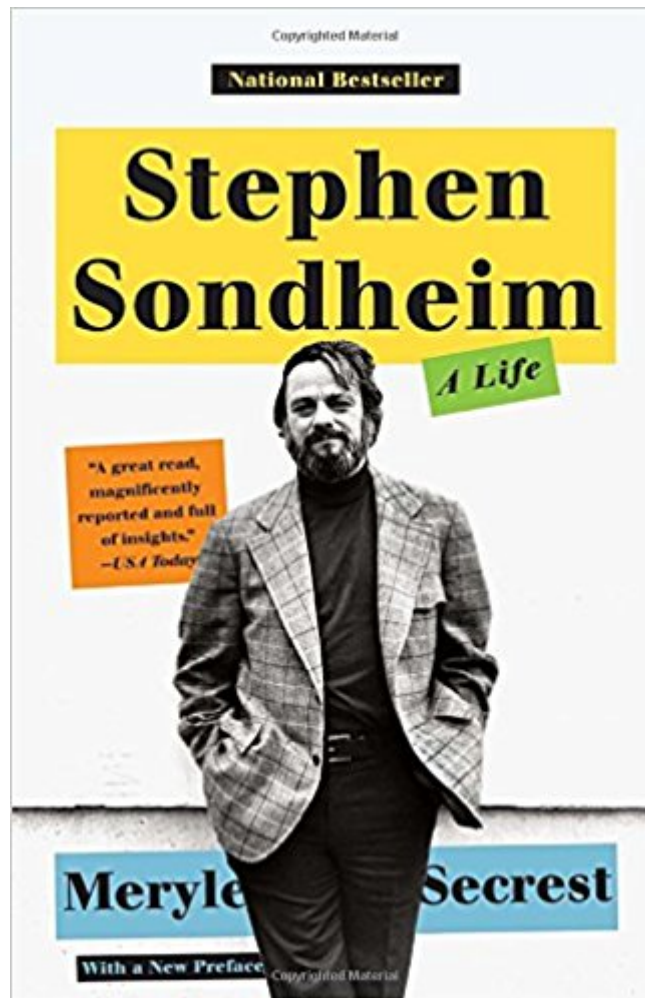


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Stephen Sondheim: A Life



Synopsis

The first and only full-scale and definitive biography of the most important composer-lyricist in musical theater today. Drawing on personal conversations with Sondheim himself, as well as interviews with his friends, family, collaborators, and lovers, Secrest offers new insight into the enigmatic and very private Stephen Sondheim. Here, we learn about his childhood on New York's Upper West Side, his parents' devastating divorce, and his ascent to the peaks of the Broadway musical. Secrest vividly recreates the energy, passion, and despair that went into each beloved show, from Sondheim's fabled collaboration with Hal Prince on Sweeney Todd and A Little Night Music, to his disagreements with co-lyricist Leonard Bernstein on West Side Story. A fascinating and remarkable portrait of the man, the music, and the genius of Stephen Sondheim: star of his own fascinating and unfinished life.

Book Information

Paperback: 480 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (October 4, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0307946843

ISBN-13: 978-0307946843

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 1 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 29 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #543,408 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #213 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Theatre #254 in Books > Arts & Photography > Performing Arts > Theater > Broadway & Musicals #2871 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Biographies

Customer Reviews

America's foremost musical-theater composer also proves to be a fascinatingly complex and conflicted human being in this meticulous biography by the always-capable Meryle Secrest (Being Bernard Berenson, etc.). Stephen Sondheim himself was interviewed for the book, as were many of his closest friends, and the author makes perceptive use of this material. Born in 1930, Sondheim was a successful Broadway lyricist (West Side Story and Gypsy) before he was 30. But the scars from a miserable childhood remained: he was inclined to be distant, hypercritical of those less intelligent than he, and terrified of serious emotional commitment. Critics sometimes found those

qualities in the series of groundbreaking musicals he created with director Hal Prince--Company, Follies, A Little Night Music, and Sweeney Todd, to name four--but they agreed that he brought new intellectual ambition and artistic adventurousness to the musical theater. Secrest does a fine job of delineating Sondheim's career in terms of what it tells us about the state of American theater, as when he shifted to a partnership with writer-director James Lapine and worked in the nonprofit sector for such musicals as Sunday in the Park with George and Assassins. She also does well in selecting revealing quotes to depict the composer's struggle to accept his homosexuality and a rage at his overbearing mother so deep that he didn't even attend her funeral. Sondheim the man and Sondheim the visionary artist get nearly equal time in an intriguing portrait. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Secrest interviewed composer-lyricist Stephen Sondheim extensively for this full-scale biography, resulting in a portrait as subtle and sophisticated as its subject. Son of a wealthy New York City dress designer and manufacturer of German-Jewish extraction, Sondheim, an only child born in 1930, was emotionally neglected by his distant father, Herbert, and by his domineering mother, Janet (Foxy). Herbert left her when their son was 10 to live with his blonde, Catholic, Cuban lover, Alicia Bab?, whom he married after they had two sons. Oscar Hammerstein II became mentor and surrogate father to Sondheim, who grew up isolated, keeping people at a distance. Sondheim discusses with Secrest his 25 years of psychoanalysis, his homosexuality, his early stumbling career as actor and TV scriptwriter, and his working relationships with such pivotal figures in his life as producer Hal Prince and playwright-director Arthur Laurents. Biographer of Leonard Bernstein and Frank Lloyd Wright, Secrest has written a wonderful biography of an uncompromising musical dramatist who uses irony, wit and disillusion to probe painful emotions. Decked out with memorable photographs, her moving and perceptive portrait, full of Broadway lore, provides an incomparable peek into the genesis of such musicals as West Side Story, Gypsy, A Little Night Music and Passion. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Very interesting reading. I've read several books so far on Sondheim..one of which was on the making of Follies. I think this author took liberty with a heavy hand and repeated what the author wrote in the section of the book that discussed Follies. Other than that, I thought it was a very inciteful biography.

enjoyed all the background information in the beginning of the book that was about his childhood and how he was molded into who he is today. The end wasn't as good because it became an overview of the shows he had written rather than about his life, but the first half to two-thirds was excellent coverage of him growing up and seeing where he found success and challenge.

I am a huge fan of Mr. Sondheim and his work. I had the privilege of seeing the original Company in 1971 and a revival in 2007. I have also seen a Little Night Music on Broadway and loved Sweeney Todd. He is a true genius who had a rather sad time of it with an unloving mother. The book is very well done and I will be starting his two "Hat" books which I own, very soon.

I would have liked to know this was a reissue. However, having missed it the first time around, I thoroughly enjoyed it. It's not gossipy, but intimate and thorough about his early life and work. A "must read" for any Sondheim fan.

I found the perfect birthday gift for a friend who is a huge Sondheim devotee. A rare, first print edition of Meryle Secrest's Stephen Sondheim: a Life was in my hands within three days of placing the order. Now that's incredibly efficient service from a small business owner who truly cares about her customers. Thank you Titanic Treasures. I am deeply grateful.

I have read the biographies by Secrest of Richard Rodgers and Leonard Bernstein, and Secrest's portrait of Stephen Sondheim is a MUST for any serious student of American Musical Theatre. I hope you will enjoy it as much as I did!

Good biography. Printing a bit small

Very good. In interesting inside look as to his early life and influences.

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