



Victorian
Opera

10TH ANNIVERSARY



SWEENEY TODD

THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET

A MUSICAL THRILLER

Education Resource - VCE Theatre Studies
Resources prepared by Meg Upton and Deborah Vanderwerp

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SWEENEY TODD EDUCATION RESOURCE: THEATRE STUDIES



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

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.

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INTRODUCTION

The Characters/Cast

Character		Cast
Sweeney Todd/ Benjamin Barker	A vengeful barber who returns to London after fifteen years of unjust servitude in an Australian penal colony. He seeks revenge first on the corrupt judge who sent him there, and then on all of his clients	Teddy Tahu Rhodes
Mrs Nellie Lovett	A cheerful, talkative, amoral pie shop owner, Todd's landlady, and (arguably) in love with him	Antoinette Halloran
Johanna	Todd's beautiful young daughter, claimed by the corrupt Judge Turpin as his 'ward'	Amelia Berry
Anthony Hope	A young, naïve sailor who rescues Todd at sea. He falls in love with Johanna Barker, Todd's daughter	Blake Bowden
Tobias Ragg	A simple soul who works firstly for Pirelli and then for Mrs Lovett in her pie shop. He is suspicious of Todd	Ross Hannaford
Judge Turpin	A corrupt judiciary official who becomes infatuated with Lucy Barker, and later with her daughter, Johanna	Phillip Rhodes
Beadle Bamford	Judge Turpin's right-hand man and accomplice	Kanen Breen
Adolfo Pirelli	An Irish trickster and former employee of Benjamin Barker. He adopts the persona of a flashy Italian barber and attempts to blackmail Todd	David Rogers-Smith
Beggar Woman/ Lucy Barker	A mad crone whose interruptions go unheeded. She is eventually identified as Todd's wife, Lucy, who was attacked by Judge Turpin	Dimity Shepherd
Jonas Fogg	The doctor at the asylum	Jeremy Kleeman
Ensemble	Carrie Barr, Paul Batey, Paul Biencourt, Cherie Boogaart, Danielle Calder, Daniel Carison, Ben Clark, Teresa Duddy, Jeremy Kleeman, Jerzy Kozlowski, Noni McCallum, Sophie Viskich	



SYNOPSIS

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.

Overview

Attend the tale of Sweeney Todd

His skin was pale and his eye was odd

He shaved the faces of gentlemen

Who never thereafter were heard of again

He trod a path that few have trod

Did Sweeney Todd

In the opening to *Sweeney Todd* (above), the citizens of London sing these words compelling the audience to witness the story about to unfold, plunging them into a world of murder, lust, deceit, betrayal, innocence, and revenge. *Sweeney Todd* is also a world of heightened characters and ghastly deeds set in the murky world of London in 1846. As an audience, your attention will help to create that world. You will be invited to imagine, to believe, and to respond. As students of Theatre Studies you will also need to analyse, evaluate and discuss the production in terms of characters, acting, theatrical styles and stagecraft.

Sweeney Todd is a musical/opera. This means that it offers both challenges and opportunities to the performers and the audience, but particularly to those who are studying it for Theatre Studies Unit 4. In musicals as in opera, it is the music and the songs that drive the narrative and express the motivations of the main characters. In analysing and evaluating the production, the realisation of characters and the characters’ journeys, the type and the positioning of songs, and the music you hear are all very important. These education notes act as an introduction to Victorian Opera’s production of *Sweeney Todd*. They provide a background to the story that inspired the musical and insight into the musical’s creator, Stephen Sondheim and his lyricist Hugh Wheeler. Finally, the notes offer a way to focus your study according to the Key Knowledge and the Key Skills of the Outcomes. Not the way...just one way. You are encouraged to find your own meaning.



Structure

Sweeney Todd is comprised of a Prologue, two Acts, and an Epilogue. An interval is traditionally taken between Acts 1 and 2. The Prologue is set some months after the end of Act 2 and is described as follows:

The company, representing citizens of London, drop a body bag into a shallow grave. As they sing, Sweeney Todd rises from the grave as though summoned by their song ("The Ballad of Sweeney Todd"), and introduces the play, set some months before the burial.

Offering something like a moral warning, the story then flashes back in time to Sweeney and Anthony's arrival in London. From then on time is linear. While the narrative predominantly focuses on Todd's revenge on Judge Turpin, the structure of the production allows for other characters' perspectives to be heard and understood. The Epilogue recounts for the audience the moral tale of revenge and justice.

SONG LIST

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.



SONG LIST (CONTINUED)

- **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.



SONG LIST (CONTINUED)

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**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION - MUSICAL THEATRE



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

Songs in musical theatre

In musical theatre the key to successful songs is how well lyrics and music work together. Songs may function dramatically in several ways, a primary one being to define character. Within the genre of musical theatre such character songs serve a number of functions.

Character songs

'I am' songs: Because musicals are by nature 'presentational' characters may introduce themselves directly to the audience through 'I am' songs. 'I am' songs can also allow characters to express feely how they are feeling at that moment, for example Maria's 'I feel Pretty' in West Side Story, and sometimes

characters discover something about themselves in an 'I am' song. Besides defining oneself and providing moments of self-revelation through these types of songs, characters may also

assert themselves against a challenge.

