



Victorian
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10TH ANNIVERSARY



SWEENEY TODD

THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET

A MUSICAL THRILLER

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SWEENEY TODD MUSIC RESOURCE: FOR SECONDARY TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

INTRODUCTION



Teddy Tahu Rhodes (*Sweeney Todd*) and Antoinette Halloran (*Mrs Lovett*) © Martin Philbey

From Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler comes this Tony Award-winning musical and the inspiration for Tim Burton's hit Hollywood film, *Sweeney Todd* - the final instalment in Victorian Opera's Sondheim trilogy. Teddy Tahu Rhodes stars as a murderous barber slicing a path of bloody revenge through Victorian London. Joining him is Victorian Opera favourite Antoinette Halloran as his wicked partner in crime Mrs Lovett, in this brand new production from the director of *Sunday in the Park with George* and *Into the Woods*.

– **PERFORMANCES:** Thursday 16 July 2015 -
Saturday 25 July 2015, 1:00pm & 7.30pm

Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim
Book by Hugh Wheeler

From an Adaptation by Christopher Bond.
2 hours and 30 minutes with one interval.
By arrangement with Hal Leonard Australia Pty Ltd
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WHAT TO EXPECT BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER YOUR OPERA EXPERIENCE

To gain the most from your visit to *Sweeney Todd* it is recommended that you have some knowledge of the work. The following resource provides background information, what to expect during your experience, and also offers pre-show activities and post-show reflection.

The background to *Sweeney Todd*

The story of *Sweeney Todd* began as a 'Penny Dreadful' in the 1830's in a story called *The String of Pearls* by Thomas Peckett Prest. It was turned into a number of plays during the next 40 years in England and the USA, and thereby Sweeney Todd became a popular character for those living in the Victorian era. There is evidence that suggests some people from this era thought Sweeney Todd was a real person.

There have been many adaptations of the story since the 1900's, including a 1926 silent film, a 1936 film – *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, a 1959 musical and a 1960 ballet.

Sondheim based his musical on a 1973 play by Christopher Bond. Bond, borrowing from *The Count of Monte Christo*, Shakespeare, and *The Revenger's Tragedy*, recreates a character in Sweeney Todd that is a tragedy of circumstance, and is more sympathetic. Sondheim saw the play that year and realised the potential of the story as a horror musical.

Sweeney Todd – The Demon Barber of Fleet Street was first performed on Broadway in 1979 and in London in 1980. It won seven Tony Awards for the production.



Stephen Sondheim

Stephen Sondheim (1930 -)

Stephen Sondheim (pictured) was born in New York but after his parents divorced, he moved with his mother to Pennsylvania. By chance his neighbour was Oscar Hammerstein II, the legendary composer of *Oklahoma*, *The King and I*, *The Sound of Music* and many other musicals. Hammerstein became Sondheim's teacher and mentor. Sondheim is quoted as saying, "I hear the word teacher and I start to get teary...the word teacher is to me that thing that to religious people God and saints are."

He has composed many musical works including *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984),

Into the Woods (1987), and was a lyricist for *West Side Story* and other music theatre works.

He is considered the most important composer and lyricist in modern Broadway history.

Hugh Wheeler (1912 – 1987)

Hugh Wheeler was a playwright, screenwriter, and novelist – writing over thirty mystery novels in his lifetime. He collaborated with Sondheim, writing the book for *A Little Night Music*, *Pacific Overtures* and *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* and contributing on *Candide*. He also wrote the screenplay for *A Little Night Music*.



The story of Sweeney Todd – The Demon Barber of Fleet Street

Sweeney Todd is a musical thriller set in 19th Century England. It tells the story of a barber – Sweeney Todd / Benjamin Barker, who returns to London after being wrongfully charged and shipped off to a penal colony, Australia, for 15 years.

He returns to wreak vengeance upon Judge Turpin, who had originally sentenced him to exile, and the Judge's accomplice, Beadle Bamford.

