would become Sondheim's surrogate father and inspiration, Oscar Hammerstein, Jr. Before Show Boat the Broadway musical was a pastiche of dances, songs, blackouts, sketches and skits with an often extravagant display of costumes, sets, and female pulchritude -- all with a long history stretching back to The Black Crook (1866) and up to the lush follies and reviews of Ziegfeld, White, and Shubert and the boy-gets-girl hilarity of composers like Gershwin and Porter. With Show Boat there came a serious attempt to combine book with music to produce a "musical play," adorned with ballet sequences and singers with real voices. Thus, the golden age of the American Musical may be said to have begun in 1927 and to have ended in 1959 with Rogers and Hammerstein's last collaboration, The Sound of Music.

Then came Sondheim.

After writing lyrics for such megahits as West Side Story and Gypsy, Sondheim took his first steps as a composer-lyricist with A Funny Thing Happened on the way to the Forum (1962) and the less successful Anyone Can Whistle (1964). Five years later he changed Broadway forever with Company, a show that could be called the first neo-modernist musical, one that reduced a plot line to a series of connected urban-life vignettes, ranging from sad to bright -- but never maudlin or romantically self-indulgent. His next show, Follies (1971), nailed the lid on the coffin of the old glory-days musicals, gently both recalling and mocking the history of a genre perfected -- and exploited -- by Rodgers, Hammerstein, Kern, etc. And this revolutionary "review" predated its famous imitator (Michael Bennett's A Chorus Line) by four years. The last show in Sondheim's first phase was A Little Night Music (1973), which included his most famous song, "Send in the Clowns."

Sondheim's second phase came with such shows as Sweeney Todd (1979), Sunday in the Park with George (1984), and Into the Woods (1987). They reflected a dark but contemporary look at our world: one no longer romantic and optimistic, but disturbed and violent and yet brutally honest. We live with serial killers as our next-door neighbors; the animal

called Art has escaped from the museum cages; the Grimm brothers were Freud in disguise. The subjects Sondheim chooses (Assassins is a singular example) not only speak to our time as cogently as, say, Ibsen spoke to his, but the composer has revolutionized the way in which musicals are musical. Instead of a series of songs, Sondheim deliberately attempts to make his shows a continuous flow of motifs, to blend melody with character in a Wagnerian fashion -- but without Wagner's chromatic harmony, bombast, and melodrama. Instead, Sondheim's dissonant accompaniment and what Rodgers and Hart might have called his constantly surprising refrains speak a new language, especially for Broadway. Few artists have had the opportunity (or the gift) to write both the music and the lyrics for full-length shows, and so falls a heavy mantle on the shoulders of Stephen Sondheim.

How wonderful that he can so often take that heavy mantle and twirl it like an iridescent cape.

Charles Cagle

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ROGUE'S GALLERY

John Wilkes Booth (1838-1865). Assassinated President Abraham Lincoln during a performance of "Our American Cousin" at Ford's Theater, Washington, D.C., April 14, 1865.

Charles Guiteau (1841-1882). Assassinated President James Garfield in the waiting room of the Baltimore & Potomac Railroad Station, Washington, D.C., July 2, 1881.

Leon Czolgosz (1873-1901). Assassinated President William McKinley during a public reception at the Temple of Music Pavilion at the Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo, New York, September 6, 1901.

Giuseppe Zangara (1900-1933). Attempted to assassinate President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt as Roosevelt greeted well-wishers in Bayfront Park, Miami, Florida, February 15, 1933.

Lee Harvey Oswald (1939-1963). Assassinated President John F. Kennedy from the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository, Dallas, Texas, November 22, 1963.

Samuel Byck (1930-1974). Attempted to assassinate President Richard Nixon; hijacked a commercial jetliner which he intended to crash dive into the White House, Baltimore-Washington International Airport, February 22, 1974.

Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme (1948 -). Attempted to assassinate President Gerald Ford as he left the Senator Hotel, Sacramento, California, September 5, 1975.

Sara Jane Moore (1930 -). Attempted to assassinate President Gerald Ford as he left the St. Francis Hotel, San Francisco, California, September 22, 1975.