'I want' songs: Where 'I am' songs describe a present state, 'I want' songs suggest a course of action for the future. Characters often express their goals and dreams through these types of songs. For example, in Fiddler on the Roof, Tevye dreams of wealth in 'If I were a rich man'. Some characters may also use these songs to say what they 'don't want'. In Sweeney Todd, Mrs Lovett sings of her own desires.

Victorian Opera 2015 – Sweeney Todd Education Resource (General)



Reprises: Often a song will occur again in the musical as a 'reprise' which can be used effectively to reveal how a character has developed during the story. An effective reprise which functions dramatically reveals the development of character since the last time it was sung. The lyrics may reflect a change in the character's attitude or self-awareness, or they may indicate a change in situation. In *West Side Story* Tony and Maria reprise their romantic ballad 'Tonight' but now it is the night of the gang's street fight and it takes on a new meaning. In *Sweeney Todd*, a strong repetitive musical motif is evident.

Emotional climax songs: When characters reach a point in the drama where they can't help but explode with feelings or love or success or simply the joy of life, music serves to amplify these emotions to a level above mere words. Emotional climax songs are exuberant, celebratory and infectious, allowing the audience to share the character's passion and excitement.

Songs that tell the story

Exposition songs: Because songs take up time reserved for dialogue in the play, musicals must move quickly to establish the dramatic situation, introduce the main characters, and give audiences some reason to care about them. Exposition songs inform an audience about what has happened and what may have brought the characters to this point in the action. They may also preview the themes of the story.

Conflict songs: At the heart of every drama lies conflict. Some of the most interesting and exciting songs in Musical Theatre involve conflict, when characters struggle.

Narration songs: Narration songs describe events that we otherwise may not see, e.g. what has happened off stage.

Summary songs: Similar to narration songs, summary songs compress lengthy amounts of time into one song.

Songs with special functions

Comment songs: A character not in the dramatic scene may step to one side and sing about events on stage. Stephen Sondheim uses this device in several of his musicals including *Company*, *A Little Night Music* and *Sweeney Todd*.

Musical metaphors: These songs take advantage of the unique qualities of musical theatre to portray a situation in presentational, non-literal fashion. Several songs in *Sweeney Todd* act metaphorically in order for the audience to consider love, justice, and revenge.

Cameo songs: Cameo songs feature a minor character in a memorable number, someone who otherwise might be forgotten. A good cameo song defines a minor character quickly and effectively, as well as giving a performer in a small role time in the spotlight.

Parodies: These rely on an audience's familiarity with music that is not in the show they are watching, but is used to evoke an appropriate mood.

Source: Spurrier, James. *The Integration of Music and Lyrics with the Book in the American Musical*. Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Illinois U, 1979)



QUESTION

Using the song descriptions as a guide, identify which ‘type’ of song style might apply to the following:

- The Ballad of Sweeney Todd – Citizens of London
- The Worst Pies in London – Mrs Lovett
- Pirelli’s Miracle Elixir – Tobias, Sweeney, Mrs Lovett, Company.
- By the Sea –Mrs Lovett sings of her fantasy future with Sweeney.

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.

Stephen Sondheim’s approach to composing musicals

Sondheim was aware of the power of music and sound in the traditional horror film. He uses the technique of scoring sounds, to increase their impact making them part of the score rather than acting direction, e.g. “Worst Pies in London” and the screaming factory whistle. He writes sensual and romantic music to underscore the violent and uncomfortable dramatic action, this also plays out the complexity of Sweeney’s emotional state and foreshadows to the audience impending dramatic action. He used the through composed operatic form to maintain the tension and drama.

What other theatrical styles are present?

The Musical Director, Phoebe Briggs, uses the term “Gothic Horror” to describe aspects of Sweeney Todd. Some of the conventions of this style are; use of atmospheric music, superstition and ritual, issues of power and class, heightened style and heightened language, the use of dramatic irony whereby the audience is aware of events and dangers and characters are not, recognisable characters or archetypes – tyrants, maidens, heroes, and villains. The production is also very heightened and dramatic, as well as having moments of humour.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION – THE WRITER

The context in which Sondheim was writing his work and the drive to create new work was in reaction to more traditional Broadway musical forms. He was also writing during the emergence of the postmodern movement.



Stephen Sondheim

Postmodernism

"I place Sondheim's career in the context of two overlapping cultural moments. The first is the exhaustion of the Rodgers and Hammerstein aesthetic of the Broadway musical... The second context for Sondheim's musicals is the growing cultural presence of Postmodernism, which by the late 1960s was evidenced in the arts. Postmodernism is a slippery and sometimes contentious term to define, not least because the postmodern enterprise resists definition... The self-referentiality (of Postmodernism) the awareness of the discourse that is expressing the art...the refusal to let the audience suspend its disbelief, the self-awareness of art points, not to the world, but to itself pointing to the world...(in Postmodernism) there is a scepticism about narrative as a meaning-conveying vehicle.

In the plays of the 1980s, 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century, Sondheim and his collaborators continued to explore the limitations of conventional narrative and to find new possibilities for meaning in unconventional structures."

Source: Gordon, Robert L (2014), *Sondheim and Postmodernism, Chapter 2, The Oxford Handbook of Sondheim Studies*, (pp. 25-38).

Creating Sweeney Todd

The following is an extract from an interview with Stephen Sondheim, *The Art of the Musical*, *The Paris Review*, Spring, 1997, No. 142.