Sweeney Todd discovers that his wife is missing, presumed dead, and his now coming-of-age daughter, Johanna, has been raised all this time by the evil Judge Turpin. The Judge intends to now make his 'ward' Johanna, his wife.

On the boat to London, Sweeney Todd befriends a young man, Anthony Hope, who inadvertently falls in love with Johanna and sets about attempting to rescue her from the clutches of Judge Turpin.

Upon his return to London, Sweeney Todd rents a room above Mrs Lovett's dismal pie shop, where as Benjamin Barker he had previously conducted his business as a barber. Sweeney Todd's desire for revenge turn to murderous psychopathology which he and Mrs Lovett conveniently conceal by converting the bodies of the victims into meat for the increasingly popular pies.

After the murder of Signor Pirelli, Mrs Lovett takes his helper, Tobias, under her wing. Tobias is afraid of Sweeney Todd and swears to protect Mrs Lovett. In the end Tobias brings about the death of Sweeney Todd.

Although *Sweeney Todd* is a thriller, it is at times humorous and is also a tragic love story.

Character and Cast List

Character	Cast
Sweeney Todd/ Benjamin Barker	Teddy Tahu Rhodes
Mrs Nellie Lovett	Antoinette Halloran
Johanna	Amelia Berry
Anthony Hope	Blake Bowden
Tobias Ragg	Ross Hannaford
Judge Turpin	Phillip Rhodes
Beadle Bamford	Kanen Breen
Adolfo Pirelli	David Rogers-Smith
Beggar Woman/ Lucy Barker	Dimity Shepherd
Jonas Fogg / Ensemble	Jeremy Kleeman
Ensemble	Carrie Barr, Paul Batey, Paul Biencourt, Cherie Boogaart, Danielle Calder, Daniel Carison, Ben Clark, Teresa Duddy, Jerzy Kozlowski, Noni McCallum, Sophie Viskich



SONG LIST AND SYNOPSIS

Prologue

- **The Ballad of Sweeney Todd– Company** - This summarises the story of Sweeney Todd, the man who owned a barber shop where men were shaved but whose souls weren't saved. He served a dark and vengeful God.

Act 1

- **No Place Like London – Anthony, Sweeney Todd, Beggar Woman** - The story begins with the arrival of Sweeney Todd and Anthony in London. We learn of Anthony having saved Sweeney Todd's life and of Sweeney Todd's gratitude. The Beggar Woman appears. Eventually Sweeney Todd tells the story; there was a barber and his wife and she was beautiful but a vulture of the law... removed the barber from his plate.
- **The Worst Pies in London – Mrs Lovett** - Sweeney Todd enters Mrs Lovett's pie shop, a filthy business producing terrible pies.
- **Poor Thing – Mrs Lovett** – Mrs Lovett tells the tale of the barber Benjamin Barker, and realises that Sweeney Todd is in fact him. When he was exiled she'd saved his razorblades and now presents them to him. He rents the room above the shop once more.
- **My friends - Sweeney Todd, Mrs Lovett** – Sweeney Todd sings of the glory of his tools, the razorblades.
- **Green Finch and Linnet Bird - Johanna** – Johanna implores the birds to teach her to sing as a relief from her caged existence.
- **Ah, Miss – Anthony, Beggar Woman** – Anthony sees Johanna and falls for her instantly, but Johanna is spooked by the appearance of the Beggar Woman and leaves them. Anthony discovers the identity of the beautiful Johanna and buys her a bird.
- **Johanna – Anthony** - The Judge and Beadle destroy Anthony's moment with Johanna.
- **Pirelli's Miracle Elixir – Tobias, Sweeney Todd, Mrs Lovett, Company** – In a market place the 'Italian' barber Pirelli's wares are touted by his assistant Tobias. Sweeney Todd sees a chance to re-establish his own reputation as a barber and challenges Pirelli to prove who the better barber is.
- **The Contest - Pirelli** – A contest ensues with Beadle Bamford as adjudicator. Sweeney Todd wins the contest and Beadle's trust.
- **Wait – Mrs Lovett** – Mrs Lovett calms Sweeney Todd as he anxiously awaits the arrival of his intended victims and his chance for revenge.
- **Pirelli's Death** – His first customer/victim is Pirelli. Mrs Lovett meets Tobias and to distract him she takes him under her wing.
- **Kiss Me/Ladies in their sensitivities – Johanna, Anthony, The Beadle, Judge Turpin** – Johanna reveals to Anthony that the Judge is intending to marry her and a plan is hatched for Johanna to marry Anthony instead. Beadle soothes the Judge and encourages him to consider his appearance to attract his future bride.
- **Pretty Women – Sweeney Todd, Judge Turpin** – Sweeney Todd savours the fact that he has the judge in his barber's chair. They both sing of pretty women.
- **Epiphany– Sweeney Todd** rages about the loss of the opportunity to kill the Judge.
- **Sweeney Todd, Mrs Lovett - A Little Priest** - Mrs Lovett comes up with a unique way to dispose of Pirelli's body. Sweeney Todd enjoys the mad idea she presents, and they sing of future victims.



