



**ROUNABOUT
THEATRE
COMPANY**

UPSTAGE GUIDE

A publication of

**EDUCATION AT
ROUNABOUT**

UPSTAGE SPOTLIGHT



MERRILY WE ROLL ALONG

Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

Book by George Furth

Based on the original play by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart

Directed by Noah Brody

Following its triumphant *Into the Woods*, Roundabout's company in residence, Fiasco Theater, reimagines its next Stephen Sondheim creation. With Fiasco's one-of-a-kind imagination, this audacious musical about a trio of showbiz friends who fall apart and come together over 20 years emerges as newly personal and passionate.

Ben Brantley of *The New York Times* calls Fiasco "a force to reckon with in American theater." Roundabout welcomes this ensemble back for this emotionally rich new production that confronts the pains and pleasures of fame, fortune, and old friends.

A NOTE FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR TODD HAIMES

Merrily We Roll Along needs little introduction. Now a cult classic and one of Stephen Sondheim's most beloved works, *Merrily* was widely considered Sondheim's least successful musical when it debuted on Broadway in 1981. But with every subsequent revival, the show continued to grow and evolve, and this production, helmed by Roundabout's company in residence, Fiasco Theater, represents a particularly special chapter in the lifespan of this musical. We have worked closely with Fiasco to develop their vision for the show over the past few years, and, in making some bold changes to the original *Merrily* script, Fiasco's fearlessly inventive production has distilled the musical down to its core. Beneath *Merrily*'s lengthy history, Fiasco reminds us, beneath the years of reviews, revisions, and revivals, lies a quintessential story of friendship, the American Dream, and the tension between the two. Fiasco has brought the best out of *Merrily We Roll Along*, and it is my pleasure to be able to mount their remarkable production on the Roundabout stage.

WHEN

1980-1957 (moving backwards in time)

WHERE

New York City and Los Angeles

WHO

Franklin Shepard: a successful songwriter and film producer

Charley Kringas: a successful lyricist, playwright, and Frank's long-time friend

Mary Flynn: their friend, a novelist and critic

Beth Shepard: a young actress and Frank's first wife

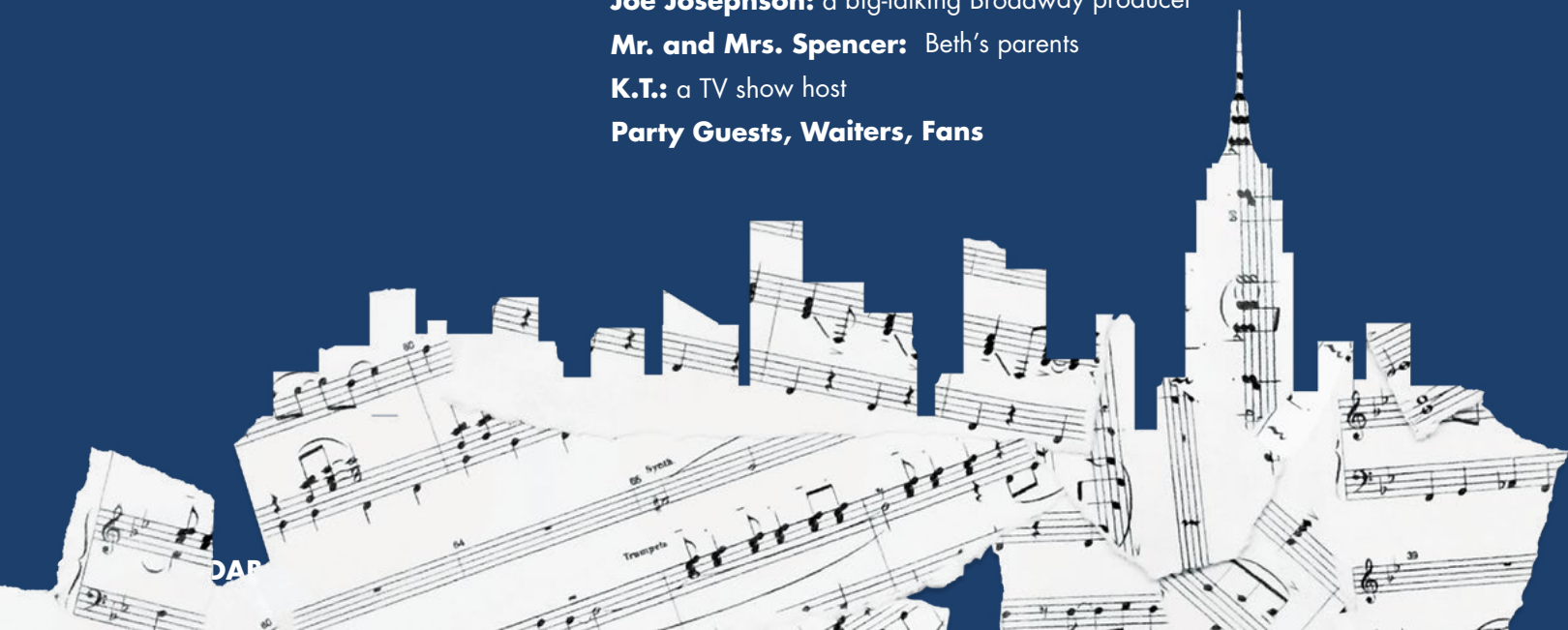
Gussie Carnegie: a successful actress, married to Joe

Joe Josephson: a big-talking Broadway producer

Mr. and Mrs. Spencer: Beth's parents

K.T.: a TV show host

Party Guests, Waiters, Fans



FYI:

THE PAGE NUMBERS FOR THIS GUIDE GO BACKWARDS
(JUST LIKE MERRILY WE ROLL ALONG)

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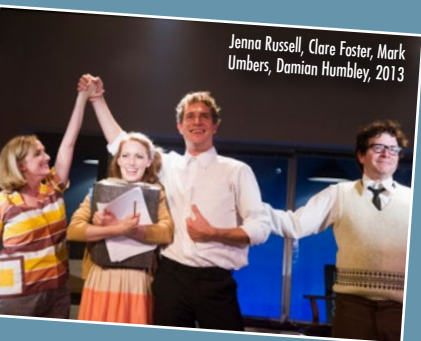
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HOW DID WE GET THERE FROM HERE? MERRILY'S MYRIAD FORMS



For nearly four decades, *Merrily We Roll Along* has undergone many revisions, revivals, and rewrites, with each production seeking to succinctly capture the ephemeral magic and heartbreak its creators imbued it with. Here's a backwards glance at *Merrily's* trajectory.



Jenna Russell, Clare Foster, Mark Umbers, Damian Humbley, 2013

MENIER CHOCOLATE FACTORY

This London production of *Merrily*, lauded by Stephen Sondheim as "the best [he'd] seen" at that time, was a critical and commercial smash. The cast included Damian Humbley as Charley, Jenna Russell as Mary, and Mark Umbers as Frank, and it focused tightly on the interpersonal relationships between the three. In her directorial debut, Maria Friedman led this production from a sold-out run at the Menier Chocolate Factory to a transfer to the West End's Harold Pinter Theatre, receiving more five-star reviews than any other musical in West End history. Acclaimed for its heightened drama, incredible stakes, and stunningly personal performances, this production, wrote Guardian critic Michael Billington, "[made] you wonder how anyone could ever have doubted its quality."

ENCORES!

New York City Center's Encores! series featured a staged concert of *Merrily We Roll Along*, with the roles of Charley, Mary, and Frank performed by Lin-Manuel Miranda, Celia Keenan-Bolger, and Colin Donnell, respectively. Directed by James Lapine, this concert was mindful of *Merrily's* history and borrowed revisions, cuts, and additions from its 1994, 1990, and 1985 productions. Ben Brantley suggested in the *New York Times* that this was a *Merrily* "trapped in time" and elaborated, "It has the air of something overexplaining—and apologizing for—its own flaws." After 30 years of reworking since the original production, the show still seemed to be, according to *Time Out New York*, "an unsolved musical-theater puzzler."

DONMAR WAREHOUSE

The show had its West End debut 12 years earlier, with a production helmed by director Michael Grandage and featuring Daniel Evans, Samantha Spiro, and Julian Ovenden as Charley, Mary, and Frank, respectively. Noted for its restoration of the stirring graduation song "The Hills of Tomorrow" (cut from some previous productions), this *Merrily* continued the tradition of working to redeem what reviewer Matt Wolf phrased as "the bitter yet ravishing beauty of that short-lived Broadway entry." The production received the Olivier Award for Best Musical that year, as well as performance awards for both Evans and Spiro.

