

VICTORIAN OPERA



A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC

Education Resource



A Little Night Music

Education Resource

CONTENTS

About this resource	3
Glossary	4
<i>A Little Night Music</i> – About the work	6
Creative team	6
Characters and cast	7
Synopsis	8
About the composer – Stephen Sondheim	9
THE ARTS – MUSIC	
Musical Theatre	10
About the music – Interview with Music Director, Phoebe Briggs	11
The orchestra	13
MUSIC – ACTIVITIES	14
THE ARTS – DRAMA	
About the work – Interview with Director, Stuart Maunder	15
DRAMA – ACTIVITIES	19
THE ARTS – VISUAL ARTS	
Costume and set design	20
VISUAL ARTS – ACTIVITIES	22
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	23
REFERENCES	23

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource is designed for school students in Years 9-12. All the activities can be used in the classroom alongside or separate to Victorian Opera's production of *A Little Night Music*.

The activities suggested in this resource align with the following Australian Curriculum Learning Areas:

- The Arts – Music, Drama and Visual Arts

The table below outlines how the activities designed around each Learning Area align to the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities.

CAPABILITIES	Literacy	Numeracy	ICT	Critical and Creative Thinking	Personal and Social	Ethical Understanding	Intercultural Understanding
THE ARTS - MUSIC							
Activity 1	✓		✓	✓			
Activity 2		✓	✓	✓			
THE ARTS - DRAMA							
Activity 1	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Activity 2	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
THE ARTS - VISUAL ARTS							
Activity 1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Activity 2	✓		✓	✓	✓		

GLOSSARY

Act – A component of the total work, consisting of its own partial dramatic arc.

Aria – An elaborate composition for solo voice with instrumental accompaniment.

Arioso – A recitative of a lyrical and expressive quality.

Baritone – The male voice between the tenor and bass.

Bass – The lowest male voice.

Book – The text of a musical theatre work.

Castrato – Historically, a singer who was castrated as a boy to retain the boyish quality of the voice. The pitch of castrato singers was similar to a soprano.

Choreographer – The person who designs and creates the movement of the performance, usually in dance form.

Chorus – In opera or music theatre this refers to a large body of singers.

Chorus master – The person responsible for the rehearsal and preparation of the chorus prior to production.

Coloratura – A rapid passage, run, trill or other virtuoso-like feature used particularly in music of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Composer – The person who writes the music.

Concertmaster – The lead violinist of the orchestra.

Conductor – The person who interprets and leads the orchestra or musical performance, coordinating the performers and keeping the time through the technique of hand movements.

Contralto – The lowest female voice.

Countertenor – The highest male voice.

Designer – The person who designs the overall look of the production, including the sets.

Director – The person who is in charge of the artistic features of the production.

Duet – A composition for two performers of equal importance.

Ensemble – A group of performers performing together.

Fairy tale – A story that involves the fairy realm, often including fairies, goblins, giants, dwarves and witches where magic or enchantment exists. These are common in most cultures, for example the writings of the Brothers Grimm or Hans Christian Andersen.

Finale – The last movement of a work that contains more than one movement.

Gauze – A thin transparent fabric of silk, linen, or cotton used in theatre and film as a scrim.

Grand Opera – A large-scale serious opera without spoken dialogue.

Hero / Heroine – In its modern form, the hero/heroine is a protagonist character who fulfils a task and restores balance to the community. He/she is a born leader, whether they know it or not, as well as a real survivor who has faith in good. Others are willing to believe in this hero and will follow him/her.

Interlude – A section of music between acts.

Key – The tonal centre around which a composition is based, often indicated by a key signature.

Leitmotif – The representation of characters, typical situations and recurring ideas by musical motifs.

Libretto – The text of an opera or music theatre work.

Mezzo-soprano – The second highest female voice.

Mise en scène – The arrangement of the scenery, props, etc., on the stage of a theatrical production.

A Little Night Music

Education Resource

Opera – A staged drama set to music, made up of vocal pieces with instrumental accompaniment and usually with orchestral overtures and interludes.

Opera buffa – Also known as ‘comic opera’, an opera with a large mixture of music, on a light subject with a happy ending, including comic elements.

Opera seria – Also known as ‘serious opera’, an opera with dramatic, serious content often with a tragic ending.

Orchestra – A large ensemble of instruments divided into four main sections: strings, woodwind, brass and percussion.

Orchestration – Utilisation of the instrumentation of an orchestra in the writing of a composition.

Overture – An instrumental composition intended as an introduction to an opera or other music theatre work.

Principal – One of the main characters.

Recitative – A vocal (singing) style designed to imitate the natural inflections of speech, used in opera where dialogue might be used in other forms of music theatre.