"When I was fifteen years old I saw a movie called *Hangover Square*, another epiphany in my life. It was a moody, romantic, gothic thriller starring Laird Cregar, about a composer in London in 1900 who was ahead of his time. And whenever he heard a high note he went crazy and ran around murdering people. It had an absolutely brilliant score by Bernard Herrmann, centred around a one-movement piano concerto. I wanted to pay homage to him with this show, because I had realized that in order to scare people, which is what *Sweeney Todd* is about, the only way you can do it, considering that the horrors out on the street are so much greater than anything you can do on the stage, is to keep music going all the time. That's the principle of suspense sequences in movies, and Bernard Herrmann was a master in that field. So *Sweeney Todd* not only has a lot of singing, it has a lot of underscoring. It's infused with music to keep the audience in a state of tension, to make them forget they're in a theatre, and to prevent them from separating themselves from the action. I based a lot of the score on a specific chord that Herrmann uses in almost all his film work and spun it out from that. That and the "Dies Irae," which is one of my favourite tunes and is full of menace."

Source: <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1283/the-art-of-the-musical-stephen-sondheim>

QUESTIONS:

- Discuss the above information and extracts.
- What do they tell you about the characters?
- What do they suggest are the theatrical styles and conventions in the production?
- How do you imagine the production being staged?



BACKGROUND INFORMATION – THE REAL SWEENEY TODD

“Sweeney was smooth, Sweeney was subtle, Sweeney would blink and rats would scuttle. Inconspicuous Sweeney was, Quick and quiet and clean ‘e was, Like a perfect machine ‘e was”

Did Sweeney Todd really exist? As a character, Sweeney Todd first appeared in a story titled *The String of Pearls: A Romance*. This penny dreadful was published in 18 weekly parts, in Edward Lloyd's *The People's Periodical and Family Library*, issues 7–24, 21 November 1846 to 20 March 1847. In February/March 1847, before the serial was even completed, George Dibden Pitt adapted *The String of Pearls* as a melodrama for the Britannia Theatre in Hoxton. It was in this alternative version of the tale, rather than the original, that Todd acquired his catchphrase: "I'll polish him off".

Lloyd published another, lengthier, penny part serial from 1847–48, with 92 episodes. It was then published in book form in 1850 as *The String of*

Pearls, subtitled "The Barber of Fleet Street. A Domestic Romance". This expanded version of the story was 732 pages long. A plagiarised version of this book appeared in America c. 1852–53 as *Sweeney Todd: or the Ruffian Barber. A Tale of Terror of the Seas and the Mysteries of the City* by "Captain Merry" (a pseudonym for American author Harry Hazel, 1814–89)

Claims that Sweeney Todd was a real person were first made in the introduction to the 1850 (expanded) edition of *The String of Pearls* and have persisted to the present day. Two publications argued that Sweeney Todd was an historical figure who committed his crimes around 1800. Nevertheless, other researchers who have tried to verify this find nothing in these sources. A check of the website *Old Bailey* for "Associated Records 1674–1834", for an alleged trial in December 1801 and hanging of Sweeney Todd for January 1802, shows no reference.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sweeney_Todd

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – LONDON DURING THE VICTORIAN ERA



Costume detail © Charlie Kinross

QUESTIONS

Search online for images of 'London in the 1840s – working class', and 'London in the 1840s – upper class'.

- What do these images conjure and suggest to you about London in Victorian times?
- Can you picture the characters of Todd, Lovett, Judge Turpin, and Johanna in one of these images?



London, 1800-1913

At the beginning of the 19th century London was the largest city in Europe. As the centre of government of a massive empire, London continued to grow at a phenomenal rate: in geographical size, in population, and in its economic prosperity. But for all its wealth and brightly lit palaces, there remained districts of extreme poverty and squalor. And while its economic institutions and trading infrastructure grew ever more sophisticated, it was not until relatively late in the century that it acquired a centralized structure for management and planning. Governed by the London County Council, the city entered the 20th century facing new challenges, including the dangers posed by motorised traffic and the direct action committed by the Suffragettes. If the 18th century had started the process of creating ever more solid social and geographical boundaries between classes, the 19th century completed the job. In the eyes of the rich, the poor appeared a different race, linked by a few miles or even a few yards of river front or city street but separated by a massive cultural chasm. When Charles Dickens wrote *Oliver Twist*, when in the 1820s the West End thrilled to the adventures of Tom and Jerry at "All-Max", the world exposed in such literature was unknown to most upper-class Londoners. The gradations between the rich and poor became ever more numerous, with a growing band of respectable poor, labour aristocrats, and complacent middle classes each claiming a distinct rung on the slippery ladder of social hierarchy.

Source: <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/static/London-life19th.jsp>

London gentlemen and shaving

In 19th century England, going to the barbers for a shave was as ordinary as going to the barbers for a haircut, especially if you were a gentleman. Sweeney Todd's barber shop would be seen as a normal part of London business.

A barber, my lord, of skill.

Thus armed with a shaven face, my lord,

Some eau de cologne to grace my lord

And musk to enhance the chase, my lord,

You'll dazzle the girl until

She bows to your every will

Beadle

'He happened to have been sharpening his razors, which were lying open in a row, while a huge strop dangled from the wall. Glancing at these preparations, Mr Bailey stroked his chin, and a thought appeared to occur to him. 'Poll,' he said, 'I ain't as neat as I could wish about the gills. Being here, I may as well have a shave, and get trimmed close' – from 'Martin Chuzzlewit' by Charles Dickens



Prop razorblade on bench top © Charlie Kinross



The pie shops of London

Seems an awful waste.

