



Book by  
**JAMES GOLDMAN**

Music and Lyrics by  
**STEPHEN SONDHEIM**

## EDUCATION RESOURCE

Produced originally by **Harold Prince**  
Orchestrations by **Jonathan Tunick**

By special arrangement with Cameron Mackintosh.  
Licensed exclusively by Music Theatre International (Australasia).

# CONTENTS

3	Cast
6	Creative Team
7	Synopsis
8	Stuart Maunder on <i>Follies</i>
10	<i>Follies</i> – The Musical
11	Stephen Sondheim
13	Musical Theatre
14	The Music of <i>Follies</i>
16	Choreography
21	Set and Costume Design
25	Glossary
26	References

This resource was collated and written by Ioanna Salmanidis for Victorian Opera.  
Thank you to Phoebe Briggs, Stuart Maunder, Yvette Lee and Roger Kirk for their contributions.  
Costume design renderings have been shared with the approval of Roger Kirk.

# CAST



**MARINA PRIOR**

Phyllis Rogers Stone



**ANTOINETTE HALLORAN**

Sally Durant Plummer



**ADAM MURPHY**

Benjamin Stone



**ALEXANDER LEWIS**

Buddy Plummer



**GERALDINE TURNER**

Carlotta Campion



**RHONDA BURCHMORE**

Stella Deems



**COLETTE MANN**

Emily Whitman



**GERALDENE MORROW**

Hattie Walker

## CAST CONTINUED



**EVELYN KRAPE**  
Solange La Fitte



**MERLYN QUAIFE**  
Heidi Schiller



**TAAO BUCHANAN**  
Young Phyllis



**MIA SIMONETTE**  
Young Sally



**JACK VAN STAVEREN**  
Young Ben



**JACOB STEEN**  
Young Buddy



**STEPHEN SMITH**  
Roscoe/Max Deems



**TOM BLAIR**  
Theodore Whitman



**HANS HENKELL**  
Dimitri Weismann



**NINA KORBE**  
Young Heidi

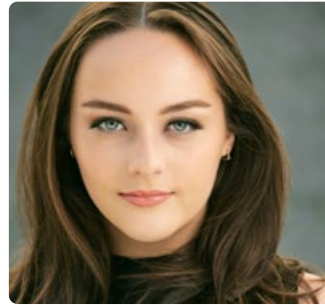
# ENSEMBLE



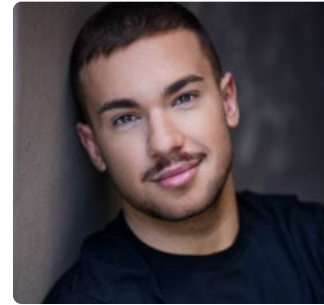
**JARED BRYAN**



**SIENNA EMBREY**



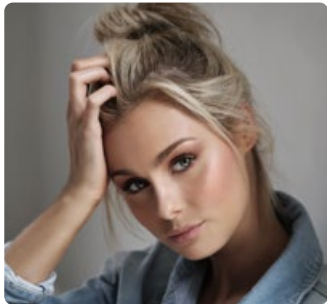
**MIA FENELON**



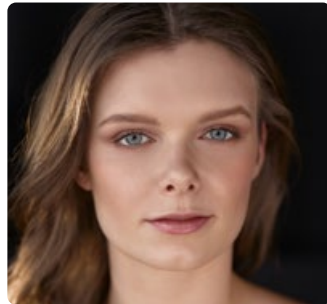
**MITCHELL FISTROVIC  
DOIDGE**



**MIKAELA JADE**



**PIP KELTIE**



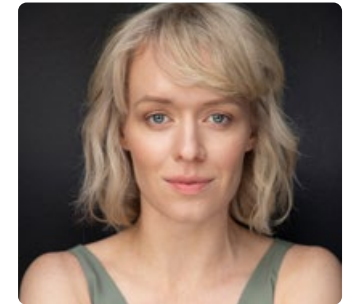
**EMILY LODGE**



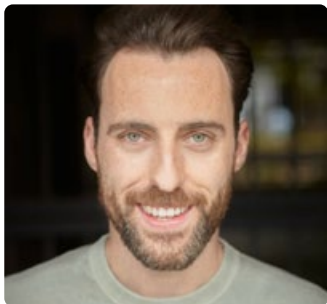
**CALLUM MARSHALL**



**JAMES MAXFIELD**



**KRISTINA MCNAMARA**



**MAX PATTERSON**



**MICHAEL RALPH**



**CARTER RICKARD**

# CREATIVE TEAM



**PHOEBE BRIGGS**

Musical Director



**STUART MAUNDER**

Director



**ROGER KIRK**

Set & Costume Designer



**YVETTE LEE**

Choreographer



**GAVAN SWIFT**

Lighting Designer



**SAMUEL MOXHAM**

Sound Designer



**LOUISA FITZGERALD**

Associate Designer

## SYNOPSIS

The story takes place in 1971. The Weismann Theatre, home to the Weismann Follies, is about to be torn down. Dimitri Weismann, the impresario who produced the shows, is giving a party on the stage of the theatre, and has invited all the living performers, along with their husbands and wives, to celebrate the nostalgia of the occasion.