Rehearsal – Where the performers and the creatives develop the production, shaping lines, songs, movements etc.

Rhythm – The regular and irregular pattern of notes of different length in the music.

Repetiteur – A pianist who works as an accompanist and vocal coach for opera.

Scale model box – A scale miniature of the set design made from foam core and card.

Score – The notation showing all the parts of a work, both instrumental and vocal.

Scrim – A piece of gauze cloth that appears opaque until lit from behind, used as a screen or backcloth.

Solo – A piece of music performed by a single performer either alone or with accompaniment.

Soprano – The highest female voice.

Soubrette – A light operatic soprano.

Sound Designer – The person who designs the additional sound used in a production.

Stage Manager – The person who manages the running of rehearsals and performances, managing all the components of the production during performance.

Surtitles – A translation of the words being sung on stage projected onto a screen above the stage.

Synopsis – A summary of the story.

Tempo – The speed of a composition.

Tenor – A high male voice.

Tessitura – The general range of vocal parts.

Tutti – A marking in a score that indicates the use of the whole orchestra and/or all the vocal parts.

Vibrato – A very slight fluctuation of pitch in rapid succession to create warmth in the sound.

Villain – Often the antagonist. In literature, this is the evil character in the story, the character who has a negative effect on the other characters.

Vocal range – The human voice falls into a range from the lowest to highest notes they can reach. The normal range is around two octaves and is traditionally broken into seven voice types, (from highest to lowest) soprano, mezzo-soprano, contralto, tenor, baritone and bass.

Workshop – An exploration of a new work (production, text, music, design).

A Little Night Music

Education Resource

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC – ABOUT THE WORK

Music and Lyrics by

STEPHEN SONDHEIM

Book by

HUGH WHEELER

Orchestration by Jonathan Tunick

Suggested by a Film by Ingmar Bergman

Originally Produced and Directed on Broadway by Harold Prince

Licensed exclusively by Music Theatre International (Australasia).

All performance materials supplied by Hal Leonard Australia.

Creative Team

Music Director – Phoebe Briggs

Director – Stuart Maunder AM

Original Designer – Roger Kirk AM

Associate Designer – Candice MacAllister

Lighting Designer – Trudy Dalglish

Choreographer – Elizabeth Hill-Cooper



The cast of Victorian Opera's Production of *A Little Night Music* in rehearsal. Photo: Charlie Kinross.

A Little Night Music

Education Resource

Characters and cast



Mr Lindquist
Markus Matheis



Mrs Nordstrom
Michelle McCarthy



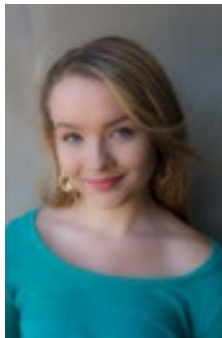
Mrs Segstrom
Kirilie Blythman



Mr Erlanson
Paul Biencourt



Mrs Anderssen
Juel Riggall



Fredrika Armfeldt
Sofia Wasley



Madame Armfeldt
Nancye Hayes



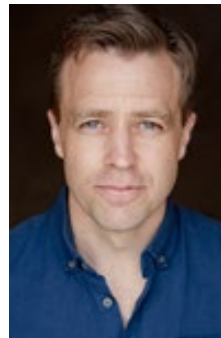
Frid, Her Butler
Tiernan Maclaren



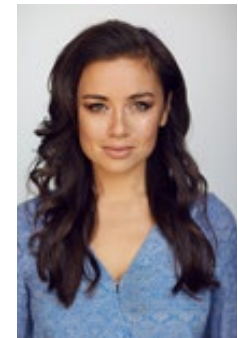
Henrik Egerman
Mat Verevis



Anne Egerman
Elisa Colla



Fredrik Egerman
Simon Gleeson



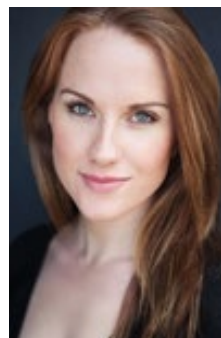
Petra
Alinta Chidzey



Desirée Armfeldt
Ali McGregor



Count Carl-Magnus Malcolm
Samuel Dundas



Countess Charlotte Malcolm
Verity Hunt-Ballard

SYNOPSIS

Act one

Thirteen-year-old Fredrika lives with her grandmother, Madame Armfeldt, while her mother Desirée, an actress, is on tour. Madame Armfeldt explains how the summer night smiles at the follies of human beings: first on the young who know nothing; second on the fools who know too little; and third on the old who know too much.

Henrik has returned from the seminary and is teased by his stepmother Anne, who is one year younger than him. Henrik's father, Fredrik, comes home from a busy day at court, surprising his wife with theatre tickets for that evening.