I mean

With the price of meat what it is,

When you get it,

If you get it

Mrs Lovett

Pie and mash is a traditional London working-class food, originating in East London. Pie, mash and eel shops have been in London since the 19th century, and are still common in east and south east London and in many parts of Kent and Essex. The shops may serve either or both steamed and jellied eels. During the Victorian era, industrial air pollution tended to be worse in the east and south east of London due to the prevailing westerly wind, with the result that the East End was settled more by the working classes, while the Western part of the city was home to higher social classes. The working class were poor and favoured foodstuffs that were cheap, in plentiful supply and easy to prepare. The savoury pie had long been a traditional food, and its small hand sized form also made it a transportable meal, protected from dirt by its cold pastry crust. European eels baked in a pastry crust became a common worker's meal since eels were one of the few forms of fish that could survive in the heavily polluted River Thames and London's other rivers at that time. Supply was plentiful through to the late 1800s, particularly from the Dutch fishing boats landing catches at Billingsgate Fish Market. Adding cheap mashed potatoes made it a plate-based sit-down meal, and a sauce made of the water used to cook the eels,

coloured and flavoured by parsley, made the whole dish something special. Later, and for a higher price, mutton or inexpensive minced meat could be alternatively ordered as the pie filling.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pie_and_mash

Transportation

In Sweeney Todd, Todd is sentenced to transportation and penal servitude for fifteen years. Under English Law, transportation was a sentence imposed for felony, and was typically imposed for offences for which capital punishment was deemed too severe; for example, forgery of a document was a capital crime until the 1820s, when the penalty was reduced to transportation. The sentence was imposed for life or for a set period of years. If imposed for a period of years, the offender was permitted to return home after serving out his time, but had to make his own way back. Many offenders thus stayed in the colony as free persons, and might obtain employment as jailers or other servants of the penal colony. In Sweeney Todd it is suggested that after serving time, Sweeney makes his own way back to England by boat. During which time he is swept overboard and rescued by Anthony Hope (note the name of this character).

Adapted from:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penal_transportation

ONLINE RESOURCES

[Conversations with Sondheim](#)

[Watch a 1982 Broadway production](#)

[Read the libretto](#)



Themes

Stephen Sondheim believes that Sweeney Todd is a story of revenge and how it can consume a vengeful person. He has asserted, "...what the show is really about is obsession." Producer Hal Prince believed it to be an allegory of capitalism and its selfish qualities. He described this theme as follows: "It was only when I realized that the show was about revenge...and then came the factory, and the class struggle – the terrible struggle to move out of the class in which you're born". Some academics and Sondheim "specialists" have argued that Sweeney Todd explores:

- The different connotations of madness within people
- The differences between inherent evil and justifiable rage
- The inconsistencies of our system of justice

QUESTIONS

- Discuss Sondheim's comment that Sweeney Todd is "really about...obsession".
- Is it possible to write a theme into a play/musical? How would music and song assist?
- What does Hal Prince mean by "an allegory of capitalism and its selfish qualities"?
- Who is "mad" in Sweeney Todd?

THE VICTORIAN OPERA PRODUCTION OF SWEENEY TODD

Performer Antoinette Halloran talks about her role as Mrs Lovett in the Victorian Opera's production of Sweeney Todd.

How did you first respond to the libretto/music of Sweeney Todd? From the first moment I heard this score it spoke to me on a very deep level artistically. I can always tell when I am going to have a love affair with a score if it takes me to a place outside the everyday. I first heard the score when I was in the ensemble of the Opera Australia Production. From the moment the whistle blew in the Prologue the hairs on the back of my neck stood to attention. The visceral connection I have with this score is the same as I do with some of the great operas. It is the marriage of text and melody that profoundly alters the other. That is where the magic happens. When the music heightens the drama and the drama informs the composition. Sweeney Todd is one of these works in my opinion. There aren't many dramaturges and composers that share this wonderful synchronicity. The result is a near perfect score....with little or no need of editing!

What type of world do the characters inhabit? Sweeney Todd and Lovett inhabit the dark and depressed world of mid-19th Century London. The greyness of their existence is reflected in their inner worlds. When they meet at the beginning of the piece it has been 20 years since they last saw each other. In that 20 years both of their hopes and aspirations have been dashed. Sweeney returns from the penal yards to find his lost wife and child. Lovett has been doggedly trying to eke out an existence in a depressed and fruitless pie shop. They find in each other something they need. Sweeney - a roof over his head, a purpose (to get the judge) and a carnal desire. Lovett seeks companionship and love.



What is your take on your character? Who is Mrs Lovett? Lovett finds the man she has always coveted from afar now within her grasp. She still has dreams of a marriage, a house by the sea and is so damaged she cannot see how warped her perspective is on the world. What terrible things happened to her between her childhood trips to the seaside and her present state? How has she become so damaged that she can't see the wrong in her actions? Is she just a bad person - or is she responding to events that she has had to bare in the past, in order to survive? It is too black and white to just say they are "bad" people. It adds much more depth to the performances if at some point we wonder why they are behaving as they are. And why they choose to inhabit a dark and evil world instead of treading "the right" path.