2013

2012

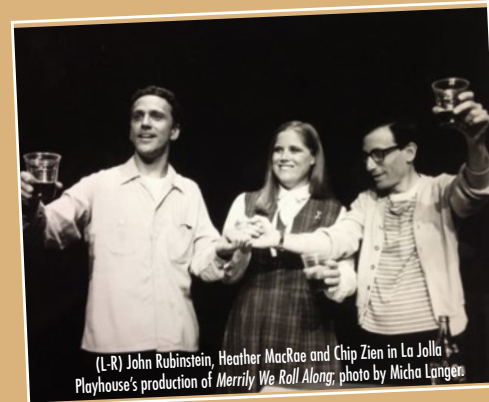
2000



1985

LA JOLLA PLAYHOUSE

Far from the pressures and scrutiny of Broadway, La Jolla Playhouse served as a safe harbor for Sondheim and Furth to return to *Merrily* after its initial Broadway failure and make the first of many attempts to make the show succeed. Directed by James Lapine, the production ran for 24 performances. Furth streamlined the book, and Sondheim added and restored songs in this version (including "Growing Up"), while cutting others. Sylvie Drake of the *LA Times* still found it "lumbering" but felt there was enough good in the show to merit the attempt: "one must hope that the work can and will continue."

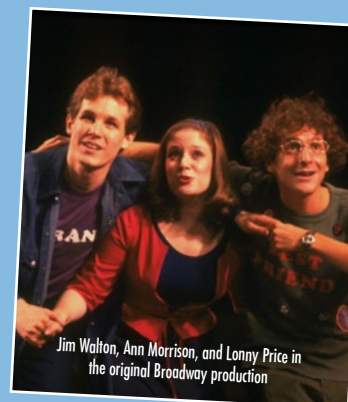


(L-R) John Rubinstein, Heather MacRae and Chip Zien in La Jolla Playhouse's production of *Merrily We Roll Along*; photo by Micha Langer

1981

ORIGINAL BROADWAY PRODUCTION

Opening on November 16, 1981 at the Alvin Theatre, Sondheim and Furth's musical version of George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart's 1934 play began its life in what may be the most torrid and turbulent manner in Broadway history. The production faced harsh judgement due to a libretto seen as "empty" when compared to Sondheim's score, a young cast so difficult to track that their characters had to have their names affixed to their clothes, and critics excited to see America's theatrical giants finally suffer a misstep. Under the direction of Harold Prince, *Merrily* spluttered to an end after only 16 performances, leaving "hearts broken" and heads shaking, wrote Frank Rich for the *New York Times*.

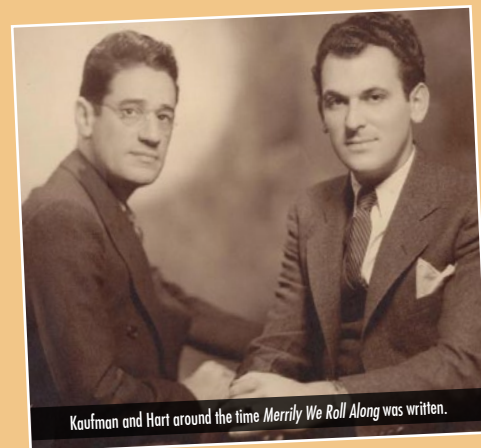


Jim Walton, Ann Morrison, and Lonny Price in the original Broadway production

1934

ORIGINAL PLAY

On a trip from Hollywood to New York in 1931 (during the Great Depression), playwright Moss Hart found himself reflecting on the difficulties of life in early 20th-century America; inspired by the country's success, ambition, and ruin, Hart sought to write a story that mirrored it. Collaborating with George S. Kaufman, *Merrily We Roll Along* told the story of a young playwright who loses as much as he gains as his career advances. In a stroke of inspiration, Kaufman and Hart decided to tell this story in reverse, moving from the protagonist's lonely adulthood backwards to his college graduation day, highlighting just how drastically his circumstances changed. While some responded negatively to this time-warping "gimmick," *Time* considered the production "superbly staged... superbly acted." Featuring a large cast of 91 actors, the production ran for 155 performances.



Kaufman and Hart around the time *Merrily We Roll Along* was written.

IT'S A HIT? THE METAMORPHOSIS OF MERRILY WE ROLL ALONG



Director Harold Prince surrounded by the original cast
© Rivka Shifman Katvan — courtesy Atlas Media Corp

The original production of *Merrily We Roll Along* closed in 1981, after only 16 performances and 44 previews. Except for the *New York Post*, it was nearly impossible to find an enthusiastic review. Theatregoers found the plot difficult to follow, and the cast of 16- to 25-year-olds portraying disillusioned, middle-aged adults confused audiences, many of whom walked out of the theatre mid-show.

Since that initial disappointing debut, *Merrily* has found new life in many ways, including concert, regional, and amateur productions. The legendary Broadway “flop” was even revived to acclaim off-Broadway in 1994 and won London’s Olivier award in 2001. How did what many considered Sondheim’s greatest failure transform into a cult classic musical?

Between 1982 and 1990, Sondheim fans and musical enthusiasts fell in love with the original *Merrily* cast recording, helping the show build a small but dedicated fanbase.

“I knew that no matter what else, we were making theatre history that night.”
— Jason Alexander, original “Joe”

Some fans of the score thought that of *Merrily* might never be produced in their lifetime. The threat of having a Sondheim show locked away for the foreseeable future only increased emotional attachment seen throughout the niche fan base, eventually forming a cult following.

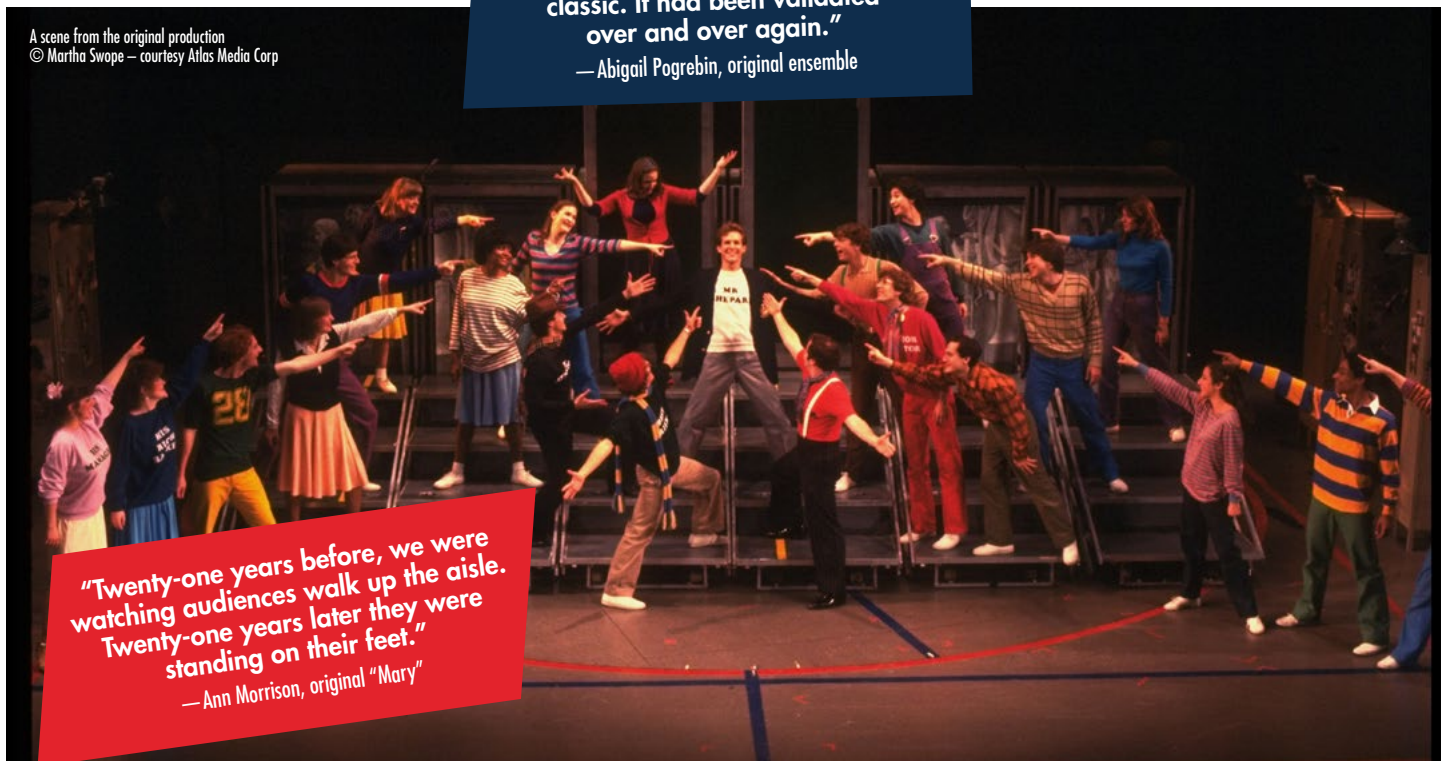
There was also something captivating about witnessing two of Broadway’s most successful artists fail. *Merrily* made the Gods of the Great White Way—Harold Prince and Stephen Sondheim—more human. Fans invested in the early counterculture of *Merrily* because it wasn’t appreciated by the general public or commercially successful. It was something only the cult following understood.