At the theatre, Desirée makes her grand entrance and spots Fredrik in the audience. Anne notices the look Desirée gives Fredrik and, filled with jealousy, makes them leave the theatre. Later that night, Fredrik visits Desirée and they reminisce about their love affair fourteen years ago.

Desirée's jealous lover, Count Carl-Magnus Malcolm arrives unannounced and catches Fredrik wearing his robe. Fredrik and Desirée attempt to fool him into thinking that nothing untoward is going on.

Over breakfast the next morning, Carl-Magnus tells his wife Countess Charlotte about the encounter and encourages her to visit Anne to inform her of her husband's dalliance. The two women bond over the behaviour of men.

Desirée returns home and convinces Madame Armfeldt to invite Fredrik and his family for a weekend at the country manor, in the hope of rekindling their love. Anne is outraged to receive an invitation from Desirée, but Charlotte convinces her to accept. On hearing about the invitation, Carl-Magnus decides that he and Charlotte will also arrive uninvited to attend the Weekend in the Country.

Act two

Everyone arrives at the Armfeldt estate and there is tension in the air: Fredrik and Carl-Magnus compete for Desirée's attention; Charlotte tells Anne of her plan to win back her husband by seducing Fredrik; and Henrik confesses to Fredrika that he is hopelessly in love with his stepmother.

Over dinner, Charlotte flirts with Fredrik, Carl-Magnus is furious, and Henrik finally denounces the party's inappropriate behaviour.

As the evening unfolds, Fredrika reveals Henrik's feelings to Anne, who is surprised and flattered, while Petra and Madame Armfeldt's butler, Frid, share an encounter in the gardens. Desirée admits to Fredrik that she was hoping to rescue him and, although he admits his love for her, he can't bear to part with Anne.

Anne finds Henrik trying to hang himself. She is overwhelmed by his love for her and realises that she loves him too.

Charlotte confesses her deception to Fredrik, and while they discuss the impossibilities of marriage, they see Anne and Henrik run off together. From Desirée's bedroom Carl-Magnus spots his wife with Henrik and, thinking the worst, rushes off to challenge him to a duel. Charlotte finally realises that Carl-Magnus really cares for her.

Carl-Magnus and Charlotte decide to leave and Fredrik declares his love for Desirée.

Madame Armfeldt and Fredrika watch the moon and contemplate the three smiles promised by the long summer night.

ABOUT THE COMPOSER – Stephen Sondheim

Stephen Sondheim is recognised as one of the most innovative, influential and important composers and lyricists in modern Broadway history.

Born in 1930 in New York City, he displayed signs of musical talent at an early age, writing his first musical when he was just 15. As a boy, he studied under Oscar Hammerstein, a key musical theatre composer, but it was the composer Milton Babbitt who would truly shape his compositional style.

Sondheim broke into Broadway when he was asked to write the lyrics for Leonard Bernstein's musical, *West Side Story* (1957) and Jule Styne's musical, *Gypsy* (1959). A few years later, his first notable work for which he wrote both the lyrics and music, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, based on the comedies by the Roman playwright Plautus, opened on Broadway and ran for 964 performances. This work won him a Tony Award for Best Musical.

He would go on to write a number of popular works, including *Company* (1970), *Follies* (1971), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1979), and *Into the Woods* (1987).

Sondheim's works broke away from the more traditional and sentimental musical comedies of the early decades of the twentieth century. Not only did he start writing music that reflected the lyrics of the work, but he composed works based on unlikely sources. For example, his musical *Sweeney Todd* was the first and only Broadway musical thriller, and *Into the Woods* was taken from traditional fairy tales.

Over his career, Sondheim has been nominated for twenty-six Tony Awards as lyricist and composer, winning fourteen times, including a Lifetime Achievement Tony Award in 2008. He also won a Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1985 for his work *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, a U.S. civilian decoration, in 2015.

THE ARTS – MUSIC

Musical Theatre

Musical theatre is a form of theatre that features music, spoken dialogue and dance. The three main components of musical theatre works are the music, the lyrics and the book; the music and lyrics form the score while the book deals with the plot of the show. The songs featured in a musical are often built around four to six musical themes that are reprised throughout the show and interspersed with spoken dialogue.

Musical theatre became a genre in and of itself in the mid-1800s in New York City but elements of the style can be identified in forms that came before it, such as comic opera, burlesque, vaudeville and pantomime. In 1927, Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein, two key composers of the genre, led musical theatre into a new stylistic period with their work *Show Boat*, by integrating music within the narrative of the story. With this work, they employed American folk melodies and spirituals to the American themes that the work dealt with.