During the course of the party, we meet them all, but the action chiefly involves two chorus girls from the 1941 Follies, Sally Durant and Phillis Rogers, who were best friends then and haven't seen each other since. They are escorted by their husbands, Buddy Plummer and Benjamin Stone, who courted them when they were in the show.

## STUART MAUNDER ON *FOLLIES*

One fateful day in 1977, Phil Scott — actor, singer, satirist, friend — lent me his double album of the current West End hit: *Side by Side* by Sondheim. I marvelled at the even then extraordinary output, from *West Side Story* to *Pacific Overtures*, from this giant of music theatre. And as wonderful and varied as every song was, the title most represented with the most melody, chutzpah and pain was the 1971 musical *Follies*.

I had just joined the Australian Opera as an assistant stage manager and, armed with a tour allowance, I haunted Readings in South Yarra, buying every original Broadway cast album of the available Sondheim shows. Save for meagre liner notes to guide me (no YouTube, no videos, no libretto — just vinyl, and a few photos on the sleeve), I listened and listened loud.

Songs that had captivated me in the four-hand piano accompaniment on *Side by Side* suddenly burst through the speakers. There was the vaudevillian bombast of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, the quirky head-bending logic of *Anyone Can Whistle*, the frenetic urban clamour of *Company*, and the elegant sophistication of *A Little Night Music*. But most striking was the haunting, theatrical *Follies*.

I will never forget putting the *Follies* LP on for the first time and experiencing the Prelude's thunderous timpani roll, dark, ghostly brass chords that morphed into a spidery, spectral theme. This was unlike anything in Sondheim's output — haunted, beautiful and full of exquisite pain and wonder.

Like most people who had not seen the 1971 original season of the show, I had no idea of the full force of *Follies* until I experienced the show in a full production. And that was a long time coming — London, 2018. Concert versions had showcased the entire score, reduced by half on the original cast album, but

these versions necessarily truncated James Goldman's acerbic and truthful book. And of course, the physical productions were minimal. These, often thrilling, occasions were licensed as *Follies in Concert*. But that's a different experience to the full show.

*Follies*, the show, is much greater than the sum of its parts. No musical is more informed by its every ingredient. A masterful blend of a revelatory score, showbiz spectacle and existential exploration, *Follies* is set against the backdrop of a reunion for former performers of a Ziegfeld *Follies*-style revue. It is a smash up of derelict theatre and fantasy world — bugle beads and tinsel and rubble. Here, themes of memory and regret force the characters to confront their past selves. The action shifts between present and past, the ghosts of their former lives emerging and retreating, echoing memories of lost dreams.

Central to the story are two couples: Sally and Buddy, Phyllis and Ben. Their stark contrast between youthful dreams and harsh realities of middle age serves as a metaphor for America's postwar decline and loss of innocence. The complexities of aging and the weight of memory resonate within the walls of this crumbling theatre in *Follies*, inviting audiences to confront their own ghosts.

In his first published review, 19-year-old Frank Rich (later, chief critic of the New York Times) wrote of the show's Boston try-out in 1971:

"*Follies* is a musical about the death of the musical and everything musicals represented for the people who saw and enjoyed them ... There is no getting around the fact that a large part of the chilling fascination of *Follies* is that its creators are in essence presenting their own funeral."



With the benefit of hindsight, a 'wake' is maybe a more apt description. In the 54 years since that first production, we can now acknowledge that *Follies* began an evolution of musicals into something altogether more sophisticated and nuanced. It is now a celebration of regret, of resilience, and of resignation.

There is no musical like *Follies*. The title, in every sense of the word, says it all: all is folly, nothing is what it seems to be, what it should be, what it could be, what we hope for, what we can hold on to. *Follies* challenges us to reckon with our lives and the choices we've made.

"Never look back," warns the old opera singer, Heidi, in the duet 'One more Kiss'. But no one listens.

**- Stuart Maunder, Director**



# FOLLIES – THE MUSICAL

Stephen Sondheim's *Follies* originally began as a murder mystery called *The Girl Upstairs*. When Harold Prince joined the production team, however, it became a somewhat surreal tribute to, and funeral for, the Ziegfeld musical theatre style of a past era.