I believe that Mrs Lovett is broken, perhaps by some terrible event in her youth, or just by the harshness of existence in Victorian London for the working class, but she has rebuilt herself, becoming strong and callused. And her moral code is now about survival at all costs. When Sweeney comes back into her life he invigorates her and propels her to excel - but she has a warped sense of success and it becomes a jigsaw puzzle of white picket fences, murder and wedding dresses. She cannot distinguish right from wrong, lust from love or danger from security

What is the relationship between Mrs Lovett and Sweeney? I believe Lovett was Sweeney's landlady when he was a young man newly married to Lucy. I don't think the young upwardly mobile couple gave her much time of day. She became obsessed with the handsome and talented barber and resented his blonde, dim (her opinion!) wife and baby. She always thought she would be a better match for him but he wouldn't look twice at her. So in love with Lucy as he was. There is the back story. So when he arrives 20 years later, and she knows Lucy is well out of the way, she makes her move. She is like a lady Macbeth. Leading him to wrongdoing and revenge. Holding his hand down the slippery path of becoming a serial murderer. She spurs him on with ideas and advice, aids and abets his crimes and supports him with nurture and love and sex. She loves him in spite of everything. Even preparing the murder of her pet Tobias, when he starts to suspect Sweeney. It hurts her deeply to kill Toby, but she will do anything for Todd - now that is LOVE! Weird, wild broken love.

Can you talk about Sondheim's music? How does it tell the story, and create the characters? Sondheim layers his score with recurring themes that return again and again. It is complex music yet you can leave the theatre humming some of the tunes. Many of them return or reprise throughout the production so you familiarize yourself with them and indeed react emotionally to them. The opening of act two has an extraordinarily complex layering of themes and textures, and by the end of the number there are three or four tunes returning and working simultaneously! The harmonies often fail to resolve leaving the eerie feeling of things about to happen. When Lovett sings Toby's gorgeous song "Not While I'm Around" the harmonies shift and bend and fill one with a sense of dread, even though she is singing about protecting him. The listener can hear his impending doom - not in her words, but in the accompaniment of them. The placement of text is extraordinary.

Lovett's frenzied mental state is evident in her first song, disjointed and complex, yet her clarity about her love for Sweeney is evident in her simple, lucid love song, Wait. Sweeney calms her down musically. He centres her and gives her a clearer journey - musically and emotionally.

How will costume, hair and make-up assist you in creating the character of Mrs Lovett? Hopefully a great design helps you lose yourself in the period and the psyche of this character. The design needs to effortlessly aid the storytelling. The audience should be able to believe - to be transported to another time and place. The less they notice the design, the better. If they just believe in the story then the design has worked!



Extract from an interview with Musical Director, Phoebe Briggs, who spoke to Victorian Opera Education Officer, Deborah Vanderwerp

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

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.



Sweeney Todd cast in rehearsal © Charlie Kinross

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.



ANALYSING AND EVALUATING SWEENEY TODD

THEATRE STUDIES UNIT 4 - PERFORMANCE INTERPRETATION

Outcome 3 – Performance Analysis

The following dot points outline the Key Skills you need to consider when responding to Sweeney Todd and completing Outcome 3

Key skills

- Analyse the character/s in the production including status, motivation and characteristics
- Analyse and evaluate interpretation by actor/s of a playscript in performance, including the acting skills used by actor/s to realise character/s, the use of focus and the acting space and the interrelationships between acting, direction and design
- Analyse the use of language to convey the intended meanings of the play
- Analyse and evaluate the establishment and maintenance of the actor–audience relationship
- Analyse the ways that actor/s work within the theatrical style/s utilised in the production
- Use theatre terminology and expression appropriately.
- The World of the Play, Structure and Theatrical Styles

Performer, Antoinette Halloran describes the world that the characters inhabit as ...the dark and depressed world of mid –19th Century London. The greyness of their existence is reflected in their inner worlds.

- What is ‘dark and depressed’ about the world of the production? What elements make it so?
- Discuss the comment ‘greyness of their existence’. Is this a grey world?
- How else would you describe the world of the production?
- What is the relationship between the characters’ inner world and the world created on stage?
- Discuss what parallels you can draw both literally and metaphorically between the exterior world of Sweeney Todd and the interior world of the characters.

As is earlier outlined, Sweeney Todd is linear in structure after the Prologue.

- What is a ‘linear plot’?
- Consider how time and differing perspectives impact on the structure of production
- Consider whether the work travels between different times. Is time disjointed?



The historical context of Sweeney Todd: Victorian England, 1846.

- How is this era created and portrayed? Consider how set, costume, make-up and lighting assist with the construction this era
- How do the types of characters contribute to establishing the era? Particularly consider the Chorus of London.
- How are the contexts recreated through the use of accent, costume and set?

The key theatrical style apparent in Sweeney Todd is musical theatre drawing on some of the traditions of opera. The director of this production, Stuart Maunder has stated in the past that, the ultimate aim of the musical is to tell a story, whether through spoken word, sung word or presence. Musical theatre is a form of theatre that combines songs, spoken dialogue, acting, and dance. The story and emotional content of the work is communicated through the music, recitative (recited dialogue), movement and technical aspects of the entertainment as an integrated whole.