Merrily We Roll Along became a “fixer-upper,” a challenge that excited directors and theatre companies. Imagine being the one to fix “Sondheim’s biggest flop.” Each new production allowed for the show to grow its fanbase. The success of *Merrily We Roll Along* might have been delayed, but it’s still a success. *Merrily* has had hundreds of productions around the world. Whether audiences are Sondheim fanatics, grew up loving the cast recording, or are intrigued by the famous production that broke the Prince and Sondheim streak, the cult classic has proven to be a true hit. •

“What happened to Merrily between its opening and the reunion was a metamorphosis. It had become a cult classic. It had been validated over and over again.”

— Abigail Pogrebin, original ensemble

A scene from the original production
© Martha Swope — courtesy Atlas Media Corp



“Twenty-one years before, we were watching audiences walk up the aisle. Twenty-one years later they were standing on their feet.”
— Ann Morrison, original “Mary”



INTERVIEW WITH FIASCO'S JESSIE AUSTRIAN & BEN STEINFELD



Jessie Austrian



Ben Steinfeld

Fiasco Theater, an ensemble theater company created by graduates of the Brown University/Trinity Rep M.F.A. acting program, has the mission of offering dynamic, joyful, actor-driven productions of classic and new plays, as well as high-level theatrical training through classes and workshops. Their breakout production of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* was presented Off-Broadway twice, for nearly 200 performances, and was honored with the 2012 Off-Broadway Alliance Award for best revival. Fiasco's production of *Into the Woods* at Roundabout garnered the 2015 Lucille Lortel Award for Best Revival.

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with two of Fiasco Theater's co-artistic directors, Jessie Austrian and Ben Steinfeld, about their work on *Merrily We Roll Along*.

Ted Sod: Will you start by telling us what each of your roles is in Fiasco Theater, and in this version of *Merrily We Roll Along*?

Jessie Austrian: I am one of the co-artistic directors of Fiasco and have been part of conceptualizing and script-weaving Fiasco's *Merrily* since we first looked at it in a workshop a couple years ago. And I play Mary Flynn.

Ben Steinfeld: I'm one of the co-artistic directors of Fiasco Theater. I worked on the new version of the script and concept with Jessie and Noah Brody [Fiasco's third co-artistic director and director of *Merrily*], and I play Frank Shepard in the show.

TS: Will you talk about being company in residence at Roundabout Theatre Company? Why was that a choice you all made for Fiasco?

JA: It's a huge gift to be in residence at RTC. RTC's contribution to Fiasco as a company in residence helps us to stay in town and develop work we're passionate about, while attempting to pay our artists

a living wage. Our early workshops [of *Merrily*] varied wildly and sometimes missed the mark entirely, but RTC's faith in us to say "keep working on it" let us learn from those failed experiments and keep working on it until we found the most useful approach.

TS: What went into the decision process before you all said yes to *Merrily We Roll Along* being Fiasco's follow-up musical to your successful version of *Into the Woods*? Will you talk about why you personally thought it important to produce this show? What would you say it is about?

BS: So much of our Fiasco journey as artists has been about dealing with questions of what it means to be old friends who want to make art together. And that's what *Merrily* is about! So it seemed to us that we were in a unique position to bring our experiences and imaginations to the story. And any chance to continue collaborating with Stephen Sondheim is something that any of us would jump at any time. I think this show is about what happens to relationships when the people in those relationships change.

JA: It was a brilliant suggestion from Todd Haimes and Jill Rafson for Fiasco to look at this show. It's about three friends and collaborators dealing with how their relationships, dreams, artistry, and feelings change over time...we know a little bit about that and could bring ourselves to it. On one level, it's about the power of a friendship and collaboration and what gets lost when individual needs, ego, fear, desire, and thoughtlessness get in the way. Fiasco is a group of six artists who have thrown our lot in together: we've opened a lot of doors together because of how we work collectively. It's a cautionary tale for us to remember how important that is and what kind of care it takes to grow together over time—that's not easy.

INTERVIEW WITH FIASCO'S JESSIE AUSTRIAN & BEN STEINFELD (CONT.)



Ben Steinfeld, Jennifer Mudge, and Jessie Austrian in Roundabout's 2015 production of Fiasco's *Into the Woods*

JA (cont.): But here's what it's really about for me: it's about how the younger versions of ourselves still exist within us at every age, and young people's voices have something to teach us at every age. A line that we reinstated from the 1981 script is: "We are all somewhere, way down deep, 18 all our lives, because that is the age when everything is possible." It's not too late to reconnect to your 18-year-old dreams, passion, love, and beautiful naivety. There's something magical as an actor in getting to take the journey back to being 18 over the course of the show, a reenactment in order to learn something from the past. It's almost religious. And right now, in this political moment I think it's very important to tell a story that says: listen to young people.

Because we were given all the previous drafts of the show, we were able to look back at the younger versions of the script. You can better understand how something "got to be here" by looking at its earlier drafts. The more time we spent with it, we found we really loved some of the material from the 1981 version that was cut and changed in later drafts. We wanted to bring out the passion, fun, and the let's-put-on-a-show-energy that infused the 1981 script. We found valuable material in the younger drafts.

TS: Will you all talk about your relationship with Stephen Sondheim? What have you learned about him as an artist, and from him as a human being?

JA: He's as generous and brilliant as you can imagine. It's been a gift to have conversations about the piece with him and learn from his experience with the show over the last 35 years. When we first told him we were interested in exploring the show, he gave us all the archival materials (earlier drafts, cut songs, etc.) from 1981, and that's what really informed the process and this production. He models the line I mentioned above: he has not forgotten or written-off his 18-year-old self. That 18-year-old self is very much in conversation with his current self. He brings his experience to every conversation without an ounce of jadedness or immovability. He has clear ideas and opinions but is always intently listening to other ideas. He is endlessly curious and gives his collaborators the benefit of the doubt. It's extraordinary but not surprising that someone whose work is this inspired also inspires in his process as an artist and a human.

BS: Well, something that sometimes needs to happen when you encounter your heroes is to remember that they are, in fact, both artists and human beings. Stephen's humor, openness, creativity, intellectual fire, and down-to-earth honesty have taught me that, in many ways, we are all on the same journey as theatre artists—trying to do the thing that we think matters and wanting other people to care about it. He has also taught me that all art is a form of teaching.

TS: Describe your process developing this version of the show. How have you drawn upon earlier versions of the story (including the original source material by Kaufman and Hart) to come up with this iteration? How did you arrive at the approach you used? What cracked it open for you during your developmental workshops?

JA: With the estates' blessings, we worked from four versions of the script: the current licensed version (copyright 1994, 1987), the 1981 opening night draft, the 1981 rehearsal draft, and the original 1934 Kaufman and Hart play. We did four workshops over a couple of years. They varied wildly; early on we experimented with it being a total memory play with no transitions or references to years at all, which was interesting as part of our process but ultimately not useful. It was when we really focused the show on the relationship between Frank, Mary, and Charley as the launching point for the rest of the show that things started to crack open. We had experimented with slightly larger cast sizes in different workshops (up to 10 people) but ultimately found it most potent with six: the triangle of Mary, Frank, and Charley plus the triangle of people who interweave with their friendship most over the years: Beth, Gussie, and Joe. Around the same time, we had a crackling meeting with our set designer, Derek McLane, in which he proposed the wonderful idea of the space being a sort of prop/costume warehouse. It's a show about people in the entertainment industry, so doing it with only six cast members in a space where you



Ben Steinfeld, Manu Narayan, and Jessie Austrian in *Merrily We Roll Along*



The company of *Merrily We Roll Along*

can grab a wig off a shelf to play “that guy at that party in 1960” got us very excited, mostly because it sounded FUN. Yes, this show is about the challenges of growing up and growing apart from people you love, but it’s also got a ton of fun baked into it. The thing we loved most about the 1981 drafts was how much fun they were: the initial concept was literally kids putting on a show in the high school gym. Derek’s space and only six actors got at that same spirit in a way that we knew would be fun and rewarding for *Fiasco* and hoped would be as fun and rewarding to the audience.