Act 2

- **God, That’s Good** – Tobias, Mrs Lovett, Sweeney Todd, Beggar Woman, Company – The ‘new’ version of Mrs Lovett’s pies have created a great deal of prosperity for her, and Tobias who now works for her, enthusiastically spruiks her wares.
- **Johanna** – Anthony, Sweeney Todd, Johanna, Beggar Woman – Sweeney Todd and Anthony sing of their love and despair.
- **By the Sea** – Mrs Lovett – Mrs Lovett fantasises of her future with Sweeney Todd.
- **Wigmaker Sequence** – Sweeney Todd, Anthony, Company – After the Judge confines Johanna to the asylum, Anthony devises a plan to rescue her. He pretends to be a wigmaker and seeks hair from the inmates of the asylum.
- **The Letter** – Sweeney Todd, Company – Sweeney Todd writes a letter to the Judge to draw him to the barber’s chair.
- **Not While I’m Around** – Tobias, Mrs Lovett – Tobias sings of his devotion to Mrs Lovett and implies his suspicions about Sweeney Todd.
- **Parlour Songs** – The Beadle, Mrs Lovett, Tobias – Beadle Bamford comes to the bakehouse to investigate the complaints of the foul smells that have been reported. Sweeney returns and gets his revenge on Beadle Bamford. Tobias discovers the foundation for his fears.

Final Sequence

- **Fogg’s Asylum - Company** – Anthony manages to release Johanna from the asylum, along with all of the inmates.
- **City on Fire** – Lunatics, Johanna, Anthony – the inmates run through the streets of London
- **Searching** – Mrs Lovett, Sweeney Todd, Beggar Woman, Anthony, Judge Turpin - Sweeney Todd and Mrs Lovett go searching for Tobias. Anthony and Johanna (dressed as a sailor) arrive at the bakehouse and await Sweeney Todd.
- **The Judge’s Return** – Sweeney Todd, Beggar Woman, Anthony, Johanna – Sweeney Todd finally gets his revenge on the Judge.
- **Final Scene** – Mrs Lovett, Sweeney Todd, Tobias – The Beggar Woman is killed, and Sweeney Todd nearly kills Johanna, not recognising her in her disguise. He then discovers that his precious Lucy was the Beggar Woman and that Mrs Lovett knew all along. He kills her. Tobias then kills Sweeney Todd.

Epilogue

- **The Ballad of Sweeney Todd** – Company



Sweeney Todd cast in rehearsal © Charlie Kinross



Style – is Sweeney Todd a musical or an opera?