Key composers of musical theatre during the 1920s and 1930s include Jerome Kern, who worked with Guy Bolton and P.G. Wodehouse; George and Ira Gershwin; Cole Porter; Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II; Harold Arlen; Jule Styne; and Vince Youmans.

By the 1960s, the style of musical theatre that had been prominent throughout the previous two decades began to decline and a new style began to emerge as writers and composers employed rock and roll, operatic styling, and extravagant lighting and staging musicals. *Hair*, composed in 1967, was the first example of a rock musical and combined loud music with stroboscopic lighting, youthful irreverence and even nudity.

Musical theatre pieces are often adaptations of literature, cinema, mythology and recorded histories. In fact, the works that have been the most popular on Broadway or in the West End are those whose original stories already had a popular following. *A Little Night Music* is an adaptation of Ingmar Bergman's Swedish film, *Sommarnattens Leende* (*Smiles of a Summer Night*). When the musical premiered on Broadway in 1973 it ran for 601 performances and its West End production two years later ran for 406.

Notable musicals from the 1970s onwards include Stephen Sondheim's *Company* (1970) and *Sweeney Todd* (1979); Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Evita* (1978), *Cats* (1981), and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986); and Elton John and Tim Rice's *The Lion King* (1997).

About the music – Interview with Music Director, Phoebe Briggs

In the interview below, Phoebe Briggs highlights the compositional techniques that Sondheim employs in *A Little Night Music*, as well as her role as Music Director and how she prepares the work for performance.

In your opinion, what is it about *A Little Night Music* that makes it so popular with not only audiences, but also the musicians, artists and creatives involved?

A Little Night Music is a work which appeals to all, both onstage and off, due to Sondheim's sumptuous and beautiful score and Hugh Wheeler's clever, witty, charming and moving book. The characters are incredibly lovable, vulnerable and flawed. It's a story about love, loss and everything in between set to a stunning score. For me, not a word or note is superfluous, each as important and specifically chosen for effect.

What are some of the compositional elements Sondheim uses that add to this work's character?

The extraordinary score, orchestrated by Jonathan Tunick, is written almost entirely in triple time. Madame Armfeldt says, 'The summer night smiles...three times' and Sondheim has used this theme of the number 3 in different guises throughout the work. He writes Waltzes – 'Night Music', 'Overture', 'Soon' – a Polonaise – 'In Praise of Women' – and a Mazurka – 'The Glamorous Life'. Others are written in compound time, always featuring groups of 3 – 'Now' and 'Send in the Clowns'.

Sondheim uses themes for each of his characters. Some are introduced in the Overture by the Liebeslieders, for example Anne's 'Soon' and Desiree's 'Glamorous Life', while others are revealed throughout the show. In Act 2, after all the characters have been through complex emotional journeys, he reprises each of these themes just as each character reaches a critical or pivotal moment. This time they are sung by the Liebeslieder who act as a Greek chorus, reminiscing about what was or might have been – 'Remember?'.

The 'Night Waltz', a sumptuous almost filmic waltz accompanied by a moving chromatic line alternating between the clarinets and bassoon, or celeste and piano, bookends the work.

As the Music Director, how much work is done on the score before you go into the first rehearsal and how early do you begin?

As Music Director, I always start studying the score well in advance of the rehearsal period, usually immediately after I have been offered the role of Music Director! In this case, I have had the luxury of working as repetiteur on two seasons of this work already so there is a depth of knowledge there that I wouldn't have if I was starting the study of the music from scratch.

It's really important to spend a lot of time absorbed in the music many months before rehearsals begin. As part of the preparation for a show, I always go through every instrumental part, as well as the vocal score, so I know what each part contains – where the player needs to swap instruments, for example from flute to piccolo, clarinet to bass clarinet, timpani to xylophone, as well as studying each character's musical and dramatic progress throughout the story.

The Music Director will also mark up each orchestral part with any particular articulations, phrasing or dynamics that he/she would like, will 'bow' the string parts (indicate where to use an up-bow or a down-bow), and will work individually with each singer prior to the production rehearsal period.

A Little Night Music

Education Resource

Do you have a method that you apply to all the works you conduct or does it differ depending on the work being staged?

My method of preparing a work is the same regardless of which style of work it is. It's most important to do all the groundwork early on so you have time to develop your thoughts and ideas about an interpretation of a work.

I like to listen to different recordings (if they exist) and watch productions from different companies as well, especially if you can get hold of an original cast recording or production footage. It's also interesting to see and hear for whom the roles were written.

What do you think students with an interest in composition might find interesting about this work? Is there anything they should listen out for?