TS: This musical is famously told in reverse chronology—what are the challenges of presenting a play whose storytelling is backwards?

JA: I don’t really think it’s a huge challenge. It’s like looking at a photo album in reverse: you recognize the people, and perhaps it can be a beautiful experience to seem to see time go backward, which of course it never can in life. Furth and Sondheim wrote a piece of experimental theater in 1981, and we’ve tried to honor that, rather than trying to make the show conform to a kind of dramaturgy that isn’t what the show is trying to do. We have tried to take the pressure off of the years to mean something specific to the audience (since audiences of varying ages will have different relationships to hearing “1973” anyway). A scene in this play happens in 1973 because that’s the year these friends had that specific argument, not because the play is saying something about America in 1973, specifically. It’s about these human beings and where their relationships were at points over the course of 25 years. The particular years aren’t the point; it’s about the broader idea of people and circumstances changing over time.

BS: I’ve come to think that the real challenge of a story on stage that goes backwards is that, as an actor, you have to figure out somehow how your experience of the play can accumulate, move forward, and grow as the show goes on. In a linear show, this happens automatically, since the characters know more at the end than at the beginning. But in *Merrily*, it’s the opposite. As an actor, however, I don’t want to cut short my experience of growth and the richness of accumulating the story—so that’s the challenge. But the writing in this piece, and the staging/acting of our production, makes building a rich experience in real time both possible and fun.

TS: How does a company who had their first breakthrough hit doing Shakespeare end up doing Sondheim? What are the similarities in performing or directing works by both authors? What are the challenges, and what are the profound differences?

JA: They are both masters at putting human experience into language and sound. They work very similarly in that sense—if you unpack what is the human experience that Shakespeare or Sondheim is after in this moment, and let the form (verse, rhythm, style) work in tandem with the content, basically all you have to do as an actor is let it in and have the experience. The writers have done all the work for me; I just have to open my heart, let it in, and be a vessel for their genius.

TS: This is a musical about three friends. How has working on it affected your own friendships and/or working relationships? What is the most salient thing—so far—that you have each learned about yourselves by working on this musical?

BS: Like the characters in the piece, and like the original creators of the show, the three of us have had our ups and downs with this process over the last couple of years. But I’m proud of the fact that we have moved through those conflicts and confusions and come out the other side with something to be really proud of—both personally and artistically. It has helped us with growing up. So far, the thing that I’ve learned about myself working on the show, more than anything else, is that I’ve always really wanted to be a leading man.

JA: I’ve learned, like Mary, that it’s easy to get trapped in nostalgia and think the past was “better.” But the challenge of life is to hold the past, the present, and your hopes for the future in front of you and look at them honestly. It takes care and thoughtfulness to do that, especially to do it with other people you have relationships with who have different narratives about the past and different hopes for the future. I’m enjoying being right here in the middle of this journey right now. •

Learn more about *Fiasco* Theatre [here](#).

STEPHEN SONDHEIM AND HIS MUSICALS



© Martha Swope — courtesy Atlas Media Corp

With 16 original Broadway musicals, plus four Broadway revues, Stephen Sondheim (born March 22, 1930 in New York City) is one of the greatest musical theatre composer/lyricists of all time. Sondheim's growth from a young writer to one of the foremost innovators of the American theatre can be traced through his canon of musicals.

A MUSICAL EDUCATION

Sondheim's musical career began in high school, during which time he apprenticed with Oscar Hammerstein II, the legendary lyricist and dramatist who, with composer Richard Rodgers, created *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, and *The Sound of Music*, to name just a few. Hammerstein, a family friend who became a surrogate father to Sondheim, taught Sondheim the basics of musical form.

PROFESSIONAL YEARS

Sondheim's first musical, *Saturday Night*, was slated for a 1955 Broadway run, but the project fell through, and the show was not produced until 1997. The show got Sondheim noticed, however, by dramatist Arthur Laurents, composer Leonard Bernstein, and director Jerome Robbins, who were collaborating on *West Side Story* (1957). Sondheim was hired as their lyricist, and the show's runaway success led to his next collaboration with Laurents, writing the lyrics for *Gypsy* (1959) alongside composer Jule Styne. Sondheim finally got to work as both lyricist and composer on *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962) and *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964). *Forum* would be the greater commercial success, but in *Anyone Can Whistle* he first employed the art of "pastiche"—parodying various musical theatre conventions and genres to bring different characters to life—which he would later come to master.

THE HAROLD PRINCE DECADE

In the late 1960s, director Harold Prince approached Sondheim with an idea to combine 11 short plays by

playwright George Furth into a single musical, which would be nontraditional in form and plot. The result was *Company* (1970), the first in a long line of Sondheim-Prince hits, including *Follies* (1971), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *Pacific Overtures* (1976), and *Sweeney Todd* (1979). These complex shows rejected traditional Broadway plot structures, used songs to advance themes or ideas (in addition to plot), and explored the darkness and disillusionment of American life. However, after the failure of *Merrily We Roll Along*, Sondheim and Prince did not work together again for many years.

COLLABORATIONS WITH JAMES LAPINE

In 1982, Sondheim teamed up with James Lapine, a playwright and director who primarily worked off-Broadway. Drawing inspiration from French painter Georges Seurat, the duo wrote *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), which won the Pulitzer Prize. They followed this success with *Into the Woods* (1987), a modern interpretation of several fairy tales. Sondheim has said his musicals with Lapine were written with more "formal looseness" than were those with Prince, "allowing songs to become fragmentary, like musicalized snatches of dialogue" and making way for "a current of vulnerability, of longing" to enter his work. The Lapine collaborations were often presented in lower-stakes, off-Broadway venues, prior to Broadway. Sondheim collaborated with book writer John Weidman on *Assassins* (1990), which, in its unconventional plot structure and its off-Broadway run, reflected the influences of both Prince and Lapine. Sondheim worked with Lapine again on *Passion* (1994), his most operatic score to date.



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RECENT PROJECTS

Sondheim’s next show with Weidman, based on the lives of two legendary turn-of-the-century brothers, Wilson and Addison Mizner, was produced in three different iterations: first as *Wise Guys* at New York Theatre Workshop (1999); then as *Bounce* in Chicago (2003); and finally as *Road Show* at The Public (2008). In total, this project’s extensive developmental process—involving four distinctly different versions of the script and three directors over 14 years—echoed the decades-long evolution of *Merrily*. Though Sondheim was satisfied with the end result, the show did not find popular success.

Sondheim is currently collaborating with playwright David Ives on a musical based on the films of Spanish director Luis Buñuel. Meanwhile, his work continues to be revised and reimagined at theatres across the country. Though his canon is still growing, Sondheim has ensured his legacy as a revolutionary of the American theatre. •



SONDHEIM SAYS...

"*Merrily We Roll Along* was written in 1980, but the story...concerns two songwriters who came to their maturity in the 1950s, when traditional song forms still ruled the stage; it seemed appropriate, therefore, that it should be told as much as possible in a series of 32-bar songs. I knew this would make the score sound anachronistic; in fact, I hoped it would... the musical and theatrical language of Broadway had evolved considerably, but I hoped to write the score... as if I still believed in those conventional forms as enthusiastically as I had 25 years earlier, before I and my generation had stretched them almost out of recognition."

HE WROTE THE BOOK

Most musicals have either two or three authors:
THE COMPOSER writes the music

THE LYRICIST writes the words that go along with the music

THE BOOK WRITER pens the non-musical dialogue and helps structure the plot

The book writer sometimes writes lyrics as well as the dialogue; in that case, they are called **THE LIBRETTIST**. For *Merrily We Roll Along*, Stephen Sondheim was both composer and lyricist, while George Furth served as book writer.



George Furth

Furth was born George Schweinfurth in Chicago in 1932. He studied speech at Northwestern University and received an M.F.A. from Columbia University in 1956. Described as "nervous" and "lanky," Furth worked steadily as a character actor from the 1960s through the

1990s. He made his Broadway debut alongside Dustin Hoffman in *A Cook for Mr. General* in 1961 and appeared in many films and television shows, from *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (playing a railroad employee who let himself be blown up to protect his train from robbery) to "Murphy Brown."

