

STILL AT IT

by Mark Halpin

Exactly half of the clues below have been affected by alterations, which must be ignored to correctly parse the clues. Half of the altered clues contain a word that is one letter too short. One diagonal in the completed grid will describe the second alteration. The other diagonal will describe how to consider the initial letters of the altered clues in order to determine what both the diagonals are, vis-à-vis Sondheim's works.

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ACROSS

- 1 Charged couple of accounts customer primarily exploited (7)
- 6 Stubborn little worker dogging Abe's dad (7)
- 13 Pitcher taken in by athlete (strange one showing unusual mental powers) (8)
- 14 Obscure places pursuing good alternative to battles (7)
- 16 Man a goddaughter starts to notice intentionally exiting church early (5)
- 18 NYC mayor familiarly in favor of embracing yours truly with some Londoners' greeting (8)
- 19 Eskimo community is flooded with endless diapers (6)
- 20 Like a lout in love with a troll (6)
- 21 Unwholesome binges barely satisfy Hef (7)
- 22 Necklaces bestowed when welcoming heartless evils (4)
- 24 Fox in Mexico to struggle swallowing penny (7)
- 29 Guy who drives Accord with Kia up front or in the rear (7)
- 30 Filthy place invaded by a marine (4)
- 31 In super-popular work, Tim trickily traps witch in a mirror (7)
- 34 Yes, the author is at the center of nonsense, like a kid (6)
- 36 Not taking sides, though finally ignored, is affecting the nerves (6)
- 37 Outspoken and discerning judgment or opinion (8; 2 wds.)
- 38 Interrupted by railroad, menagerie guy writing the same letter over and over with the same words (5)
- 39 Sir, not surprisingly, helps someone get situated, say (7)
- 40 Making fun of giant nut cruelly (8)
- 41 Craft wrecked soundlessly (not loud) (7)
- 42 He at last arranged bower to show arched feature (7)

DOWN

- 1 Offensively gives rage! (9)
- 2 Extremely colorful, with excellent red, green & yellow stripes (6)
- 3 Demur embracing ladies, at first 550, without emotion (6)
- 4 Poorly done signage displays nothing like boats or ships (8)
- 5 Engineered fragments containing bit of sequence including guanine perhaps! (12; 2 wds.)
- 7 Bizarre, soft, red ... what? (7)
- 8 It's essentially problematic in a ruined nap! (5)
- 9 Saint isn't depicted in more majestic artist's studio (7)
- 10 Understate ethnologist's core morals (5)
- 12 Cool and brisk, perhaps, Cory's composed about one of Hamlet's options (8)
- 15 It's helpful to interpret one tot's tears after upset (12; 2 wds.)
- 17 So nice correcting inverted stance (6)
- 22 Cruellest criminal talks at length (8)
- 23 Incoherent old scrawls not initially desirable or too useful for a woodworker (9; 2 wds.)
- 25 Begin to tolerate ingredients from A to Z (6; 2 wds.)
- 26 Narcotic I've quit considered differently (8)
- 27 "Elfish!" and "A beam of sunshine!" declared actress transported by an unusually large pea (7; 2 wds.)
- 28 Commands that guy to break personal records (7)
- 32 Scary old woman, um, discussed Danish icons (6)
- 33 Section of habitat to open in from the parlor (6)
- 34 Oddly breezy, oust Amazon's chief (5)
- 35 One's baked and given a bit of cream! (5)

If you're new to cryptic crosswords and would like tips for solving clues, please contact the constructor at markhalpin3@gmail.com