- Musical theatre and opera ask an audience to accept the notion that music and songs contribute to the story and characters' journeys
- Return to the song list (pp. 5 -6) and discuss how the songs contribute to the narrative of Sweeney Todd
- Choose two songs from the production (there is a link to the full libretto in this resource) and analyse and evaluate how they contribute to the narrative/story. Whose story do they tell? What do they reveal? What comment do they make with regard to the themes and ideas in the production?

Often a key feature of the musical is the 'presentational' nature that it demands. In presentational acting the performers acknowledge the audience by speaking or singing to them.

- Is this style apparent in Sweeney Todd? What did you observe about the performers?
- Consider how the following characters might contribute to the presentational style – the chorus or

ensemble, Sweeney Todd, Mrs Lovett, Anthony, Judge Turpin

- Traditionally a 'presentational style' eliminates the 4th wall, or the pretence that the audience is looking in on the real world of the characters – do you agree?

Gothic horror, comedy, drama – these are the terms that Musical Director, Phoebe Briggs uses to describe the production.

- Research, discuss and list the conventions of each of these styles
- Select a key moment from the production that exemplifies or provides a clear example of each of these styles
- Make direct links between the conventions you have listed and the action, characterisation, actor-audience relationship, and stagecraft of that exemplar or example.

One academic has written that Sondheim's work is postmodern in conception. "The self-referentiality [of postmodernism] the awareness of the discourse that is expressing the art...the refusal to let the audience suspend its disbelief."

- Discuss 'self referentiality' and 'awareness'.
- Do you feel these two terms apply to aspects of Sweeney Todd?
- Are you compelled to 'suspend your disbelief'? Discuss.



Actor/audience relationships

Sweeney Todd is being performed at the Arts Centre Melbourne, Playhouse. The space has been 'designed specifically for drama but can accommodate other art forms' (from ACM website). The Playhouse might be described as a contemporary version of a proscenium arch theatre.

- Would you agree?
- What are the features of a proscenium arch theatre?
- What features can you see in this image that reflect the structure of a proscenium arch theatre?

In Sweeney Todd the actor/audience relationship is established, maintained and then re-established on a number of occasions. It shifts throughout the performance, within the theatrical styles of musical theatre and opera, for the purposes of establishing the world of the play.

- Does the design reflect a 'proscenium arch' theatre?
- Do the characters remain within the arch or do they sometimes emerge from it? Who? Why?
- How would you describe the actor/audience relationship that a proscenium arch theatre/design establishes?



Teddy Tahu Rhodes (Sweeney Todd), Ross Hannaford (Toby) and Company rehearse © Charlie Kinross

Throughout the production of Sweeney Todd, characters appear to directly address the audience

- Discuss how the Ensemble or Chorus use direct address in the Prologue.
- Discuss how other individual characters address the audience either when singing or in the recitative (recited dialogue) moments.

How is the Playhouse PERFORMANCE SPACE used by the performers to establish, manipulate and re-establish the actor-audience relationship?



Characterisation – acting and expressive skills

- Select TWO of the following characters: Sweeney Todd, Mrs Lovett, Anthony, Johanna, Lucy/Beggar woman, Judge Turpin, or Toby. Select two contrasting characters – consider class distinction or gender.
- Remember to record the name of the ACTOR/PERFORMER who plays the character – you will need to differentiate between the character and the actor in your exam.
- Create a character profile for each character that describes them physically and include their costume, hair and make-up – you may find some images on the VO website or [Facebook](#) page.
- Describe in detail the use of expressive skills used by the performers to create their character voice, gesture, accent, focus, movement, stillness and silence.
- WHICH KEY SONGS do you associate with the selected characters? (see the song list on pp. 5 - 6)
- Does the selected character have a particular social class? How is this established through the use of expressive skills? Is this evident in the use of voice, accent, timing, pitch etc.?
- Which specific examples can you list that clearly represent the performer’s use of accent, voice, focus, gesture, movement and stillness?
- Which characters does each character interact with most? Who are they closest to? What is the relationship?
- How do the characters’ use of expressive skills contribute to the PERFORMANCE STYLES within the show?
- What function do the Ensemble or Citizens of London have within the production? Which ‘types’ do they represent?
- In talking about her character, Mrs Lovett, performer Antoinette Halloran comments that in thinking about Mrs Lovett she asks; “What terrible things happened to her between her childhood trips to the seaside and her present state? How has she become so damaged that she can’t see the wrong in her actions? Is she just a bad person - or is she responding to events that she has had to bare in the past, in order to survive?”
 - What do these questions suggest about the character of Mrs Lovett?
 - What do these questions suggest about how Antoinette Halloran will INTERPRET the character?
- “Lovett’s frenzied mental state is evident in her first song [“Worst Pies in London”], disjointed and complex, yet her clarity about her love for Sweeney is evident in her simple, lucid love song, ‘Wait’. Sweeney calms her down musically. He centres her and gives her a clearer journey - musically and emotionally” – Antoinette Halloran, Mrs Lovett
 - Discuss this description by Antoinette Halloran. Do you agree?
 - Analyse and evaluate the impact of music and song on characterisation in *Sweeney Todd*
 - Do you think that the music drives the interpretation of the characters?
- “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” – Phoebe Briggs, Musical Director
 - Discuss these comments and how they link music and character.