Composition students should listen out for the themes of the characters and how they develop throughout the show. For example, the use of the 'Night Waltz' and its meandering chromatic line signifying the complexities of lives and the emotional pulls and pushes throughout. Also listen for the eerie sound of the piccolo in the 'Night Waltz', surely foreshadowing that everything is not 'right' in this world, and the use of the cello for the character of Henrik, his cadenza first sung by him then echoed on the cello.

Listen out for the different dance styles, such as the Polonaise with its jaunty rhythm, Mazurka, a Polish folk dance with strong accents on the second and third beats, and of course, the Waltz. Also listen for the masterful layering of text, rhythm and melodies as the Finale of Act One, 'A Weekend in the Country', unfolds.

Sondheim uses the technique of layering songs together – for example, 'Now', 'Soon' and 'Later' – as the characters become more entwined. He also uses reprise as a compositional method to recall events. The Liebeslieder singers act as a Greek chorus and sing snippets of each character's theme.

Finally, his use of the clarinet and alto flute in 'Send in the Clowns' to create a rich, lush sound, or the brilliance and warmth of the celeste in 'Liaisons' (the glimmer in Madame Armfeldt's eye) balanced by the mournful tones of the cor anglais.

Do the cast who play the characters Henrik and Fredrika have to know how to play the cello and piano or are these parts covered by the orchestra?

No, they don't need to be able to play the cello or piano, but they do need to be able to mime playing them! The instruments themselves will be played by orchestral players in the pit.

If you had to choose one, what is your favourite piece in this work?

Ooh, that's too hard a question! I think this whole score is wonderful! But I do adore the Act 1 Finale, 'A Weekend in the Country'... or 'Send in the Clowns'...or 'Liaisons' ...or 'In Praise of Women'...or wait there's 'Now', 'Soon', 'Later' as well!

A Little Night Music

Education Resource

The orchestra

The orchestra for *A Little Night Music* consists of 19 players and is made up of the instruments listed below.

Some of the musicians in the woodwind sections are doubling or tripling up on instruments covering the Flute, Alto Flute, Piccolo, Clarinet, Bass Clarinet, Oboe and Cor Anglais parts.

Strings

- Violin 1
- Violin 2
- Viola
- Cello
- Double Bass
- Harp

Woodwind

- Piccolo
- Flute
- Alto Flute
- Clarinet
- Bass Clarinet
- Oboe
- Cor Anglais
- Bassoon

Brass

- Trumpet 1
- Trumpet 2
- Trombone
- Horn 1
- Horn 2
- Horn 3

Percussion

Piano/Celeste

MUSIC – ACTIVITIES

Activity one: Sondheim's works

As Phoebe discusses in her interview on page 11 of this resource, the score of *A Little Night Music* is written almost entirely in triple time.

Listen to some of Sondheim's other popular works and discuss the following:

- Are there any particular compositional styles that he employs and are they heard throughout the whole work?
- Does the music reflect the emotional and dramatic development of any of the characters? If so, give examples of how.

Activity two: Melodic transcription

Identify the musical themes of the characters listed below and in three listens transcribe their melodies.

- Desirée Armfeldt
- Anne Egerman
- Fredrik Egerman
- Henrik Egerman
- Madame Armfeldt

Recordings can be found on any music streaming websites or in record stores.

THE ARTS – DRAMA

About the work – Interview with Director, Stuart Maunder

In the interview below, Director Stuart Maunder discusses the themes central to *A Little Night Music*, the ideas behind the set designs of the original production, and his love for the work.

What are some of the major themes in this work and how do you explore them on stage?

The major theme of the work I think, is the folly of relationships and that we all make the same mistakes and we will continue to make mistakes. When it originally appeared on Broadway in 1973, they trumpeted this idea, ‘Good God! An adult musical’ – and that is not meant in an *Oh! Calcutta!* sense. It treats the material really seriously and it is all about relationships. We can read into it what we will but basically, we’re talking about a grandmother and her granddaughter – the granddaughter comes from a broken home and doesn’t know who her father is; Desirée is an absent parent; I mean, all of these things are so current now. Then you’ve got affairs within relationships, the classic older man with a much younger girl, and mid-life crisis stuff. There’s a wonderful moment where this girl [Anne] says, ‘I saw this man [Fredrik], he was so unhappy because his wife had died but I thought I’ll rescue him’, so she marries him. It just looks at the stupidity and the joy of all relationships. It’s so wise as a musical.

At the end where he’s [Fredrik] seen his wife run off with his son, he’s almost killed himself in a game of Russian Roulette, and he just thinks that his whole life has come to an end, Charlotte says, ‘I’m afraid marriage is not the easiest of institutions, Mr Egerman. For a woman, it’s impossible.’ It’s not that possible for a man either. That’s probably the overriding theme of the whole work. The stupidity and inevitably and that we’ll continue to make exactly the same mistakes. It’s the joy of it really, the ride.