The features that distinguish musicals and operas are complex. This is largely due to the evolution of both of these forms over several centuries, and due to the interpretation of those styles in the contemporary context.

Some of the discussions around the differences and similarities of musicals and opera include features like actor or singer, the style of singing used, the use of through-composition or dialogue, popular (low-brow) or classical (high-brow), commercial or art.

Sweeney Todd is one of only two of Sondheim's works to be listed in *The New Kobbe's Opera Book*, edited by The Earle of Harewood and Anthony Peattie.

Music theatre is a form of theatrical performance in which the content is conveyed through song, dialogue, dance, acting, and scenic arts. Music theatre is a genre that has existed since the 18th Century. However combining song and drama has been practiced since Ancient Greece.

Opera is a musical form that has existed in Europe since the late 16th Century. Over many years it has undergone a number of transformations. The form has evolved to include a wide variety of styles ranging from comic opera to tragedies. Many great operatic composers have developed the art form including Mozart, Verdi, Wagner and Puccini.

Opera was a popular form until the 20th century, when the musical became the presiding popular music/drama form.

A feature of opera is that the words are almost always all sung, whereas in music theatre, the story is told through dialogue interspersed with songs. In Sweeney Todd, Sondheim uses minimal dialogue, so the story is told almost exclusively through song.

The Score

Sondheim creates the particular mood and atmosphere of *Sweeney Todd* using a variety of musical devices including dissonance, repetition, ostinato, and motifs. Leitmotifs are a common operatic device that Sondheim has used in previous theatrical compositions. These motifs are heard in both the orchestration and vocal parts. This technique is often used by other composers to identify a character or emotion. In the case of *Sweeney Todd*, Sondheim assigns a motif to specific characters.

Opera uses devices such as love duets and revenge arias. In *Sweeney Todd* there is an example of each of these, "Green Finch and Linnet Bird" and "Epiphany". He also brings in elements of the popular in songs such as "By the Sea".

Sondheim uses the sound of the organ in the Prelude to create a familiar gothic horror mood. Sondheim's motifs are introduced in the prelude. He also references the "Dies Irae", from *The Sequence - Mass for the Dead*, a Gregorian chant.

Sondheim rapidly changes pace and rhythm throughout the score which emphasises the changeability of Sweeney Todd's nature. This also underscores the diverse nature of the characters, their personalities and the complex nature of the situation they are all in. Sondheim uses repetition as a device in his scores which is also played out in the lyrics. Repetition is demonstrated in the ostinato that he uses in the opening ballad which returns later in the work.

Sondheim was aware of the power of music and sound in the traditional horror film. He scores sounds and percussive actions to be acted out by the cast as part of the score rather than acting direction, for example in *Worst Pies in London*. The sound of the screaming factory whistle is used to both shock the audience and later to accompany the murders. He writes sensual and romantic music to underscore the violent and uncomfortable dramatic action, this also plays out the complexity of Sweeney Todd's emotional state and foreshadows impending dramatic action. He used the through-composed form to maintain tension and drama.



The Musical Direction: an interview with Musical Director - Phoebe Briggs

What do you think are the strengths of Sondheim's compositions, particularly Sweeney Todd?

Sondheim has an incredible gift of being able to set words to music. His use of rhythm, melody and instrumentation enriches the text and drama.

How would you describe the style of Sweeney Todd?

Gothic horror, comedy, drama

How would you describe Sweeney Todd as being different in style and/or composition to Sondheim's other music theatre scores?

Each Sondheim score is unique in style.

What are the themes explored in Sweeney Todd and how are they expressed in the musical score?

There are various themes explored in the work, the main two being love and revenge. The music accompanying Sweeney Todd's memories of his wife is full of emotion and yearning and then he quickly snaps into a rapid-fire muttering about the world being full of vermin. The underlying repetitive chromatic motif appears regularly throughout the work, usually accompanying Sweeney's rage and anxiety. In contrast, Anthony sings a sweeping melody of love when he sees Johanna for the first time and then when he vows to rescue her.

