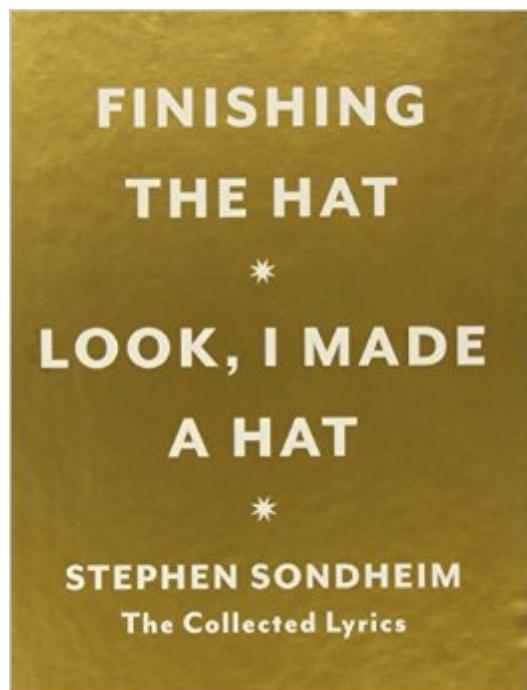


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Hat Box: The Collected Lyrics Of Stephen Sondheim



Synopsis

In Hat Box, Stephen Sondheim presents his complete collected lyrics from the acclaimed Finishing the Hat and Look, I Made a Hat. This box set includes lyrics from Sondheim's most popular shows like West Side Story, Sweeney Todd, Sunday in the Park with George, and Into the Woods, richly annotated with anecdotes, pointed observations, and invaluable advice from one of the greatest songwriters of our time. This handsomely designed package is essential reading for any fan of the theater or this living legend's work.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Some of us became aware of Stephen Sondheim for the genius that he is in the early 70's. As a professor of music and theatre I've been teaching Sondheim's music and lyrics for 26 years. I've found that there is no subject about which must be taught that Stephen Sondheim has not written a song (or indeed an entire show) about. Starting in 1976 I began to tout praise for Sondheim's work with his musical "Pacific Overtures." When "Cats" took the Tony award over "Sunday In The Park With George" I told everyone, "Just wait and see." Six months later "Sunday" became the fifth musical in history to win The Pulitzer Prize. When "Merrily We Roll Along" closed after 17 performances I said, "The audience is too stupid to understand it." The TV show "Lost" taught the public about time travel in storytelling and now "Merrily" has enjoyed a renaissance. It reminded me of how, as a college student, I worked at the Harvard Coop and I overheard someone say to her friend, in that Boston accent, "I don't want Aht; I want postuhs." Well "Cats" is a big poster and it's

taken until the 21st century but at last the theatre community (such that it is) and the public are finally recognizing the genius that is Sondheim's words and music. J.S. Bach wasn't known as a composer until fifty years after his death. By that time an estimated 50% of his music was lost. Sondheim, from age 79 to 82 has written two massive books that match. The first is called "Finishing The Hat" and the second is called "Look, I Made a Hat" The titles are references to one of his finest songs from the score "Sunday In The Park With George" in which an artist is explaining how he is driven to work. Will his lover be waiting in the bed when the grass, the hat and the parasol have finally found their way?

As a Sondheim fan (though not as monomaniacally worshipful as some) I have positive but not unmixed feelings about this book, as I did about the previous volume, *Finishing the Hat*. Overall I'd highly recommend both, in fact think they are invaluable for anyone interested at all in American musical theatre. But to the old expression that children, law, and sausage are three things one should not watch being made, I might add a fourth: art. As with the first book, I sometimes shook my head in dismay and wonderment, asking myself, "was that REALLY what you were thinking when you wrote ...?" I was so disappointed to find that the wittiest line in *West Side Story* was not an intentional play on words, but a compromise because SS couldn't drop an f-bomb. ("Krup you" is witty. The f-bomb wouldn't even have been funny.) The letdown in this volume was to find that the shooting-gallery setting in *Assassins* (my favourite of his works) was in the source material, not Sondheim's invention. In sum, if you approach the book believing that Sondheim really is God, and that art springs whole and perfect like Athena from Zeus's brow, expect to be disillusioned. Art is work, and work is often drudgery. (If you have ever even tried to write, though, you'll smile wryly and often laugh out loud.) Buy this book especially for the section on *Wise Guys/Bounce/Road Show*. The Mizners and Sondheim were like Jack Twist and Ennis Del Mar: He just couldn't quit them. This lengthy section is a great detailed case study of how a musical gets put together, taken apart, put together again. Theatre is a collaborative art, perhaps the ultimate collaborative art, and collaboration invariably involves compromises, with other artists, with the material, with the audience.

In terms of structure this second volume of Stephen Sondheim's collected lyrics is much like his first: after a one-paragraph summary of the show and an introductory note on its development from a concept to a full production, we get the lyrics, including cut songs and alternate versions, surrounded by just enough plot summary that the songs make sense and interspersed with

annotations on the logic behind the songs, the stories behind them, the successes and failures (in Sondheim's eyes) of a line, a verse, a whole lyric. Short essays on general musical-theater themes appear in boxouts at intervals throughout. A few photos, all black-and-white, are nice enough but pale in comparison to the other images: reduced pages that show the original handwritten workings for various songs, with alternate readings crowding each other out. They aren't always fully legible, but the general insight into the evolution of a song is invaluable. On a larger level, the annotations and essays reveal aspects of the construction of a musical that even devotees of the form might not have considered. Sondheim's non-fiction voice, incisive, witty, and self-deprecating, is always entertaining. What sets *Look, I Made a Hat* apart from volume one, *Finishing the Hat*, is that the included content is a little different. Where the earlier book featured thirteen full shows, including early classics like *Gypsy* and the extraordinary successes of the 1970s, this one covers only five.

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