



## One Man's Love Affair with Sweeney Todd

Bob McLaughlin

When I graduated from Fordham University in May 1979, my best graduation gift was a trip to the Tony Awards, courtesy of Sally Parry (my future wife). This was, at the time, the neatest-ever event of my life, and it still ranks pretty high. Not only did I learn that a great place to meet celebrities at an event like this is the men's room ("Hey! You're Bobby Morse!"), but I got to be present, very high up in the Shubert Theater's second balcony, as the evening turned into a celebration of my favorite new musical, *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. *Sweeney* took home the awards for Stephen Sondheim's glorious score, Hugh Wheeler's book, Harold Prince's direction, Len Cariou and Angela Lansbury's leading performances, plus sets and costumes and, of course, Best Musical. I was in heaven.

I don't know how many times I'd seen *Sweeney Todd* by then, but before it ended its run a year later, I'd seen it twelve times, including its very first preview and, later, twice in one day. I know this seems obsessive, but even then I was aware that, although I might see future productions, I'd never see it again on this scale—the set was a nineteenth-century iron foundry, hauled down from New England and reconstructed on the stage of the Uris Theater! The story is about a barber, Sweeney, who returns to London after having been transported to prison in Australia fifteen years before by an alarmingly lecherous judge who covets Sweeney's wife. Escaping from prison, Sweeney returns to England to take revenge on the judge and his slimy assistant, Beadle Bamford. When his plan fails, he goes mad and vows to kill indiscriminately. His neighbor, the amoral and commercially ambitious baker Mrs. Lovett, knows an opportunity when she sees one and suggests that they work together, using Sweeney's victims as ingredients for her meat pies. Act One curtain!

The macabre plot, with its sly commentary on a dog-eat-dog—no! man-eat-man!—society, was only one of the things that drew me back to the Uris again and again. The score, widely regarded as Sondheim's masterpiece, offers the beautiful ("Johanna"), the scary ("The Ballad of Sweeney Todd"), the hilarious ("A Little Priest"), and many other treasures. The book, despite its subject matter, is extremely entertaining. And the cast, led by Cariou and Lansbury, was brilliant. The show was delightful, rich, and deep, offering new things to see and hear at each performance I attended. I've seen few Broadway plays like it.

As I suspected, I've had the chance to see *Sweeney* many times since the initial Broadway production: a revelatory scaled-down production in a black-box theater with a small cast and no set, in

White River Junction, Vermont; a Broadway revival at the Circle in the Square Theater in 1989; the two versions that have been taped for television; and two very fine local productions, one at ISU, the other at IWU. I also look forward to seeing the current Broadway revival and the forthcoming big-screen version.



Best of all, after all these years of being a spectator, I've finally gotten the chance to perform in *Sweeney Todd*. I'm lucky enough to be included in the extremely talented cast director **Kathy Parrish** has put together for Community Players' upcoming production: **Joe Penrod** as Sweeney; **Cris Cristopher** as Mrs. Lovett; **Conor McGowan** as Anthony Hope, a sailor in love with Sweeney's daughter, Johanna, played by **Emily Richardson**; **Chuck Palm** as Beadle Bamford; **John Lieder** as Pirelli, a rival barber who abuses his simple-minded assistant, Tobias, played by **Brian Artman**; **Rebecca Marcotte** as an unfortunate Beggar Woman; **Jim Kalmbach** as asylum owner Jonas Fogg; and as various citizens of London and meat-pie filler, **Nathan Botoroff, Justin Palm, Tom Smith, Anita Corso, Connie Hargan, Tracy Hoogstra, Jennifer Rusk, and Heather Williams**. I get to play that alarmingly lecherous judge.

The set, designed by **Gary Schwartz**, uses multiple levels and extends to the left and right aprons in front of the proscenium. An orchestra "pit" has been designed into the center of the set. The orchestra, lead by **Mike Wallace**, will be visible, but will blend with the action.

*Sweeney Todd* is being produced by **Bruce Parrish**. **Dan Virtue** is lighting designer. **Rich** and **Carol Plotkin** are doing sound and properties design respectively. **Kathy Parrish** is pulling double-duty as Director and Costume Designer. **Elizabeth Parrish** is the stage manager and **Ellen Hagen** is the rehearsal accompanist.