Furth’s career as a playwright took off in the early 1970s. *Company*, his first collaboration with Stephen Sondheim (Furth as book writer, Sondheim as composer and lyricist) won him the Best Book of a Musical Tony Award in 1971. *Twigs*, four short plays about the lives of four women from the same family, ran on Broadway for nine months in 1971-72. Furth went on to write several other straight plays, including a 1996 collaboration with Sondheim called *Getting Away with Murder*, and the book of the Kander & Ebb musical *The Act*. He died in 2008.

INTERVIEW WITH MUSIC DIRECTOR ALEXANDER GEMIGNANI



Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with Music Director and Orchestrator Alexander Gemignani about his work on *Merrily We Roll Along*.

Ted Sod: Where were you born and educated? How did you get involved in the theatre?

Alexander Gemignani: I was born in Manhattan on the Upper West Side. My parents moved to New Jersey, so that really is my home. My dad, Paul Gemignani, who is music directing *Kiss Me, Kate* this season, has been music director for many shows at the Roundabout as well as countless musicals spanning a 50-year career. He was also the original MD (music director) on *Merrily* when it debuted on Broadway in 1981. My mom, Carolann Page, is a singer and actress who started in the theatre but mostly did opera when I was growing up, then shifted back to the theatre when I got into high school. When I was five, my mom and I would drive out to Route 17 on Saturdays, I think, to take a Yamaha parent-child piano class. I continued to take private piano lessons and study classical music for several years until my junior year of high school, when I told my Mom I didn't want to play classical music anymore: "I want to play jazz. I want to play shows." I had already been taking scores of musicals off the shelf and playing through them for my own enjoyment. I also picked up the trumpet in fourth grade, and that quickly became the thing I pursued. I went to the University of Michigan to be a trumpet player, but in my freshman year I started to lose my love for playing the horn. I had a very keen awareness of what a life in music would be as an instrumentalist and knew what it would take to be good enough. I was good, but I was not going to be Wynton Marsalis, so I thought, what else do I like to do? I had been in high school plays and musicals, so I transferred into the musical theatre department at Michigan, and it was very evident that it was the right fit for me. I eventually made my Broadway debut as a performer in a revival of *Assassins*, which Roundabout produced. I'm a longtime family member at Roundabout. I subsequently performed in *Violet*, *The People in the Picture*, and *Sunday in the Park with George*.

TS: Is it difficult for you to switch from performer to music director, or does one complement the other?

AG: They definitely complement each other, but they're not mutually exclusive. The longer I'm in the business, the more I crave collaboration, and one of the ways to do that is to wear different hats. They all feed into each other whether I'm composing, orchestrating, music directing, acting, or artistic directing at the O'Neill National Music Theatre Conference. I can happily say that working on *Merrily We Roll Along* has been a tremendous fit and has led to other incredible music directing opportunities, mostly because of Steve (Sondheim's) vote of confidence.

TS: Will you talk about what the music director's job entails on a production like this?

AG: In general, a music director is responsible for maintaining the integrity of the score. Specifically, it means making sure the actors understand the lyrics and guiding them through interpretation, musical phrasing, and sometimes vocal technique, depending on the situation. On a basic level, it means teaching the score and making sure the cast feels confident enough to execute it eight shows a week. A good music director should support and even help create the director's concept for the production and translate that vision into how the



Alexander Gemignani

music is performed. The MD also has to collaborate fully with the choreographer, so the movement and music are in sync, both on a practical level (do the accents and phrasing in the music match up with the dance?) and conceptually (do the arrangements reflect the correct vibe or time period, for instance?). Part of the job is also unlocking an actor's potential, so they can perform at their highest level. It's not about being prescriptive or bossy, but for many actors, including some of our most beloved performers in the industry, it's an incredibly vulnerable thing to sing a song. It takes a tremendous amount of confidence, bravery, and skill.

TS: Who is responsible for the new arrangements and orchestrations? What will the instrumentation be? Would you say this is a new version of the show?

AG: With Steve's blessing, I'm thrilled to be doing the new arrangements and orchestrations. The orchestration is eight players: piano, bass, drums, guitar, two trumpets who double on flugel horns, and two woodwind players. The first woodwind plays flute, clarinet, alto sax, and tenor sax; and the second woodwind plays tenor sax, bass clarinet, and baritone sax. So, they'll be busy. It's definitely a new *Merrily*. We haven't made up any dialogue, and I certainly have not written new music. I'd say the transitions have been given a lot of attention. The *Fiasco* version of the show is actor-driven, and Steve has allowed us to do that. We were able to take our time over a handful of



workshops and ask tons of questions about the show. A result of that process led to me asking myself, “How do I address the things we now believe about the Fiasco version of *Merrily* from a musical perspective?” That can be a very delicate and surgical job. I have to honor Steve Sondheim’s work, the production’s aesthetic, and my own tastes as well. I find that puzzle really thrilling and electrifying. And, of course, when you’re working with some of the greatest material on the planet, it’s a tremendous gift.

TS: Is there anything that your father or Sondheim told you about this score that you are willing to share?

AG: Steve’s very open to and encourages questions, and he’s also extremely collaborative. I actually believe it’s one of the things that makes him the legend and genius he is. He empowers his creative teams to interpret his work in a wild variety of ways, sure, but the story is always paramount. His ability to approach his own material time and again as if it were new and stay endlessly curious is a truly incredible quality...and that of the purest form of theatre maker.

I use my dad as a sounding board every now and again, given his vast experience and passion for the art form. For instance, when I was putting together the orchestrations, he had some great thoughts about the sound and style of the score, since he was there when they first made it in ‘81. The fact that I’m doing this kind of work now has allowed us to compare notes about what this job is and how it’s changed since he was starting out, and what integrity in the job means.

TS: Is there a part of the score that you especially love music directing?

AG: I love the score so much and have been lucky enough to have sung several of the songs in concerts or events, etc. It’s hard to pick a favorite, but for some reason, every time we get to the end of “Our Time,” I’m weeping. It’s one of those things that just creeps up on you. It never really happens when I’m working on it out of context. I think I need the whole dramatic arc of the show ahead of it. As a music director, I love when that song starts to happen because it really is a delicate moment, and I really enjoy delicate moments. I’m also a softy.

TS: Is there a part of the score you think is going to be a challenge?

AG: I think “It’s a Hit” always presents a challenge as a number, because it’s so musically challenging. It’s hard to sustain, it’s hard to settle into the right tempo, it’s hard to know when to put the gas pedal to the floor. Having said that, I delight in the challenge of nailing it. And it’s also not just up to me. I have great actors who are also figuring it out, as well as my fantastic associate, Emily Whittaker.

TS: How else does music directing this chamber version of *Merrily We Roll Along* differ from the original or one of the many revivals?

AG: In any of the bigger choral moments, you have to make sure your bases are covered from a logistical standpoint. Do you have enough voices to cover every line Steve has written to be sung? Pieces like “The Blob,” for instance, have multiple, layered vocal lines, and again you need excellent singing actors to execute it, so no trouble there. When you look at a show originally performed by 18-20 people and decide to do it with six, you have an opportunity to really essentialize everything that’s happening in the play. When you have a small company, you get to enjoy the virtuosity of an actor going from one role to another in a split second.

TS: What specifically were you looking for in the performers who are joining the Fiasco company for this production?

AG: Bravery. And the obvious things like, can they sing it? The two additional actors we’ve cast are just incredible—Manu and Brittany—they are fearless, viciously smart, ask great questions about the text and the characters, and are ready to play. I cannot wait to get in a room with them.

TS: Tell us about the collaborative process with director Noah Brody and choreographer Lorin Latarro.

AG: We’re all actors, so we always looked at things with the thought, “What would be fun to do here?” The greatest lesson in collaboration is the improv lesson: say yes! As my wife, director Erin Ortman, says, “The bad ideas will fall away.” And she’s completely right. If you make space for people to be heard, the good ideas rise to the top. We have each had bad ideas, and that’s fine. That’s part of narrowing down your point of view. You don’t feel free to share your bad ideas unless you know your collaborators have your back. We knew working together would be exhilarating and great fun right from our very first meeting talking through the transitions. In a musical, everything is about the transitions. •



Music Director Alexander Gemingani and Director Noah Brody in rehearsal for *Merrily We Roll Along*

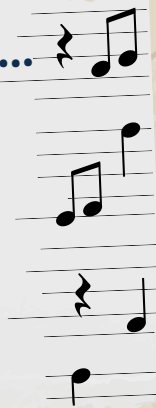
OUR TIME: THE WORLD OF MERRILY WE ROLL ALONG

In conceiving *Merrily We Roll Along*, Stephen Sondheim and George Furth were attentive to the history unfolding around their characters. These are some major events that Frank, Charley, Mary, and their peers would have lived through during the show's timeline.