When you are working with the cast what are the main elements, musically, that you are working to achieve with them? How is this different to the Director's task?

We are both working towards the end result of clarity of text and drama. The Director guides the singers as to where they should be on stage and their acting characterisation whereas I focus more on the way the characters are developed musically. There are musical shapes which I need to achieve to enhance the drama as well. For the chorus ensemble, accuracy of text and rhythm is a necessity to make them sound like a cohesive unit full of colour and character.

What is the orchestration that Victorian Opera is using for this production? Are there any differences from other productions in the choices that VO is making instrumentally?

We are using the alternate orchestration which is scored for 9 instruments rather than full orchestra. It is an arrangement orchestrated by the original orchestrator, Jonathan Tunick. The orchestra is made up of violin, cello, bass, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, horn, percussion and keyboard.

Are there any choices that you as MD are making in this production that are significantly different from other productions of Sweeney Todd that have been produced in Australia?

I don't believe so. The work is complete as it is and does not need any change.

What do you particularly enjoy about being MD of Sweeney Todd?

Having been a répétiteur on the musical for three different productions, it is exciting to be part of the creative team on a new production. The music is at times incredibly powerful and at others very moving and to be a part of that is wonderful.

What is the journey you have been on artistically that leads you to this production for VO?

After I completed my Bachelor of Music, I decided to pursue a career as an accompanist. This led to working with singers and eventually working for an opera company. After a number of years of experience there I started doing some conducting as well as continuing my work as a répétiteur, both in music theatre and opera. As Head of Music for Victorian Opera I have had the opportunity to conduct *Sunday in the Park with George*, *The Play of Herod* and *Alice's Adventures in Operaland* as well as assisting on *Into the Woods*. It is a great pleasure to be conducting *Sweeney Todd* this year.



PRE-SHOW AND POST SHOW ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSIONS

- Watch the [Sweeney Todd Live in Concert](#) recording, or the most recent Tim Burton film version starring Johnny Depp and Helena Bonham Carter.
- There are also a number of other examples of Sweeney Todd songs on YouTube to watch.

1. Motifs

There are a number of motifs (leitmotifs) used in *Sweeney Todd*. As you listen to the music, see if you can identify some of these. Listen to the Prelude and see if you can identify the ones included here.

2. Prelude

- Listen to the [Prelude](#). Which instruments are used to create the mood of the work in the prelude? Why do these have the desired effect?
- Watch the short YouTube clip of the [Dies Irae](#). Can you hear this in the Prelude?
- What do you think is the purpose of this Prelude?

3. Themes

The themes explored in *Sweeney Todd* are identified by Sondheim as obsession and revenge. There are other themes that are also explored such as despair, love and fear.

- How are these explored by the music?
- In “My Friends”, how does this song juxtapose the implements of death with the tone of the music? How are the themes expressed in this song?
- What is the impact on the themes addressed in *Sweeney Todd* by having the child character Tobias?

4. Music, Imagery and Mood

- Why did Sondheim choose the various voice types for the characters in *Sweeney Todd*? For example, what is the impact of using a soprano voice for Johanna or baritone for Sweeney Todd?
- The song “Not While I’m Around” isn’t heard until the near the end of the work. It presents as a love song, how does this juxtapose the drama of the story at this point in the work?
- Listen to a number of the songs and discuss them for mood, imagery and the choice of instrumentation.
 - [“Not While I’m Around”](#)
 - [“Pretty Women”](#)
 - [“Epiphany”](#)

5. Critic’s responses

What are the critical responses you can find to *Sweeney Todd* on the internet? How are these similar or different to the reviews you find about the Victorian Opera production after the production opens? Do you agree with them, why/why not?