I first saw it as a 16-year-old and I was just blown away by the breathtaking theatricality of the night. It was so beautiful to look at, and that’s what, together with the designers Roger Kirk and Trudy Dalglish, we were trying to create something that has that feeling of the summer night that you really only understand when you’ve been to the higher European lands where the sun never sets. A summer where the sun never sets and a winter when the sun never rises. As she [Madame Armfeldt] says, ‘It’s enough to addle the brain of any man.’ I think that’s very true, there’s nowhere to hide. Act 2 is all played out basically in full daylight because that’s, in effect, what the twilight is.

Which of the characters are particularly important in presenting the themes you’ve just mentioned?

The joy of the piece is that all of them are and that’s not meant to be as glib as it sounded. In the very first section, which is called the ‘Night Waltz’, an incredibly evocative Waltz theme, you see all of these figures and characters in different relationships. So, you’ll have Desirée and Fredrik together; then Desirée will be taken away by the man she’s having an affair with, Carl Magnus; and then you’ll have Carl Magnus’s wife who oversees that; then you’ll have the little girl of the relationship that we’ll know eventually is going to be the issue from Fredrik and Desirée’s affair from however many years ago; the young girl that Fredrik marries who has a relationship with the son of Fredrik. You know, all of those things, they’re all incredibly important and probably the two wisest people in the night are the grandmother, played by Nancye Hayes, the most wonderful, wise and very acerbic commentator on life, and the young girl [Fredrika] who’s much, much older than her years and she’s being groomed by the grandmother in her wisdom. ‘I am not legitimate’, she says.

The easy answer is all of them, including Petra, the maid, who is the quintessential sensual creature that just loves life and will suck the marrow out of everything. She just throws herself into everything and realises where she is and what she could aspire to.

A Little Night Music

Education Resource

It's great to see how much you love it, I'm looking forward to seeing it.

I do, it's so special as a work. There's a moment in Act 2 for example, when Desirée comes clean to Fredrik and says she brought him to the weekend because she hoped that they were going to rekindle the love that they have and to rescue him as well. And Fredrik as an older man, comes clean and just says that he flirted with the idea of rescue, too, and he says, 'When my eyes are open, I see this extraordinary woman who's loved me, who I've loved all of my life. But when my eyes are closed, which is most of the time, I see a young girl in a pink dress throwing her arms around me as if I've come back from Timbuctoo rather than the mere simple courthouse.' At that moment, the orchestra starts up and this clarinet plays the very opening of 'Send in the Clowns', and suddenly you realise what those lyrics have meant all those years. We've all heard it. 'Isn't it rich? Aren't we a pair? Me here at last on the ground, you in mid-air.' And suddenly the lyrics make sense. You think, 'How ludicrous are we, that I'm incredibly practical, you're incredibly impractical, we're here again, we've lost it once, we'll lose it again.' It's incredible.

The quintet in this work plays a similar role to that of a Greek chorus. Are there any other techniques common to Greek and Roman repertoire that lend to the theatricality of the action in the work?

What Sondheim was deliberately trying to do was to try and give it an operetta feel. Some say that Harold Prince, the original Director and Producer, and Sondheim were shamelessly trying to write a hit. I don't believe that for a second. I think they were absolutely going for the sophisticated operetta. There's no doubt that Sondheim was referencing all of those great huge operetta ends of Act 1, where all of the moments are tied together. Consequently, the Liebeslieder were very much a way of commenting on the action and this is very much the way Harold Prince was working in those days. If you look at his work on *Cabaret* for example, there were always observers in *Cabaret*, be they the band or just people that are in the club. They're always just on the side observing. If you look at *Follies* he has this idea of all of the ghosts of the theatre from the past, all of the showgirls and things who move through the action. Or in *Company* the same thing happens. You'll have a theme between two of the married couples and a third person from a married couple will enter and sing a song about that.

I think it's less about a Greek chorus...well Greek chorus always were sort of the audience's way into a work, weren't they? They sort of explained where we were and what we were to look at. In Act 2, for example, they are the reprises that happen. So, as Fredrik is having a major moment, they will ironically, musically comment on what he said in Act 1. Or when there's a moment where Fredrik and Carl-Magnus are being particularly stupid and go off to duel, the two girls will say, 'Men are stupid, men are vain, love's disgusting, love's insane. A humiliating business, oh how true', and then they'll just go away again. So, they just remind us where we're at as well as giving it a gloss of theatricality and operetta.

What is it about the works of Sondheim that make them so popular?

Well, he would dispute that, you know. I mean, he is hugely popular within a very small part of the population and, as he often says, 'I'll play you a medley of my hit!' If you look at the output of somebody like Andrew Lloyd Webber or Jerry Herman or Rodgers and Hammerstein or any of those, he just pales in significance, in output and in popular appeal.