SONDHEIM SAYS...

"...we were writing about a generation's idealistic expectations for the future, symbolized by the launch of Sputnik, and their deterioration into compromise and deceit, exemplified by Nixon and Watergate and culminating in the Me Decade, as the 1970's came to be labeled."



1973

President Richard M. Nixon holds a press conference on October 26, 1973

CHARLEY AND FRANK ON TV

- Watergate scandal hearings conducted in Senate
- Roe v. Wade assures abortion as constitutional right
- Sharp worldwide inflation hits consumers
- Paris Peace Accord ends U.S. war with Vietnam
- Billie Jean King beats Bobby Riggs in most-viewed tennis match ever



1979

Ronald Reagan, the 40th president of the United States, and his wife Nancy, wave to the public from the presidential car during the Inauguration Day parade, January 21, 1981.

RICH AND HAPPY

- Michael Jackson's breakthrough album "Off the Wall" released (watch [HERE](#))
- Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* premieres on Broadway
- In 1980 Ronald Reagan will be elected POTUS & launch conservative Reagan Era



1976

The first Apple computer, built by Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, now on display at the Smithsonian Museum.

FRANK AND CHARLEY'S LAST FIGHT

- Democrat Jimmy Carter wins presidential election
- "Saturday Night Live" enters second season (watch [HERE](#))
- First punk rock band "The Damned" debuts (watch [HERE](#))



1966-1968

500,000+ U.S. soldiers fight in Vietnam — protests erupt across U.S.

FRANK AND BETH DIVORCE

- Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinated
- McDonald's introduces Big Mac (49¢)
- *Hair* plays on Broadway



1964

The Beatles wave to fans after arriving in New York City on February 7, 1964 just before their first U.S. television appearance.

"IT'S A HIT" ON BROADWAY

- Lyndon B. Johnson is POTUS after JFK assassination in '63
- Congress authorizes Vietnam War
- Martin Luther King, Jr. wins Nobel Peace Prize



1958-1960

President Richard M. Nixon holds a press conference on October 26, 1973

OPENING DOORS

- VP Nixon and USSR Premier Khrushchev debate capitalism on television
- Cuba is first communist country in the west
- Gypsy (lyrics by Sondheim) opens on Broadway



1962

Amazing Fantasy (1962) #15, cover art by Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko

FRANK AND CHARLEY MEET "THE BLOB"

- Cuban Missile Crisis nearly starts new world war
- Marilyn Monroe sings "Happy Birthday" to JFK; 3 months later dies of pill overdose
- Spider-Man first appears in Marvel Comics



Sputnik 1

1957

OUR TIME

- USSR launches first satellite Sputnik, and the space race begins
- Republican Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower is POTUS since 1953
- My Fair Lady wins Tony for Best Musical
- "American Bandstand" premieres on TV



1960-1961

Inaugural Address of John F. Kennedy, 35th President of the United States, on January 20, 1961

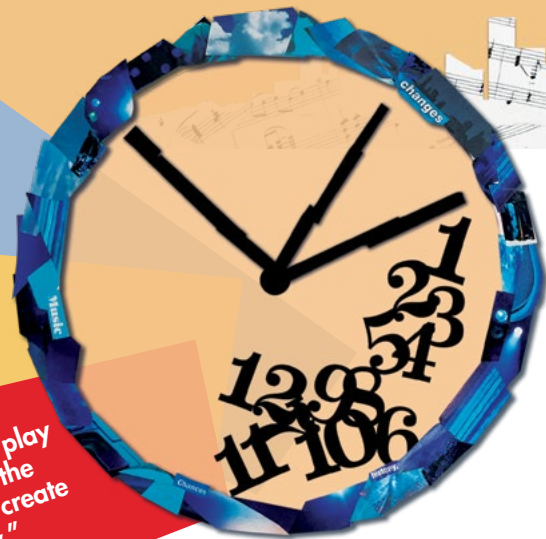
FRANK AND BETH GET MARRIED

- First U.S. troops sent to Vietnam
- Birth control pill approved by FDA
- Chubby Checker's "The Twist" starts dance craze (watch [HERE](#))
- West Side Story movie (lyrics by Sondheim) released

LOOKING BACK TO MOVE FORWARD

The events in *Merrily We Roll Along* unfold in reverse chronological order, from a moment in the characters' middle adulthood, when their destinies appear settled, back to their early 20s, when everything was possible and nothing was secure. George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart—authors of the original play—chose to focus audience attention on the how and why of the characters' journeys, rather than on what happened.

"It could be told in no other way. Played forward, or in the conventional manner, the play would have no point. Played backward, the audience is allowed to see each character create his individual and inevitable tragedy."
—Moss Hart



Merrily isn't the only narrative told in reverse chronology: Alexandre Dumas fils' *La Dame aux Camélias* (played famously by Sarah Bernhardt) opens with the death of a courtesan before exploring her life. J.B. Priestley's *Time and the Conways* (seen last season at Roundabout) and Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* are other examples. By giving audiences hindsight on events across time, these plays allow us to understand how the characters' choices shape their destinies.

Psychologists use the term **hindsight bias** to describe our tendency to claim to have known how an event would play out before the it began. One study found that while 58% of people correctly predicted the outcome of a judicial confirmation hearing before it took place, 78% of these people claimed that they had correctly predicted the outcome, after the hearing. In our individual lives, hindsight bias leads us to misremember events, assume the inevitability of outcomes in our lives, and punish ourselves for not realizing how things would play out. This can prevent us from learning from our experience: if we believe the outcome was inevitable, then nothing we do could change it.

Reverse chronology stories also encourage us to engage in **narrative reflection** on our own lives. We can rarely understand the meaning

of events in our lives in the moment; it's only with the passing of time that we can analyze what happened, why it happened, and how it connects to who we are today. This type of consciously looking backwards has been part of spiritual traditions for centuries—including Buddhists, Stoics, and Ignatians—helping us make choices that lead to more fulfilling and ethical lives.

The end of *Merrily We Roll Along* finds both the characters and the nation at a moment that, in retrospect, seems innocent and ideal. The feeling of **nostalgia** (derived from the Greek words for "home pain," or longing for the past) has a purpose: it's been proven to lessen loneliness, improve social connection, and give a sense of meaning and value to our experience. In ending *Merrily* with a warm and wistful scene, the authors leave the audience in a state of heightened consciousness, not cynicism, about their lives. Just as the catharsis of Greek tragedy helped its audience to purge strong emotions, reverse chronology allows modern audiences to consider the past more clearly, reflect on the moments that have shaped our own lives, and move confidently into the future. •



SONDHEIM SAYS...

"In truth, like the characters in the show, I was trying to roll myself back to my exuberant early days, to recapture the combination of sophistication and idealism that I'd shared with Hal Prince, Mary Rodgers, Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick, John Kander and Fred Ebb, and the rest of us show business supplicants, all stripped back to our innocence."

INTERVIEW WITH CHOREOGRAPHER LORIN LATARRO



Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with choreographer Lorin Latarro about her work on *Merrily We Roll Along*.

Ted Sod: Where were you born and educated? Did you have any teachers who had a profound influence on you? You started as a performer. Why did you want to become a choreographer?

Lorin Latarro: I was born in Fairfield, New Jersey and shuttled in and out of New York City for dance classes when I was young. Most members of my family are doctors, but I am grateful my parents supported my drive to become a professional dancer. I was lucky enough to be accepted to The Juilliard School. The experience was life-changing, and my exposure to international teachers was inspiring. Even more than the hundreds of hours of technical study, it was the constant creative environment that taught me how to be an artist, how to live as an artist, how to hold habits to maintain creativity. During freshman year, Pina Bausch and Jirí Kylián were both teachers of mine. Ben Harkavy and Linda Kent also were positive influences, and it was there that Frank Corsaro introduced me to opera—another love of mine.