Characterisation – status

As you are journeying through the discussion, analysis and evaluation of the production, now consider how status between characters was evident in the show. How is status made evident in theatre? How do you recognise high status, low status, and when does status shift? What are the stakes for characters in these particular moments?



- A good example would be to examine the status between Mrs Lovett and Sweeney Todd. Consider the following moments:
 - When Todd decides to rent the room above Mrs Lovett’s shop
 - When Mrs Lovett convinces Todd to fill her pies with the results of his vengeful murders
 - When Todd discovers Mrs Lovett knew who the beggar woman was
 - Analyse how the status between Mrs Lovett and Todd shifts throughout the production
- What are specific examples of this? How did the performers use space and expressive skills?
- How did they use tension and timing, stillness and silence?
- Another example worth exploring is the status between Judge Turpin and Johanna, Todd’s daughter AND the status between Judge Turpin and the Beadle
- Consider the scene where the Judge proposes to Johanna.
 - How would you describe the status between Turpin and Johanna characters? Does this status shift as the story progresses?
 - How would you describe the status between Turpin and the Beadle?
 - Is it one of profession? Class? Need? Does it change or shift throughout the production?
 - Does music contribute to the status of characters?
- Read and discuss the following scene with the Beggar Woman. This is the character who we learn is Todd’s wife, Lucy, driven mad.
 - Discuss the role and function of ‘mad’ people in many theatre traditions.
 - Which other plays do you know that have mad characters, beggars and fools that appear regularly throughout the story?
 - Discuss and analyse the role and function of the Beggar Woman in Sweeney Todd.



Dimity Shepherd (Beggar Woman) in rehearsal © Charlie Kinross
mouth of hell — City on fire! (The smoke trails away as dawn comes up) City on fire ... Mischief! Mischief! Mischief...

(Night falls. We see a wisp of smoke rise from the bakehouse chimney, a small trail gradually bellowing out into a great, noxious plume of black. As it thickens, we become aware of MRS. LOVETT, in a white nightdress, inside the bakehouse. The oven doors are open and cast a hot light. She is tossing "objects" into the oven. As the music continues under, a figure stumbles into view from the alleyway beside the chimney. It is the BEGGAR WOMAN, coughing and spitting and carrying a meagre straw pallet, her bed) BEGGAR WOMAN (In a rage, loudly, sings): Smoke! Smoke! Sign of the devil! Sign of the devil! City on fire! (She tries to interest passers-by but, clearly revolted by her, they move away) Witch! Witch! (Spits at the bakehouse) Smell it, sir! An evil smell! Every night at the vespers bell — Smoke that comes from the



Characterisation – motivation

“I believe that Mrs Lovett is broken, perhaps by some terrible event in her youth, or just by the harshness of existence in Victorian London for the working class, but she has rebuilt herself, becoming strong and callused. And her moral code is now about survival at all costs. When Sweeney comes back into her life he invigorates her and propels her to excel - but she has a warped sense of success and it becomes a jigsaw puzzle of white picket fences, murder and wedding dresses. She cannot distinguish right from wrong, lust from love or danger from security” – Antoinette Halloran, Mrs Lovett

- Analyse this character description.
- Consider moments in the portrayal of the character where these characteristics and motivations were made evident by the performer.
- Explore the motivations of each of the following characters. Remember to use the elements of the production to support your response.
 - What motivates Sweeney to reopen the barber shop? Why does Mrs Lovett encourage him?
 - What motivates Mrs Lovett to ‘recreate’ her pie fillings?
 - What motivates Anthony to rescue Johanna?
 - What are Tobias’s motivations, to work for Mrs Lovett? With regard to Sweeney Todd?



Phillip Rhodes (Judge Turpin) and Amelia Berry (Johanna) in rehearsal © Charlie Kinross

Victorian Opera 2015 – Sweeney Todd Education Resource (General)

- READ THE FOLLOWING SCENE between Todd and Turpin.
 - Recall how it was staged
 - Discuss and analyse the status between these two characters
 - Discuss and analyse what motivates them both at this moment
 - Discuss and analyse how dramatic tension is created

TODD whistles and starts stropping his razor rhythmically. He then lathers the JUDGE's face. Still whistling, he stands back to survey the JUDGE, who is now totally relaxed, eyes closed. He picks up the razor and sings to it)

Now then, my friend.

Now to your purpose.

Patience, enjoy it.

Revenge can't be taken in haste.

JUDGE (Opens his eyes):

Make haste, and if we wed,

You'll be commended, sir.

TODD (bows):

My lord . . .

(Goes to him)

And who, may it be said,

Is your intended, sir?

JUDGE: My ward.

(TODD freezes; the JUDGE closes his eyes, settles comfortably, speaks)

And pretty as a rosebud.

- Did you relate to, sympathise or empathise with any of the characters in Sweeney Todd?
- What elements are at play in order to evoke our sympathies or our empathy?
- Consider narrative, dialogue, perspective, music, motivation, status, and themes.



Characterisation – use of acting space

The story of Sweeney Todd takes place in multiple locations some of which include: London Streets, the pie shop, Todd's barber shop, the stairs between, Judge Turpin's house, a court, the oven room, near an asylum.

- Consider how each of these and other locations are created within the design and the playing space.
 - Are they suggested or is the space manipulated to create them?
 - How do the performers use the space?
 - What limitations or opportunities does the space offer the performers?
 - Consider the use of levels, the relationship between characters, the necessary relationship of performers to set items and properties
 - Select one or two locations within the production
 - Analyse and evaluate how effectively the performers used the space
 - How might the theatrical styles of the production impact on the way space is used?