That being said, within the theatre community and within the Broadway community, he is revered, and rightly so, as one of the great storytellers and lyricists, certainly, and I believe, composers of our time. He has probably infiltrated the opera scene more than any other Broadway composer. I think I can sort of say that. Even Bernstein, when you do *West Side Story* you in effect have to bring in a whole cast. When you do *Candide*, it's largely an opera cast or operetta cast. But you know Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* is now one of the most performed Broadway musicals in opera houses, and *A Little Night Music* has been done in a lot of opera houses as well.

Does the work change when it's adapted?

Yeah, he [Sondheim] always says it does. He always says that a piece is what it is in the particular house or what the audience who's coming is expecting it to be. So, *Sweeney Todd* in an opera house is closer to an opera, *Sweeney Todd* in a theatre is closer to a play. It's that sort of thing.

A Little Night Music is less like that. I think it stays the same in wherever you're performing it. All of those questions like an opera is through-sung or an opera doesn't include dialogue or an opera is usually elegiac and often tragic in its view – every time you set up a maxim like that, it's shot to flames because *The Magic Flute* has dialogue and *The Magic Flute* is comical. I think trying to pigeon hole a work is useless. Interestingly, this was the first musical on Broadway that was completely designed to be amplified. So, in 1973, this was sort of the start to the new build and amplification that tended to come down to the size of orchestras. This is very wordy in a Sondheim sense, very wordy and it's a gossamer thin orchestration of the time when Broadway still had serious size orchestras.

In regards to the set and costumes, where did the inspiration for them come from?

Well, a few different places. We wanted to create something very beautiful and gossamer thin and transparent. It's written very much as a screenplay, you know it was originally based on an Ingmar Bergman film, *Smiles of a Summer Night*. We wanted it to be moveable and textured, and yet would take us wherever we need to go.

I particularly loved an Australian watercolourist called Blamire Young who I came across at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. The watercolours in his featured works had these greens and blues – he's actually Australian, but the colours were very European. So, that was where we went as far as the gauzes were concerned because we wanted something that would be able to give you that lustrous quality of a mid-summer night that the gauzes could be lit with blue and glow. We've gone very Scandinavian and down the operetta route. Operetta's a big inspiration so there's a lot of glamour in this piece.

How do the costumes reflect the personalities of the characters and the journeys they take throughout the work?

There are obvious things like when we get into Act 2, 'Send in the Clowns' land, the colouring of Desirée's costume is sort of a deep, blood red, sensual, elegant but very passionate in the feel. Likewise, Madame Armfeldt is in black as she is for the rest of the night but is coloured with this red feeling. Charlotte is almost devoid of colour, she's been sort of washed out in Act 2. Sometimes you have to be guided by the script, obviously. Anne is mentioned a lot as the girl in the pink dress. But her costume is very much a girl who is a cross between a prom queen and a girl who would be singing in an eisteddfod. So, it's sort of like almost that wedding dressy, puffed up, dressed up to be something that you're really not, hasn't got the elegance yet.

The girls in the *Liebeslieder* are very much theatrical, sequined and all colours of the night and the woods and earth so they can almost sort of flit and disappear into things.

Is there anything in the set?

Not really. The set largely consists of furniture and we've deliberately stripped the furniture of all colour – it's very much blonde wood and white fabric on them. It's just trying to sort of create a blank page, I suppose. Words like elegance and stylish that we don't use nearly enough in the modern age. No practicality. Practicality doesn't exist.

You mentioned a little bit earlier about the themes of the work. What can students take away from watching a work like *A Little Night Music*?

It's just like history in that we know everybody knows that history repeats itself. So, for god's sake, listen to it and take the wise words on board! I look at it [the work] now and you see these relationships and you can see the way you have gone into variations of it, it's not always the same. But it's just the terrible cliché, the rich tapestry of life. But, don't look at this and think this is far-fetched because let me tell you...

There's a real sense in this that finally, Fredrik and Desirée realise that all of the reasons that have kept them apart just should never have been considered. Yet that's what we do, always. We construct reasons to not be with somebody or to not hurt somebody and all of that and I think it's a wise man that's able to find that difference between selfishness and need.

Moving away from the work, can you tell me a little bit about yourself and how you first got into directing?

That's a reasonably easy question. I was desperate to perform, always was desperate to be an actor. I was the son of a farmer, but I had very supportive parents who allowed me to experience a lot and do whatever I wanted really as far as experiencing Sydney. I was a country boy and I would go down to Sydney a lot to see shows and all those sorts of things.