Though I performed both on Broadway in 14 shows and in modern dance companies, I was always simultaneously choreographing. In MOMIX, my first professional dance company, we devised the work together, and on Broadway I often assisted choreographers. At a certain point, I realized I enjoyed working on creating the shows more than being in shows. The transition felt natural and timely. My years as a dancer have given me the gift of understanding masters like Bob Fosse, Twyla Tharp, Michael Bennett, Steven Hoggett, Martha Graham, among so many other giants.

TS: How did you research the world of *Merrily We Roll Along*? Can you give us some insight into your process as a choreographer?

LL: First of all, to receive a call from the *Fiasco* team was an unexpected thrill. I am a huge fan of their work and process. My hope was to join them in the room and not squash their singular aesthetic, but to extend ideas and riff with them. I read the play and watched the original grainy video on YouTube. I also watched my dear friend Lonny Price's gorgeous documentary. My process varies, based on the content of a play or musical. Sometimes I prep heavily and know exactly where everyone stands and what count they dance on, and how each musical

number begins and ends. For *Merrily* though, we found most of our ideas in the room together. We discovered how our *Merrily* behaved on our feet. *Fiasco* actors have sharp, smart instincts. The vibe was so creative that with each day we dreamt up new moments.

TS: What do you think the musical is about? How do you understand the relationship among Frank, Charley, and Mary? What are the challenges in storytelling that goes backwards in time?

LL: I fell in love with this musical. The musical is a love letter to every person who has lived long enough to make some mistakes; every person who can look back to their past and see course shifts—some good, some bad. So, basically everyone. The three friendships are bittersweet. This is a cautionary tale about communication and ambition and how easy it is to forget the integrity that comes with being a neophyte. Working backwards has its thrilling possibilities and pitfalls. Even talking about the dramaturgy can get confusing. I often heard one of us saying, "You mean the order it happens onstage, or when it happened in the characters' lives?" Ultimately, the concept works beautifully to make an audience feel the consequence of one's actions.

TS: Will your work be influenced at all by the work of choreographers on the many other revivals of *Merrily We Roll Along*? If so, how?

LL: I don't think my work will be influenced by earlier choreographic decisions, but rather from *Fiasco*'s point of view and approach. Though, choreography is a sneaky thing. Sometimes, a choreographer's ideas are so deeply imbedded in the DNA of a show, they are disguised as stage direction or even text. For those moments, I am grateful and respectful of all the artists who worked on it in the past and their lasting influence on the show.

TS: What do you look for when collaborating with a director and musical director? Will you talk about working with your collaborators, Noah Brody and Alexander Gemignani?

LL: When working with the rest of the creative team, I am attracted to true collaborators who support creativity and are brave enough to take something apart to see other ways it can be put together. Noah, Alex, and I clicked in a deep way. The rehearsal room was buzzing with creativity. Noah, our brilliant director, is a dramaturgical wizard. One needs to be a wizard with *Merrily* because it is hard to keep track of what the audience sees chronologically, and what happens in the characters' lives chronologically. Alex, I like to say, was literally born into a pool of Sondheim. It's like he soaks in the notes and lyrics. He is remarkable. The music is so deeply in his veins, he knows every note and understands how to honor every moment of the music.

TS: Any advice for young people who want to choreograph musicals?

LL: Go for it! Choreographing musicals is very satisfying! Just say yes to every opportunity, no matter how big or small. If you enjoy the work, the actor/dancers will enjoy the work, and then the audience will enjoy the work as well.

TS: How do you keep yourself inspired as an artist?

LL: I am constantly inspired by fellow artists and collaborators. I love to travel solo and take in a new city, but New York City keeps me buzzing with new plays, musicals, art, and movies. I read a lot and I daydream a lot. •

DESIGNER STATEMENTS

DEREK McLANE—SET DESIGN

I've known *Merrily We Roll Along* for a long time and have always found it poignant. It chronicles a lifetime of diminishing aspirations and dreams—something I have witnessed among both friends and family. The score is one of the most exhilarating ever written, and the libretto is one of the most challenging to produce. The genius of *Merrily* is that it tells the story backwards, so that the story ends when a group of young people are at their most idealistic and ambitious. There were two tracks of research for this set design: one was for the overall environment, which in our production is a costume/prop storage area creating the "toy chest" from which we tell the story, and the other was for the individual scenes, which take place in receding time periods and economic conditions. This is my fourth collaboration with Fiasco Theatre Company. Fiasco tells stories through the use of objects, manipulated by actors, so a big part of my job is to invent the "toy chest" out of which these objects come. I always start the design process by reading the script, listening to music, and talking with the director. Next, I sketch. I revise and redraw until an idea emerges. My associates and I then build scale models, which I share with the director. This is often the time when the director figures out how to physicalize the production. *Merrily* is a big show and orchestra to fit on the intimate Laura Pels stage. We are building two balconies offstage for the orchestra, using the space below to store furniture and props. Our biggest challenge is making clear where and when the action is happening, within the confines of the constructed space.

PALOMA YOUNG—COSTUME DESIGN

I love the way *Merrily We Roll Along* feels like rewinding a timer, letting it run forward and then twisting it back again. There's a thrilling/exhausting confusion to it, and I am excited to both embrace and tame that a little. We all have moments of examining our past by identifying starting points that seem to have infinite possibilities but then ultimately lead us to different or unexpected destinations. I also feel this musical is in sync with our nation's anxiety, depression, and mourning.

As a costume designer, it is always fun to explore how the personality traits of the characters evolve or remain the same over time and what that means for the way these characters dress themselves. The action in *Merrily* transpires backwards over 23 years in the 20th century, so I covered a lot of ground collecting primary source images. Noah Brody, the director, and I met several times and looked through those images. The small cast and the Fiasco style require paring the costume design down to something elemental. We are creating a world that takes place in an imagined backstage space, so the costume design process will continue throughout the rehearsals and allow for ample improvisation. There are moments in the show where we're still looking for the perfect piece to pull out of the "costume trunk." I'm lucky to know the cast as I design, so I can look at each individual and design to their body and personality. Defining the world can be easy to do with period pieces, but the period in *Merrily* is a moving target. I think this may be the first show I've designed where the characters themselves have become the geography I keep returning to.

CHRISTOPHER AKERLIND—LIGHTING DESIGN

I love *Merrily We Roll Along*. Like the last project I designed for the Roundabout, *Time and the Conways*, plays and musicals that have an odd element of time in them are always interesting for a lighting designer. The "present to past" inverse unfolding of this story about people on the cusp of something wonderful, who transform into something tired and cynical, requires the help of lighting to give the moments of the past a feeling of romance. And where we begin/end in the present, we need a steelier, harder environment. Another exciting requirement, in addition to the lighting designer's responsibility to create legibility, composition, tone, etc., is the need to articulate this particular production's required places and times within Derek McLane's set, which features a warehouse of objects, props, and costumes. It's a theatre warehouse where the imagination can conjure anything needed to enhance and create the islands necessary to allow *Merrily*'s reverse river of time to exist.



Set Model for *Merrily We Roll Along*



1980



1975



1962

Costume Sketches for the character of Gussie in *Merrily We Roll Along*

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES



HOW DO STORYTELLERS USE TIME AND ORDER OF EVENTS TO CLARIFY OR OBSCURE THE PLOT?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5)

Before seeing *Merrily We Roll Along*, students explore the creative opportunities and challenges of performing and watching a story in reverse chronology.

- PREPARE** Split students into groups of 4-6. Each group selects a fable or fairytale that they know very well. Instruct the students to work together to identify the (1) exposition, (2) rising action, (3) climax, (4) falling action, and (5) conclusion of their selected story.
- CREATE** Explain to students that a tableau is a frozen stage picture, created by a group of performers who hold a pose. Have the groups create one tableau for each of the five parts of the story they chose. Next, rehearse the tableaux in reverse chronology, starting with the conclusion tableau (5) and working toward the exposition tableau (1).
- PERFORM** Invite each group up to perform their tableau in reverse chronological order (from 5 to 1). Ask observing students what it's like to take in the story in reverse chronology.
- REFLECT** How is it different to watch a familiar story backwards? How did it affect your ability to understand the story? How is it different as a performer to act in reverse order? Did you discover anything new about the story or characters by thinking about it in reverse?

HOW DOES AN ACTOR USE ANALYSIS TO PREPARE TO PERFORM A 32-BAR SONG?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.2)

Before seeing *Merrily We Roll Along*, students explore the musical structure of a 32-bar song.