John Hinckley (1955 -). Attempted to assassinate President Ronald Reagan as he left the Washington Hilton, Washington, D.C., March 30, 1981.

CAST

THE BALLADEER		Anthony Turner
JOHN WILKES BOOTH		Paul Huybrechts
DAVID HEROLD		Jas Abramowitz
CHARLES GUTEAU		Bobby Bell
JAMES BLAINE		Whitney Platt
LEON CZOLGOSZ		Isaac Brewer
EMMA GOLDMAN		Olga Zavaroueva
GIUSEPPE ZANGARA		Kyle McGuffin
LEE HARVEY OSWALD		Jas Abramowitz
SAMUEL BYCK		Wes Warlop
LYNETTE 'SQUEAKY' FROMME		Aimee Kennedy
SARA JANE MOORE		Lael Meats
BILLY MOORE		Jerod Martin
JOHN HINCKLEY		Seth Golay
THE PROPRIETOR OF A SHOOTING GALLERY		Paul Smith
THE CHORUS		Jas Abramowitz Heather Arnold Whitney Platt Paul Smith Heather Swartz
MUSICIANS	synthesizer synthesizer percussion	Stephen Taylor Susan Laushman Neil Bryan

ASSASSINS runs for 90 minutes without a break

DIRECTOR	John Green
MUSICAL DIRECTOR	Stephen Taylor
DESIGNER	Barry Bengtsen
PRODUCER	Pete Hamilton
COSTUME DESIGNER	Scott Simpson
ARMORER	Larry Ranney
MAKE UP	Jennifer Russell
STAGE MANAGER	Becca Madrid
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER	Shirley Drew
COSTUME CONSTRUCTION	Lisa Dickey Da'Lene De Priest Scott Simpson
SET CONSTRUCTION	Brian Bartlett Peter Flood (Crew Chief) Anthony Greb Lakeisha Pascall (Painter) Patrick Stanton
TECHNICAL CREW	Bill Vickery Technical Production class
SOUND ENGINEER	Terri Falis-Cochran
SLIDES	Malcolm Turner
PUBLICITY	Darlene Brown
ADVERTIZING	Tammy Willits PR & AD Club
PUBLICITY POSTERS	Linda Grilz
PRODUCTION ADVISORS	Charles Cagle Sandra Ranney
HOUSE MANAGER	Cindy Clay
BUSINESS MANAGER	Shirley Purdy

Assassins is a Department of Communication
production in association with the Department of Music

PRODUCTION ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The Director would like to thank Gary Mitchell of Independence Community College, Mostly Books of Pittsburg, Dr. Gene Vollen, James Tapier, Dr. Robert Larson, John King, Mindy Messinger, Susan Johns, Cynthia Pfannenstiel, Becky Trotter, PSU Printing Services, PSU Quick Print, KRPS Radio, Instructional Media, and all those individuals and organizations who have contributed to the staging of this production.

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A Tribute to Robert W. Gobetz

by Harold W. Loy, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus

When I first came to PSU (then Kansas State Teachers College) in 1953 as a member of the Department of Education, my assignment was Supervisor of Speech-Drama Activities in the College High Laboratory School where the Kelce School of Business now resides. For purposes of interscholastic competition, College High was a member of the Old Mineral Belt League. As participants in each annual Mineral Belt League Speech and Drama Festival, my students and I soon faced a chief rival for top ratings in one-act plays and individual drama events. That rival was tiny West Mineral High School. It was then that I became acquainted with their talented, young coach by the name of Robert W. Gobetz.

For the next several years, before Bob moved on to other positions, we enjoyed a brisk professional rivalry, but always enduring friendship. When I learned that Bob was a graduate product of the Northwestern University School of Drama, as had been my college drama mentor, I recognized why our directing philosophy and style were so very similar -- procedures in handling auditions, prepared director's prompt books, pre-planned blocking and movement patterns, body positions, projection, diction and so on. All these elements were reflected in Bob's well-paced productions, complemented by strong, dynamic characterizations. I continued to admire and respect his directing skills.