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**COMMUNITY PLAYERS**  
Calendar

November- December, 2005

**Sweeney Todd**

Performances: Nov. 4-6, 10-13, 17-20, 2005  
Preview: Nov. 3

**Opening Weekend Dinner**

Chevy's Restaurant  
Saturday Nov. 5th 4:30 p.m.  
RSVP to Joann  
(hstry95@yahoo.com)  
by Thursday November 3rd

**Board Meeting**

Tuesday November 8 6 p.m.  
Community Players Theatre  
All members welcome.

**Deadwood Dick**

Auditions: Nov. 14-15, 2005  
Community Players Theatre

**Wicked**

Member trip to the  
Fox Theatre in St Louis  
Saturday, December 3 2:00 p.m.

**2006-2007 Season  
Announcement Party**

Members, guests,  
and donors only  
Be the first to hear the shows  
in the new season!  
Thursday, December 15th  
Community Players Theater  
Additional details TBA



Community Players  
210 Robinhood Lane  
Bloomington, IL 61701  
309-663-2121  
www.communityplayers.org

**Newsletter Committee**

Jim Kalmbach  
John Lieder  
Bob McLaughlin  
Joann Yant

Send comments and suggestions to  
lieder78@yahoo.com

We are looking for writers, artists,  
designers and story ideas. The  
deadline for the next issue is  
December 21, 2005.

**Deadwood Dick Auditions**



For the first time in over 40 years, Community Players will be staging a good old-fashioned, rootin' tootin' melodrama. Auditions for *Deadwood Dick*, will be Monday and Tuesday, November 14 and 15. Auditions will begin at 7:00 PM each night, but those auditioning are requested to arrive 10 – 20 minutes early to complete the audition form.

The play requires 18 adults, and includes many outrageous characters such as Calamity Jane, Wild Bill Hickock, Piano Annie, Chet Pussy (the bartender), Lily Blossom (a tender prairie flower), Pong Ping (a Chinese cook) and a host of miners and toughs. The play takes place in Calamity Jane's Man-Trap Saloon, sometime in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It proves to be great fun for audience and actors alike.

*Deadwood Dick or A Game of Gold*, will be directed by **Bruce Parrish**. **John Lieder** is the producer. For more information, contact John at [lieder78@yahoo.com](mailto:lieder78@yahoo.com) or 662-4080.



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**Deadwood Dick,  
THE  
PRINCE OF THE ROAD;  
THE SHACK RIDER OF THE BLACK HILLS**  
BY JAMES T. WOODMAN.  
IN THREE PARTS.  
PART I.

THE BLACK HILLS, between Cheyenne and the Black Hills, a trail led behind the a rocky hill. It was a trail that had been used for many years, and it was a trail that had been used for many years. It was a trail that had been used for many years, and it was a trail that had been used for many years.

And looking from several positions all the world could be seen, the scene was a picture of beauty. The hills were green and the sky was blue, and the water was clear and the air was fresh. It was a scene that was fit for a king, and it was a scene that was fit for a queen.

The hills were under the command of an old man, and he was a man of many years. He was a man of many years, and he was a man of many years. He was a man of many years, and he was a man of many years.



It was a scene that was fit for a king, and it was a scene that was fit for a queen. It was a scene that was fit for a king, and it was a scene that was fit for a queen. It was a scene that was fit for a king, and it was a scene that was fit for a queen.



# Board Spotlight

[Editor's note: This is the first in a series of articles highlighting positions on the Board of Governors.]

## Marketing Chair

Suppose Community Players was to produce the best show imaginable, with all the theatrical elements magically coming together to make the production worthy of a spot on Broadway. If no one came to see it, even at that level of excellence one could hardly consider the production to be a success. Clearly, proper marketing is vital to the success of each show and really to the success of any theatre organization. At Community Players, the responsibility for "getting the word out" falls on the shoulders of the Marketing Chair. Since 2003, that position has been ably filled by **Cathy Sutliff**.

The Bylaws list a dozen specific responsibilities for the Marketing Chair, including advertising in the news media, soliciting season ticket holders, coordinating advertising in the playbill, bidding for show logos, working with external groups such as the Chamber of Commerce, etc. When it all comes together, the season, and every show in the season, receives the maximum exposure that our budget dollars allow.

So, how does it all "come together"? As one can imagine, it takes considerable planning and organization. Sutliff states that it all begins shortly after the new season is announced. She first creates a calendar with deadlines for all the tasks that need to be accomplished for the season, along with marketing strategies for each individual production. The first task on her calendar is to solicit designs for the new show logos. After the logos have been approved by the Play Reading Committee, Sutliff then works with a designer to combine the logos with synopses of the shows (provided by the Play Reading Committee) to create the season brochure. The new brochure must be ready before the last show of the current season. It is then mailed to current season ticket holders and batches are sent to such organizations as the Visitors and Convention Bureau. While the brochures are being created, Sutliff works with another graphics designer to incorporate the logos into the show posters that are displayed at the front of the theatre. Posters for display in the lobby are created at this time as well.

Sutliff then secures paid playbill advertisements for the season.

Once this is all accomplished, Sutliff prepares special marketing for the first show of the next season. Press releases regarding auditions are faxed to all newspapers and radio stations in the area. An ad for auditions is created and run in *The Pantagraph* for three issues the week prior to auditions. The audition information is also posted on the website and e-mailed to other interested parties.

Next, the show is marketed through various media. Complimentary tickets are mailed to local radio stations. Information is sent to

Eastland Mall to be displayed on their marquee. Arrangements are made to have a rehearsal photo with show information included in *The Pantagraph* during tech week. Show information is sent to the local McDonalds to be included on their tray liner calendars. Depending on the show and the target audience, interviews may be arranged with radio stations and local access television shows. Occasionally, if the budget allows, television marketing will be procured. While working on all the media publicity, Sutliff also works with the producer of the show to incorporate show information with the advertisements to create the playbill.



*Cathy Sutliff, Community Players' Marketing Chair.*

When all this is finished, it is then about time to work on promoting auditions for the next production and the process starts all over.

The Marketing Chair is also responsible for promoting Community Players to the community at large through numerous events with external organizations such as the Visitors and Convention Bureau, the Chamber of Commerce, the Lions Club, PEERS and local merchants. Although Sutliff considers this aspect of the marketing position to be the most fun, it can also be the most time consuming and inconvenient, since many of these events take place during the workday. Consequently, she would like to get a group of persons together (a committee, if you will) to help her out. If you would be interested in working with Cathy on Marketing, please contact her at 828-7471 or at [clsutliff@verizon.net](mailto:clsutliff@verizon.net). She is specifically interested in getting help with coordinating community events.

—John Lieder



## Costume Sale Nets \$1200

On October 15, Players staged a very successful costume sale, raising \$1200. Thanks to the costume committee for all their hard work and for members of the cast of *Sweeney Todd* for helping with set up.

## A Note on Sweeney from a Sondheim Detractor

I'm a Rodgers and Hammerstein fan and I readily admit that Stephen Sondheim's musicals have never been among my favorites, although I consider a couple of his collaborations top echelon (*West Side Story*, *Gypsy*). I find many of his songs to be excessively repetitious, and it seems he makes his music difficult just for the sake of it being difficult.

However, rehearsing for the upcoming Community Players production of *Sweeney Todd* has given me a new appreciation for what Sondheim is able to accomplish dramatically and musically. An example of this is the song "Pretty Women". Sondheim placed this beautiful little waltz into an early climactic moment as the audience anticipates the murder of Todd's main nemesis. While Sweeney prepares to give the judge the ultimate in close shaves, they partake in your normal barbershop small talk via the song. As the tension builds, so does the tension in the music. It's something special, especially as performed by Players' Joe Penrod and Bob McLaughlin.

Similarly, the song "Not While I'm Around" is wonderfully tender, sung by the naive Toby to the amoral, but motherly, Mrs. Lovett as the plot thickens into its final climax. And, of course, the comic relief in the song "A Little Priest" (another waltz) in which Todd and Lovett discuss various ingredients for meat pies is pure genius.