6. Language

The language used in Sweeney Todd is masterfully crafted. As you listen to the music and watch the production, listen for the use of wit and symbolism, look out for the use of poetic techniques such as rhyme, rhythm, alliteration and assonance. Look at the lyrics below from “No Place Like London” and “Worst Pies in London”.



Teddy Tahu Rhodes (*Sweeney Todd*) and Antoinette Halloran (*Mrs Lovett*) in rehearsal © Charlie Kinross

No Place Like London (Anthony, Sweeney Todd, Beggar Woman)

There's a hole in the world, like a great black pit
And the vermin of the world, inhabit it
And its morals aren't worth what a pig could spit
And it goes by the name of London.

At the top of the hole, sit the privileged few,
Making mock of the vermin in the lower zoo,
Turning beauty into filth and greed.

I too have sailed the world and seen its wonders,
For the cruelty of men is as wondrous as Peru,
But there's no place like London!

- How does Sondheim’s music accompany these words? What is the effect of these two elements working together?

Worst Pies in London (Mrs Lovett) - excerpt

(Slams a lump of dough on the counter and begins pounding it)

...And no wonder with the price of meat what it is (*pound*), when you get it. (*pound*)

Never (*pound*) thought I’d live to see the day men’d think it was a treat finding poor (*pound*) animals (*pound*) what are dying in the street. Mrs Mooney has a pie shop (*pound*) (*pound*), does a business, but I notice something weird (*pound*) (*pound*). Lately all her neighbours’ cats have disappeared. (*pound*) (*pound*)

Have to hand it to her. (*grunt*) Wot I calls (*grunt*) enterprise, (*grunt*) Popping pussies into pies.

Wouldn’t do in my shop. (*pound*) (*pound*) Just a thought of it’s enough to make you sick. (*pound*) (*pound*) And I’m telling you, them pussy cats is quick. (*pound*) (*pound*) No denying times is hard sir. Even harder than the worst pies in London...

- In the song “Worst Pies in London” the sound effects and actions are included in the libretto. What does this do to the lyrics and the mood of the song?
- The humour in the lyrics juxtapose the darkness of the mood prior to this. What effect does this have?

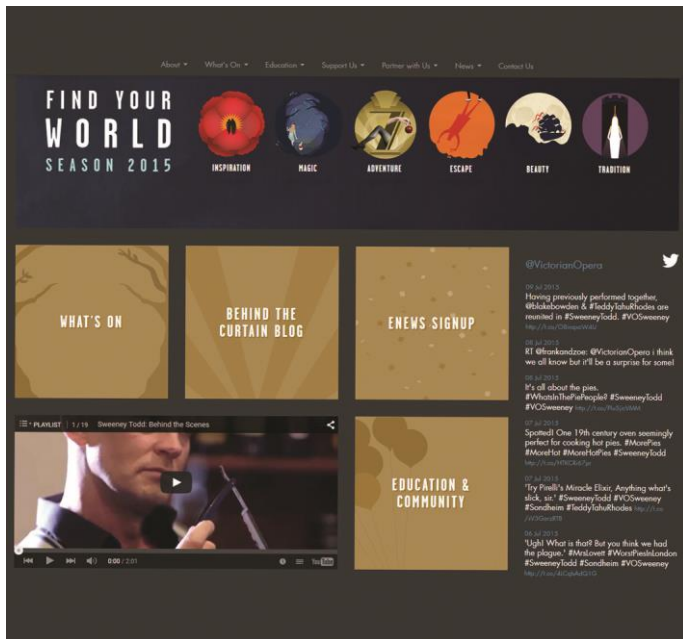
7. Go on the VO website

How do the images and videos assist you in your understanding and interpretation of the work?



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THANKS

With thanks to Stuart Maunder, Phoebe Briggs, and Phillipa Safey. Resource written by Deborah Vanderwerp, edited by Kate Stephens.

Victorian Opera Education Program is generously supported by:
 Victorian Opera Education Syndicate



EDUCATION REFERENCES

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