- PREPARE** Use this **AABA SONG FORM PDF** to explore elements of a 32-bar song (AABA) with your students. Students will then listen to several popular examples of a 32-bar song, working together to identify the (A) verse and the (B) bridge.
- CHANT** Once students have a better understanding of the 32-bar song structure, they will receive this **HANDOUT** of lyrics for "Good Thing Going" from *Merrily We Roll Along*. Students will work independently for five minutes to identify the (A) verse and the (B) bridge of the song. Next, the class will share their AABA selections and why they made those selections.
- COMPARE** There are many variations of the 32-bar song (AABA) format. Students will listen to "Good Thing Going" from *Merrily We Roll Along* (available **HERE**), a typical 32-bar song (AABA), and compare it to one of Sondheim's other compositions, "Your Fault" from *Into the Woods* (available **HERE**), which deviates from the typical 32-bar song (AABA).
- REFLECT** How does the structure of a 32-bar song impact the mood or tone of the song? How did the melody make you feel? How can analyzing the structure of a song benefit a performer?



POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

HOW DOES A COMPOSER-LYRICIST COMPOSE A 32-BAR SONG?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.5)

After seeing *Merrily We Roll Along* and exploring the musical structure of a 32-bar song, students will write lyrics for their own songs, using the AABA form.

PREPARE Review this **AABA SONG FORM PDF** to explore the elements of a 32-bar song (AABA) with your students. Then, have them listen to “Good Thing Going” from *Merrily* (available **HERE**) as a reminder of a 32-bar song from the show. Discuss the themes related to friendship seen in *Merrily We Roll Along* and how they are explored in the lyrics of “Good Thing Going.”

COMPOSE Lead students through a brainstorm on what friendship means to them. Next, students will use this **LYRIC-WRITING TEMPLATE** containing a sample song formula to compose their own 32-bar song, exploring the topic of friendship. Students may choose to use the tune of an existing 32-bar song such as “Good Thing Going,” “Over the Rainbow,” or “Blackbird” or compose their own tune.

SHARE (OPTIONAL) Have students share their compositions aloud with a partner. Students may give feedback and use this to revise their compositions.

PERFORM Allow a few students to share their compositions with the class. In between songs, have students identify the AABA pattern and share observations on how friendship is explored in these songs.

REFLECT How did we hear the theme of friendship being explored in the lyrics? How does the AABA structure help you to construct lyrics? What are some of the differences between telling a story through song vs text? Why do we use music as a tool for storytelling?

HOW DOES A THEATRE ENSEMBLE CELEBRATE “FAILURES” AS LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3)

After seeing *Merrily We Roll Along*, students explore the act of turning failures into moments of learning and approaching failure as part of any artistic or innovative process.

DISCUSS Read and discuss “It’s a Hit?” (page 18) and “How Did We Get There From Here?” (pages 20-19) in this guide. How was the original production of *Merrily We Roll Along* received by critics and audiences? How have the creators revised the show since that time? How did critical and audience feedback help?

WRITE Have students write a paragraph (or more) about a failure they experienced. Encourage them to consider times they took a risk and things didn’t work out, either in sports, school, relationships, a job, or perhaps innovating a way to do an everyday task. Remind them that the stories will be shared.

STAGE Working in groups of 4-6, have students tell the stories within small groups. After each story, listening group members should snap or applaud the failure. Once all have shared, ask each group to create a scene, staging a pivotal moment in one of the failures. After staging their scenes, have them create a monologue that reveals how the protagonist learned from this failure.

SHARE Students perform scenes but freeze before the monologue. At the freeze, ask the audience what they think the protagonist learned from the failure. Then, re-animate the scene and continue into the monologue.

REFLECT What was the experience of revisiting a failure from the past and finding the learning in it? Why are failures important? What can we do to make sure that failures don’t hold us back?

GLOSSARY AND RESOURCES

**32-BAR SONG:
(OR AABA FORMAT)** Popular song form, often used in traditional American musicals. The standard form is 32 measures long, with each section of the song being 8 measures long, following a structure of: (A) Verse (A) Verse, (B) Bridge (A) Verse. "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" is an example of a classic 32-bar song. *Sondheim chose to use 32-bar songs throughout Merrily We Roll Along because these are the types of songs that Frank and Charley would have known best*

BOFFOLA: Extremely successful or sensational
The opening night audience of Musical Husbands, loves the show calling it boffola

FERMEZ LA BOUCHE: A common French phrase that literally translates to "close your mouth"
As Gussie introduces Frank and Charley, she tells the crowd to sit down and fermez their bouches.

GROSS PERCENT: The percentage of the money made from selling a product, minus the cost to produce it
Frank tries to get Charley to write a new show by telling him that he will negotiate to ensure that they get a gross percent.

OPTION: In film, an agreement between the author of a story and a film producer that grants the producer the rights to turn it into a movie
Frank is eager to option Musical Husbands, so that they can make money off of the movie grosses.

UPBRAID: To criticize severely or find fault with
Frank says that having an old friend like Charley who always upbraids him helps to keep him balanced.

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ABOUT ROUNABOUT

ROUNDABOUT ARCHIVES

PEEKING THROUGH THE CURTAIN: STORIES FROM THE ARCHIVES

As we head into our eighth Sondheim production, Roundabout's archives contain a wealth of production records chronicling our interpretation of his and his collaborators' work—starting with our 1985 production of *Company* at the Criterion Center, Stage Right, all the way to our 2015 pared-down staging of *Into the Woods* (conceived by resident company Fiasco Theatre) at the Laura Pels Theatre. In 2010, we staged James Lapine's *Sondheim on Sondheim* at Studio 54. This musical revue used documentary projection to provide an intimate look at Sondheim—the man—using many of his well-known songs to underpin the narrative.

These items are examples of some unique records from our production archives. While our archives maintain the common remnants of a production (playbills, posters, photographs, etc.), we also retain unique documents, such as played part orchestrations, unique stage props, and annotated blocking scripts. These records provide both researchers and theatre fans alike a contextualized look into our production history.

For more information on the Roundabout Archives, visit <https://archive.roundabouttheatre.org> or contact Tiffany Nixon, Roundabout Archivist, at archives@roundabouttheatre.org



Sondheim on Sondheim set sketch by Beowulf Boritt

Show art by SpotCo

Company set model/design by Tony Walton

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: IINTERVIEW WITH KATIE CHRISTIE, DIRECTOR OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Ted Sod: Tell us about yourself. Where were you born and educated? How and when did you become the education department's Director of Teaching and Learning?

Katie Christie: I was born in Indianapolis but spent most of my life in Miami. I grew up doing theatre and then founded an organization that has been using theatre for 30 years to promote cross-cultural understanding and offer a platform for young voices locally, nationally, and around the world. I have a Liberal Studies degree from Florida International University, but most of my education comes from the school of life. I also have a grown daughter named Maya Umoja, who is the joy of my life! I came to Roundabout and NYC a year ago, seeking a job in the theatre that would allow me to work with a large population.

TS: Describe your job at RTC. What are your responsibilities?

KC: I work with the Teaching Artist roster, providing them with the

training they need. I also oversee Roundabout Youth Ensemble (RYE), School Programs, and Professional Development. My job at RTC is always an adventure. We stay very busy, visiting programs, hosting events, and having a lot of meetings. My goal every day is to do my best to support the needs of our TAs, while making sure our programs are the best they can be and in line with the goals of our department and the theatre.

TS: What is the best part of your job? What is the hardest part?

KC: The best part of my job is interacting with the programs, Teaching Artists, students, and teachers. The hardest part of my job is working to embody equity, diversity, and inclusion in our work.

TS: Why do you choose to work at Roundabout?

KC: I chose Roundabout because I wanted to have to opportunity to be part of the positive changes that are currently occurring in the American theatre around the country. •

Learn more at roundabouttheatre.org. Find us on:



WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

FOR
EDUCATORS

TICKET POLICY

As a student participant in an Education at Roundabout program, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

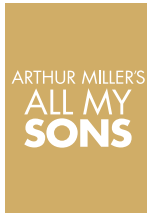
PROGRAMS

All the theatre patrons are provided with a program that includes information about the people who put the production together. In the "Who's Who" section, for example, you can read about the actors' roles in other plays and films, perhaps some you have already seen.

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the restroom for intermission. Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a cell phone or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.

ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY • 2018-2019 SEASON



Roundabout Theatre Company (Todd Haimes, Artistic Director/CEO), a not-for-profit company founded in 1965, celebrates the power of theatre by spotlighting classics from the past, cultivating new works of the present, and educating minds for the future. More information on Roundabout's mission, history and programs can be found by visiting roundabouttheatre.org.

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NYC Cultural Affairs



ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY