CONNECTING THE DOTS: A HISTORY OF STEPHEN SONDHEIM’S

SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE

A THESIS IN
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CONNECTING THE DOTS: A HISTORY OF STEPHEN SONDHEIM’S
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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2012

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a history of Stephen Sondheim’s musical Sunday in the Park with George (1984), which was inspired by Georges Seurat’s masterpiece: Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte (1886). By first examining the lives and careers of Seurat and Sondheim, a foundation is established to take a deeper look into the creation of this musical. It becomes clear how the lives of these two men intertwined to form a groundbreaking show. From its moment of conception to its closing night on Broadway, the history of the musical theatre piece is chronicled in detail. Through the recollections of the show’s creators, stars, and critics, the ups and downs of this journey are revealed. Four other productions of this show are explored, all of which opened after the completion of the original Broadway run. These versions were put on at different times in various locations and take on unconventional styles, but each one proves that Sunday in the Park with George remains a Sondheim classic that has the power to change lives as it did history.
The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, have examined a thesis titled “Connecting the Dots: A History of Stephen Sondheim’s *Sunday in the Park with George,*” presented by Rebecca H. Rubino, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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PREFACE

Stephen Sondheim has been my favorite composer since I was in elementary school. I first discovered his music through one of his muses: Bernadette Peters. It was Halloween and I had just come home from trick-or-treating. I sat down in front of the television and began watching the televised version of Sondheim’s Into the Woods. I did not know what the show was, but recognized all my favorite fairytale characters like Cinderella and Little Red Riding Hood. As I kept watching, I became enchanted by the Witch, who was played by Peters. She had power and attitude, but was funny too. She sang great songs that were full of passion. I was amazed by her change from ugly to beautiful at the end of the first act. It seemed like magic that the old hag became a stunning beauty in a matter of seconds. She became my new idol. I was determined to find out all about the lady who played the Witch. I read all about her and tried to see everything she was in. This eventually led me to Sunday in the Park with George.

The first time I saw Sunday in the Park with George, it was just to see Peters. I was a pre-teen and did not grasp the overall point of the show, but would watch it over and over again. I loved the songs and adored watching her perform. At that age, I did not understand that I was seeing a theatre performance that just happened to have cameras capturing it. To me anything that I saw on television had to be just like in the movies. Every moment could be repeated until the whole thing was perfect. When “We Do Not Belong Together” came on, I was amazed. George and Dot were fighting about their love for each other and Peters
was crying. Her entire face glistened with tears. I studied that scene to try to figure out how they made her cry. Maybe when they cut to Mandy Patinkin, she put drops of water in her eyes or pinched herself. I was sure it had to be some kind of special effect. It was so convincing and felt real. Suddenly the truth dawned on me. It was real. It was not some trick of the camera or make-up; it was live theatre. Peters was standing there crying. She was in the moment and the pain of the scene moved her to tears. It was sincere and heartbreaking. I had seen live musicals before, but had never seen one in which someone stood onstage and cried. It was a very powerful moment. My admiration for Peters skyrocketed and this Sondheim musical became one of my favorites.

During my freshman year in college that fact was reaffirmed. I watched *Sunday in the Park with George* with new eyes. This time I picked it up because of Patinkin. I had recently discovered him in *The Princess Bride* and went into one of my obsessive states. Since I already had *Sunday in the Park with George* on DVD, I figured I could start my investigation into his career by watching that. I had not seen the show in many years and looked forward to revisiting an old favorite. I sat there watching a story I had seen countless times before, but this time it was different. I had grown up and the story seemed more relevant to my life. At the time, I was contemplating becoming a theatre major and was surrounded by many people who told me it was a bad idea. I understood George’s longing for others to understand his passion and his wish to connect. I related to modern-day George’s desire to be something special. At the end of the show, Dot tells George he must not worry what others think and simply move on. She says:
Anything you do,  
Let it come from you.  
Then it will be new.  
Give us more to see. (Sondheim 52)

She calls out to all the characters in the painting and invites them to see George. I was overwhelmed. The characters were finally able to recognize George’s genius and pay their respects. As they sang “Sunday” and bowed before him, I burst into tears. I had never seen anything so beautiful. It was a moment that has remained with me always.

Since I adored the musical so much, I decided that I needed to make the journey to see Seurat’s masterpiece in person. Once I arrived at the Art Institute of Chicago, I found the location of the painting and began making my way to it. As I walked through the different galleries, my heart began to beat faster and faster. I had to restrain myself from running through the halls of the museum just to find it. Then I turned a corner and there it was in all of its glory. It stopped me in my tracks and took my breath away. I walked towards the magnificent canvas and stood in wonder of Seurat’s brilliance. I was in complete awe of this glorious piece of art, but I wanted to take my experience a step farther. As I sat there in front of the painting, I listened to the entire cast recording of Sunday in the Park with George. I examined each character in the painting as I heard his or her story being brought to life through Sondheim’s music. It was a life-changing experience that made me appreciate the genius of both Sondheim and Seurat on a deeper level.

When it came time to write my thesis, I had no idea what to write about. Someone told me a former professor of hers wrote about Sondheim’s musicals and how they showed the destruction of the American dream. I liked that idea and decided I would do something relating to Sondheim as well. So I turned to my old favorite: Sunday in the Park with
George. I wondered how much of the musical was actually based on Georges Seurat’s real life. Did he really have a mistress who left him while she was pregnant? Was he such a focused artist that he shut out the rest of the world in favor of his paintings? How did he come to paint without mixing colors on his palette? Then I thought about Sondheim. How did he go from writing lyrics for *West Side Story* to writing a musical about the life of this painter and his great-grandson? How did the show come together? What were people’s reactions when it first opened on Broadway? Finally, I recalled the impact that this show had on my life. I was so touched by this musical, but I knew many people did not feel the same way. They thought the first act was slow moving and that the second act was superfluous. It made me sad that others did not see the beauty that I saw in this story. So I resolved to try to open their eyes to the brilliance of Sondheim’s masterpiece.

*Sunday in the Park with George* changed my life forever and I have five people to thank for that: Bernadette Peters, Mandy Patinkin, Stephen Sondheim, James Lapine, and Georges Seurat. This musical opened my eyes to the power of live theatre. It taught me that the only art worth making comes from your heart and that most people have a strong desire to connect to the world and people around them. Every time I watch the DVD, I recall the magic this show made me feel. By delving into the life of the artist, the life of the composer, and the creation of this musical, my love for *Sunday in the Park with George* has increased by leaps and bounds. I might never have been exposed to this musical had I not seen *Into the Woods* that one Halloween night. I am grateful to Peters for introducing me to this show; Patinkin for helping me rediscover it; Sondheim and Lapine for creating it; and Seurat for living it.
To Bernadette: thank you for introducing me to the magic of theatre.
CHAPTER 1
THE ARTIST

Georges-Pierre Seurat was born on December 2, 1859, in Paris. He was the third child of Antoine-Chrisostôme and Ernestine Faivre. He had an older brother, Émile, an older sister, Marie-Berthe, and a younger brother, François-Gabriel, who died in 1868. Because his siblings were thirteen and twelve years older than him, respectively, Seurat was the only child in his household by the age of nine. His parents had a thirteen-year age difference between them.

Seurat’s father was in the real estate business, having bought a bailiff’s office in 1840. By 1856, the elder Seurat had earned enough money to retire, and this set him free to spend his time as he pleased. Unfortunately for Seurat, this did not mean his father wished to be home. “It is known that Seurat’s father escaped from the family circle in the Boulevard Magenta whenever he could, taking refuge at La Raincy, where he had a house . . .” (Courthion 11-12). He would come home every Tuesday for a family dinner, but aside from that Seurat thought of his father as a distant, cold figure. His mother, on the other hand, was the center of his world. Ernestine came from a family of sculptors and carpenters. She was a quiet, peaceful woman who provided a source of strength for her son that lasted until his death in 1891.

The best thing that his father provided for Seurat was a financially stable home. Seurat was raised in a world where he never wanted for anything. His family lived in a
fourth-floor, six-room apartment on the boulevard Magenta. This was a relatively new street that was perfectly situated between the modern and the old areas of Paris. He referred to this apartment as his official home even though he owned several other studios throughout his life. He went to standard schools until he was sixteen when he decided to pursue his interest in art. In 1875, Seurat enrolled in drawing class at the École Municipale de Sculpture et de Dessin located near his home. The program was run by sculptor Justin Lequien who emphasized proper training for his artists. His students were charged with assignments of sketching sculptures, lithographs, and live models. Seurat moved quickly through the ranks along with his friend, Edmond Aman-Jean. Within two years both young men were able to produce drawings of great skill which signified that they were ready for the next step in their development as artists.

In February 1878, Seurat and Aman-Jean took their exams to gain entrance into the École des Beaux-Arts. They passed with flying colors and were studying under Henri Lehmann within a month. Lehmann, like Lequien, stressed the importance of studying the basics of art. Students competed in competitions held within the institution as a way of measuring each student’s success and progress. Seurat returned to drawing plaster casts and models, but he wanted more. “. . . [H]e gradually became dissatisfied with the routine academic character of Lehmann’s classes and turned increasingly to the fundamental artistic principles to be found in the art of the old masters” (Homer 14). Seurat began studying on his own. At night, after his classes had finished, he would go the library and continue his work. He read books feverishly, often engaging Aman-Jean in lengthy discussions about his discoveries. With all of this new-found knowledge, Seurat came to the realization that his aspirations as an artist were not going to be found within the walls of a school.
After the devastating loss suffered during the Franco-Prussian War, France was anxious about what would happen if it was ever involved in another war of that magnitude. In order to make sure the country would be prepared at all times, a law was passed that required French citizens to serve a term of five years in defense of their country. This law was not terribly strict and most people found ways to either get out of it or shorten their time of service. In 1879, Seurat left the École des Beaux-Arts to fulfill this required time. During his year in the military, he continued to draw during all of his down time. Unlike other students who left to satisfy this duty to their country, he did not return to the school when he came back to Paris. Instead he moved into an apartment at 19 rue de Chabrol where he would eventually create his first two masterpieces, Une baignade, Asnières and Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte. Here he began on his new path towards finding his own aesthetic. His first move was toward naturalism, which for him meant a study of the people and landscapes of the natural world. Unlike many of his contemporaries from the École des Beaux-Arts, Seurat focused on the ordinary people of Paris. He also placed very little emphasis on the personality of his drawings. His subjects often had no facial features or distinctive unique qualities. This time in Seurat’s life marks the beginning of his move away from the use of lines as a means of definition in his drawings. He began working with tonal masses to create his figures. However his intermingling of dark and light makes his work distinguishable from other similar artists.

In his drawings, Seurat used conté crayon and Michallet paper. The Michallet paper initially appeared pure white, but became more cream in color the longer it was exposed to light. It also had ridges that were created by the fibers of the paper. Conté crayon was Seurat’s preference for sketching because it did not smudge or create dust as charcoal did.
Therefore when these two materials were combined, the conté crayon would not leave remnants in the crevices of the paper. These helped to create a natural sense of depth in his art. He carried this concept of contrast to other aspects of his drawings as well. The dark areas of his drawing were surrounded by a halo of light and the light sections bounded by a pool of darkness. This fueled his idea that each area of the piece should be a reaction to another. He would take this even further when he began working in color.

Seurat began his study of color while he was still in school. Seurat read about Eugène Delacroix in Charles Blanc’s *Grammaire des arts du dessin*. Delacroix is credited as the leader in the movement towards divided color. Seurat studied Delacroix’s use of opposite colors and breaking up color into several different tints. This was also the first time that Seurat was preliminarily introduced to the concept of optical mixture. A few years later, Seurat began studying the theories and writings of Michel-Eugène Chevreul and Ogden Rood. Chevreul was a chemist who wrote about how color extended far beyond the small area of canvas that it actually touched. He believed that color had an influence on all the areas that surrounded it as well. Fellow scientist Rood proved his own concept that objects do not have an inherent color attached to them, but are a mixture of several colors that produce what we see. Seurat readily absorbed all of these ideas and tried to find his path to his own aesthetic. Finally in 1882, Seurat discovered the Impressionist movement which would provide him with the springboard to delve into his own theories.

The Impressionist movement was concerned with displaying nature as it exists in an instant. All of nature is unique in each moment and will never be duplicated in exactly the same way. The Impressionists saw it at their job to capture that beauty. “One of the Impressionists’ chief aims was to record the appearance of their subject, as conditioned by
the light falling on it, without preconceptions of any kind. They felt that they must execute their paintings at the site and add nothing more to them in the studio” (Homer 56). In order to achieve this, the Impressionists abandoned many of the classical techniques of art for their own. Traditionally, color was applied in layers, but the Impressionists followed in the footsteps of Delacroix by placing strokes on top of the basic layers of color. They also used the theories of contrast that Seurat was investigating. Seurat admired the work of the Impressionists especially Degas and Renoir, but it still did not fulfill his every artistic desire. Seurat felt that the Impressionists had stopped short of the magnificence that could truly be achieved. He appreciated their ideas of capturing nature in the glory of an instant, but he wanted more. He knew that more than one impression of a scene would allow the artists eventually to bring all of those images together to make one perfect moment.

In 1883, Seurat initially put his ideas to use in his first large-scale painting, Une baignade, Asnières, even though those ideas were not yet fully developed. Seurat’s technique in this piece was a combination of the classical training he had received at the École des Beaux-Arts, his fascination with naturalism, and his inspiration from the Impressionists. He completed twenty-five studies of the Asnières area before he began on the final canvas. He began the process by laying down his darkest and lightest tones to guide the rest of the piece. The color was then put down by small strokes that intertwined with each other. The idea of pure unadulterated color had not gained complete control of him yet. He mixed his colors on his palette in order to create the tones he desired. He also used earth tones such as black and brown in this painting. He continued his use of contrast to lend depth to his figures. With this work, Seurat hoped he would leave a huge mark on the art world of Paris. However that was not the case.
Once Seurat finished *Une baignade, Asnières* in 1884, he submitted it to the Salon d’Automne which held a monopoly on exhibitions. That was the only way that artists were able to display their works. The art was placed before a jury and examined to deem whether it was acceptable for a showing. If an artist’s piece was rejected, he was basically excluded from the public art world for an entire year until the next Salon came about. Although a few of Seurat’s pieces had been accepted in the past, *Une baignade, Asnières* was rejected by the Salon. Instead of being resigned to a year of solitude, Seurat turned to the newly developed Groupe des Artistes Indépendants that was composed of other artists who were fed up with their work being ignored. This group decided to put together its own exhibition where everyone’s art would be accepted for a small fee. There was no jury or evaluation involved. People were able to display their art without having to jump over any hurdles. The first Salon des Artistes Indépendants opened on May 15, 1884. There were about four hundred artists who took part in this event. Seurat’s work was displayed in the back and received mixed reviews. Yet the most important aspect of this show for Seurat was his introduction to Paul Signac.

Signac was an artist four years younger than Seurat. He had works displayed in that first Salon in 1884, but found himself drawn to and inspired by Seurat’s paintings. He regarded as attractive the influences of Delacroix in Seurat’s art. He became a fast friend and supporter, but felt that Seurat had not taken his art far enough yet. Signac convinced Seurat to drop the earth tones from his palette. The use of these colors diminished the power of his color scheme in contrast to the Impressionists who used strictly prismatic colors, which made their paintings more vibrant. Signac encouraged Seurat to really explore the divisionism that
Delacroix had lined out. Drawing upon that and his inspirations of the past, Seurat began on his next great venture: *Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte*.

Beginning in the spring of 1884, Seurat’s life became consumed by his newest canvas. He chose to depict a scene of the island of La Grande Jatte on a Sunday. To prepare for this enormous undertaking, Seurat visited the island every day for several months and then at least once a week until the process was completed. There he created at least twenty-seven drawings, twenty-seven panels, and three canvases that would all be synthesized to create the final image. He observed people on the island who caught his interest. “He preserved, in more or less developed studies, persons seen by chance in the typical costumes and postures that can be observed in the photographs of the time. When necessary, he had models pose in the studio until he finally determined the attitudes he wanted” (Rewald 77). Seurat worked on this piece in a very calculated manner. Nothing was left to chance. Unlike the Impressionists, he wanted to take the best of each study to create one perfect Sunday in the park. His goal for this painting was that it be displayed in the next exhibition, set for March of 1885.

Seurat’s research for this task included examining every aspect of the park. He examined the environment just as much as the people themselves. He completed many drawings before he even decided to use La Grande Jatte. He studied the positioning of the leaves, tree trunks, and shadows cast by the sun. Once his final composition of the landscape was mostly fixed, he transferred its basic form onto the large canvas. From that point, he was ready to start working on his human and animal subjects. He sat in the park and took note of those that grabbed his interested. For example, he was fascinated when he saw a woman walking through the park with a monkey on a leash. He was delighted by the animal that
exuded a sense of refinement to him. He studied the actions of the creature to decide upon which pose he liked best. With all of his subjects, he tested their positioning and grouping throughout his preliminary work. By late summer, Seurat had completed most of his studies and worked out the basic design for the painting on a medium-sized canvas. He then devoted the rest of the year to developing his final image of the perfect Sunday.

The painting was completed by March 1885, but the May exhibition Seurat was aiming for had been postponed. Contented with his work, Seurat decided to spend the summer on the Channel coast. This was typical for Seurat’s contemporaries because artists were able to better familiarize themselves with nature and be able to sell their paintings to the tourists in those regions. Seurat did not play into this scheme. He choose to vacation at the less populated Grandcamp, a small fishing area, which had been a family destination for him since childhood. Here he widened his power over natural landscapes. Unlike some of the Impressionist painters who loved the tumultuous nature of the waters, Seurat was drawn to the calm glow of the sea. He completed five paintings and several smaller studies here, but he gained something greater on this trip. He learned how to better skillfully build up the colors on his canvas using small divided brushwork. He realized that he could make *Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte* better. He returned to Paris with a new determination and excitement for his art.

During the fall of 1885 and the spring of 1886, Seurat reworked his masterpiece. He added more color dimensions to certain areas and also rounded out a few of his subjects. Prior to these changes, many of his figures resembled those found in ancient Egyptian art. There was a rigidity and flatness to his characters. He decided to enhance their innate graceful nature by providing them with more curvatures. The best example is of the woman
with the monkey at the right side of the final picture. When Seurat went back to the canvas, he made her more voluptuous and her bustle larger. He did the same with several of the other women in the park. There was however an essence of brilliance that was lost the more it was worked on. Some of the colors were more vibrant before he added other elements. Yet the painting became much more accurate and analytical after he revisited it. When Seurat finally put down his paintbrush, he was pleased with his creation. It had achieved everything for which he was striving. The next step would be exposing it to the rest of the world.

*Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte* was set up to be shown at the last exhibition that the Impressionists had arranged on May 15, 1886. There was a substantial amount of hype from fellow artists around this piece. They had heard of is large size and subject, but much of the rest remained a mystery until it was finally displayed. “The room in which *La Grande Jatte* was exhibited was too shallow, and the spectators, unable to see Seurat’s painting from the distance he had intended, were much provoked by it” (Rewald 100). The painting was credited as the first piece to be accomplished by an entirely divisionist technique and this caused it to make waves. Many of the viewers were unable to see the magnitude of Seurat’s work due to this poor placement. Others commented that there was no difference in style between the art of Seurat, Paul Signac, Camille Pissarro, and his son Lucien which were all contained in the same room. They felt that the new technique had taken away the individuality of the artists. Several critics were upset that the painting was created so analytically, as they felt that this was naturally opposed to art. Luckily, there were a few people like Félix Fénéon who connected with the piece and supported it wholeheartedly. Fénéon had already acknowledged Seurat’s talent in 1884 when he saw *Une baignade,*
Asnières, but wanted to allow the world to see the uniqueness he saw in the new canvas. He wrote an article in *La Vogue* citing the aspects of the paintings that were fresh and innovative. He described how Seurat divided up color on the palette and the concept of optical mixture that was being utilized. Reactions like Fénéon’s were encouraging, but the only thing that would truly help was time and perseverance.

After the Impressionist Exhibition, Seurat was very disheartened. He had been noticed, but his work was not given the outstanding praise for which he was undoubtedly hoping. He did not let it completely knock him down though. He decided that he would show the painting again. He contacted some of the other artist from the exhibit, such as Signac and Pissarro, who all agreed to another showing. The Société des Artistes Indépendants set up their second exhibition for August. Fénéon was in attendance at this event. Following this showing, he published an article discussing their works in *L’art modern*. It was in this review that Fénéon first called the group Neo-Impressionists. He saw that artists like Seurat were using systems that were based upon accuracy and calculations unlike the Impressionists who were spontaneous and impulsive. The Neo-Impressionists came from Impressionists influences, but were creating their art in a new, bold way. Unlike the Impressionists, they did not believe that a single instant needed to be captured in nature and not refine afterward in the studio. The Neo-Impressionists felt that several moments could be studied and combined later to create a more perfect painting that encapsulated all the best aspects of the world. From that point on, a new movement was officially born with Seurat at the forefront.

After the show by the Société des Artistes Indépendants in August, Seurat had several opportunities to display his art abroad. He had received some exposure earlier in 1886 when
he sent some canvases, including *Une baignade, Asnières*, over to the United States with art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel. The exhibition received nothing but praise from the American public, even though none of Seurat’s paintings was sold. After that he was offered a spot in Les Vingts, an exhibition set up in Brussels for early 1887. His work was displayed there with a group of independent Belgian artists. He submitted seven pieces which included *Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte*. As it did in Paris, this large canvas generated a lot of conflicting opinions. While some people admired his work, most were confused and thought his theories frivolous. There was a bright side to this situation. One of the biggest benefits of this showing was that Seurat became more widely known in the art world. Seurat would continue to send his important works to be shown at the exhibitions in Brussels throughout the next few years. Other nations would not be exposed to Seurat’s art until after his death.

As head of the Neo-Impressionist movement, Seurat found himself under the strict scrutiny of others. After the shows in Brussels, the number of people in the Neo-Impressionist group expanded. All of these artists looked to Seurat to set the example they could follow. Seurat was annoyed by this prospect and became much more secretive about his art. It reached a point where he became very hesitant about publicly displaying any of his work in fear that others would steal his creative ideas. In addition to this, Seurat continued to be hounded by the press. When he exhibited other large canvases such as *Poseuses* and *Parade de cirque*, Seurat was again not given the respect he deserved from the critics. After a while it began to take a toll on him:

Seurat himself began to grow weary of seeing each of his works become the center of discussions that quickly deteriorated into an exchange of reproaches and suspicions, arguments running aground in seas of prejudice or complacency. On the other hand, he watched with some anxiety as the circle of his friends swelled with new converts, and he observed, not without regret,
the efforts made by these recruits to appropriate his theories and his technique. (Rewald 149)

Seurat decided to close himself off from most of the people he knew. His personal life became shrouded in mystery.

In order to gain a new foothold on the uniqueness of his art, Seurat began working on painting the frames for his pictures. The tradition of using ornate gold frames had been a thing of the past for many of the Impressionist painters. Instead they were drawn to white and colored frames. At the start of his career, Seurat followed in their footsteps. He used off-white or white frames for his paintings, including *Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte*. Once he was at the center of the Neo-Impressionist movement and wanted to revitalize his originality, he came up with the idea of painting the frames with the painting’s complementary colors. He believed this would heighten the contrasts in his work, but that there was still something lacking. Seurat took his idea a step further in 1888 by painting small borders along the edges of his pieces as well. He would take a color at the outskirts of the painting and add its opposite next to it as a border. This way the feeling of the scene was empowered by the contrast. He even applied this new technique to many of his existing paintings; this required him to stretch the canvases to provide the extra space for borders. As with most of his innovations, his painted borders and frames were greeted with mixed reviews. Most of them were disapproving of this new technique. Even Seurat’s long-time supporter Félix Fénéon disliked the idea and claimed that it was a ridiculous concept. As always, Seurat turned the other cheek and proceeded to create his art the way he wished.

One of the most significant paintings of Seurat’s finals years is *Jeune femme se poudrant* because it gives a glimpse into his personal life. The subject of the painting is
Seurat’s mistress, Madeleine Knoblock. Most of Seurat’s close friends did not even know of her existence in Seurat’s life until after his death. It is speculated that their relationship started early in 1889, but he did not let romantic entanglement affect his art. Her image in the painting seems distant and very detached. The picture is also devoid of any sensuality. “In the Young Woman Powdering Herself Seurat painted the portrait of the mistress he took in his last years. . . . he hardly makes his paramour . . . appear very exciting” (Courthion 41).

Despite the fact that the model was his lover, Seurat remained very analytical. He painted her as he would any other subject. Once the canvas finished, it was shown at the exhibitions of the Indépendants in March of 1890. Since most people did not know the back story behind Seurat’s model, the painting was glossed over and pushed aside.

In the early stages of their relationship, Knoblock did initially not inform Seurat that she had become pregnant. He went off to the seaside during the summer of 1889 as usual, but returned to Paris immediately when he heard the news. Because of her delicate condition, they decided to move into an apartment together. Seurat could then tend to and support Knoblock’s needs and keep their involvement out of the public eye. Their first son, Pierre-Georges Seurat, was born on February 16, 1890. Knoblock became pregnant again sometime later in 1890, but that child died shortly after she gave birth. Unfortunately, the love affair and life of a brilliant artist came to a very abrupt end.

In February 1891, Seurat attended an event celebrating symbolism. In attendance were men of all ranks. Most recognized Seurat’s talent and knew that he had a wonderful path of discovery and genius ahead of him. However, just a few weeks later Seurat was fighting off death. He had been working steadily with the Société des Artistes Indépendants to set up for their impending exhibition. Over this period, an infection grew in his throat and
he tried to ignore it. “It was diagnosed as infectious quinsy, and Seurat was confined to bed” (Courthion 42). He became seriously ill with a fever and was moved to his mother’s apartment to be watched carefully. His last few days were very agonizing. In addition to the fever, he experienced hallucinations for a period of three days prior to his death. He finally died at six in the morning on March 29, 1891. His son, Pierre, had contracted the disease as well and died two weeks after his father. Seurat’s death was not mentioned by the press at all.

His Theories

Seurat approached his work not only artistically, but also scientifically. This began in school with Charles Blanc’s book Grammaire des arts du dessin which was used as the basis for study. This book played an important role in Seurat’s life because it introduced him to the ideas of many men who would later inspire Seurat’s own techniques. Blanc was an art critic and historian who had a deep appreciation for beauty. Most of Blanc’s book referenced artists and scientists who exhibited qualities and theories he thought valuable. He expanded upon many of their ideas particularly ones that concerned the use and power of color. Blanc’s most important original contribution to the art world was his creation of the term optical mixture. While he may not have been a painter himself, he had strong feelings about how art should be executed. He continually wrote about the idea that art should not merely be used as a tool to recreate landscapes and scenes. He believed that the artist should use his imagination to give nature an original burst of life. This inspired Seurat to look beyond the walls of the École des Beaux-Arts for his artistic education.
Seurat first turned to the theories of Eugène Delacroix. Seurat read essays about Delacroix by Blanc and carefully studied his painting techniques. Delacroix strongly believed that flat colors were only interesting to a certain extent. He understood that color needed to be infused with life and dimension in order engage the viewer. It was through Delacroix that Seurat was first introduced to the concept of divisionism. “He paid special attention to two of Delacroix’s practices: surrounding a color with its opposite and breaking or dividing colors into several tints” (Herbert 103). Seurat observed how Delacroix enriched his colors by laying in small brushstrokes that were either complementary or different shades of the base color. This would give the piece more depth and intensity. Seurat was particularly impressed by the way that Delacroix enlivened the gray tones in his work.

The other technique that greatly interested Seurat was Delacroix’s use of optical mixture. Most artists used the method of subtractive mixture, where the colored pigment were mixed on the palette and then applied to the canvas. Delacroix however used the concept of additive mixture. Colors were put on the painting in small strokes side by side. The colored lights that were reflected from these paints would be mixed together by the viewer’s eye and produce a third, new color. The only catch in this theory was that the painting had to be observed from a certain distance. If viewed too closely, the small strokes would be seen individually. With the correct amount of space between the spectator and the painting, the colors would seem to blend together to create the illusion of a fresh color. This heightened the beauty of Delacroix’s works because his paints appeared more vibrant and lively than most others.

Michel-Eugène Chevreul was another person to whom Seurat was introduced through Blanc’s book. Chevreul was a chemist who became interested in color theory through his
work in tapestry dyeing. In attempts to increase the color of a fabric, he realized that the intensity of a color depended strongly upon the other colors that surrounded it. He delved further into this idea by creating his own laws about theories of color contrast. These concepts drew upon the idea that a pale version of a color’s opposite is automatically created in the spectator’s vision when that color is viewed. For example, when one looked at red, he would also see faint elements of green. The two types of contrast that Chevreul focused on were called “simultaneous” and “successive” contrasts. “In the “simultaneous contrast” of two colors seen side by side, each color will tint the other with its opposite, thereby heightening the contrast. . . . “Successive contrast” operates when we look at one color for a time and then look elsewhere; in doing so, we tinge this other area with the pale opposite and therefore alter it” (Herbert 389). These ideas clicked in Seurat’s mind and he used them extensively in his works.

Ogden Rood, an American physics professor at Columbia University, supplemented Chevreul’s work. Rood was a scientist, but also dabbled in painting. In his book, Modern Chromatics, he addressed his ideas to the art community. He clarified the difference between colored pigments and colored lights. He strongly preferred the use of colored lights for artists. It used the process of additive mixture which he felt was more beneficial because it occurred frequently in nature. He referenced the work of Dr. Jean Mile about the mixture of colored lights. “. . . [A]ccording to Mile, small dots of color placed next to each other, when viewed at a distance, yield the same effects as mixtures obtained by rotating discs or from projected beams of colored light” (Homer 37). While Rood approved of this theory, he also clarified the concept that it was not a true mixture of colored light since it was a result of the reflections from the colored pigments on the canvas.
Like Chevreul, Rood also explored the idea of color contrast, but he utilized more scientific theories to support his findings. He experimented with the saturation of colors by measuring the results of different colors placed next to one another. From this, Rood produced a diagram of twenty-two distinct colors and their compliments. The main benefit of this chart to the art world was that Rood listed the colors by their paint names such as vermilion, emerald green, and cyan blue. He eventually divided these colors into warm and cool hues and stated that warm hues should be more prevalent in artwork. Rood was not a slave to this science though. In the conclusion of his book, he claimed that while these regulations hold a lot of weight, they should not be unyielding in their control of an artist’s work. Seurat did not share the same belief. His method was his foremost concern in all of his creations.

Seurat called his technique chromo-luminism. Like many of his predecessors, he believed that color and light were the two most essential elements for art. He had a series of thoughts about color that were dictated by how it was affected by light:

Seurat aimed at analyzing the colour of an object into the following elements:  
1. The colour that the object would have in white light, i.e. its local colour.  
2. The colour of the light falling on it, e.g. a warm yellow if the object is in sun-light.  
3. The colour created by that part of the light falling on the object which is modified by the colour of the latter before being reflected from it.  
4. Light reflected on the object from other coloured objects near it.  
5. Colour induced by the contrast with neighbouring objects, e.g. an object seen against the sky will take on something of the colour complementary to blue, namely orange. (Blunt 80)

These theories called upon the concepts of Delacroix, Blanc, Chevreul and Rood, but it was the degree to which Seurat rigidly applied them that distinguished him from the others.
Seurat believed that art was a harmony that was composed of the mixing of colors, lines, and tones that were both similar and different. Like his role models, he felt that contrasts were essential to art. Light and dark tones, color complements, and lines that form right angles should be constantly interacting in a piece. He also said that the feeling of the painting was strongly influenced by the types of lines, tones, and colors that were used most often. He had definitions for what caused a painting to feel gay, calm, and sad:

Gaiety of tone is given by the luminous dominant; of color, by the warm dominant; of line, by lines above the horizontal.
Calm of tone is equality between dark and light; of color, equality between warm and cold; in line, it is given by the horizontal.
Sad tone is given by the dark tone dominant; in color by the cold dominant; in line by the descending directions. (Pach 24-25)

He followed all of these guidelines very carefully in the creation of his art. He always believed that he was painting his technique and that his subject did not matter. Regardless of who or what he was painting, he would remain faithful to his theories.

**The Painting**

Seurat began defining his own theories as he worked on *Une baignade, Asnières*, but it was during the time he was working on *Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte* that his technique became solidified. With this masterpiece, Seurat truly defined himself as an artist. The painting began, as always, with a series of thorough studies of his subjects. First he made sketches in conté crayon and paint. He focused on one aspect of the composition in these studies. He classified them according to whether he was experimenting with line, tone, or color. The most important aspect of these early observations for Seurat was the basic
Georges Seurat, French, 1859-1891, *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* -- 1884, 1884-1886, Oil on canvas, 81 3/4 x 121 1/4 in. (207.5 x 308.1 cm), Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial Collection, 1926.224, The Art Institute of Chicago. Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago.
composition of the park. He first had to decide upon what the landscape was going to look like before he made arrangements of figures. Seurat was particularly fascinated by the verticality of the trees on the island and the placement of the shadows. He realized that the proper situation of these elements was essential to creating the movement and feeling he wish for the piece. Even though his people seem possessed by a haunting lifelessness, there is an innate sense of motion due to the distance between the trees. “Space is likewise one of the artist’s main resources for suggesting movement, for it is through placing pairs of figures at almost stated intervals that he achieves the slow, ponderous, but unmistakable rhythm of the painting” (Rich, Seurat 39). The trees give the picture a sense of structure that influences the rest of the painting. In order to maintain balance in his painting, Seurat had to remain very conscious about his use of horizontal planes as well. There were two main horizontals that helped establish a sense of depth: the foremost shadow and the opposite shoreline. From there, Seurat used the shadows cast by the trees to create more horizontals. All of these elements combine to create a perfect park setting where people could enjoy a Sunday afternoon.

When it came time to introduce the figures into his painting, Seurat deliberated carefully about which people he wanted to use. He tested every candidate against a portion of the landscape to see if they would complement one another. He was also very careful about making sure the positioning of a subject was harmonious with the structure of the existing landscape. For this reason, many of his subjects are shown in profile. “In the drawing and sketches we have observed Seurat liking to place his figures in profile. This position allows the artist not only to stress his expressive contours but to state the areas within those contours as parallel to the picture’s frontal plane” (Rich, Seurat 25). This
placement of his figures helped him enhance the sense of depth he was developing with the shadows. It also emphasized the people’s detachment from the artist. As a private man who became so consumed by his work that he shut out most of the world, Seurat instilled these qualities onto the subjects of his painting. The figures do not even engage with each other. They are isolated in their own assigned spaces.

Although the structure of the painting was vital, Seurat’s use of color was even more important. After completing *Une baignade, Asnières*, Seurat eliminated black and brown from his palette. He was committed to only using colors from the visible spectrum to ensure the maximum purity of color for his art. He used a total of eleven colors that came straight from the paint tubes. He made a line of these at the top of his wooden palette. He used a total of eleven basic colors because he wanted to use the complementary colors from the tube instead of creating them out of a mixture of the primary colors. He believed that when the primary colors were combined on the palette, the resulting hue had much less intensity than it did when it came straight from the tube. Below that were those same eleven colors mixed with white. This type of mixture was acceptable for his technique because it was manipulating the gradation not diminishing the purity of the original color. At the bottom was a row of white. Once the palette was set up, the next step was approaching the canvas with color.

It is often believed that Seurat was a pointillist. This is a fallacy. Pointillism refers to the method of applying paint to a canvas by solely using small dots of color. Seurat did use small dots in different areas of his painting, but his use of them was not exclusive. He used different types of small strokes that complemented the subjects of the painting:
For tree trunks, the elongated dabs flow along the axis of the trunk and then change direction to move outward on the branches, as though they were the vital carriers of sap. The strokes similarly follow the imagined reality of the figures and their costumes, flowing in outward curves for bust and hips, vertically for upright torsos, and along the axes of each portion of an arm or leg as it changes direction. (Herbert 173)

These types of strokes were essential to Seurat because they aided him in achieving the detail he was striving for. They also helped to create boundaries and definitions for the characters in the picture without using harsh outlines. This was an idea that he borrowed from the Impressionists, but since his brushstrokes were so small, the technique was not as obvious as in Impressionist paintings.

Seurat had his theories down to a science that made it possible for him to work under any type of circumstance. Many artists required natural light to produce their works of art, but not Seurat. “At the hour when most artists lay down their palettes and clean their brushes, he was still working under an artificial light that his contemporaries described as villainous. . . . strong sun pouring into the room or the inadequate flare of a gas-jet were the same to him” (Rich, Seurat 11). He did not need to step away from his canvas either to see the effects of the colors. He knew precisely how each color would interact with all of the surrounding hues. He could stand for hours painting an area without ever having to put distance between himself and the canvas. This allowed him to remain focused on his task at hand. When he was working on his painting, it was as if the rest of the world vanished. The only thing that existed to him was his art and that is the way he preferred it.

The most surprising element of Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte is the commentary on French society that Seurat embedded into his painting. Most of the figures in the painting
come from the lower and middle classes of French culture, but they are dressed in the latest
trends and styles:

Through the juxtaposition of current fashion with the figures’ manikin
stiffness and their uniformity of presentation Seurat offers us a critical
perception of society’s artifice, particularly that of the lower classes, who took
advantage of cheaper ready-made clothing to mask their true position while
consorting with others of higher station. (Herbert 177)

Seurat’s perfect Sunday is composed of people who are simply out in the park to show off
that which they do not necessarily have. He treated the park like a stage that people paraded
across to display their superficial wealth. This idea is supported by the fact that most of his
characters seem isolated from the world. According to Seurat, a perfect afternoon in the park
is nothing more than an act that has no real depth or feeling. It is all very scientific and
detached just like the artist himself.

His Legacy

Like many artists, Seurat’s genius was not widely acknowledged during his lifetime. His fellow Neo-Impressionists admired his work, but Seurat’s influence did not extend
beyond this scope until he died. Since he was the head of this movement, many Neo-
Impressionists believed that the techniques of that group would die along with Seurat. In
many ways it did. Divisionism lost its foremost artist and that style of painting lost favor
with the art community. The other problem was that once he had passed away, his
techniques were glossed over. He was grouped in with other Neo-Impressionist artists like
Signac and Seurat’s originality was lost. His innovations and skill were thrown onto the pile
of forgotten artists. Fortunately Seurat’s legacy and talent did not die there.
Seurat’s lasting contribution to the world of art came through his detailed analysis of form and the application of color. His color theories lost popularity shortly after his death, but people were still attracted to and inspired by his breakdown of form for decades to come. “By virtue of the magnitude of his contribution, Seurat may rightfully be regarded as a major progenitor of twentieth-century art. Almost every important movement owes something, directly or indirectly, to his achievement” (Homer 256). He had a hand in the foundation of the Italian Futurist movement. Divisionism had reached Italy at the end of the nineteenth century. This, paired with Seurat’s work, gave rise to the beginning of the Futurist movement in Italy. The Cubist movement emerged from these undertakings. Artists like Picasso and Severini called upon the works of Seurat as part of their basic understanding of form. Seurat’s personal techniques were not investigated any further, but were continually used to inspire burgeoning art movements.

*Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte* is undoubtedly Seurat’s masterpiece. It earned its renown during the twentieth century and has not lost its hold on society. It continues to captivate spectators as it did during Seurat’s time. “*La Grande Jatte* has become the most commonly reproduced painting for advertisers and designers who wish to evoke summer leisure, uncontaminated by work and worry. Its decorative clarity lends itself to graphic reproduction, and its satirical edge—its finely tuned irony—entertains as much as it instructs” (Herbert 178). The painting has become iconic all around the world. It has been used extensively in America’s popular culture. It was used in the 1986 film *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off* and was recently adapted to advertise the new season of the American sitcom *The Office*. Yet it was Stephen Sondheim who used the painting to delve into the life of the artist and the impact Seurat has made upon the rest of the world.
Stephen Sondheim was born on March 22, 1930, in New York City. As an only child, it would be expected that Sondheim was at the center of his parents’ lives, but this was not the case. His father, Herbert, was a dressmaker who rose from an impoverished background to owning a secure business by age thirty. He was described as a man who had a charming exterior, but was very elusive. He did not have strong convictions outside of his work situation. He would rather run away from a conflict than deal with it head on. He loved his son, but simply did not have the time for him. In fact, after returning from a day’s work at the office, Herbert would go into his son’s room and provide him with some small treat to make up for his constant absence. Unfortunately, Sondheim’s mother, Janet, did not make up for this distance. Sondheim cannot recall his mother’s presence at all in his life during his early years. She was a fashion designer who worked for her husband. Her nickname was “Foxy” which was very fitting for her personality. Like her husband she came from nothing, but instead of rising above it she allowed it to define her. She invented different pasts to compensate for the reality she loathed. She was focused solely on her own well-being and image. She was not afraid to speak her mind and express her true feelings about any situation.

Sondheim’s parents were obviously lacking in most areas, but his father gave him one priceless gift: the gift of music. Herbert’s favorite recreational activity was playing the
piano. Despite the fact that he was never formally trained, he became what might be called a pseudo-expert. He mastered about eight different chords that allowed him to play countless songs proficiently. This provided hours of entertainment for the Sondheims and their friends. Music was constantly flowing through the house and was even incorporated into the finales of fashion shows at work. Herbert passed his love of music onto his son. With his father’s help, Sondheim taught himself to play piano by ear by age four. He started receiving formal piano lessons at age seven. His father was extremely proud of Sondheim’s playing and would show him off to the neighbors. Sadly, Herbert’s influence in his son’s life was greatly diminished by his divorce from Janet in 1940.

Sondheim’s parents’ divorce was not amicable. Although his mother was very self-centered, he felt that she truly loved her husband and that his father got married simply because he needed a designer for his emerging business. So when Herbert walked out on his family for a younger woman he had met on a business trip abroad, Janet was left shattered and alone. She had been betrayed by the man she loved and she lost her job at the same time. This hurt turned into bitter anger that she pushed upon her son. “After Herbert left, most of his mother’s effort, Sondheim said, was focused on poisoning his mind against his father. A college friend also thought Foxy blamed her son for the failure of her marriage and succeeded in making him believe it” (Secrest 30). She banned him from seeing his father and even had him tailed to make sure that he kept his promise. She was trying to completely cut him off from the only parent who gave him any form of attention. In order to ensure the distance between her son and ex-husband and get her life back on track, Janet packed up her son and sent him off to military school in Cornwall, New York.
Sondheim enjoyed the two years he spent at the New York Military Academy. For a child who had grown up with little guidance from his parents, the structure and management enforced at the school were a very welcome change. He reveled in the fact that every minute of his day was planned out and supervised by adults. He was finally able to depend on a group of grown-ups who would not disappoint him. He became very active in the academy and excelled in several areas. He was able to skip an entire grade level because of all of his achievements. Fortunately, his musical education did not come to a halt either. Located on the second floor in the chapel was a large pipe organ. Since he was already familiar with playing piano, Sondheim was instinctively drawn to the organ. \textit{“At the age of eleven I was there with my feet hardly able to touch the pedals, sitting on the edge of the chair, pulling every green button and every red button, and manual after manual, and having a great time”} (qtd. in Secrest 25). Even though his parents had devastated his life, Sondheim was able to find solace and comfort in the rigidity of his time spent at school. Of course this comfort could not last forever.

Sondheim returned home fulltime in 1942. His mother had been granted full custody and took advantage of all her alone time with her son. With the absence of a man in her life, Janet turned to her son to fulfill the role of the man of the family in every way possible. \textit{“When my father left her, she substituted me for him. And she used me the way she had used him, to come on to and to berate, beat up on, you see. What she did for five years was treat me like dirt, but come on to me at the same time”} (qtd. in Secrest 31). She would behave seductively by exposing different parts of her body hoping to arouse the boy’s interest. As a child of twelve, Sondheim had no escape from his mother’s advances. He was very naïve to her motives at first, but soon came to live in fear of what his mother would try
on him. It was not until they moved to Pennsylvania that he finally found a safe haven from this trauma.

Shortly after Sondheim finished military school, Janet did the one thing for him that would make a positive impact on his life. She packed up all her belongings, her son, and moved to Doylestown, Pennsylvania. It was here that Sondheim came to personally know Oscar Hammerstein II who would become his mentor and surrogate father. This move was prompted by a relationship that was created with Hammerstein’s family. Oscar Hammerstein’s wife, Dorothy, was an interior decorator who had struck up a friendship with Janet while she was still in New York. Hammerstein had a son, Jamie, around Sondheim’s age and the boys bonded immediately. Sondheim found a new joy with the Hammersteins that he had never experienced before. He found a family that cared for him deeply and nurtured his talents. However the Hammersteins were careful to not overstep their boundaries. Since the two households were only a few miles apart, Sondheim was over at the Hammerstein’s house daily and this his mother began to resent. She threatened to never let him see the Hammersteins again in fear that he would turn against her. Sondheim reached a happy balance that satisfied both his needs and his mother’s demands. He spent his weekdays at home, having the obligatory Friday dinner with his mother, and then stayed at the Hammersteins’ house for the rest of the weekend. With this quality time, Hammerstein was able to impart his knowledge and passion for music and theatre to his young friend.

Hammerstein’s parents both died when he was a teenager and while Sondheim’s parents were still alive, Hammerstein could relate to Sondheim’s feelings of abandonment and confusion. Hammerstein was known to have a cruel wit. He was a jokester who would often create humor at other people’s expense, especially his children’s. Sondheim was never
the butt of these jokes, however. In him Hammerstein found a kindred spirit. Even though Sondheim did not realize it yet, he was drawn to music because it was a form of order. Music had strict guidelines which Sondheim appreciated. It helped him create some sense of organization and control out of the chaos that his life had become. Hammerstein recognized these longings in his surrogate son and knew that he had much to teach him. And Sondheim was very eager to learn from his role model.

In order to test Sondheim’s natural ability, Hammerstein told him to try to write a musical. Collaborating with friends, Sondheim came up with the idea of a show about life at his school, The George School. The result was By George, a three-act show with a cast of about fifty people that included about twenty song and dance numbers. It was produced by the school in 1946 and was quite a success. Pleased by his first venture into the musical theatre realm, Sondheim had visions of being one the youngest men to ever have a hit musical on Broadway. With such high aspirations, he was eager and anxious to get feedback from Hammerstein. Hammerstein made sure he understood exactly what kind of critique Sondheim wanted before he made any comments about By George. Sondheim made it clear that he did not want to be given special treatment. He wanted Hammerstein’s professional and objective opinion about the show. With that permission, Hammerstein told Sondheim that it was the worst thing he had ever read. This was not the reaction that Sondheim was hoping for and seeing the disappointment in his eyes, Hammerstein reassured the boy that even though he thought it was bad, Sondheim had tremendous talent that just needed to be trained. Sondheim wanted to know more and this resulted in a breakdown of the entire piece. The two sat there for several hours dissecting the show bit by bit. This was the beginning of Sondheim’s lessons with Hammerstein.
Hammerstein taught Sondheim the only way he knew how. He drew from his own life experiences. Since he recently saw huge commercial success with his first musical collaboration with Richard Rodgers, *Oklahoma!* which opened in 1943, he had great insight into what makes a show work. Sondheim recalls how Hammerstein educated him about every aspect of how to create a musical:

> He taught me how to structure a song like a one-act play, how essential simplicity is, how much every word counts and the importance of content, of saying what you, not what other songwriters, feel, how to build songs, how to introduce character, how to make songs relate to character, how to tell a story, how not to tell a story, the interrelationships between lyric and music—all, of course, from his own point of view. (qtd. in Zadan 4)

Later in life, Sondheim realized that the knowledge he got from Hammerstein was very partial to two specific fields of the musical world. Hammerstein was strictly a lyricist and book writer. He tried to lean Sondheim towards those two roles, but Sondheim later found that he had much more talent for composing than for book writing. From this point, Hammerstein gave Sondheim another set of writing challenges that would occupy his life for the next six years.

Sondheim had finished his time at the George School by the time he was sixteen. He decided to attend Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts. During his time there, Hammerstein gave Sondheim the assignment of writing four different musicals. For the first one, Sondheim had to take a play that he enjoyed and turn it into a musical. He chose a play called *Beggar on Horseback* by George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly. This eventually became the musical *All That Glitters*, which he completed during the summer of 1948. It told the story of a composer who was conflicted between marrying a girl he loved and a wealthy girl who would satisfy all of his financial needs. The musical was somewhat
successful when it ran for three performances at Williams the following spring. The next task on Hammerstein’s list was to take a play that was not very good, but could be improved. For this Sondheim chose the play *High Tor* by Maxwell Anderson. He completed the musical and contacted Anderson to see if he would allow the musical to be performed at Williams. However, Anderson was planning to create his own musical out of the piece and therefore denied them performing rights.

For his third assignment, Sondheim had to make a musical out of a non-dramatic piece of writing. He chose the stories of *Mary Poppins* by P.L. Travers. He worked on this show for about a year before abandoning his efforts. He was not able to find a way to merge all of the short stories into one large, connected show. This was the only one of the assignments from Hammerstein that Sondheim was not able to finish. For the fourth musical, Hammerstein gave Sondheim one of the most difficult jobs of all: to create an original work. *Climb High* was the result of this task which Sondheim began work on during his senior year at Williams. As he did with his former original musical *By George*, Sondheim wrote about what he knew: the people at Williams College. It told the story of a recent college graduate who travelled to New York to hit it big on Broadway. The main flaw of this show was that Sondheim wrote a protagonist, David Alton, who was an unlikeable character. The character used people and behaved badly to accomplish what he wanted. Hammerstein made it clear that this despicable leading man could cause a problem with his audiences, but continued to encourage Sondheim’s writing.

Upon graduating from Williams College in 1950, Sondheim knew that he wanted to pursue a career in musical theatre. He was granted the Hubbard Hutchinson Prize which gave him $3000 a year for two years to pursue music in any way he wished. He decided to
study with Milton Babbitt. Babbitt was an avant-garde composer who researched synthesizers in a laboratory at Columbia University. He approached music as a science. He examined all aspects of music and treated it as a mathematic puzzle. Most thought that he was a strange choice for a mentor, but Sondheim admired his analytical mind. “I just wanted to study composition, theory, and harmony without the attendant musicology that comes in graduate school. But I knew I wanted to write for the theatre, so I wanted someone who did not disdain theatre music. Milton, who was a frustrated show composer, was a perfect combination” (qtd. in Secrest 86). Sondheim was drawn to the fact that Babbitt stressed precision in his music, but would not discourage him from entering the realm of Broadway. Babbitt himself had dabbled in this field. He was working on a musical about Helen of Troy when Sondheim began studying with him. They worked together in four-hour sessions. During the first part of their time, they would study the popular songs of composers like Kern, Brown, and Gershwin. The next portion of their lessons would be centered on the classics of Beethoven and Mozart. Every piece of music was looked at very intensely to be picked apart and understood to its core. At the end of two years, Sondheim was ready to enter the real world, but was unsure of how to get started. Yet again Hammerstein came to his aid.

Sondheim had been dabbling in screenwriting just prior to 1953. Hammerstein was aware of this and decided to try to arrange a way of opening a door for Sondheim into show business as he did with his own children. Sondheim was invited to attend a dinner party that the Hammersteins were hosting. George Oppenheimer was also present at this event. Oppenheimer, an established screenwriter and playwright, was working on a new television series at the time. He had sold the pilot episode and was currently looking for a co-writer.
because of the demands of the network. He had a total of twenty-nine episodes to complete in a period of six months. Sondheim and Oppenheimer met and struck up a connection.

Sondheim offered to show Oppenheimer some of his screenwriting work. Oppenheimer was pleased with what he saw and hired Sondheim as his co-writer for the new series *Topper*. Sondheim packed up his life and moved to Hollywood. While he was initially dazzled by the glamour of Hollywood, he soon became disenchanted by the real pressures of his work. The writing was not too difficult, but keeping up with Oppenheimer’s ever-changing personality was a different story. Sondheim found himself in the role of the encourager to his co-writer who would transition between bliss and depression very quickly. Sondheim decided this was not the life he wanted to live and moved back to New York after just five months in Hollywood.

Sondheim was anxious to make his mark on the Broadway stage. He kept looking for great ideas that would launch him to that level and 1954 seemed to be the year that would happen. He met Lemuel Ayers at a wedding where they were both ushers. Ayers, a designer and producer who had worked on *Oklahoma!* and *Kiss Me, Kate*, was working on a new project. He wanted to turn the play *Front Porch in Flatbush* into a musical. The play was written by the Epstein brothers who had written the screenplay for the Academy Award-winning film *Casablanca*. Ayers was looking for a composer and was familiar with some of Sondheim’s early work. Sondheim wrote three songs for the proposed show which became known as *Saturday Night*. The material impressed Ayers and got Sondheim the job as composer. Sondheim’s work for this show was very basic. He had not had enough first-hand experience on how create a dramatic structure that was unique and complicated. He was relying on the styles of others he had studied. The score was not a total failure though. It did
have a sense of freshness to it because of Sondheim’s age and outlook. Regardless of the quality of the show, it never reached an audience. Ayers died before the show could be produced and the project was ditched. Yet Sondheim did not have long to wait for his first real break into the theatre.

Arthur Laurents and Leonard Bernstein were beginning work on their new musical, *West Side Story*. Laurents, a playwright and director, was already familiar with Sondheim’s work because Sondheim had auditioned for an early project of Laurents’s with his work from *Saturday Night*. Laurents was not particularly impressed by Sondheim’s music, but did find something charming in his lyrics. So when Sondheim asked about Laurents’s newest project at a party, Laurents decided he would have Sondheim play for Bernstein. Like Laurents, Bernstein was pleased only by Sondheim’s lyrics. Since Bernstein was initially planning on writing the score himself, Sondheim was offered the position of co-lyricist. This was not the job opportunity that Sondheim was hoping for, but it seemed to be one of his only viable options. “. . . *Saturday Night* was dead. . . . Hammerstein and also Sondheim’s new agent, Flora Roberts, both argued that it was a chance to have his name on a prominent project and that he would gain valuable experience working with these talented men . . .” (Secrest 112). Sondheim listened to the advice of his respected advisors and accepted the job. While this was a prized opportunity, it did not come without some difficulties.

One of the biggest lessons Sondheim learned while working on *West Side Story* was how to cope with difficult personalities. Both Bernstein and choreographer Jerome Robbins provided Sondheim with many challenges. They were experienced professionals who felt very strongly about certain aspects of the show. With Bernstein, Sondheim had to deal with a man who had a completely different style of working. Bernstein liked to work for short
periods of time during the morning hours while Sondheim preferred to work at night pondering his ideas at length before ever setting anything down on paper. Sondheim conformed to Bernstein’s schedule as best he could. Bernstein also had a different sense of poetry than Sondheim did which caused problems when it came to the lyrics Bernstein had already written. Sondheim felt distanced from the emotionality of the music Bernstein had written. Sondheim did his best to try to remedy the situation, but Bernstein was not the only obstacle lying before him. Robbins had a strong temper that would flare up when things were not going as he wished. On several occasions Robbins lashed out at Sondheim because he was the easiest target. Yet despite these outbursts, Robbins did teach Sondheim fundamental principles of musical theatre. Robbins asked Sondheim what Tony was doing while singing “Maria.” Sondheim did not quite understand the question and continually gave Robbins the wrong answer by saying Tony is singing:

> There are certain kinds of shows which are presentational. You just get out there and sing the song. But that’s not *West Side Story* . . . It’s supposed to be full of action. It’s supposed to carry you forward in the story, which means that every second should carry you forward in some way. Well, it’s up to the songwriter to think those things up before you put the show in the director’s lap. If you don’t, you get clumsy staging or static songs and you end up throwing lots of things out on the road because they don’t work. (qtd. in Secrest 123)

Sondheim finally grasped the concept that Robbins was getting at. It was not enough to simply write a song that a character would just stand on stage and sing. It needed to be moving the story along with each word. Sondheim learned that he was not just writing lyrics, but shaping a narrative that would allow the audience to enter the world of the play even more. It was an invaluable lesson that would never leave Sondheim’s mind again.
The other aspect of *West Side Story* that profoundly impacted Sondheim’s career was the concept of a musical that did not have a happy ending. Up until that point, musicals were thought to be cheerful and bright. They told stories of people whose lives were simple and happy. There might be bumps in the road, but the characters always had a happy ending. There were shows prior to *West Side Story* that tried to break this stereotype, but this show had a much stronger impact on Sondheim because he was personally involved in the process. Sondheim was touched by the idea that life does not always have a happily ever after. Hurdles are thrown in the picture and cannot always be cleared. It was a reflection of real life that Sondheim connected to and that is shown in his work. Sondheim shows a bleaker side of reality, the side that we sometimes wish would disappear, but he will not let us forget it. The success *West Side Story* experienced proved to Sondheim that boundaries for musicals could and should be challenged. Audiences were receptive to the beautiful side of life as well as to the tragic, which was an encouraging message to the young composer. It gave him the courage he would later need to take risks with his work. With a hit musical under his belt, Sondheim’s name was put on the map in 1957. He became known as “America’s foremost lyricist” (Gordon, *Stephen Sondheim* 2). After the completion of *West Side Story*, he went on to write lyrics for two more musicals: *Gypsy* and *Do I Hear a Waltz?*. He was pleased with the recognition, but was not content to be just a lyricist. He wanted to work on his own projects that would show off his talents as a lyricist as well as a composer.

His opportunity to be both composer and lyricist was finally achieved in 1962. The project was *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* which was based on the short plays of Plautus. Sondheim started work on it with Burt Shevelove immediately after he finished working on *West Side Story*. Since this was his first show on his own, he decided to
not challenge all of the standards of musical theatre all at once. He chose to keep with the
trend of happy musicals by making this piece a farce. However, he left the style of his
beloved teacher Hammerstein behind in order to experiment with music:

As a lyricist for *West Side Story* and *Gypsy*, he had employed his mentor’s
technique, in which a song is an inevitable, almost uncontrollable expression
of a character’s emotional state and is invariably utilized to advance the story.
For a rapidly paced farce, the characters of which are drawn as prototypes . . .
Sondheim wrote the songs as respites from the frantic activity of the farce.
They do not develop the characters but serve “to pinpoint moments of joy or
delight or desire.” (Gordon, *Art* 20)

Sondheim reasoned that the music and lyrics were always supposed to support the story
being told. He had disappointed himself in *West Side Story* by making a poor Hispanic girl
sound much more educated than she should have been and was determined not to let that
happen again. Since the characters in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*
were two-dimensional, having them sing songs that reached into their humanity would have
undermined the rest of the show. While this show is not as creative or experimental as
Sondheim’s later works, it did show promise and a step in the right direction.

Before *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* finally opened on
Broadway in May 1962, it had undergone eleven full revisions. It was a huge success, but
Sondheim’s contribution to the project was mostly overlooked. *A Funny Thing Happened on
the Way to the Forum* won several Tony Awards including Best Musical. Sondheim’s score
was not even nominated. When his collaborators Hal Prince, Burt Shevelove, and Larry
Gelbart won their awards for Best Producer and Best Book of a Musical respectively, they
neglected to thank Sondheim for his work on the project. “‘As far as they were all
concerned, my friends, my colleagues, I didn’t exist’” (qtd. in Secrest 157). Sondheim was
so wounded by the lack of acknowledgement on this project. It did not help the fact that
Hammerstein had passed away in 1960 without ever having heard a full Sondheim score performed on Broadway. Sondheim felt this loss deeply and dedicated *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* to Hammerstein’s memory. Even though the show had bittersweet moments, it was a milestone for Sondheim. He had finally been given the opportunity to write a Broadway score all by himself. He still had a lot more territory to explore, but he was on the path to finding his own musical voice.

Up until this point, all of the Broadway shows that Sondheim worked on were very well received. In 1964, Sondheim experienced his first personal failure with *Anyone Can Whistle*. Just before *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* opened on Broadway, Laurents and Sondheim discussed collaborating again on a show that had many elements of a political satire. *Anyone Can Whistle* tells the story of a psychiatrist and nurse of a mental institution who try to overthrow the corrupt mayor of their small town. It became an absurdist style musical with the patients of the mental institution being the only “sane” people in the show. Sondheim and Laurents felt that the main message of this show was that each person has an obligation to make an effort to realize his full potential in life. While the creators of the show felt passionate about its meaning, as a whole the piece proved very difficult to market. It opened on Broadway in April 1964 and closed after only nine performances. Sondheim’s next venture did not do much better. He collaborated with Hammerstein’s former partner, Richard Rodgers, on a new musical *Do I Hear a Waltz?*. Sondheim was again limited to simply contributing the lyrics, but Rodgers’s work ethic made the experience that much more difficult. Rodger did not feel the need to expand his horizons and push his art to the next level, which frustrated Sondheim. He felt that Rodgers was very brilliant, but did not choose to exercise his talent as he should have. *Do I Hear a Waltz*
opened on Broadway in 1965 and ran for 220 performances. While it was not as huge a success as other shows Sondheim had been involved in, it was not as big a failure as *Anyone Can Whistle*.

After producing these couple of flops, Sondheim was careful to make sure that his next project would be something worthwhile. His next show would not open on Broadway until 1970. In order to supplement his income, Sondheim worked for a year and half as a puzzle writer for *New York* magazine completing a total of 41 cryptic puzzles. He also wrote a short television musical in 1966. He was already working with James Goldman on ideas for a new large-scale musical, but both men needed another project to help get them through their tough financial times. They decided to turn John Collier’s short story about a secret group of people who live in a department store into a musical called *Evening Primrose*. Goldman wrote the book while Sondheim wrote the music and lyrics for the four songs in the show. *Evening Primrose* was presented by the American Broadcasting Company on November 16, 1966. While this show was not as widespread as some of Sondheim’s other work, it was the first time that he was really able to use his own voice as he wished. The show had a darker side that Sondheim enjoyed, but still captured the beauty of his talent. Once *Evening Primrose* was realized, Goldman and Sondheim returned to their original project, *The Girls Upstairs*. However, this idea ran into many obstacles and was temporarily shelved for a more promising opportunity. Sondheim was approached by his friend George Furth who had written a series of seven one-act plays about marriage. Sondheim was interested and asked his director friend Hal Prince if he would be willing to collaborate with him. Prince had wanted to work on a piece that reflected the strains and pressures on
contemporary marriage and jumped onboard immediately. The stories were strung together and *Company* was born.

With *Company*, Sondheim abandoned all the standards of musical theatre. This show did not help audiences forget about their problems for two hours, but forced them to address their issues head on. “*Company* is an episodic collage focusing on the relationships of a thirty-five-year-old bachelor, Robert, with his doting and devoted married friends. As seen through the skeptical eye of this bemused hero, marriage is an oppressive state in which one inadequate individual is yoked forever to another less-than-perfect individual” (Gordon, *Art* 38). The show was a piece that addressed the issues the common masses were having to deal with at the time. Marriage was not depicted as pure bliss, but as a complicated arrangement that has as many problems as joys. The other big change that Prince and Sondheim wanted to accomplish with *Company* was to make the songs carry even more meaning than the book. The show is strung together by the songs that hold all of the emotion and weight. The music is essential to the telling of the story so much that if they were taken away, the show would fail to exist. The songs are where the characters get to bare their souls and deep-seated concerns. The risks of this project were many and luckily they paid off.

*Company* received rave reviews. Most critics loved Sondheim’s innovative style. They felt that it was a refreshing new approach to the musical genre. However audiences did not feel the same way:

Audiences presumably went to the musical expecting to be soothed and stroked; *Company* jolted, discomforted, and disturbed. Audiences were far from sure that they wanted to pay for this kind of assault, as Sondheim acknowledges: “We wanted to achieve a lot of surprise in *Company*. We wanted a show where the audience would sit for two hours screaming their heads off with laughter and then go home and not be able to sleep.” (Gordon, *Art* 75)
Sondheim and his collaborator definitely achieved their goal. Audiences were startled by the way marriage was depicted. The show contained an ounce of truth that hit too close to home for most people. The show also did not conform to the traditional structure of a plot. In fact there is a lack of plot that made many people confused. Despite these challenges, the show was very successful. It received fifteen Tony Award nominations and won 7 of them which included the award for best musical, best music, and best lyrics. Sondheim had officially changed the way that the world looked at musicals and would continue to do so for the next twenty-five years.

In 1971, Sondheim decided to return to *The Girls Upstairs* while bringing Hal Prince along with him. So far, Sondheim and Goldman had worked from the concept of a reunion of showgirls. Goldman wanted it to be a murder mystery show that centered upon two couples. He wanted to pull upon a famous image of Gloria Swanson standing amongst the ruins of the Roxy Theatre. Prince liked the image, but threw out the murder-mystery angle. He felt that it needed to be more than just the story of four different people. He found himself haunted by the Swanson image because it was disaster in the daylight. “Like a waking dream, it should gather up the miragelike qualities that the photograph represented. [The show] would come to signify the death of a certain kind of musical theatre and its evolution into one that was going to be more sophisticated, more knowing, more nuanced and entirely devoid of sentimental illusions” (Secrest 204). Sondheim and Goldman liked Prince’s ideas. A new draft of the show was created and renamed *Follies*.

Sondheim’s collaboration with Prince on this project was a blessing. Their relationship was not without issues, but for the most part, they got along well. Prince was naturally inclined to assess the larger picture, which left Sondheim available to focus on the
music. He was very determined to make sure that the songs he created would blend well with the book that had been written for the show. He was very open to other people’s opinion if they were in the best interest of the musical. Additionally, Follies was Sondheim’s second collaboration with orchestrator Jonathan Tunick. They first worked together on Company. The experience was so pleasant that the two were natural complements to each other and continued to work together on most of Sondheim’s pieces. With so many elements of the show going so smoothly, there were bound to be problems. As with Company, Sondheim and Prince ran into the conflict of tone. They were concerned that the ending of Follies was too depressing for a standard musical theatre audience to accept. However, they decided to stick to their convictions and keep the ending as somber as originally intended. Follies opened on April 4, 1971, at the Winter Garden Theatre. It was a hit, but not as successful as Company. The show ran for over five hundred performances and earned seven Tony Awards, but it was still labeled by many as an experimental musical. The audience was not sure how they felt about a musical of this style, but they were warming up to it little by little.

With two hits under their belts, Sondheim and Prince were looking for another project to begin immediately. They had toyed with the idea of making a musical out of Jean Anouilh’s play Ring Round the Moon, but were rejected twice. So they turned to Ingmar Bergman’s 1956 film Smiles of a Summer Night and hired Hugh Wheeler to adapt it for the stage. They originally had the idea to make it a fantasy tale that had the characters continually living out a weekend until they got everything right, but this concept became too hard to put on paper. With the abandonment of this angle, part of the experimental nature of
the piece was dismissed. The characters became much more natural and less raw than those of *Company* and *Follies*:

. . . [T]he work lacks the profound emotional depths that characterize Sondheim’s two previous pieces. Audiences can be delighted, charmed, and moved, but the cathartic impact is missing. *Night Music* is lovely to listen to and gorgeous to see. It has wit and style but little inner tension. . . . The musical is elegant and refined but not revolutionary or profound. The characters are troubled but not enigmatic, and the audience’s expectation that all will be resolved in the end is rewarded. (Gordon, *Art* 153-4)

Sondheim’s music gave the characters some darker tones, but their emotions were not nearly as deep and chaotic as those of *Company* and *Follies*. *A Little Night Music* quickly became a hit after opening on Broadway in February of 1973. It ran for almost a year and a half and won six Tony Awards including best musical and Sondheim’s third Tony for best score. It seemed that the right balance between experimental and audience satisfaction had finally been reached.

Sondheim’s career was on fire. With the successes of *Company*, *Follies*, and *A Little Night Music*, he was the Broadway composer to watch. In keeping with the trend of his previous hits, Sondheim decided to collaborate with Prince on another experimental-style musical. The result was *Pacific Overtures*. They took a play written by John Weidman about Commodore Perry’s visit to Japan in 1853 and put a twist on it. In order to shake things up, Sondheim and Prince decided they wanted to tell this story from the point of view of the Japanese people. Sondheim was not as fond of the idea as Prince was at first, but as soon as he began researching Japanese music he was hooked. One of the biggest issues that surrounded this musical was that ideas were at its core, not characters. At one point Wheeler was consulted about this. He wanted to give the storyline more depth by adding more meaning to the characters, but ultimately his revisions were rejected. The show remained a
musical that emphasized concept over characters. Audiences were not pleased, to say the least. *Pacific Overtures* opened early in 1976 and closed after only 193 performances.

Inspiration for Sondheim’s next show began in 1973. While on a trip in London, he attended a performance of Christopher Bond’s stage adaptation of *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. He was captivated by this dark tale of a barber who is wrongly banished, returns to a ruined life, and vows to seek revenge on his enemies. He loved the darkness and beauty of it all. He approached the producers about turning the show into a Broadway musical and in turn they asked Bond. Bond was hesitant at first, but eventually said yes and turned his play over to Sondheim. Although Sondheim was hoping to adapt the piece himself, it proved a bigger task than he anticipated. He again turned to Wheeler, who cut the play down to a manageable size. Sondheim was not so much concerned about the running time as he was the subject matter of the show:

[. . .] I was only worried about how the audience would take the murders, whether they’d think them silly or not. And then, when Mrs. Lovett gets the idea for making the meat pies, what would the audience’s reaction be? In America nobody’s ever heard of Sweeney Todd . . . So they were seeing this wild plot for the first time, and there was a loud gasp at the first murder, which was staged very violently with a great swash of blood. Then when Mrs. Lovett got the idea for the pies and the audience realized what was up, there was satisfying laugh, the like of which I’ve rarely heard. (qtd. in Secrest 291)

While the subject matter was shocking, the show turned out to be a tremendous hit. After opening on Broadway in 1979, *Sweeney Todd* was deemed the best of the Sondheim-Prince musical collaborations. Critics and audiences alike loved the show. It won a total of eight Tony Awards along with endless amounts of praise. This was seen as Sondheim masterpiece. His music had never been better and he had nowhere to go but up.
Unfortunately, Sondheim’s next show would not keep his career booming. *Merrily We Roll Along* came from the play of the same title by George Kaufmann and Moss Hart. It tells the story of Franklin Shepard and his two best friends, Mary Flynn and Charley Kringas. The twist of this story is that the show starts at the end of their friendship and progresses backward to the first time they meet. The characters begin as shattered souls and are eventually turned into their youthful, former selves. Prince signed on immediately to direct and George Furth, who wrote the book for *Company*, was approached to do the same for this show. In order to make the characters honest, Prince and Sondheim wanted to cast young actors who had very little theatre experience. Looking back, it became clear to Sondheim that he was as naïve about this project as the characters in his show. It proved almost impossible to get these actors to portray the rundown, destroyed characters who begin the story. Sondheim and Prince had also decided to not have out-of-town try outs. As with *Sweeney Todd*, they held previews in New York, but *Merrily We Roll Along* was in much worse shape than *Sweeney Todd*. Sondheim and Prince were working day and night to make this show work, but nothing was able to save it. *Merrily We Roll Along* opened in November of 1981 and closed after a mere sixteen performances.

*Merrily We Roll Along* was the biggest failure that Sondheim had experienced and had a strong impact upon his life. Both Sondheim and Prince felt the flop very personally, but reacted in different manners. Prince had a very difficult time overcoming the failure. He felt that most of the critics of the show were commenting on all the work he had done with Sondheim. For this reason, Prince decided that his partnership with Sondheim had come to its end. After the split, Prince continued to receive projects that were quickly shut down. This was a pattern that continued for the next six years. Sondheim, on the other hand, was in
denial about *Merrily We Roll Along*. Even in interviews a year after the show closed, he defended the choices he made. It took him a very long time to come to terms with the devastation *Merrily We Roll Along* had caused. He no longer had a steady partner to work with and was very lost. In fact, he contemplated leaving the theatre world behind completely. However, this all changed when he met James Lapine, his future collaborator, in 1982.
CHAPTER 3

THE ORIGINAL

The Concept

With the failure of *Merrily We Roll Along* fresh in his mind, Sondheim was very hesitant to take on a new show. With the loss of Prince, Sondheim was searching for a new collaborator. Producer Lewis Allen approached Sondheim and proposed he check out playwright and director James Lapine. Fortunately, this was not a name that was foreign to Sondheim. He had seen Lapine’s production of *Twelve Dreams* at the New York Shakespeare Festival the year before and was impressed by Lapine’s work, but *Merrily We Roll Along*’s failure still loomed over him. He was unable to take the first step and initiate contact with Lapine. Allen sensed this about Sondheim and took action for him. Lapine was called and he was brought into Sondheim’s life.

Lapine’s craft had not always been theatre. He began his career as a photographer. He was a visual artist who had a keen eye for the beauty in things. Pursuing this type of art, he accepted a job at Yale School of Drama to design the posters and programs for all of its productions. From there, Yale offered Lapine a position on their staff to teach graphic design. Lapine accepted the job, but did not sever his ties with the drama department. He was fascinated by the world of theatre and knew that he could use his visual talents to bring a
show alive onstage. He tried his hand at directing and playwriting and fell in love. He had found his passion and there was no going back.

Lapine was in his thirties when he first met Sondheim in 1982. It was not the happiest of meetings. Sondheim was very depressed about his Broadway failure and exuded that attitude to everyone he met. “When I first met Steve he was very bummed out, in a very low state. He kept referring to himself as a dinosaur. He was complaining, very bitter, thinking about giving up the theatre, and I thought he was joking” (qtd. in Secrest 326). Despite Sondheim’s negative outlook, Lapine liked him. Lapine was also not intimidated by Sondheim’s reputation. The only show of Sondheim’s that Lapine was familiar with was Sweeney Todd. So Lapine was able to come to the relationship with a fresh outlook, which Sondheim needed desperately. After a couple more meetings, both men decided that collaborating together was a good idea. So the next step in the process was to decide what their show was going to be about.

Allen had originally proposed that they create a musical out of Nathanael West’s novella A Cool Million, but that idea was soon ditched. So the two men set up once-a-week meetings to sit down together to brainstorm ideas. One evening, Sondheim brought a promising idea to the table:

I showed Jim a French graphics magazine of the Fifties and Sixties called Bizarre, and one issue was devoted entirely to a couple hundred pages of every conceivable variation of the Mona Lisa . . . both visually and verbally. And Jim told me that he had, at one time, directed a piece by Gertrude Stein called Photograph. It was a poem which he staged with famous images as the centerpiece of the show . . . (qtd. in. Zadan 296)

Sondheim and Lapine decided that they wanted their show to carry this same concept. They wanted to have one central theme, but play with different variations of it. With this idea in
mind, they collected tons of photos of people and threw them together in the hopes that they would find inspiration in one of those faces. However, the people did not seem to blend and to create a world for them to inhabit would be difficult. Sondheim and Lapine then turned to existing works of art to see if inspiration was hiding there. Once they found Seurat’s *Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte*, they knew their search was over and then the wheels began turning.

Sondheim and Lapine looked at Seurat’s painting and immediately saw it as a stage set. There were levels built into the painting and a plethora of characters to choose from. Yet when Sondheim and Lapine began looking at the people in the painting, a group of questions popped into their minds: Why were none of the people looking at each other? What was going through each character’s mind? Were there tensions or secrets between them? What did they feel about being in this place with all these other people? Maybe there were sordid pasts and affairs occurring between some of them and perhaps this made them hesitant to engage with anyone else. With each new figure they examined, the story began to develop further. Lapine was the one to finally bring the entire story together with one crucial statement. He pointed out that the main character was obviously absent from the painting. Sondheim was unsure what he meant. Lapine then said the main character was the artist who painted it. At that point, all the puzzle pieces for the basis of a show fell into place and *Sunday in the Park with George* was born.

After the initial concept was formed, Sondheim and Lapine wanted to flesh out the story and began to research Seurat’s life. The more they searched for information on him, the more excited they became about the show that lay before them. “Here was this marvelous [sic], mysterious genius who died of some strange disease, probably a rare form of
meningitis. He led a double life—on the one hand, almost every night he had dinner at his mother’s house. Only a few weeks before he died . . . she discovered he’s kept a mistress and had a baby by her” (qtd. in Secrest 327). The records of Seurat’s life that Sondheim and Lapine uncovered were so vague that it gave them fundamentals but room to be creative with the show. They decided to not reflect Seurat’s life accurately, but to pick and choose the elements that were the most enticing. Personally, Sondheim was captivated by Seurat’s painting techniques. He instantly came to the understanding that Seurat’s guidelines for painting applied perfectly to music. Seurat’s concept of mixing colors by eye instead of on the palette spoke to Sondheim. Even the way Seurat applied the paint to the canvas was musical. Sondheim and Lapine had the overall show imagined and now needed to go to their own corners to create their portions of the musical.

**The Story**

Lapine was in charge of writing the book for the musical. His technique for writing the script was to create a basic outline for the whole show very quickly and then expand it bit by bit. He decided that the main character of the musical had to be George Seurat. The other characters in the show are the people found in George’s painting. All of these characters are simply people who pass through George’s life. The only two people that have any real meaning in George’s life are his mother and his mistress, Dot. George has hired a nurse to attend to his mother. She ridicules George’s behavior and his art. Dot, on the other hand, adores George’s art. She loves watching him paint and craves to be close to his genius. Lapine introduces us to all three of these characters within the first few minutes of the show. The stage starts off as a blank canvas that George walks on to and fills with his drawing of...
the scenery. During this first scene, we see the dynamics of George and Dot’s relationship. Like the real Seurat, George is completely consumed by his work. As he sits in the park and sketches Dot, he focuses completely on his drawing pad. He talks to Dot as his model instead of as his lover. He constantly corrects her on the things like her eye line, her posture, and her concentration. He never speaks to her lovingly or with concern for anything other than his art. This is something Dot struggles with. She loves being a part of his art, but is upset that she cannot be the perfect model that he wants. Yet that is not the biggest problem in their relationship.

Dot is constantly frustrated that she is second in George’s life. She does everything in her power to please him, but he cannot make the same kind of commitment to her. “... [W]hat she loves most is the thing that will forever keep them apart emotionally. She wants to be the center of his universe, yet she can never be because his art will always come before her. She can only come close when she is the subject of his work” (Miller 158). She is aware of the fact that he can never completely separate himself from his art. No matter where they go, a part of him is always with his paintings. For example, once George finishes sketching Dot, he dismisses her. Since he can sense that she is upset, he tells her that they will go to the Follies later that night. During the next scene in their apartment, George is working on his painting while Dot is preparing herself for a night out on the town with her lover. George comes out for more paint and watches Dot getting ready. She asks him if he is going to get cleaned up, but he does not know why. When she reminds him of their promised date, George tells her that he cannot go because he has to work on the painting. Even though he loves this woman and knows that this decision will upset her, he cannot tear himself away from his painting. She is fed up with her position in his life. In making the decision to
ignore his commitment, he loses the only person who really matters to him. Dot leaves him alone with his art for good.

In the next few scenes, we are introduced to the other characters in the painting. These people have lives and stories of their own, but the audience is not made aware of their backgrounds. This was not the way that Lapine originally wrote these characters. He gave them more depth than they ended up with, but during the workshop stage Lapine realized that audiences did not care to learn more about the supporting characters. Therefore these secondary characters are seen the way George would see them. There are tensions and affairs occurring between them, but we learn these things because we observe them in the park just as George does. Lapine shifts our focus again to George and Dot. As George draws in the park, Dot reads a grammar book in an effort to improve her education. She hopes to prove to George that she has the potential to be the woman he wants her to be and make him sorry he lost her. In order to make George feel her absence even more strongly, she strolls through the park on the arm of the baker. She wants to prove to George that she has moved on, but Lapine makes it clear that she has not.

During the middle of the first act, Dot reveals to George that she is pregnant. Shortly after, she visits him in his studio to tell him that she is leaving for America with the baker. There is this small hope within Dot that thinks George will hear this news and suddenly come to his senses and want her to be with him. Unfortunately, this does not happen. Even though these two people love each other desperately and should belong together, it will not turn out that way. “Dot comes to the realization that her needs and desires will always take second place to George’s work. . . . She is not content to live with a man who withholds himself emotionally, who relates more easily to the still images of her that he created than to the real
woman” (Gordon, Stephen Sondheim 16). His art is too powerful to let their bond flourish. So Dot leaves for America with her new lover. George’s personal life falls apart and so he buries himself even deeper in his work. He is next found sketching his mother. His mother tries to recall beautiful memories, but George shoots every one of them down. He cannot connect to anyone anymore. As he sketches her, Dot enters carrying her baby, Marie. George cannot even acknowledge his newborn child. All he does is work on his drawing. Just before Dot leaves outraged, George apologizes to her, but Dot takes the baker’s arm and exits. As George’s life is in shambles, the people in the park are in a state of chaos as well. They enter the stage arguing and fighting. Yet George looks at it as his painting and brings it back to order. He finally completes his painting by assembling the characters in their final positions for his finished work. On this note, Lapine concludes Act One.

Lapine came into trouble when trying to decide what the second act should be about. He and Sondheim were unsure about whether they needed a second act at all. There were debates about expanding the first act to make it a full show, but that was soon abandoned. One of the next ideas was to follow the travels of the painting after it had been completed, but it was decided that was not a dramatic enough choice. Sondheim also proposed the idea of simply displaying different variations or criticisms on the painting, but Lapine rejected that. It was finally decided to create a story that would parallel the first act, but connect to it personally in some way. “One of the devices to help connect the two acts is the use of the same group of actors in both acts all playing different though sometimes parallel roles” (Miller 156). Act Two begins with the final image of Act One. The characters remain frozen in their positions and one by one recount facts and feelings about George’s untimely death. As all of the characters leave the stage, the painting fades away just like George. From there,
we fast-forward to 1984 when we first meet George’s great-grandson, George, who becomes our new protagonist.

Like his great-grandfather, George complicates his life with art. He is the creator of Chromolumes, large sculptures that use color and light to create dynamic art displays. The one he is currently presenting is his seventh creation of this kind. This one is a tribute to *Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte* and he is asked by museum officials to make a presentation to accompany it because of his personal relationship to the painting. George brings along his grandmother, Marie, to help tell his family’s history. After this, the museum hosts a reception for the success of George’s new work in the gallery where Seurat’s masterpiece is hanging. Here we come to understand that George is struggling with his art. He has lost sight of his artistic vision. Instead of focusing on his creativity, George is forced to concentrate on receiving funding for his work. “Whereas the artist of the first act holds fast to his principles, appearing almost as a Keatsian guardian of Beauty and Truth, his second-act descendant here reveals that success actually depends on “politics,” on negotiations of cultural power” (Gordon, *Stephen Sondheim* 175). He does not have the privilege of spending hours of undisturbed time in his studio. In order to make his art a reality, he has to constantly promote it. Like that of his namesake, his own art has taken over his life and pushed him to make tough decisions. He has had to sacrifice his family and happiness in order to thrive in the art world. Yet there has been a bigger toll taken on George’s life.

Due to his intense dedication to his creations, George has lost sight of his artistic inspiration. In the modern world he inhabits, art has become a business where marketability is key. Instead of trying to break into new territory, George has made Chromolumes again and again. His work has become monotonous and it has been noticed by the art community.
One of the characters George meets at the reception is art critic Blair Daniels, who makes it very clear that she has become bored with his work. She bluntly tells George that his art has become meaningless. With news like this, George becomes very defeated. In addition to this bashing, George receives news that his long-time collaborator Dennis is leaving to return to a career in NASA. The only one who still believes in him whole-heartedly is his grandmother, Marie. She tries to pass on their family history to him by using Dot’s small, red grammar book, but he denies that the stories she tells are true. She talks of Seurat’s painting with love, but George is closed off to her. She tells him of her excitement about traveling back to that park in a month, but he does not share her joy. He makes some half-hearted efforts to connect to his grandmother and his heritage, but is unable to. By the time George is finally ready to leave for France and spend quality time with her, he is too late. Marie passes on before ever returning to La Grande Jatte. So without any other meaningful plans ahead of him, George makes that trip alone.

George has come to Paris to display his Seurat-inspired Chromolume. One would hope that returning to the famous park would reignite George’s passion for art, but he is completely empty. His grandmother was the last important thing in his life, but now she is gone. Dennis, who made the journey with George, tries to cheer his friend up, but it is hopeless. George sits in the park alone and looks through the red grammar book. Yet as he feels lost in the universe, Dot appears before him. This is a fated meeting for both characters:

In an attempt to revitalize his original vision George discovers his kinship with Seurat and returns to his roots, making a pilgrimage to Seurat’s Parisian park. In so doing he also acts as a surrogate Seurat to reconcile at last with Dot, the rejected mistress, discovering Seurat’s love and need for her. It is a
crucial moment of recognition, . . . a rare happy ending for a Sondheim musical and a highly significant event. (Secrest 329)

Dot sees George sitting there and notices her book in his hands. She mistakes him for the original George as she tells of her life as mother to Marie. She thanks George for all the gifts he gave her especially the art of concentration and being in the moment. She asks how his work is going and is astonished to find him so devoid of new ideas, but realizes that she can help him. As a thank you for the way he positively changed her life, Dot reveals the world of La Grande Jatte to George as it is seen in the painting. She invites all the other characters on stage to finally acknowledge George’s brilliance. In giving George the artistic recognition that Seurat deserved, George comes to understand the beauty and importance of creating a fine work of art. With this, the curtain falls and the show is completed.

The Music

With Lapine working on developing the story, Sondheim dove deep into his music. Sondheim’s process was very different than Lapine’s. First off, Sondheim wrote lying down because it would help him to go to sleep more easily. He took ten minutes to write, two minutes to nap, and would sharpen his soft-lead pencils every five minutes. However, he spent hours mulling over his ideas before ever setting anything down on paper:

- He invests enormous intellect and effort into each melody, harmony, and rhythm; each spelling of a chord; the accompaniment figures and in which registers they are placed; and every dynamic. He plans how extended numbers will develop and evolve so that they hold together and are satisfying without becoming relentless or boring. . . . he writes music that is true to his characters and their situations. (Horowitz, Sondheim ix-x)

One of Sondheim’s true gifts is creating music that matters. The songs his characters sing have purpose. He meticulously works out his music and lyrics to perfectly suit the situation
on stage and let the characters bare their souls. *Sunday in the Park with George* is no exception. Many of the songs were not completed until very late into the rehearsal and workshop processes. One of the reasons Sondheim took so long to create these songs is that he wanted to make them perfect. With a story, character, and message he was so connected to, Sondheim worked diligently to serve Seurat well.

Sondheim made every effort to be sure that his musical style matched Seurat’s artistic techniques. He made connections with Seurat everywhere he could. Sondheim read about Seurat’s use of eleven colors plus white and instantly related it to the twelve notes on the musical scale. He decided to use these notes to create leitmotifs, small musical phrases that represented different characters or concepts. This was established at the start of the show. “The show opens with a series of musical figures, arpeggiated chords, which will be a prominent leitmotif throughout the show. They represent the creation of art” (Miller 169). These chords are played and George creates the world around him. There were several other leitmotifs that Sondheim used in his score, but this was the most essential because it became the basis for George’s world and mindset. After creating his park, George brings out Dot who takes over the song and sings about her frustration with George.

Sondheim had a difficult time writing the songs for this show from the beginning because he felt he did not know the world of the show well enough to be true to it. Since Lapine worked at a much faster pace, Sondheim wanted to make sure his music would coincide with the story Lapine had created. In order to get a deeper sense for Lapine’s characters, Sondheim asked Lapine to write a stream-of-consciousness monologue for Dot as she stood posing for George at the top of the show. What Lapine created was an interior thought process that was all over the place. Dot does not stay with one thought and follow it
through. Her mind jumps from one subject to the next in the blink of an eye. Sondheim was more than pleased with this material:

. . . [Lapine] gave Dot a mind that does not burn with a steady flame, but flickers and sputters; she has a short attention span. That justified my juxtaposing images and emotions without transitions between them, such as the instantaneous switches from complaints about her discomfort to her defiant determination to be a model [George] admires to suspicious jealousy to general observations about art and artists. (Sondheim, *Look 11*)

Sondheim also took the skittish nature of Dot’s monologue and translated it into the music. He used rhymes that were imperfect. Dot is trying her hardest to constantly impress George and in her attempts to rhyme words, she falls short. She is not as good as she should be for him. In this song, which became the title song, the dynamic of George and Dot’s relationship is clearly established.

After Dot’s frustration is released, the park becomes inhabited by other members of Seurat’s painting. As they enter, the music becomes more frantic. With this choice, Sondheim wanted to convey to the audience that George’s creative world had become more complicated. He now has more than one subject to observe. The chaos of the music builds until we meet George’s contemporary, Jules, and his wife, Yvonne, in an art gallery. They are observing George’s most recent work *Une baignade, Asnière*. They sing “No Life,” a song that ridicules George’s painting style and aesthetic. They sing of how George’s work has no life. It is mundane and ordinary. They complain that there is no heart in his painting or his life. This was a song that Sondheim could relate to very easily. When he wrote the mean remarks that Jules and Yvonne say, Sondheim was simply putting the ideas of his own critics to music. With the satirical nature of this song, Sondheim made it clear that Jules and Yvonne’s opinions should be rejected. It sets up the idea that George is an artist whose work
is ridiculed without being given any sort of chance. In support of this idea, Jules and Yvonne do not get the last laugh. At the end of their song, Jules and Yvonne are mocked by the boys in the painting who send out loud Bronx cheers to them.

The next song, “Color and Light,” takes us into George’s studio. Here, we are first introduced to another of Sondheim’s leitmotifs. This motif is referred to as the “Finishing the Hat” motif that represents George’s frustrations that others do not understand his love and commitment to his art. In this song, Sondheim’s translation of Seurat’s divisionism comes into play. ““Color and Light, Part I” establishes a new motif, the staccato accompaniment figure that accompanies George’s brush strokes on his canvas. . . . this motif is the musical equivalent of George’s physical brush strokes which create the pointillistic style he uses in his painting” (Miller 171). The music has a jumpy feeling to it that matches the style of Seurat’s painting. The “Finishing the Hat” motif also reappears as George speaks tenderly to the subjects of his painting about what he is doing to them. As George stands at his canvas, Dot sits at her dressing table preparing for a night out on the town. Here the second portion of the song begins. Dot applies her make-up using the same rhythmic pattern that George does to apply his paint to the canvas. Dot sings of all the ways she could improve her appearance to please George. Just as before, she gets distracted and has fantasies about being a Follies girl. However, under the staccato rhythm of the music and lyrics are conflict chords. As she returns to reality, she is annoyed by the abundance of color and light, which is what George lives for. No matter what she does, she can never be perfect for him. The third section of the song has George and Dot singing in an alternating pattern. As George continues work on his canvas, Dot sings of George’s concentration on his art and the mix of emotions she receives from his eyes and looks. George comes out from behind his canvas
for more supplies and studies Dot at her mirror. As she sings to his emotional distance, he sings about her simple nature, but the beauty of the light that falls on her face. After Dot storms out in anger, George feels conflicted about his choice to stay with his painting over going out to the Follies with her. The staccato music stops and starts as George goes over what just happened. It reaches its height as George furiously paints and forgets about Dot altogether. He cannot help being engrossed in his work even at his lover’s expense.

The painting motif continues as George goes to the park on a following Sunday. The people in the park move according to this motif. When the staccato music is playing, the characters move, but once it stops, they freeze. The use of this motif makes it clear that we are seeing the park that George is currently creating. Each time that staccato pattern repeats, the audience is reminded that George is in control of the scene because he is the artist painting it. Yet the other characters have a right to their own opinions of George, which they convey in the song “Gossip.” As each group of people comes on stage, a different musical motif accompanies them. “All the gossip and commentary is arranged into discrete units that coalesce to form a musical canvas. Thus, George is bombarded with sound, shape, color, and light. The recognizable musical identity of each group corresponds to the various hues of the painter’s palette” (Gordon, Art 275). Even though the characters have their own thoughts, they remain part of George’s created world. Each characters sings disparagingly of him with his or her own personal motif, but all have the staccato pattern of his brush strokes underneath them.

This exploration of secondary characters continues in the “The Day Off.” In this song, the audience is given a small glimpse into the characters’ personal lives as George is sketching them. He starts off with two dogs in the park. George sings the interior
monologues that convey each animal’s feelings about life as a dog. From there, George focuses on each different cluster of people. “Since James had thoughtfully connected two of them in a marriage (Franz and Frieda) and three of them in a romantic dalliance (the Celestes and a Soldier) I was able to combine them into a duet and a trio, varying the structures. . . . I tied each one into George by having him sing the introductory lines of the characters’ verses along with them” (Sondheim, Look 21). The main concern Sondheim had with this section of the score was keeping the audiences’ interest engaged. Since it had been decided to keep these characters two-dimensional, Sondheim worked hard to make it clear that these would be the prominent characters in George’s final painting and not insignificant passers-by. In order to break up the possible monotony of this area of the show, Sondheim inserted contemplative solos for Dot and George.

Dot’s song is “Everybody Loves Louis” in which she sings about her relationship with Louis the baker. She sings about all his wonderful qualities and throws them in George’s face. Louis is always there for her and is friendly with everyone. She is trying to prove to George that she is better off with the baker, but as with other Sondheim characters, she is trying to convince herself of this as well. She wishes she could care for Louis the way she cares for George. Louis is the safe, secure choice because he is simple and kind, but he does not possess the uniqueness and creativity that Dot is attracted to in George. The music is bouncy as she sings of all of Louis’s charming attributes. This is contrasted with the slow, elongated lines that she sings about George. She is conflicted between the man her head tells her to be with and the one who owns her heart. However, she has been down that road with George before and knows that nothing will ever change. The pace of the music is flirty again
as Dot takes a bite out one of Louis’s cream puffs and chooses him. She leaves the stage along with the other characters and George is left in solitude.

George sits alone in the park and glances through the drawings he has completed during the day. With each sketch, he sings the beginning lines of the corresponding song until he reaches the end and there is nothing left to look at. For once George is alone with his thoughts. He has seen Dot strolling through the park on Louis’s arm and can now confront his true feelings about the situation. It is here that the “Finishing the Hat” motif is expanded to create a full song. George longs to be part of Dot’s world, but is frustrated by the fact that she cannot accept his devotion to his art:

George is saying it would be nice if anybody could understand the act of finishing the hat, could understand his compulsion to put his work above all else, “how you have to finish the hat.” In other words, it’s not his fault he’s inattentive, insulting, thoughtless, rude – it’s his art’s fault, because that’s what forces him to be as he is. He justifies the fact that he watches the world rather than participating in it, . . . so why should he live by its rules? (Miller 161)

He tries to blame Dot for her inability to comprehend his passion. He believes that if there were one person who could come to terms with his situation it would be her, but is hurt by her inability to do so. Just as Dot does in her song, George is trying to convince himself that he is not to blame for his rude behavior. It is either Dot’s fault, society’s fault, or his own art’s fault but never his. He wishes that he could be different. He knows that he is missing out on some of the beauties in life because he is always with his canvas, but he is haunted by those chords that tell him otherwise. His art is the only thing that fully understands him and therefore he cannot turn his back on it. Yet just as he is trying to come to terms with the state his life is in, he receives a big surprise.
During an encounter in the park, Dot reveals to George that she is pregnant with his child. The action then moves to the studio where Dot asks George for the painting he made of her powdering herself. Lapine created a beautiful scene in which Dot and George are trying to express their undying love for each other, but are unable to. The song Sondheim wrote for this moment is “We Do Not Belong Together.” It begins as George tries to excuse himself from the conversation to return to his painting. This infuriates Dot who has just told George that she is leaving for America with Louis. Throughout the beginning of this encounter, Sondheim uses restless rhythms to reflect the intense emotions that are trapped within this relationship. Dot becomes frustrated by George’s inability to express his feelings for anything but his art. She does not care about what the feelings are but wants to know that he has some. George is struggling internally with this problem as well. He does have a strong love for Dot, but he cannot give her the proof she longs for. “While the words he expresses are harsh, the music to which they are set undermines their cruelty and expresses his suffering. When, for example, he protests that he cannot speak the words she longs to hear, the word need lies on a tender high note that conveys the magnitude of his feelings” (Gordon, *Art* 283). The only way George knows how to show Dot he loves her is by using his art to immortalize her. Unfortunately, in this moment, George’s love for Dot cannot overpower his anger for her inability to understand his passion for his work. He lashes out at her for turning her back on him and returns to his painting. Dot is left alone to come to terms with her feelings for George. In the second half of the song, Sondheim gives Dot more intelligence and insight than she has ever had before. Prior to this point, Dot has only had to care for herself. She could remain entangled with George because the only person it hurt was her. Now she must think of her child too. She sings about being incomplete without George,
but acknowledges the fact that they can never be together. The things that make them love each other are the same things that will keep them eternally apart. She knows that in order to give her child the best life possible, she must go to America with Louis. Even though it causes her great pain, Dot comes to the conclusion that she has to move on from George. Dot leaves just as George comes out to speak to her. He is left alone with his pain, just as Dot was. The only woman he could ever love has left him for good.

Following this devastating encounter, we witness a following Sunday when George is sketching his mother in the park. His mother gazes off in the distance and watches the Eiffel Tower being constructed. She hates change and the erection of this new “machine” frightens her. She sings about the destruction of nature by man-made items that corrupt the solitude and serenity of the park. She sees the world becoming ugly and losing its beauty, but George disagrees. “To his mother, changing represents the destruction of things; but to George changing represents the idealization of things, which is the essence of his art . . . ” (Miller 167). George finds change appealing because then he can create a world that is perfect. George says that “what the eye arranges is what is beautiful” (Sondheim, Look 31), but no words can pacify his mother’s fears. She can see herself disappearing just as the park is. She begs George to draw the world before it fades into oblivion. George promises his mother that he will not let her simply vanish, but will use his art to capture her life. This song extends the sadness that was brought about in the prior scene. Even though George is out drawing in the park, he cannot escape the melancholy that he feels over the permanent loss of Dot.

George’s personal life has been demolished. He has no connection to anything, but his art. As he tries to run away from his pain, the people in the park enter in a state of chaos.
A cacophony of voices and music fill the stage until George cannot stand it anymore. He stops the scene to bring about order. Sondheim uses the same arpeggio that was heard at the beginning of the show to signal that the creative process is about to take place. George is going to complete his work of art accompanied by the song “Sunday.” For the first time in the entire show, all of the characters sing together. They are finally being joined as one to create beautiful harmonies, visually and musically. As each voice sings, they represent different sets of colors on George’s palette. All of them are vital and important to complete the painting. George guides each character into his assigned spot in his park:

As the artist omnipotently moves his characters and objects about the park, there is a sense of peace and inevitability. His control over the animate and inanimate world is complete. . . . This is the moment of release both George and the audience have been working toward. Finally, too, George is able to acknowledge his love for Dot. The work becomes dedicated to her as he reverently leads her to the foreground of his masterpiece. (Gordon, Art 285)

By taking special time out to lead Dot to her reserved spot up front, George is finally allowing his love for Dot to radiate through his painting. As the cast sings in beautiful harmony, they describe George’s park while utilizing his artistic terms. They sing of the shapes, colors, and brush strokes that George used to create his masterpiece. As the characters assume their immortal positions and the first act comes to an end, George takes a step back to admire his finished work of art with the audience. At last he has created his perfect park.

Just as Lapine linked the two acts by using the same actors in different roles, Sondheim connected the songs of both acts by repeating melodies and concepts. However, he did this in such a way that it did not seem as if he was cheating the audience out of a fresh set of songs. For example, the first song of the second act mirrors the first song in the show.
At the beginning of the second act, the story returns to George’s painting. Here the characters remain frozen in the positions that George left them in before intermission. They are understandably tired of being stuck in these poses and are given permission to air their grievances through the song “It’s Hot Up Here.” As Dot did in the title song, the characters sing of their frustrations about posing for a distant artist. Since we are looking at the painting during this number, Sondheim made sure to highlight the painting style of the artist. “The staccato quality of the lyric, with its short sounds, single syllables, simple rhymes, and long pauses between each comment again serves to suggest the painter’s divisionist technique” (Gordon, *Art* 286). The rhythm of this song returns to the bouncy nature that was found in “Color and Light.” This song brings Seurat’s painting to life on many different levels. As the story moves forward to the present, these characters are released from their still stances, but are not gone for good.

The next song is “Putting It Together” in which modern-day George goes on about his frustrations with the art world. Sondheim decided to modify the “Finishing the Hat” melody for this song. Both songs deal with artists who feel misunderstood by the world around them. So Sondheim felt the repetition of the “Finishing the Hat” tune was very fitting, but he took it one step further. “Putting It Together” begins with the art gallery guests discussing George’s latest work. The groups get their own moments to discuss their opinions. This part of the song feels very similar to “Gossip” and “The Day Off.” With the secondary characters being played by the same actors, this repetition of style makes the story feel much more connected. As George enters the scene, he sings about the process of creating art in a money-centered world. This is a song that Sondheim relates to very personally. Early on in his career, Sondheim had to focus on selling himself before he could
even start to sell his music. He had to peddle his compositions as any other salesman would. This is exactly what George is going through. He has been halted artistically because he has had to focus all of his attention on attaining funding for his work. The rapid rhythm of the music reflects the hectic pace of George’s current world and is a reference back to his nineteenth-century predecessor.

After the chaos of the party subsides, George is given a quiet moment to spend with his grandmother, Marie. Unlike the other guest at the event, Marie accepts and loves George’s art wholeheartedly. In her song “Children and Art,” she sings of George’s genius to the image of her mother, Dot, in Seurat’s painting. She beams with pride for her grandson and speaks of the beautiful art he makes out of color and light. She tells her mother how much she would have loved George and his work. The song’s focus then shifts to include George. Dot taught Marie that the only two things that can be left behind in this world are children and art, and Marie wants to impart that knowledge to her grandson. Even though George never had children with his ex-wife, he still has his art. Marie sings to him of their family legacy found in this painting. She points out all the female characters that were inspired by Dot. “In the painting she finds conformation of Seurat’s love for Dot. This heritage, the source of her pride and sense of self, she longs to share with her grandson. . . . In attempting to convey Dot’s magic and sensuality, Marie tries to convince George to accept his emotional self” (Gordon, Art 292). As Marie sings of her love for her family history that is captured in this work of art, George rejects her claims. He does not believe that Dot is really all those women that Marie points out. He is not even convinced that he is really related to Seurat. Just like his great-grandfather, George is unable to emotionally connect to the world around him. He is lost and Marie recognizes that in him. She sings about how
important this painting is because it will be the only family he has left after she is gone. She
tells him that he will understand once they are back in that park. Marie then has her final
moment with her mother. She looks up at Dot with great love and bids her farewell for the
last time.

The next song, titled “Lesson #8,” is a solo for George. George sits alone on La
Grande Jatte because Marie passed away before she was able to make the trip to Paris. As he
sits there contemplating his future, he flips through Dot’s red grammar book that Marie
treasured. He opens to the lesson Dot was working on during the first act: Lesson #8. At the
sight of Marie’s name on the page, George’s isolation in the world hits him harder than it
ever has before. “He speaks of himself/Seurat in the third person, putting himself in Marie’s
place, objectifying himself, making himself someone who is acted upon instead of someone
who acts. He finally realizes that he must connect to his past, to his great-grandfather”
(Miller 184). Sondheim’s choice to have George sing in third person makes the lesson he
learns in this song applicable not only to him but to his great-grandfather as well. Sondheim
also felt that the repeated use of George’s name supported the pointillist style of the other
music in the show. As he sits there, George echoes the sentiments Seurat’s mother expressed
in “Beautiful.” He is afraid of fading into oblivion and leaving no lasting impression on the
world. George finally understands that art alone is not enough. He needs to connect to his
family legacy in order to make his life truly meaningful. Unfortunately, all that he has left is
the lone “family tree” that stands in the park. This is his only physical connection to the past
that remains, but it proves to be enough. George’s acknowledgement of his need for a
connection brings the past back to life.
As George longs to be reunited with his family history, Dot enters the park. She sees George sitting there and believes him to be Seurat. In their final duet, “Move On”, Sondheim allows their love story to come full circle:

“Move On” is both an extension and a development of “We Do Not Belong Together,” which in turn is an extension and a development of the lyrical section of “Color and Light,” the seeds of which, both musical and verbal, have been planted in the interlude of “Sunday in the Park with George.” They are four parts of one long musical arc... They could be read as a mini-musical of their own: Boy Loves Girl, Boy Loves Art, Boy Loses Girl, Boy Gets Both Girl and Art a Hundred Years Later. All the musical themes of the love story culminate and intertwine in “Move On.” (Sondheim, Look 52).

Sondheim pulls on all of George and Dot’s prior love duets to allow both characters to finally be together. He echoes the music and lyrics of those songs to highlight the love and affection these two feel for each other. As George sings about Dot’s beauty and care for him, she receives the loving feelings from George that she has always longed for. Instead of looking at her as merely a model, he sees her as a woman who is very dear to his heart. In return, Dot gives George the lesson he needs about making his art and life matter again. Since she sees him as Seurat, she tells him what he has taught her. She lets George know that he needs to make a decision and not worry about what others will say. She chose to leave for America with Louis which may or may not have been the right choice, but that no longer matters. The choice was made and she had to move on from it. In this song, Dot teaches George that all he has to do is let his art come from within. He has the artist inside of him who is dying to be let free, but is stifled by the worry of what critics will say. With Dot’s assistance, George is able to let his passion for art bloom again by moving on from his fears. Regardless of their past problems, George and Dot need each other. They are only able to jump over life’s hurdles because the other is there to show them the way. They do indeed belong together.
As George’s excitement for his life is rekindled, he notices the words Dot wrote in the back of her grammar book: Order, Design, Tension, Composition, Balance, Light, and Harmony. Dot explains to him that those were the words he would often say as he worked. As George begins reading the list, the characters of Seurat’s park come out to greet him. George cannot read the last word and asks Dot what it is. As she says “Harmony,” all of George’s painted characters start to sing a reprise of the first act finale, “Sunday.” This time the song is sung as a tribute to the artist whose brilliance they never had the chance to formally acknowledge. In this moment, George is completely connected to his great-grandfather’s glory. He understands how powerful art can be if it comes from the heart. The characters move toward their assigned places in the painting before leaving the stage. Dot is the last to leave. She acknowledges him one last time as the white canvas descends in front of her and he reads the final notes in her book. “White. A blank page or canvas. His favorite. So many possibilities . . .” (Lapine 174). A final note sounds and the show comes to a close.

The Cast

Casting the show proved to be an easier task than one would think. Since Sondheim continued to write the music all the way through the final weeks of previews on Broadway, there were not many songs that could initially be used to audition actors. Mandy Patinkin was a name that popped into Lapine’s mind. Patinkin had just finished his run as Che in Andrew Lloyd Webber’s Evita. He won a Tony Award for his performance which had launched him into the limelight. When Lapine suggested Patinkin for the role of George, Sondheim was not as sold on the idea as Lapine was. Sondheim had been writing George as
a bass-baritone, which Patinkin was not. Lapine still felt Patinkin was the right choice and
decided he would prove it to Sondheim. Lapine called Patinkin and told him about the
project. Patinkin was immediately interested, but became nervous when he found out he
would have to audition for Sondheim. Patinkin hated auditioning and thought that with his
new Tony Award he would never have to audition again. He had also heard a rumor that
Sondheim hated tenors and since Patinkin was a tenor the thought of auditioning for such a
man petrified him. While rehearsing another project, Patinkin was sent the music to “Color
and Light” and told to learn half of it. He was then brought in to see Sondheim, Lapine, and
musical director Paul Gemignani. From the minute that Sondheim heard Patinkin sing, he
was astounded. “‘Mandy has a wide tessitura, both top and bottom,’ Sondheim says. ‘It’s an
extraordinary voice with a working two-octave range’” (Zadan 299). The reason Sondheim
had been hesitant about casting Patinkin was that Sondheim could not visualize a tenor
singing the songs he had created for a bass-baritone. Yet Patinkin proved that he was up for
the job. He had learned “Color and Light” as Sondheim had written it and simply sang it in
his natural voice. After hearing Patinkin sing about 40 bars, Sondheim was convinced that
Patinkin was the perfect person to play George. Patinkin was cast and Sondheim began
adjusting the existing songs to suit Patinkin’s range.

Now that George had been cast, the next on the list was Dot. Again Lapine was the
one to come up with an idea for the female lead. He thought Bernadette Peters would be
ideal for the part of Dot. She had the perfect look for an artist’s model and a strong voice to
go with it. Before running the idea by Sondheim, he sent Peters the material to see if she was
even interested. “‘. . . I never in a million years thought she would do it because we had
only a sketch to show her. I mean, it was just thirty pages of the first act with one song. I
was shocked that she said yes immediately, but she just loved the material’” (qtd. in Zadan 300). Peters agreed to do the show, but had one small issue. Included in the pages that Lapine sent her was a scene from the second act that was based upon Seurat’s *Poseuses*, a painting of a naked woman in three different poses with *Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte* displayed in the background. In the script, Lapine had made the woman in the picture Dot. Initially, George had asked two other female characters to pose for him, but once they found out it had to be nude, they refused. So George turned to Dot who became all the women in the picture. This scene was intended to be the climax of the second act, but Peters was not pleased with it. She called up Sondheim to tell him how much she loved the piece, but informed him that she would not do the nude scene. Although he was not pleased by the news, Sondheim convinced her that it would not be a big deal to work around and Peters officially signed onto the project. The issue ended up being a moot point because that scene was later cut. With the two leads in place, the other characters came easily. Some actors abandoned the project after the workshop period and were replaced, but George and Dot were always Patinkin and Peters.

**The Road to Broadway**

The show had been cast, but it still had a long way to go. At this point in time, Lapine had written only the first act and Sondheim had finished two songs: “Sunday in the Park with George” and “Color and Light.” In order to aid Sondheim in the creative process, a reading was set up at Playwrights Horizons. This was a non-profit organization off-Broadway that worked to develop the shows that showed promise. Lapine had worked with it before and received a commission to develop a new show. Lapine decided that *Sunday in
the Park with George should fulfill that obligation. The first read-through was set up to give Sondheim a better feeling for the piece. It was here that Patinkin and Peters met for the first time and it became clear that they had great chemistry. As the first act was read, everyone knew that this was a special piece that had a bright future. As the show became more fleshed out, a second reading was arranged. It now had a rough outline of both acts and five completed songs. Pleased with what they saw, Playwrights Horizons gave Sunday in the Park with George a four-week period during the summer of 1983 to workshop their piece before an audience. Lapine was familiar with this type of environment, but Sondheim was not. Prior to this, all of Sondheim’s shows had gone straight to Broadway. Presenting an unfinished work to an audience made him feel a little unsettled and nervous, but he trusted Lapine. However, Sondheim was not the only one who felt this way.

Many of the actors were excited about being a part of this show and nervous all at the same time. The workshop process was very frustrating for them because they had no clear vision of where the show was going to end up. Judith Moore, who played the Nurse and Mrs., the American woman, in the first act explained how she often would feel as if she was doing nothing and this made her very anxious. “I would sit on the floor for hours before I had another bit to do. We had no concept of the overall theme, that we were dots in the painting. The dialogue was a dot here, a dot there. We didn’t know that. We thought it was so bizarre. It was totally foreign from any musical any of us had ever seen” (Moore 28). The actors had to trust that the show’s creators would come through for them with exceptional material that would make all of this waiting worthwhile. Yet there was one member of the cast who was not sure if he was going to be able to handle the wait.
Like Sondheim, Patinkin was not familiar with the workshop format. He felt very uneasy about working on a show without knowing his part. At the time they started rehearsals, he had only one song to work on: “Color and Light.” Sondheim was often absent from rehearsals, but when he did show up, he usually had very little to show for his time away. Songs came about slowly, especially Patinkin’s songs. This continued for quite a while until Patinkin reached his breaking point. “I was very testy because I wasn’t used to any kind of workshop atmosphere. So I was working for five weeks and sitting on the side, with not many things to sing and not enough of my part written for me to figure out what it was going to be, and getting more and more impatient, and right before we opened to the public, I quit” (qtd. in Zadan 304). Everyone was ready to perform the show’s first workshop performance and their leading man had taken his leave. With the temporary loss of the main character, Lapine went into a state of panic. He immediately called Patinkin and begged him to do the show that night. In order to not add too much pressure to the situation, Lapine suggested that Patinkin bring along his wife and agent for that evening’s performance and see what their feedback was. Patinkin agreed and performed that night. After the show, Patinkin went out to dinner with his friends to listen their thoughts. Everyone agreed that this show was worth sticking around for. Although Patinkin still felt a little uneasy, he agreed to continue on with the show. This was a smart decision because Patinkin’s character had a big development on the way.

A few days after this outburst, Sondheim came to Patinkin with a new song: “Finishing the Hat.” Around four o’clock in the afternoon, Sondheim, Patinkin, and Gemignani went to a coffee bar nearby that had a piano they could use in the basement. Sondheim sat down at the piano and played “Finishing the Hat” for the two men. Looking
back on the situation, Patinkin realized that George was the hardest character for Sondheim to write for because the part was so similar to himself. As Sondheim sat at the piano playing, he became completely invested in the song. He played so feverishly that he was in a sweat by the time the song was over, but it was worth it. Gemignani was in tears and Patinkin wanted to start work on the song immediately. Patinkin took a copy of the song to practice with until that evening’s performance. Show time came and Patinkin still had not had the song memorized, but he knew he needed to sing it that night regardless. André Bishop, the head of Playwrights Horizons, went on stage before the curtain rose to announce that a new musical number was being inserted into the show that would be sung by Patinkin. “. . . I taped the lyric sheet, just the words, on the back of the sketch pad I carried. . . . And I sang it. . . . As the song ended the place went insane, an ovation I’d never heard before. And it crippled me for the rest of my life to try to sing that song, because I felt I could never do what I must have done then’” (qtd. in Secrest 333). Since the song was inserted into the show that quickly, there was no time left to fuss over it. It was sung with such passion that it has remained one of the highlights of the show to this day. From this point on, Patinkin learned to trust Lapine and Sondheim. The material would eventually be produced and it had been proven that the wait was worth it.

Since Sondheim had not finishing writing before Patinkin was cast, Patinkin was able to contribute in large ways to George’s songs. One of the songs he had a strong hand in was the first part of “Day Off.” During this number, George is sketching two dogs in the park and speaks their thoughts. Sondheim had the idea to use a special-type of microphone to alter Patinkin’s voice:
. . . I had gone to a Laurie Anderson concert and watched and listened with fascination as she sang into a large sausage-shaped microphone called a vocoder, which transmogrified her voice as she sang into any timbre and range that she chose: crackling, gurgling, soprano, bass, male, female, infinite kinds and infinite combinations. I thought it would be smart and surprising to conceal one of these instruments in George’s sketch pad so that his voice would take on the qualities of a growling mutt and a yapping lapdog in turn. (Sondheim, Look 20)

Sondheim loved this concept, but Patinkin had a different thought. He believed that he could create the voices for the dogs himself, but Sondheim still needed to be convinced that this would work. Patinkin gathered Sondheim, Lapine and Gemignani together and auditioned dog voices for them. Sondheim was amazed. Not only did Patinkin prove that he could achieve the desired effect, but he also gave the creators options. He came in with three different voices for both the male and female dogs. They decided on a voice for each dog and the song came alive. In hindsight, Lapine realized that this number was the one in which George won the audience over. By creating stylized voice for these dogs, George was given a sense of humor that he had been lacking.

Another song that Patinkin was frustrated with was “Beautiful.” This was the song in which George sings about the beauty of the world with his mother just after Dot has left him. When they were performing it during the workshop, only half of the song was finished. Patinkin’s part had not been written yet which frustrated him. He felt as if he was cheating the audience out of something very precious. He vented some of his feelings and Sondheim came to him to discuss it:

[. . .] Steve came up to me and said, ‘I’m getting ready to start writing your part of the song, could I pick your brain a little. . . can I call you?’ And I said, ‘Sure.’ And he did, and we talked for two or three hours . . . and it had to do with a lot of feelings that we shared, having to do with people that you love, things you’d like to say to them, ideal states of when you can communicate and when that communication can never take place again. . . .
was one of the most incredible conversations I had ever had with anybody. And four days later, he came in with this conversation turned into a poem called ‘Beautiful,’ set to this simple gorgeous music. (qtd. in Zadan 305).

Sondheim had again come through for Patinkin with a breathtaking song that made the role of George much richer. Progress was being made, but there was still a lot to be done.

By the time the first two weeks of the workshop had passed, the first act was finally completed. It was not in its finished state, but it had a complete story and songs to go with it. However, the second act remained nonexistent. There was a basic outline of the second act, but it had not been developed further or had songs created for it. This caused a lot of debate because many people felt satisfied by the first act alone. Sondheim and Lapine were unsure as to whether they should ditch the idea of a second act altogether and just expand the first act. They decided against it because they had so much they wanted to say that was not contained in the first act. So the first act continued to be performed by itself as Lapine and Sondheim worked trying to finish the second. One of the issues was that Lapine was also directing the production. With his attention divided, Sondheim was left much more on his own to figure out the feeling for the second half. In hindsight, Lapine wishes they had finalized the show before beginning the production process. Fortunately, Playwrights Horizons was pleased with the work they were producing and Sunday in the Park with George became a regular in their workshop series. Three days before the close of the workshop, the second act was finished enough to perform. It had only two songs, but that was better than nothing.

The show closed at Playwrights Horizons and the future of the production was in question. The goal was Broadway, but there was still a lot of work to be done. With the down time between rehearsal periods, Patinkin decided to delve even further into his
character. He had received an offer to be a part of a new production of *Death of a Salesman* with Dustin Hoffman, but turned it down because he wanted to stay with *Sunday in the Park with George*. So, Patinkin began attending art classes at the Arts Students League to learn how to draw. He watched documentaries and read books about Seurat and the painting. He even flew to see the original painting in Chicago:

[. . . Patinkin] spent a total of seven hours staring at Seurat’s masterpiece. ‘I talked to it,’ says Patinkin, ‘and I listened to people talking about it. I got up on a chair and looked to see the red and the blue and the hat and I tried to see where the yellow flecks were, so that I could create it on stage correctly. I also did the whole first act of the play in front of it, talking to the different people in the painting. I felt I was him . . . or his ghost.’ (Zadan 308)

Patinkin became even more deeply invested in the show. He had a connection to Seurat that he had not felt previously. After studying the painting for hours on end, Patinkin better understood what Seurat must have felt as he worked on his masterpiece. Patinkin was ready to take the show to Broadway and get a chance to explore George more. Luckily, the producers of the show agreed. After six months of downtime, the production was set to open on Broadway on April 23, 1984, at the Booth Theatre. Until the preview period started, it was back to the rehearsal hall to continue developing the show.

Peters was pleased that the show was moving forward, but made it clear that she would not accompany the production unless she was allowed to explore her character more. From her point of view, Dot was not developed enough. Peters felt Dot faded into the background with all the other secondary characters. Peters wanted more meat added to her role:

I had many concerns. . . . If George was such a defined character and if they had this very deep connection in their relationship, then [Dot] needed to be a much stronger person. ‘We Do Not Belong Together’ was originally more of a duet, but Steve realized that this was a mistake: you didn’t hear enough of
the woman’s point of view in this relationship, otherwise she would just be one of those other women that he sings about in ‘Finishing the Hat.’ So the number was refocused to carry Dot’s emotions. The song, even more strongly, shows how Dot makes a decision and resolves within herself that they do not belong together, even though they do belong together. (qtd. in Zadan 308-9)

Sondheim and Lapine did not want to lose their leading lady and worked to satisfy her needs. In turn, the story of the show was strengthened. By giving the audience a bigger glimpse into Dot’s mind, the story was no longer seen completely through George’s eyes. It became a show in which both characters could be equally sympathetic. Both George and Dot became relatable and compelling. With the two leads pleased for the moment, other problems began to crop up.

*Sunday in the Park with George* was the first time since *Company* that Sondheim did not have Jonathan Tunick to orchestrate his score. Tunick was focusing on his own career as a composer and left Sondheim to find a new collaborator. Initially, Sondheim handed out copies of the piano score to three or four musicians at the workshop so they could experiment with it. That sufficed for the show’s Playwrights Horizons period, but was not enough for Broadway. Michael Starobin, who had worked with Lapine on *March of the Falsettos*, was brought in to orchestrate the show, which was not a simple task. “‘Steve had definite ideas of what his music was about and how it should be presented,’ Starobin says. . . . ‘Steve . . . writes his own accompaniment figures, so he’s asking you to support the ideas that he’s already put down’” (Zadan 310). Starobin had been used to helping songwriters expand the structures of songs, but in this situation he just needed to act as a support system. Although Starobin was lost at first, he soon found his footing and the project was a breeze. The only song that caused him some trouble was the opening song, “Sunday in the Park with George.”
It had a different feeling from the rest of the show, but Sondheim explained that this was done on purpose. Sondheim made the first number comedic and more upbeat to let the audience ease into the show. He wanted to let the audience know that this was not going to be a dreary evening of theatre and that humor could be expected. Starobin grasped the concept and completed the orchestrations with ease.

Now that the orchestrations were finished, it was up to Gemignani to find musicians to play in the orchestra pit and figure out where they would sit during the show. Luckily, Sondheim found an old orchestra pit in the Booth Theatre that had been covered by additional rows of seats. The Shuberts, who owned the theatre, were more than happy to tear out those rows to expose the orchestra pit. A wall was also torn down so a grand piano could be brought in. The place to play had been discovered, but people to play the score were still required. It was decided that eleven musician were needed. With Gemignani conducting, the number was twelve which matched the number of colors Seurat had on his palette. The problem Gemignani was facing was that the score seemed almost impossible to play. “... I had six or seven people coming in and looking at the parts and deciding that they didn’t want to play it. It was too difficult for them. I mean, every turn of the page was more complicated. It is rhythmically intense and there’s less left to the imagination, in the sense that everything is written out”’ (qtd. in Zadan 310). In addition, there was the added fact that some of the music was dependent upon the movements of the set pieces. Gemignani eventually found eleven musicians who could play the score and who signed onto the project.

The next step was to create the sets for the Broadway production. Designer Tony Straiges had already come up with the concept of using cutouts for all of the scenery and additional characters in the park. This idea was used at Playwrights Horizons and worked
well because it mimicked the flatness of Seurat’s painting. Playwrights Horizons’ space also
had the ideal dimensions to make the picture look accurate. At the end of the first act, when
George completes his painting and places the frame around it, the actors are perfectly
proportionate to the size of the frame. A life-size representation of Seurat’s masterpiece had
really been created on stage. This was not the case at the Booth Theatre. It was one of the
smaller houses on Broadway, but it was larger than the workshop theatre. Therefore all of
the set pieces needed to be augmented to suit the new space. Fortunately, the Shuberts were
very willing to assist the show in any way they could. Since they had already dug up the old
orchestra pit, they allowed the stage to be plowed underneath to create room for Straiges’s
set. Spaces had to be carved out in the stage floor to let the cutout elements pop-up from
underneath. Cutouts were also eventually used in the second act during “Putting It
Together.” To display the pressures of having to socialize with many different groups of
people during a cocktail fundraiser, George would raise cutouts of himself from the floor to
stand in for him while he moved on to the next group. The other pieces of the set that did not
come from below would either slide in from the wings or be lowered in from the fly space.
The one large three-dimensional set piece was in the second act. When George presents his
newest work at the art gallery, he needs to have something to display. Originally Lapine
thought of making George a performance artist, but then decided against it because he did not
want to make George look like a fool. Lapine wanted it to be something modern and new
that would seem cutting edge. “Eventually, special effects designer Bran Ferren came up
with the idea of a laser sculpture, a “chromolume” (literally, “color-light”), a work that
incorporates color and light just as Seurat’s painting did. . . . The set around the device was
entirely white to suggest Seurat’s “blank page or canvas”” (Miller 157-8). Ferren had to
invent new technology to create the sculpture, which made it very cutting edge. With the sets decided upon, next up was the lighting.

Richard Nelson was the lighting designer on this production. Like most of the other designers, he was inspired by Seurat’s painting techniques. He wanted to light the stage in such a way that it appeared as if it was created using a pointillistic technique. He came up with the concept of using templates. Up to this point, templates were used in lighting figures to project a pattern onto the stage such as a leaves for a forest scene. These templates were used only to achieve certain effects and very rarely to light an entire show, but this is exactly what Nelson decided to do. “Lighting is additive, and the more lights with colors you mix together on stage, the more the audience will see “white” light but with an incredible amount of coloration. . . . Richard used this additive principle and mixed all different colored pointillism dots, colors picked from Seurat’s color palette, into a very rich colorful “white” light” (Tan). He had his pointillism templates custom made and used them on almost every light. Since the templates cut down the amount of light that hit the stage, Nelson had to use more lighting fixtures than normal. This approach was radical and supported the nature of the production perfectly. Costumes were the next design element to be figured out.

Patricia Zipprodt and Ann Hould-Ward were at the head of the costume design team. Most of the costumes were not too challenging to create. The only character that has two challenging transitions is Dot. During “Sunday in the Park with George,” she goes into a fantasy sequence during which she gets out of her dress and dances about. The complication with this was that the dress needed to stay standing while Peters was not in it. During the workshop period, the dress simply had to be brought on and off by Peters, but it was decided that something more elaborate needed to be created for Broadway. A mechanical device was
built that would open and close the front of the dress. This was then followed by two small legs being lowered from inside the dress to hold it up. It was controlled from offstage so Peters did not have to fuss with it. This solved the problem, but also created more issues. For one, Peters had problems getting out of the dress without knocking it over. If she did not wait for the legs to lower, the dress would lose its form and fall. There were also several occasions when the device failed to work and Peters was trapped inside the dress. In order to avoid that, an override was installed into the dress. Peters could flip a switch to either open or close the front. The scene in which Dot reveals she is pregnant was the other costume challenge. Fortunately, this was much easier to solve. To create a pregnant belly, the costumers simply had Peters pull her bustle around to her front. The effect could be executed quickly and looked great. The costumes for the other characters were simple since most of them came directly from Seurat’s painting. There were a few problems though with props.

Robert Westenberg, who joined the show for the Broadway run as the soldier, was having problems with his main prop: his fellow soldier. In Lapine’s story, there are two soldiers whom George observes in the park and who are always together. One soldier speaks while the other one is a mute. Instead of having to pay an actor to play that part, the creative team decided to create their own soldier. For Playwrights Horizons, the soldier was made out of plywood and had a cheap handle placed on the back of it, but as with Peters’s dress, the Broadway production needed something grander. A brand new soldier was created who would move around on casters and be magnetically connected to Westenberg’s waist. A special belt was created for Westenberg to wear that had metallic fasteners that would attract the magnetic soldier. All of Westenberg’s costumes had to be styled to fit over this belt that was very substantial in size. The producers poured thousands of dollars into this magnetic
soldier and hoped that it would convey the idea that these two men were connected at the hip. Unfortunately, once the magnetic soldier was tried out on stage it continually became detached from Westenberg’s belt. It ruined the illusion the creators were striving for and the whole idea had to be tossed out. The wooden soldier was brought back and Westenberg had to get used to carrying it with him. It was a little cumbersome, but proved to be much simpler than the other option.

While great advances were being made on the design elements of the show, the second act remained unfinished. The Broadway preview period began on April 2, 1984, with a full first act and a second act that had only one song, “It’s Hot Up There.” The cast would go on each night performing the show as fully as they could with the material they had, but the audiences were not gentle as they had been during the workshop. Sondheim had experience with disapproving Broadway audiences, but this was a new adventure for Lapine:

My biggest shock was the Broadway theatergoing audience. When you go to an off-Broadway show, you almost expect something different. Broadway people, I found . . . were expecting opening numbers and dance numbers and that kind of tits-and-ass stuff . . . So after the first few performances . . . the theater parties came and hated it. They’d sit there stone-faced and start getting up and walking out and talking and I was in a state of shock. I couldn’t believe it . . . because I thought it was going fine. I knew what the show needed – and we were working on it . . . (qtd. in Zadan 310-1; 4th ellipsis in orig.)

The audience was not pleased to find that the show was experimental and additionally that it was not finished. On April 10th, it was announced that Sunday in the Park with George’s opening night would be pushed back nine days. Sondheim continued to work to get his songs completed, but he knew that rushing the process would not create good material. At one point he gathered the cast and said they just had to trust him. He knew the preview performances were upsetting because of the lack of material and the audiences’ responses,
but he promised the songs would be there when they needed to be. It was clear that the producers were confident that Sondheim’s genius would eventually come through and so the cast had no other choice but to stand behind their composer and trust that he would keep his word. Sondheim finally had all but two songs in the second act finished, but it was still not enough. Audiences were walking out and the tension in the company increased. Patinkin was at his wit’s end. Every night, he would go out onstage in poor spirits. He knew that the show was incomplete and would let that influence his entire performance. He made suggestions to Lapine and Sondheim about what he thought the show needed, but the two men would just reply that they were working on it.

Patinkin eventually reached his breaking point. He felt that the show was dying and hated being able to do nothing about it but wait. Every night he would get to the scene in the second act in which George is supposed to have a moment with his grandmother, Marie. It killed him to get to that pivotal point in the show and have nothing more to work with. Determined to get this problem solved, Patinkin again approached Sondheim and told him to write anything. At this point Patinkin did not care if the material was brilliant. He just wanted something to sing. Sondheim felt that the scene was already beautiful and a song might not be necessary:

[. . . A]fter Patinkin expressed his frustration and Sondheim agreed to try and write [a song], they talked for hours about what the character was thinking and feeling. They talked at length about their mothers, Patinkin said. ‘I can’t remember specifically what Steve said, but it was, essentially, the impossibility of getting through to his mother. I remember we talked about how much we wanted to love our mothers, connect with them and not hate them, and how hard the struggle was.’ (Secrest 334)

That was all that Sondheim needed. He knew what the remaining two songs needed to be about. He disappeared for a few days and worked feverishly to complete them. When he
came back, he had “Children and Art” and “Lesson #8” in hand. These two songs were added and life was breathed back into the show. Finally Sunday in the Park with George was complete and just in the nick of time.

The Finished Product

On May 2, 1984, Sunday in the Park with George began its Broadway run at the Booth Theatre. It had taken Lapine and Sondheim two years to get to this point. The entire cast and crew had worked tirelessly to make this dream a reality. With all the stumbles along the way, it felt like a miracle that the show had finally come together. It was exhilarating to see the concept fully realized on Broadway at last. The cast went out and gave a knockout performance that night and then waited for the reviews to come in. The critics were divided. There were some who were very impressed by the show. “Jack Kroll in Newsweek heralded, ‘Sondheim’s score is original even for him. . . . The new collaboration with Lapine may be a promise of exciting things to come. . . . To say that this show breaks new ground is not enough; it also breaks new sky, new water, new flesh, and new spirit. . . .’” (Zadan 313). Like Kroll, other critics felt that Sunday in the Park with George provided the audience with a great challenge. This was not a show at which the audience could turn off their brains and watch spectacle after spectacle. Instead they needed to be engaged and ready to experience something they had never seen before. Critics who disliked Sunday in the Park with George recognized that there was effort put into the show, but felt that it fell flat. Clive Barnes of the New York Post wrote that the audience would get more out of going to a park with anybody else than spending an evening in the theatre with this show. He felt that even Patinkin and Peter’s performances could not save the production. Unfortunately, Barnes was not alone in
his opinion. Douglas Watt of the New York Daily News said that he wished the show was shown in an art gallery so that you could move on to the next exhibit once you became bored with this one. Julius Novick, who wrote for the Village Voice, stated that he enjoyed the show, but that it might not be a show for most. He felt it was slow to start and would not keep audiences engaged enough to sit through the whole thing. Unfortunately, Novick was right and audiences’ opinions of the show were just as varied as the critics. Even members of the theatre community were not entirely supportive of the show. Arthur Laurents, who had previously worked with Sondheim on West Side Story and Gypsy, felt the show missed the mark by placing too much emphasis on the importance of art in one’s life as opposed to the necessity of other people in a person’s life. However, the New York Times went to bat for the show in a very big way.

Frank Rich, who wrote for the New York Times, was the one critic who took his thoughts about the show a step further. He was enraptured by it. He saw how radically Sondheim and Lapine were changing the musical theatre world and did not want their work to be tossed aside because it was innovative. Rich’s opening night review was glowing:

Seurat, the authors remind us, never sold a painting; it’s anyone’s guess whether the public will be shocked or delighted by “Sunday in the Park.” What I do know is Mr. Sondheim and Mr. Lapine have created an audacious, haunting and, in its own intensely personal way, touching work. Even when it fails – as it does on occasion – “Sunday in the Park” is setting the stage for even more sustained theatrical innovations yet to come. (“Sunday,” NYTCR 282)

Rich was not claiming that the show was perfect, but he saw the genius in it. He became committed to sustaining this show. The New York Times continued to write articles that kept Sunday in the Park with George in the public eye. From the moment the show’s Broadway run was announced, the New York Times talked about it as one of the most anticipated shows
of the season. After Rich’s positive review, the passion for the show increased at the paper. Articles and interviews kept coming off of the press all the way through October of that year. So much attention was given to the show by the *New York Times* that other Broadway shows began to get jealous. They started mocking the production by referring to it as “Sunday in the Times with George.”

Despite the conflicted views about the show, the creative team remained positive. Lapine was concerned at first. Since he was used to working off-Broadway, he was not accustomed to all the negative reaction about an experimental show. “When all the reviews said that the show was so inventive for Broadway, I was shocked. Because I thought, ‘My God, if this was done at the Public Theatre nobody would blink an eye.’ I thought, ‘This is odd, because I didn’t feel I’d done anything that I wouldn’t have done anywhere else I would work’” (qtd. in Zadan 313). He was confused about why so many people found the show extremely challenging. He and Sondheim had meticulously worked on it to get everything the exact way they wanted it. Lapine was hearing that people felt the show was boring and dull. It was slightly frustrating for him to get such a bland response from a piece he felt so strongly about. However, the *New York Times* campaign for the show made up for it. Rich wrote:

*Sunday* [. . .] blurs old definitions, [. . .] those that separate Broadway from Off Broadway, show music and serious music, commercial entertainment and art, the theatre and musical theatre[. . . . Sondheim] changed the texture of the musical as radically as Hammerstein once did in *Show Boat* and *Oklahoma!*—but, even more than Hammerstein did, he has built a bridge between the musical and the more daring playwriting of his time. [. . .] he may yet become . . . one who leaves our theatre profoundly and permanently changed. (Secrest 339)
*Sunday in the Park with George* eventually found its own audience. The younger generations seemed to be drawn to the show. They could connect to a character who was lost and trying to redefine himself. Lapine also noticed that the show brought up different things for different viewers, which was the desired effect all along. While the show has universal themes, Lapine and Sondheim wanted it to be a personal journey for each audience member. Both men had connected so much to the piece that it was wonderful to hear comments from people who had related to the show in a brand new way. Lapine and Sondheim felt extremely rewarded by the experience. They had followed their passions and not given into commercial pressures. The best part was that the accolades for the production were still on their way.

Even though *Sunday in the Park with George* was surrounded by mixed reviews, it was expected to be one of the favorites during the awards season, especially at the Tony Awards. Other musicals such as *La Cage aux Folles* were *Sunday in the Park with George*’s biggest competition, but there were early indications that Sondheim and Lapine’s show could expect to sweep the awards season. The show won the Critics’ Circle Award in a landslide. After this, it went on to win in eight categories at the 30th Drama Desk Awards. Lapine won the awards for outstanding director of a musical and best book of a musical while Sondheim won for his lyrics. The technical work of the show was given great recognition and won the awards for outstanding lighting, orchestration, set design, and special effects. The most satisfying win of the night was the award for outstanding musical. Even though Sondheim’s music and the leads of the show were overlooked, the evening was a great success. Soon after, the final ballots for the Tony Awards came out and *Sunday in the Park with George* received a total of ten nominations. After receiving such high praise at previous awards
ceremonies, the production team went into the Tony Awards with high hopes. To their and everyone else’s surprise, *Sunday in the Park with George* won only two awards that evening: for best scene design and best lighting. Lapine, Sondheim, Patinkin, and Peters were passed over for more commercial musicals. Jerry Herman, the composer for *La Cage Aux Folles*, pointed this fact out in his acceptance speech for best score. “This award . . . forever shatters a myth about the musical theatre. There’s been a rumor around for a couple of years, that the simple, hummable show tune was no longer welcome on Broadway. Well, it’s alive and well at the Palace!” (qtd. in Zadan 315). Whether it was intended or not, this was a slap in the face to *Sunday in the Park with George*. Yet there was still a lot in store for the show.

About six months into the run, Patinkin decided that his journey with the show had to come to an end. His initial contract had run out and he had received an offer to be in a film that he could not pass up. He was sad to leave the production and the cast was disappointed to see him go. As a farewell present, they gave him a giant paintbrush that had the words “I’m using a different brushstroke” (Lapine 56) painted on it. They also presented him with a box. Inside were three pictures: one of him and Peters at the top of the show, one of the real Seurat, and one of Patinkin in costume that matched the picture of Seurat. These were meaningful gifts that Patinkin has kept with him to this day. When Peters left the show in February of 1985, she also received a special sendoff. Instead of being presented with bouquets of flowers, she was given a frame that had a picture of a monkey holding a flower on one side and a certificate on the other. The certificate stated that the cast and crew had contributed funds to make Peters a member of the New York Zoological Society and have a monkey at the Bronx Zoo named after her. Since Peters was a huge animal lover, she was very moved by this sweet, heartfelt gesture.
There were several other actors who took over the roles of George and Dot after Patinkin and Peters left, but only one of the replacements was pulled from the original Broadway cast. Westenberg, who had played the role of the soldier, took over the part of George after Patinkin left. He had been George’s understudy and had gone on several times for Patinkin. One of these times happened to be when Frank Rich from the *New York Times* was seeing the show. It was only about two weeks after the show had opened and Westenberg had only two understudy rehearsals at that point. He had never practiced with the costumes or make-up, but he got the call that he was going to go on that afternoon and had no choice but to give it his all. He was amazed that everything seemed to fall into place like magic. He knew the material and the show was performed without a hitch. Rich was impressed and gave Westenberg a very positive review, which came in handy when Westenberg was set to take over the part. The producers were able to slap these wonderful statements all over the theatre to promote their new leading man. Westenberg was honored to officially become George, but was nervous. He had seen Patinkin’s portrayal so many times and did not want to throw the whole company off by putting his own spin on the role. However, Lapine and Sondheim assuaged his fears. During one of the rehearsals before Westenberg’s official opening, Westenberg was performing a bit of business the way he had seen Patinkin do it. Sondheim asked him what he was doing and Westenberg explained that he thought it was staged that way. Sondheim told him that was something Patinkin did and that it did not need to be retained. Both Lapine and Sondheim told Westenberg that he must not have to feel obligated to mimic Patinkin’s performance, but should create his own George. In order to make this work completely, Sondheim adjusted two of the numbers, including “Finishing the Hat,” to fit Westenberg’s voice. Westenberg could sing the songs as
written, but they were at the very edge of his range and so the songs were taken down a half-step. These accommodations the creators made for Westenberg were a huge relief to him and he went on to play the part for about seven months. However, he would return to the role of the soldier for one special performance.

Terry Hughes, who had filmed a televised version of *Sweeney Todd*, decided he wanted to do the same with *Sunday in the Park with George*. This show was more difficult than *Sweeney Todd* because it was much more poetic. Hughes felt that this musical was very two-dimensional and that television was about depth. He was also unsure of how to convey a story that is seen through the eyes of the artist and Lapine spoke to him about this. In the first version Hughes created, Lapine felt that too much attention was given to the secondary characters with close-ups and that there needed to be more wide shots. Hughes did not agree, but went along with Lapine’s idea since it was his creation. Patinkin and Peters were both working on other projects at the time, but fortunately they returned to be a part this project. During the filming, Peters was sick with a sore throat which compromised some aspects of her performance that later had to be refined. She had to re-record two and a half of her songs at a later date. “‘I think it turned out pretty well,’ Sondheim says. ‘The problem was that you want to constantly to be looking at that picture frame filling up, and it’s hard to do on a television screen. Nevertheless, I think it’s swell and there is at least a recording of it, and I think it’s important that there be a record of theater pieces’” (Zadan 354). Despite all of the issues, *Sunday in the Park with George* was filmed successfully. It was aired on Showtime and Public Broadcasting Station on March 3, 1985. Several years later, Sondheim, Lapine, Patinkin, and Peters were asked to record a commentary for the DVD. As they re-watched
the show, great memories came back to them and they were all pleased that this production had been preserved forever.

After having run a little under a year, the show was losing its audience. The *New York Times* had worked its magic, but could only take the show so far. In most people’s eyes, the show could not be expected to run much longer. That changed in April of 1985 when *Sunday in the Park with George* won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. It was the sixth musical ever to receive such an honor. Sondheim was told by the producers of the show who were thrilled with the news. The cast and crew celebrated the achievement by drinking champagne after their matinee performance. All their hard work and genius was finally being given the recognition that it deserved. Additionally, once the news reached the public, ticket sales skyrocketed. However, Sondheim kept the entire thing in perspective:

> After a while of winning and losing awards, I realized the obvious, something often overlooked in the interest of maintaining a workable ego: the only meaningful recognition is recognition by your peers or, more accurately, people you consider your peers, and peer-recognition is a very personal matter. An artist’s peers are other artists, not necessarily in the same field—musicians for musicians, painters for painters—but people who understand what you’re trying to do simply because they’re trying to do a similar thing. (Sondheim, *Look* 51)

While the awards did not hurt in the moment, Sondheim later came to an understanding that winning contests and trophies were not what made this show worthwhile. He had embarked on this adventure because it was a message and story that was close to his heart. He wanted to create a new kind of musical that would bring new meaning to people’s lives. The show had not been accepted by everyone, but it touched people in a way that other shows could not. It had found its fans and made its impression on the musical theatre world. After 604 performances, *Sunday in the Park with George* ended its Broadway run on October 13, 1985.
It had been a long and trying process, but all the parties involved agreed they were better off for having been a part of this magical experience.
CHAPTER 4
THE REVIVALS

London: 1990

Ever since the show’s successful run on Broadway ended, there have been many other productions of *Sunday in the Park with George*. The first of these to look at is the show’s premiere production in London. It began with British theatrical producer Cameron Mackintosh who had given Oxford University $2.9 million to support student theatre in 1989. Oxford did not have an official drama department and did not wish to use the money to set one up. Instead, Oxford announced that they had invited Stephen Sondheim to be a visiting professor for part of the academic year. He would teach for six months which would begin in January. Sondheim was flattered by the offer and accepted the position. He was told that he would not be teaching formal classes, but would lead workshops and master classes in theatre as well as oversee productions of his work, which included the National Theatre’s premiere of *Sunday in the Park with George* that had been scheduled to open in March of 1990. “One of the reasons that I wanted to do the Oxford class in conjunction with *Sunday in the Park* [sic] was not just to give the students a taste of what it is to put on a show as opposed to dealing with art, but also to show how the theatre is entirely different from movies and television in one way – it’s always re- interpretable” (Sondheim, “Stephen”). In
the hands of director Steven Pimlott, *Sunday in the Park with George* was given a clean slate in London.

Just as Sondheim and Lapine had done, Pimlott, along with his set designer Tom Cairns, made a special trip to Chicago in October of 1989 to gain inspiration from Seurat’s masterpiece. After seeing Seurat’s work in person, both men decided that one of the things they wanted to convey in their production was George’s inner-mind. “…[I]n a sense, everything that happens on the stage, it has an external reality, they’re real people with real relationships, but also they’re all created by George. They are all aspects of his personality. It’s possible to see every character as an expression of his own personality and we decided to go outwards and express that in the set” (Pimlott). In order to make this a reality, Cairns set started out at the top of the show as a white room that had a large white frame around most of it. There were two openings created between the frame and the wall on both sides of the stage. As the show starts, George stands in the blank room that has small sketches sitting against the back wall. These are his initial ideas that are held in the back of his mind. As he speaks his artistic mantra, George brings in only a few elements of the park instead of creating it in its entirety. He brings on two black-and-white drawn trees, an umbrella, and floor-to-ceiling cutout of Dot’s final image in Seurat’s painting. As Dot enters to begin her first scene, George steps out from behind the frame. With this set, Pimlott and Cairns clearly established their vision. George is in control because he decides what happens in his art and what does not. The images are in his mind and he is exploring their possibilities. This was not the only artistic change that Pimlott made.

In the original London production, George’s canvas of *Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte* was much smaller than the one on Broadway. It was just slightly taller than Philip
Quast who played George in this production. It was also positioned nearly perpendicular to the audience. Another variation involving the canvas came into play during “We Do Not Belong Together.” In the original Broadway show, after George leaves Dot in anger, he retreats to work on his painting which is a scrim right behind her. So while she is singing her solo in agony, the audience can see George working in the background. In Pimlott’s version, George and Dot are arguing with the canvas between them. Instead of returning to his art, Pimlott has George leave the stage completely. Dot is left alone in his studio haunted by the thing she can never outshine: his painting. The most radical change Pimlott made was in the second act. He had heard that Broadway audiences were confused by the chromolume, a contraption that was brought onstage just before “Putting It Together.” They were not sure whether it should be taken seriously or seen as a joke. In order to avoid this problem, Pimlott made modern George into a performance artist. He hired Martin Duncan, an actor and director of British fringe theatre, to come in and stage a small performance piece involving four of the actors. Duncan made George a performance artist who used people as his medium and arranged them in different positions on stage. This change in George’s character definitely had a strong impact on the story. The other huge elements that influenced the story quite a bit were the two leading actors: Philip Quast and Maria Friedman.

Philip Quast was an Australian actor who had been working in London at the Palace Theatre in a production of *Les Misérables.* He went to the audition for *Sunday in the Park with George* at the National Theatre without high hopes. He knew that this was going to be a very coveted role and that competition would be stiff. Once he was cast, he knew he would have his work cut out for him, especially following in the footsteps of Broadway’s Mandy
Patinkin. With the new direction in which Pimlott was taking the show, Quast had the opportunity to bring new life to George. Maria Friedman, who was cast in the role of Dot/Marie, had this same chance. She was able to free herself from the vision of Bernadette Peters as Dot and reinterpret the character in her own way. Friedman was not as new to theatre as Quast was. She came from a musical family and had been pursuing a career on the West End for many years. Dot was Friedman’s first leading role and it put her on the map of the London theatre scene. Both leads were hopeful that this production would be a huge success. As with the Broadway production, the London premiere got mixed reviews.

Even though Pimlott had a brand-new vision for Sondheim’s musical, he still had to compete with the Broadway version. Many of the critics had traveled to New York to see the original Broadway production and used that to evaluate the London premiere. Some critics loved the show and Pimlott’s visionary take on it. Michael Billington of the Guardian wrote:

. . . what is impressive is the way [Pimlott] and his partners, designer Tom Cairns and lighting-man Wolfgang Gobbel, have come up with a clean, clear visual concept different in many points from the New York original. The show begins and ends in a picture-framed, arctic-white box. By a dazzling trick of perspective, the second act starts with the figures of La Grande Jatte huddled together in an elevated, framed canvas. And where on Broadway the museum-scene was dominated by a laser-beam light-show it here becomes a satire on Robert-Wilson-style performance-art: highly relevant since that too is about order, control and arranging bodies in space. (Billington, “creation”)

Other critics who gave positive feedback to the production were dazzled by the visual aspects of the show. Pimlott and Cairns’s inner-mind concept proved to be very effective. Most of these critics were even impressed with the acting skills of Quast and Friedman. As in New York, the aspect that received the most negative criticism was the work of Lapine and Sondheim. London audiences felt that while the sets were fascinating, the storyline of the musical lacked depth and emotional impact. They commented that the second act seemed
superfluous and was strangely connected to the first act. There were a few who understood
the point Sondheim and Lapine were making, but as a whole, reactions to this production
were similar to those in New York. That did not stop the London premiere from winning
recognition from the London theatre community. Quast won an Olivier award for
outstanding performance of the year by an actor in a musical and the production won the
American Express Award for best new musical. Just as in New York, *Sunday in the Park
with George* was a new experience for theatergoers that opened their minds to a different
style of musical theatre.

**New York: 1994**

Ten years after the original production of *Sunday in the Park with George* opened on
Broadway, a reunion was held at the St. James Theatre on Sunday, May 15, 1994. All but
three of the original cast members assembled to put on this one-night concert of the piece as
a benefit for Friends in Deed, an organization that supported people who had life-threatening
illnesses such as AIDS. A similar concert was held the year before to mark the 25th
anniversary of *Company*. Most people in attendance at that reunion were thrilled to see the
cast come together again to perform the piece after such a long time. *Sunday in the Park
with George*’s reunion was not expected to be as grand an event. Only ten years had passed
and the original show had been preserved on video. The set was also not going to be used
which was such an essential element to this production. Many felt seeing this musical put
together again would not be as powerful, but they were wrong. So many elements from the
initial production came together that the magic of the original was recreated in full.
Lapine, who was directing the concert, was able to reignite the passion contained in the original performances of his cast. Paul Gemignani again played the role of music director for a show he loved so much. To make up for the loss of the sets, Wendall K. Harrington developed projections to display on screens. These pictures merged elements of Seurat’s painting with photographs of the original production. Some of the spectacular technical aspects of the show had to be reworked to adapt to this concert style. For example, Bernadette Peters was not able to use the mechanical dress during “Sunday in the Park with George.” Instead she placed a life-size cutout of herself where she had been standing and moved away to continue the rest of the song. Additionally, cutouts of Mandy Patinkin were not able to pop-up from beneath the stage during “Putting It Together.” So he did the same as Peters and brought them on from backstage. In fact, the cutouts had been updated to show Patinkin in his concert attire holding his script in hand. All of these adaptations were charming, but the biggest highlight of the evening was seeing the two leads back in the roles they were meant for.

Patinkin and Peters both left the show before the Broadway run was completed. They had received offers for new projects that they were unable to pass up. The replacements had done well, but no one could match the chemistry that these two performers had. Since the roles were specifically written for them, the idea of them reuniting for this show was very exciting. Fortunately Peters and Patinkin did not disappoint:

Neither Patinkin nor Peters has ever had a musical stage role that allowed them to be as electrifying, and both were as good or better than they ever had been in the parts. . . . Both were magnificent in their solos—Patinkin’s “Finishing the Hat” was sublime—and by the time the two joined for “Move On,” they were levitating, and so was the audience. (Mandelbaum 24)
Patinkin and Peters were just as thrilled to be a part of this reunion. It was a chance to relive all of the memories they had made during the original production, but they were a little surprised by the experience. Peters had somewhat expected to simply jump back into the show as if no time had passed since she had left it, but this was not the case. Due to the complexity of Sondheim’s music, Peters said she felt as if she had to go back to square one and learn it all over again. Patinkin was surprised at how differently the show affected him this time around. He had come to the reunion with the images and meanings he had taken away from his initial experience with the show, but it was ten years later and a lot had changed in his life. There were different things that touched his spirit and moved him emotionally. However, both felt privileged and honored to be working on Sondheim’s masterpiece once again. This special reunion was an enchanting event that proved that Sunday in the Park with George would certainly be able to stand the tests of time.

Los Angeles: 2007

In 2007, Reprise Theatre Company staged Sunday in the Park with George at the Freud Playhouse on UCLA’s campus. Reprise Theatre Company is an organization that was founded in 1997 by Marcia Seligson. She modeled the company after New York City Center’s Encore! series that staged concert-style productions of musicals that were not often given revivals. Seligson appreciated this concept because it allowed shows to be put on that normally would be forgotten. With a concert style format, these less-popular shows could have smaller budgets and a shorter run, which would make them more profitable. A perfect show for this type of organization was Sunday in the Park with George. Jason Alexander, who had starred in Reprise Theatre Company’s first show, Promises, Promises, was asked to
direct the production. He was more than thrilled to accept the opportunity because he had an emotional history with this show. He had seen the workshop and the original Broadway productions and remembered being touched by them. At Playwrights Horizons, he saw the first act and recalled how amazed he was by how the style of the painter had been so beautifully translated to the stage. Yet it was not until he saw the finished show on Broadway a year later that he came to truly love the piece. “I sat, having seen the completed piece for the first time, weeping from its beauty and strength and courage. I went on to see the show at least half a dozen times more. And each time, it revealed itself to me more profoundly than the time before” (Alexander 3). Since he was so strongly moved by this show himself, he was honored to get the opportunity to give a new audience a similar experience.

One of the main problems this production encountered was the lack of funding. Reprise Theatre Company had started producing concert-style shows, but as time passed the performances became more elaborate. *Sunday in the Park with George* was a musical that would require a set that was not cheap. In order to bring Seurat’s masterpiece to life, the design team, led by set designer Bradley Kaye, needed to be creative. They created periaktoi that could be used to evoke the atmosphere of the different locales. One side of the triangular column was George’s blank canvas, another was George’s sketches of La Grande Jatte, and the third was a modern-day, colored version of the park:

The director and I wanted to have a show that could quickly flow, shifting the environment as often as an artist can rethink his vision. Starting with a blank page, sketching, reassembling and “fitting the pieces to a whole”, or along those lines. . . . The periaktoi could be manipulated and shifted by the characters, as they became more and more a part of the painting. [It] becomes a total group effort for the painting to emerge at the end of the act. (Kaye)
These structures were easy to change and move into different configurations. The need for a bulky elaborate set had been eliminated, but there was still the issue of the painting George would work on through the show. There are several scenes in which George is standing at his canvas filling in the missing parts of his work. Due to the production’s limited budget, they could not afford to create several different scrims that would show *Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte* in its various stages of development. Instead dots of color were projected onto a blank scrim when George was at his canvas. The colors would change according to what hue George was working with especially during the “Color and Light” number. Kaye felt this concept worked well and made a connection with the light-emitting sculpture that George creates in the second act. A completed *Un dimanche à la Grande Jatte* was used in the museum reception scene during the second act, which the production had been given as a loan from another company. For the most part, Reprise had gotten around spending too much money on their sets, but they had done it in such a way that was inventive and new.

Similar action was taken with the costumes. Since George was in the sketching stages of his painting during the first act, all of the actors, except George, wore different shades of beige and off-white. George wore variations of gray and white. Color was not brought into the costumes until the second act. Even during the first act finale when George is completing his painting, most of the sets and all the costumes remained in neutral colors. There were hints of color added to George’s sketches of the park, but not much beyond that. They were taking a big risk with a design concept like this, but hoped it would pay off. The next task at hand was casting.

The actor brought in to play the part of George was Manoel Felciano. He had just finished a run in the hit Broadway revival of *Sweeney Todd* and was excited to get to be a
part of another brilliant Sondheim musical. To prepare to play George, Felciano diligently ignored Patinkin’s portrayal. He did not merely want to be a recreation of the original. Since Alexander had seen the 1984 production many times, he had specific ideas about George. He imparted many of these ideas to Felciano, but it was such a short rehearsal process that Felciano had to work intensely to uncover his own George. “... I remember that ACT I George was very much who I was at the time, lost in my work, and ACT II George was who I had been as a very young man, full of desires and longing for artistic greatness but feeling very “blocked”…” (Felciano). Felciano took drawing lessons from Alexander’s wife and read as much as he could about the painting. He also had informal chats with Sondheim about the character. One of the most important aspects of George that Felciano wanted to make clear was that George loves Dot tremendously. He said this was trickiest during “We Do Not Belong Together” because he wanted the audience to feel George’s ache and longing for Dot without being overly emotional. In order to accomplish this, he added small, loving moments into earlier parts of the show. For example, during “Color and Light,” Felciano conveyed that George was happy at the sight of Dot powdering herself by giving her a gentle kiss. It was tender moments like this that made his George different. Kelli O’Hara, who was cast in the role of Dot, did similar things. Where Peters was very outwardly emotional, O’Hara seemed more reserved. Her Dot had excitement for life, but her pain was more subtle and contained. This worked to a point for Dot, but was perfectly suited for Marie. O’Hara’s Marie had a strong connection to the painting that was palpable in the audience. The two leads complemented each other well, but the test would be if the audiences felt their chemistry. The production opened on January 30, 2007 and was again at the mercy of the critics.
Alexander’s production took a lot of risks. They had a small budget and limited rehearsal time. They did the best with what they could, but in most cases, it proved not to be enough. While critics appreciated risks that the company was taking with the set design, they tended to be disappointed by the lack of color in the first act. They found the concept of using neutral tones interesting at first, but it soon lost its charm. Since Seurat’s painting style has so much to do with color, it was a disappointment at the end of the first act when the picture was completed in shades of beige:

... the biggest casualty of the experiment was the lush, climactic finale of Act I, in which the painting comes gloriously to life. What is meant to be a breathtaking riot of color and escalating emotion became, instead, simply a pale impersonation. Some minimal color was introduced... but it wasn’t dramatic enough to set spines a-tingle. ... the loss of that spectacular Act I conclusion killed momentum (already slow to begin with), weakened what little emotional resonance had been built, and left viewers — especially those who had never seen the show before — more bewildered than breathless and bowled over. (Roberts 37)

A moment that was meant to be powerful and moving lost all of its magic due to its lack of color. Critics did find some of pleasure in the performances, but again the lack of time brought the actors down. Felciano was criticized for his lack of convictions. His George seemed to be gentle. O’Hara had similar problems. Audiences found that she was too soft. She did not have the fire and spunk that Dot needed to attract George. She was too refined for a character who is so uneducated. Both Felciano and O’Hara seemed more at ease in the skin of their second-act characters. In fact, the scene in which George and Marie are making a presentation about George’s lastest work of art was hailed as the best in the entire show. Most of these comments seemed very cruel, but critics agreed that it was a product of the lack of time the production had to come together. For a show as complicated as *Sunday in the Park with George*, time is essential to make these character fully come to life and connect...
with each other and the audience. Reprise’s version was ambitious and unfortunately did not have enough time to reach its maximum potential.

London to Broadway: 2005-2008

*Sunday in the Park with George* has had only one Broadway revival. The journey for this production began with a young theatre director in London named Sam Buntrock. He was inspired to enter this unpredictable profession by a production of Sondheim’s *Into the Woods* in 1990. From that point on, Buntrock had a passion for Sondheim’s work. As a student, he staged *Assassins* at a 1997 fringe festival in Hampstead. The show was successful and impressed the management at the Donmar Warehouse. He was offered the position of resident associate director for the company. Buntrock saw this as a great entry into the field he longed to be a part of and accepted the position. He received many opportunities to work with respected directors such as Sam Mendes and John Crowley. It was expected that his career would soar, but that was not how things unfolded. Buntrock was a shy person who was not familiar with having to sell himself to get work done. He had been a stutterer since he was seven years old and this made him very self-conscious. He was unable to get anywhere with his productions. He grew frustrated with the theatre and decided to look for work elsewhere. As the son of an advertising man, Buntrock had been familiar with graphic art since he was young. So he decided to go into animation. He started working for corporate clients and the television industry and earned lots of money. He had discovered another passion that he had a great talent for. In the early 2000s, he established his own animation company, Ninjasticks. Buntrock was pleased with his success as an animator, but saw his theatre career slipping by the wayside. He ended up turning to alcohol which led his
life downward. Additionally, in 2003, he was diagnosed with cancer. Fearful that his life might not last much longer, Buntrock decided to get his career back on track. After beating cancer and becoming sober, he figured out that he wanted to merge his two passions. Again, he turned to the composer who had inspired him so much as a young man: Stephen Sondheim. He began to look through Sondheim’s works and *Sunday in the Park with George* jumped out at him. The show had never been given a Broadway revival and Buntrock believed it was about time the musical was given a new life. Once he went back to the original score, he knew this musical was perfect. It was a show about an artist who did not want to squander his talents and wished to leave a mark on this world. Buntrock officially decided to bring his two talents together in Seurat’s beloved park.

Buntrock started with the concept of using animation on the figures in Seurat’s painting. He enlisted the help of Shaun Freeman, a fellow animator who had been working on a new feature film called *Happy Feet*. Freeman agreed to help Buntrock figure out if his idea was plausible. They ran a test on one of the characters in the park to see if they would be able to animate it and move around in a simulated environment. The experiment was successful and Buntrock started the process of gathering animators to work on this project.

In order to make this dream a reality, Seurat’s masterpiece had to be perfectly recreated through the use of technology. This would be a tedious task at times, but it allowed the painting to be seen in all of its stages of development. Buntrock decided that the animation would begin with one drawn line:

> When I hear those opening chords of *Sunday in the Park* . . . , it feels like someone both tentatively finding their way and embarking on a huge journey. So it became clear very early on that that was the first sketch. The painter Georges Seurat knows the environment he wants to draw. He knows the line of the river bank—it’s the first line that goes across the page. That was the
initial spark of inspiration, and the rest of the act is putting everything else on the plane. (Gener 9)

With this beginning it would be clear to an audience that the story would be seen through George’s eyes. He could alter the world as he wished with his pencil and paints. This drawn line of the river bank became a signature for Buntrock’s production. The rest of the first act was built upon this one line. He assembled a team of about ten animators who worked on the production full-time to create Seurat’s park.

With the animation underway, Buntrock needed to get started on the theatre part of the show. One of his goals with integrating these two mediums was to make both the animated work and live actors seem as if they were living in the same world. Since the Menier Chocolate Factory had agreed to let Buntrock use its space for his production, Buntrock turned to set designer David Farley and projection designer Tim Bird to bring his vision to life. From the beginning, Farley wanted to project the animated figures onto the physical set rather than use screens. This way the two elements would feel connected as Buntrock had envisioned. So Farley had to determine what the base environment for the projections would be:

After some research into Seurat, the piece and already knowing the original space . . . I came up with the notion we were always in George’s studio. He came from a wealthy background, so this could a grand-ish room, but the main thing was the idea of George drawing on the wall, starting this picture, which sucked him in, and we were seeing it through his eyes. (Farley)

The set was built to resemble an artist’s studio. All the walls were blank. It had four doors, a wood floor, and two gathered curtains at the back. This was the real world that George would create in, but it soon transformed into the world of his imagination. The curtains at the back became trees, boats began to sail down the river, and dogs, projected on individual
canvases, ran around the park. The studio would be brought back during numbers such as “Color and Light,” but the rest of the time, the animation was used to create George’s world. It was even able to help establish George’s moods during the piece. For example, during “Beautiful,” the season in the park was fall, and this supported the theme of change in the song. This design made the transition between the acts easier as well. To show the passage of time, shadows of spectators passing the painting were used. They were costumed to indicate which era they were from. When the action reached the 1980s, the artist’s studio became an art gallery. An animated gallery was created to match up with the perspective of the real stage. This helped the audience feel as if it were in an actual gallery at a museum instead of a tiny theatre. Farley’s set design was simple but a perfect environment for the animation and theatrical elements to coexist in.

Next on Buntrock’s list was finding an actor who could portray George. Daniel Evans, who had begun his career as a child actor, was cast in the role. Like Buntrock, Evans had been inspired to pursue a career in musical theatre by Sondheim. In 1992, while studying acting at Guildhall School of Speech and Drama, Evans saw a production of Sondheim’s Assassins at the Donmar Warehouse. He was moved by the show and the music. He had been studying classical theatre, but this event turned him onto the idea of trying his luck at musicals. He taught himself what he needed to know and was eventually given his shot to prove that he had what it took to be in a musical. Trevor Nunn cast Evans as the title character in his 1999 production of Candide. His performance was a success and a new world was opened to him. He won an Olivier Award in 2001 for his portrayal of Charley Kringas in Sondheim’s Merrily We Roll Along. So when Evans landed the part of George in Buntrock’s new production, he was thrilled to again be working on a Sondheim musical. The
biggest concern he had with this version was being upstaged by the technical aspects of the show. As soon as Anna Jane Casey was cast opposite Evans, rehearsals began. What everyone did not know was that this production had a long life ahead of itself.

As is standard with *Sunday in the Park with George*, the Menier Chocolate Factory’s production was not universally liked. Some adored the mixing of mediums and felt that it completely reinvented Sondheim’s masterpiece. Others still had trouble getting past the original material. The performances by Evans and Casey were praised. They did not have the bravado of Patinkin and Peters, but they were able to hold their own against the animations that surrounded them. Evans’s George was said to be very immature, but it worked well in this version. His growth process began at the top of the show and was carried all the way through to the final curtain. Casey’s Dot was a very raw creature whose emotions seemed to flow out effortlessly. Buntrock and the rest of the team had worked very hard to bring this vision to life and it proved to be successful. However, the best response came from Sondheim who said that if the technologies had been available when the show was first produced, he would have wanted to do everything just as they had done it. With an extraordinary compliment such as that from the show’s creator, the entire cast and crew of *Sunday in the Park with George* knew that they had something very special on their hands. They had poured their hearts and souls into this production and it had paid off. Fortunately the journey was not over. The musical’s run was extended several times and a deal was worked out to transfer to the West End of London in the spring.

With the show set to open at the Wyndham’s Theatre in the spring of 2006, the production needed to be reevaluated to determine if anything should be altered. Most of the technical elements remained the same, but a big casting change was made. Casey was
replaced by Jenna Russell, who had just completed her run on the West End as Sarah Brown in *Guys and Dolls*. Russell had received an Olivier nomination for her performance and was sought out to become a member of the *Sunday in the Park with George* cast. She was extremely flattered by the offer since she was thoroughly impressed when she saw the production at the Menier Chocolate Factory. The one catch in the situation was that the cast recording would be made before Russell would ever have a chance to rehearse her parts. It was a daunting proposition, but Russell knew she could not pass up such a wonderful opportunity. “It was a challenge. It was a great honour, though, as it’s only the second recording ever made of the show. I think I did the best I could in the circumstances, but I hadn’t had the opportunity to properly investigate the character of Marie, who I play in Act Two and who I am now really very fond of” (Russell). Buntrock, Evans, and the rest of the show’s cast and crew welcomed Russell with open arms. She was never made to feel as if she was entering the process late in the game. She was given the freedom to explore and establish her own characters just as everyone else had. After the recording of the cast album was completed, rehearsals started to prepare the show for its West End opening.

On May 23, 2006, *Sunday in the Park with George* opened at the Wyndham’s Theatre to very positive reviews. Since most of the critics had previously seen the show at the Menier Chocolate Factory, Evans’s performance was given the same praise. He was commended for portraying both Georges with such ease and skill. It was also noted that he had great chemistry with his new leading lady. Russell’s presence in the production was hailed as a breath of fresh air:

. . . [I]t is Jenna Russell, fresh from success in *Guys and Dolls*, who lends the show a whole new dimension. From her first weary, sidelong glance at Seurat as she stands posing on a hot day in the park, she suggests Dot is an
independent spirit who yearns to be more than an artist’s creation. And in the second half, as Seurat and Dot’s nonagenarian daughter, Russell implies age without stating it and hymns Children and Art with a devastating emotional directness. (Billington, Wyndham’s Theatre)

Russell brought a new depth to the piece that had been missing. She was able to relate to Dot and really get inside her head to make her story more captivating. The show received the standard criticism about the story being slow-moving and the two acts disconnected, but the encouraging responses were enough to push the show to great success. It won five Olivier Awards: for best actress and actor in a musical, best lighting design, best set design, and outstanding musical production. The entire Sunday in the Park with George team was thrilled that so much of their hard work had been given great recognition. Their West End run had been extended to run through September and negotiations were underway about sending the show to New York.

The show officially closed in London on September 2, 2006, and was set to open on Broadway some time during the following year, but the details needed to be worked out for the show’s transfer to America. One of the first issues to figure out was where the show would be playing. The production team was hoping for a smaller-Broadway house that would feel similar to the spaces they had used in London. It was arranged for the show to be seen at the Roundabout Theatre’s Studio 54. Luckily, this environment was not drastically different from the Menier and Wyndham. Farley came to the conclusion that the changes to the New York set would be purely mechanical. Since the show was given a much larger budget, Farley could have the slip stage and doors automated. The next step was determining if the London cast would accompany the move to Broadway. This was a matter of finances more than a matter of interest expressed by the actors. In fact, during the London
run, Russell’s biggest hope was that the show would go to New York. Fortunately, Evans and Russell were signed on to make the trip with the show. The rest of the cast had not been determined yet, but the hype surrounding the London stars was enough to peak lots of interest in New York. Evans and Russell were honored to continue their journey in the musical and felt a certain pleasure in bringing it back to its hometown. Once the rest of the show was cast in October of 2007, it was announced that the Broadway opening had been set for February 21, 2008.

The show’s original Broadway run was received with mixed feelings. The revival expected to receive the same response. They had pushed the envelope and brought this musical into the twenty-first century. This was a big risk to take on a show that was experimental to begin with. Were New York audiences ready to give this show another chance or would history merely repeat itself? Sadly, the reviews for the revival mirrored those of the original. Some critics felt that while the technological advancements were dazzling, it forced other elements of the show to be sacrificed. Jeremy McCarter of New York Magazine wrote that the music sounded like a bad recording of the original and that this evening of theatre was ultimately a disappointment. Clive Barnes, who wrote for the New York Post, gave the original production a poor review and his opinion of the revival was not very different. He was impressed by the animation and urged his readers to go see the show, but told them he could not be blamed if they wished they had left after the first act. Fortunately, there were many critics who loved the new production. Ben Brantley of the New York Times wrote, “...a familiar show shimmers with a new humanity and clarity that makes theatergoers see it with virgin eyes” (Brantley, “Down”). He felt that this production gave the show a deeper level of intimacy that was not seen in the 1984 version. The Daily
News reported that Buntrock’s creativeness made up for the flaws in the original story. The second act was seen as much more connected to the first with the show’s use of animation to indicate the passage of time. The innovations this production took were recognized by the Broadway community as well and the revival received nine Tony Award nominations. However, it was beaten in every category by the other powerful revivals of the season: South Pacific and Gypsy. While it could never overpower the original, the revival was able to peek out from behind the 1984 shadow. It had come a long way from the small venue in London, but most agreed it was worth it to return Sunday in the Park with George back to the New York stage.
CONCLUSION

*Sunday in the Park with George* has never been one of Sondheim’s most popular shows. It does not have a steady plotline. The music is not classically melodic. A century passes between the action of the first and second acts, which leaves the show feeling disjointed. Yet it has stood the test of time. It won a Pulitzer Prize and continues to be produced all over the world. The question is why. If this show always receives such mixed reviews, why do people keep putting it on? The answer is simple: the need in people to be noticed and appreciated, which is conveyed in this piece, is timeless and universal.

Seurat was never an artist who painted for the masses. He worked to explore his passion for his craft. His theories were not widely accepted and he was looked down upon by many for trying something new. He did not need to be loved by everyone, but wished for his art to be acknowledged. Unfortunately, he died before this could truly happen. Sondheim followed a similar career path. He was not content to mimic the music of the past. He wanted to challenge the boundaries of musical theatre and create something that the world had never seen. His experimentation began with *Company*, but did not reach its pinnacle until 1984. Inspired by Seurat’s most famous painting and his life, Sondheim collaborated with Lapine to create a show that went against all the standards of musical theatre.

The original production of *Sunday in the Park with George* was not easy, but Sondheim never lost his faith. He believed in this material because it was his story as much
as it was Seurat’s. Sondheim wanted to be noticed for the risks he was taking. This musical was very close to his heart and he was not willing to sacrifice its dignity. He poured his soul into the music and hoped that this story about love, connection, and art would awaken the hearts of his viewers. Fortunately, Sondheim has had more time for his revolutionary work to affect people.

Sondheim is now seen as one of the greatest musical theatre composers of all time. *Sunday in the Park with George* has been hailed as his masterpiece. It has taken a while, but people are coming to understand that this musical is about more than just art. It is about the desire people have to feel important and vital. Through George and Dot’s love story, Sondheim tells his audiences that it is never too late to be acknowledged and make a difference. Each person will be given his moment in the sun. It may not happen on as grand a scale as it did for Seurat and Sondheim, but it will be just as important. This musical reminds us that we will all get our chance to connect and for this reason, *Sunday in the Park with George* will never cease to impact the world.
REFERENCE LIST


VITA

Rebecca H. Rubino was born on September 13, 1987, in Torrance, California. From a very early age, she had a passion for the arts, especially the theatre. Her first stage role was the Wicked Witch of the West in third grade class’s production of The Wizard of Oz at Sherman Oaks Elementary in 1996. After graduating from Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies in 2005, Ms. Rubino attended Chapman University where she originally pursued a degree in Broadcast Journalism. During her freshman year, she took an acting class that changed her life. She decided that this was her passion and switched her major to Theatre. In addition to being in two Chapman productions, Ms. Rubino became very active in the community theatre and has been involved with Musical Theatre Village, a family Christian theatre in Irvine, for the past four years. She graduated magna cum laude from Chapman in 2010.

At the encouragement of her advisor at Chapman, Ms. Rubino applied for graduate programs. She began attending the University of Missouri-Kansas City in the fall of 2010. During her time in Kansas City, Ms. Rubino has worked for Starlight Theatre’s Blue Star program as an adjudicator and has taught several basic children’s drama classes through Starlight Theatre and Roeland Park Community Center. She has also worked as dramaturg for The Seafarer at the Unicorn Theatre directed by Mark Robbins and for Kansas City Repertory Theatre’s production of Little Shop of Horrors directed by Kyle Hatley. After
earning her Master of Arts in Theatre, Ms. Rubino plans on returning to Orange County, California, where she will seek out theatre opportunities in education and dramaturgy.