When I was at university studying Law, I was doing plays and eventually a person that was doing the design for one of the plays was working for the Australian Opera, as it was called then, and she said that they were after stage managers. I didn't really know what a stage manager was but I decided that any excuse to be somewhere near a stage was something I wanted to do. I didn't have any real experience of opera save for the fact that for the two years prior to that I had been at university and had availed myself of the student rush tickets, which in those days were only \$5, and \$8 for Joan Sutherland performances, but that was a lot of money in those days as I recall. That was in a time where the repertoire was much more open, much wider. I knew I didn't love all of it, I didn't, but the joy of it was that there was so much on offer that you could see that opera is a much bigger world than we think it is. It's much more about four centuries of work, of output, and if you find somebody who says they don't like opera, it's clear that they just haven't found the one.

So, I joined the company as a stage manager. In that instance, stage management is the best possible instance to be in a company because you see what everybody's doing if we're talking about the actual product, the stage. I had the great good fortune of observing first hand some of what I believe are the best crop of opera directors, and that's in the day when there were things like opera directors. People like John Copley, John Cox, Anthony Besch, Sir Robert Helpmann, Peter Bervay and David Pountney. So many extraordinary minds that you would just see the way they worked, the way they could focus in on something, the way they dealt with difficult people, the way they learnt the chorus's names, the way they staged a chorus scene. I was eventually asked to assist some people, which I did, and then eventually think 'Ok, we'll take a punt on you' and I learnt on the job. So, almost all of my working life has been based around opera but at least it's based around, really, music theatre. I've done very few straight plays, which is a huge regret for me, but it's just the way the cookie crumbles, the way you do things. Then eventually I came back into management as Artistic Administrator of Opera Australia, but I've always directed, I've always had that as my major contribution, I think.

Is there any advice you'd give to students who want to pursue a career in the arts?

Do it. If you want to do it you'll get in there and do it. It is the most amazing career and difficult! But when it works, it's pretty spectacular.

The other thing I would say about performance and directing and everything, is that you've got to do it, you can't talk it. So, the more chances you get to get in front of a few people and direct them, if you're a director for example, or to get in front of a few people and perform, if you're an actor, is the way you learn your craft. Ultimately, it's that relationship between the people that makes it work and makes it real.

DRAMA – ACTIVITIES

Activity one: Monologue

Watch a production of *A Little Night Music* then write a monologue for one of the characters listed below.

- Desirée Armfeldt
- Fredrik Egerman
- Henrik Egerman
- Anne Egerman
- Count Carl-Magnus Malcolm
- Countess Charlotte Malcolm
- Madame Armfeldt
- Fredrika Armfeldt

Choose a point in the production where the character is at their most vulnerable. Your monologue should explore the crisis the character finds themselves in, their emotional torment and how they come to their resolution.

Prepare your monologue for a performance to your classmates.

Activity two: Essay

Watch a production of *A Little Night Music* then write a 1000-word essay that explores how this work is still relevant to a present-day audience. Consider each of the characters of the work and the themes that the work explores.

THE ARTS – VISUAL ARTS

Costume and set design

In the interview on pages 15-19 of this resource, Stuart Maunder discusses the ideas behind the costume and set designs, designed by Roger Kirk.

The watercolour images below are of the period and style that inspired the overall world conveyed in the production.



Kaukola Ridge at Sunset painted by Albert Edelfelt in 1889/1890.



After Sunset painted by Kitty L. Kielland in 1885.



Summer Night painted by Kitty L. Kielland in 1886.



Roses by painter Peter Severin Krøyer in 1893.

A Little Night Music

Education Resource

The images below demonstrate the intricacy of the costume design for various costumes in *A Little Night Music*.



Some of the work on the bodice of Mrs Nordstrom's dress.



Count Carl Magnus Malcolm's jacket.



The cuff of one of Countess Charlotte Malcolm's dresses.

VISUAL ARTS – ACTIVITIES

Activity one: Costume Design

Read the synopsis on page 8 of this resource and design costumes for three of the characters listed below.

- Desirée Armfeldt
- Fredrik Egerman
- Henrik Egerman
- Anne Egerman
- Count Carl-Magnus Malcolm
- Countess Charlotte Malcolm
- Madame Armfeldt
- Fredrika Armfeldt

In a presentation to your classmates, discuss how you came up with your designs including the reference photos you used as inspiration and the fabrics you would make them in, sourcing swatches to better illustrate them.

Activity two: Set design

Consider how the watercolours discussed on page 17 and presented on page 20 of this resource influenced the design of the world in which *A Little Night Music* is set in and develop a proposal for how you would design the set for a production of the work.

Present your designs to your classmates and explain how you formed your ideas and any designers who inspired you. Be sure to include any reference photos you used in your design process and to discuss these in your presentation.

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