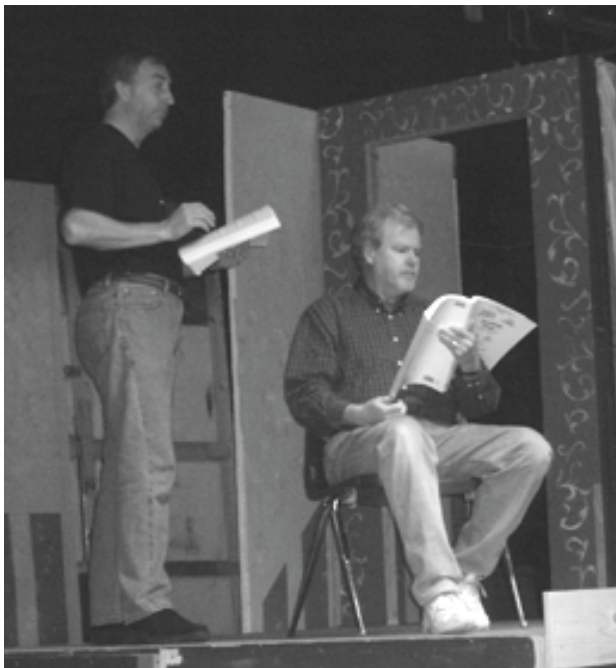
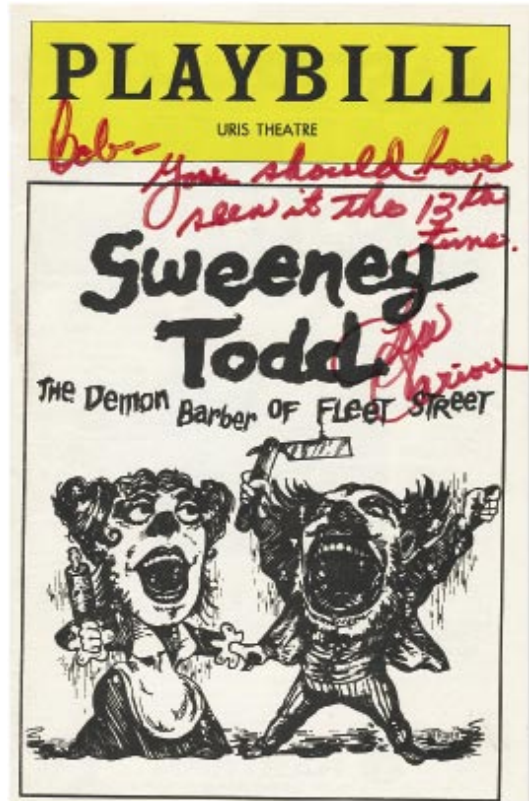
Okay, I'm won over. Working on this show, and especially the music, has been a truly rewarding experience and great fun. Perhaps my tastes just haven't been sophisticated enough.

Mr. Sondheim, I tip my hat to you!

—John Lieder

... *Sweeney Todd* continued from page 1

Thus my love affair with *Sweeney Todd* continues. Not long ago, I screwed up my courage and sent one of my old *Sweeney* Playbills to Len Cariou asking him to sign it. In my fan letter I sheepishly admitted that I'd seen the original production twelve times. The Playbill came back with a message in blood-red ink: "Bob, You should have seen it the 13<sup>th</sup> time. Len Cariou." You know—I should have.



Jor Penrod as Sweeney Todd and Bob McLaughlin as Judge Turpin rehearsing "Pretty Women."



Brian Artman as Tobias has had a little too much gin.

## Opening Weekend Dinner

John and I hosted the first Opening Weekend Dinner in September at Famous Dave's Barbecue. Our group was small but messy – I mean, merry (the ribs were messy). Sheri Scott talked about *Cheaper by the Dozen*, and John answered questions about the Board of Directors and about *Deadwood Dick*.

The *Sweeney Todd* Dinner will be at Chevy's, Saturday Nov. 5th 4:30 p.m. RSVP to Joann (hstry95@yahoo.com) by Thursday November 3rd

—Jean Lieder