When Bob moved on to other teaching positions, I kept abreast of his good work at Miami High, NEO of Miami, Joplin High, and eventually at Northeastern State College at Tahlequah. In 1967 shortly after I became Chairperson of the Department of Speech and Theatre, we had a drama vacancy and Bob was hired. In his 23 years of service in the department, he directed more than 50 productions, touching the lives of scores of talented students as well as the hearts of thousands of appreciative audience members.

He loved the challenge of developing "raw talent" by recruiting students who had no prior acting experience. "I've got a lot of green wood in this show," he would say, half lamenting, half boasting. Yet, certain devoted experienced actors auditioned only for "Mr. G's" shows.

Bob tended to give preference to plays dealing with the lives and conflicts of the common man. But whether it was a drama by William Inge or a selection from The Texas Trio, his shows always bore the Gobetz trademark of sensitive pacing, balanced stage pictures, and dynamic, believable characterizations. One could not avoid sensing the strong hand of "the director" in every production. His disciplined approach to directing carried over into his classroom. His expectations for students to follow a prescribed "method" for preparing speeches in the basic course were no less adamant than the required memorization of the phonetic alphabet in the Diction course.

Bob was a stocky, raw-boned, friendly fellow with a heart bigger than his frame. The son of Yugoslavia immigrants, he grew up on a farm near West Mineral where his father worked in the coal mines. That environment no doubt contributed to his love of

people, his appreciation for the working class, and his warm sense of humor. He took pride in his Slavic heritage and retained fluency in his native language.

When I reflect on my forty years' acquaintance with Bob Gobetz, the man -- a panorama of memories flood my mind: convention trips; judging trips; cast parties; Ella's baked beans; a friendly game of poker; an early mess of lettuce from his fertile garden; a day at an auction to buy play props; a Christmas eve gift of his own handmade potica; or one of his many backyard sales. Ah, yes, backyard sales! In recent years he would vow, "This is my last yard sale. I'm getting rid of this junk for the last time!" But the next auction would find Bob crowded in near the auctioneer bidding on tools and other miscellany, as usual.

Health complications increasingly bore down on his body until he found it necessary to retire in 1990. His health steadily declined until his recent death on August 26, 1994, when we all lost a valued colleague and loyal friend.

Life lingered long enough for Bob to fulfill years of longing to have a grandchild. Son Rob and his wife Robin fulfilled that wish with a precious little boy in time for Bob to hold the baby in his arms several times during his waning weeks of life.

Bob may have had his last yard sale, but I prefer to think that he has just begun another great production. Break-a-Leg, Bob!

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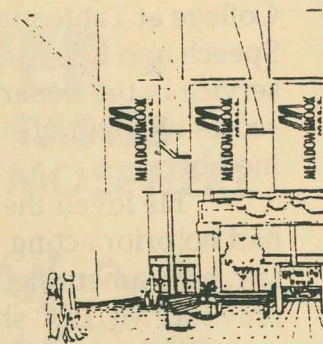


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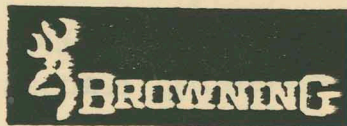
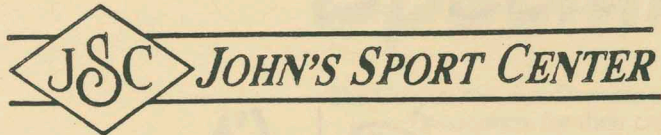
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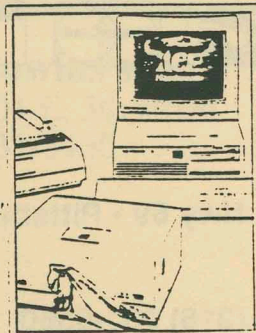
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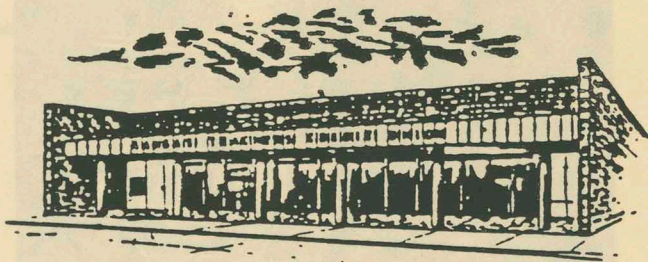
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