Application of Stagecraft

In this section, you are asked to consider the contribution stagecraft makes to the world, the story and the characters in Sweeney Todd.

MUSIC

"Sondheim brings... [an] intense, systematic intellectual precision to the composition of his words and music" Stuart Maunder, Director

- Discuss how the music created the world of London in 1846
- Discuss Stuart Maunder's comment with regard to 'intense, systematic intellectual precision'
- How would you apply it to your own experience of the production?
- How does the music contribute thematically?

SET

- How would you describe the aesthetic and style of the overall set? Stylized? Representational? Realistic? Non-naturalistic?

THEATRE TECHNOLOGIES

Consider how theatre technologies were applied to create the different locations in the production. For instance:

- How was the Pie Shop created?
- How was Sweeney's Barber Shop created?
- How were set changes effected?
- How did the mechanics contribute to the overall aesthetic of the production?



COSTUME



Costume detail © Charlie Kinross

Costume is a very large part of the production. It is particularly important for creating era or period, class, fashion, and character.

- Select TWO characters from the production – either the two you chose for character analysis or two others - carefully examine the costumes they wore as each character
 - Sketch each costume and annotate it for colour, silhouette, texture, period or era, class, and other references you feel assist in enhancing its contribution to creating CHARACTER
 - Would you consider the costumes to be intimate or public? Meant to be seen or only worn in private?

- Consider in your discussion the inclusion of ACCESSORIES – hats, gloves, bags, canes

CHARACTERISATION

- Discuss how the costumes enhanced the qualities of each character, enhanced or inhibited their movement, and determined their class. Did they look comfortable?

MAKEUP AND HAIR

- Again, this is a large part of the production, especially because the performers are creating a very particular and atmospheric world with elements of 'gothic horror'.
- As you are discussing costume in detail, consider how make-up and hair contributed to: Era/period, the overall aesthetic, age, class, occupation, and to the creation of each character.

INTENDED MEANING OF THE PRODUCTION

"There are various themes explored in the work, the main two being love and revenge" – Phoebe Briggs, Musical Director

- Discuss this comment in relation to your analysis of the show
- How does LOVE manifest in the production? Between which characters? What type of love?
- Consider Lovett/Todd, Anthony/Johanna, Todd/Lucy, Turpin/Johanna, Tobias/Lovett
- Now consider REVENGE
- How is this theme made manifest in the production? Who seeks revenge? Upon what or whom?



“So ‘Sweeney Todd’ not only has a lot of singing, it has a lot of underscoring. It’s infused with music to keep the audience in a state of tension, to make them forget they’re in a theatre, and to prevent them from separating themselves from the action” – Stephen Sondheim

- Discuss this statement by the composer.
- Is there a constant state of tension?
- How does the music contribute to meaning in Sweeney Todd?
- Could you imagine the story without music?

Discuss other ideas and meanings that you discovered in the production or that have occurred to you as you have been analysing and evaluating the production. Remember to use the LIVE PERFORMANCE as your ‘text’ and draw on specific examples from it to emphasise and support your arguments.

- Do particular characters ‘embody’ particular ideas and themes?
- Is Sweeney Todd a ‘psychological’ musical?
- Recall Antoinette Halloran’s comment that the exterior world reflects the interior world of Mrs Lovett – what themes and ideas in the production might this comment relate to?

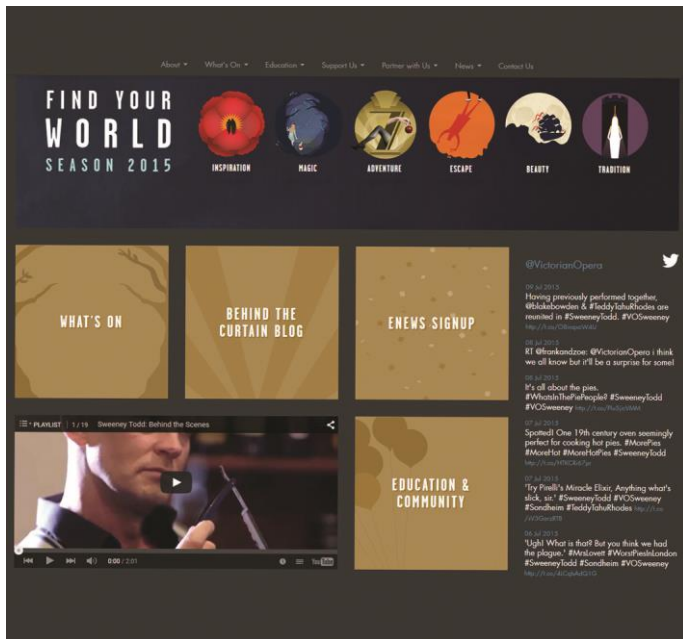
STAGECRAFT EXAMINATION

- How will your exploration of key characters in this production relate to your choice of monologue for the Stagecraft Examination?
- Which theatrical styles did you see being explored that could be useful?
- Which performers’ use of expressive skills were examples of excellence?
- What did you learn about the establishment of particular actor/audience relationships that could be helpful?
- How did particular set pieces, costumes and props assist in establishing the world? A character?



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