Making its Broadway debut in 1971, *Follies* divided audiences and critics. It was successful in the sense that it received good reviews and featured a few hits in its score. Financially, however, it lost money and provided no return to its investors who had put in a combined US\$800,000 — then, one of the largest sums of money spent on a Broadway show.

*Follies* was promoted as a 'concept musical'. Rather than having a straightforward plot that unfolded chronologically, allowing its characters to develop and reach a happy ending, *Follies* was fragmented in its storytelling. It presented a collection of memories and events in no particular order, making the undoing of its main characters all the more pertinent. The conceptualistic nature of *Follies* presented opportunities for each member of the 1971 creative team to visualise the themes of the work as they understood them.

*Follies* illustrates the result of what can happen when one clings to a disillusioned version of the past — remembering only the good, while forgetting about what really happened. It is also a metaphor for the change in American culture in the 1970s. Harold Prince, the original production's producer and director, once stated: "*Follies* isn't about, will the guy get the girl? Or, will the boat arrive in the harbour on time? It's about the country [USA], marriage, affluence, the loss of spiritual standards."

Boris Aronson, who created the scenic design for the original production, understood *Follies* as "a metaphor for a disillusioned postmodern society, which resonated with moral and spiritual conflicts and contradictions". While for Sondheim, the central theme of *Follies*, was "the selective memory of nostalgia, which recalls only the good, but never the real".

These themes appear throughout *Follies* via several different methods. First, the very reason for their reunion is for a final hurrah before the theatre they all performed in as youths is knocked down and turned into a car park. The transition of theatre to carpark symbolises the quick progress taking shape in America at the time and its lack of consideration for, and preservation of, American cultural history.

Second, the loss of spiritual standards, as well as the moral and spiritual conflicts and contradictions that Aronson saw in *Follies*, becomes apparent as the characters trump their successes in the last 30 years to their former colleagues when, really, they're miserable. But societal expectations around airing dirty laundry won't allow them to express or act upon their true feelings.

Finally, Sondheim sees the central theme as the selective memory of nostalgia, which unfolds before the audience as Sally, Ben, Buddy and Phyllis become undone. They each deny remembering the actions that led to their misery, all the while the ghosts of their younger selves play out the events as they really happened. It leaves everyone to wonder how they lasted so long.

## **FOLLIES – THE MUSICAL, CONTINUED**

Sondheim's lyrics and music heighten these themes by using a variety of styles. For example, the book numbers, which the characters sing as their middle-aged selves, use a modern style of music to the 1970s. This makes the statement that music, too, has progressed. On the other hand, the pastiche numbers – in which the characters recalled their youthful fantasies – captures the essence of the greats who came before, such as Cole Porter and George Gershwin, as a tribute to Sondheim's musical theatre roots. When speaking on the score, Sondheim explains: "there are two kinds of music going on in *Follies*. I was splitting the attention, but that was the idea. It's a schizophrenic piece and it's supposed to be."

The true genius of Sondheim, however, is how he pairs his music to lyrics. While the audience is getting nostalgic listening to music that speaks to theatre and culture of a past time, his lyrics are full of irony and satire, so the audience is simultaneously teased about their disillusionments around love. What musical theatre of the past encouraged everyone to dream of having, reality proves that is really is just that: a dream.

## **STEPHEN SONDHEIM (1930 – 2021)**

Stephen Sondheim was an American composer and lyricist who paved the path for a new style of Broadway musical theatre. He set language that was witty and direct to music scores that illustrated a deep understanding of an array of styles. His best-known works include *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962), *Company* (1970), *Follies* (1971), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *Pacific Overtures* (1976), *Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1979), *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984) and *Into the Woods* (1987).

Sondheim studied piano and organ as a boy and displayed a love for musical theatre from an early age, which continued throughout his education. At age 12, Sondheim found himself as the neighbour of Oscar Hammerstein II (of Rodgers and Hammerstein fame). He asked the famous librettist to look over his first stage work, *By George*, written at age 15 for a high-school production. Hammerstein's earnest review of this work resulted in a four-year mentorship that would forge Sondheim's uniquely innovative style. When speaking on the influence Hammerstein had on his writing, Sondheim states:

*"Majorly, he taught me to write for myself, because I wrote songs that imitated him. He said, 'No, write what you feel'. You know, he said, 'This is what I feel about, you know, love and humanity. You write what you feel'. And that was important, because you think that would be natural, but it's not. It's not, particularly, if you think highly of the person that you're imitating, which I did... I was writing a musical right after I got out of college, and it took me the time it took to write that musical [to be able to write what I feel]. The musical ended up not very good, but I had learned my lesson. And it sounded like me, which wasn't necessarily the best thing."*

He went on to study music at Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts, during which he continued to write college shows. He graduated in 1950 and received the Hutchinson Prize for composition, which allowed him to study with the American composer and music theorist Milton Babbitt in New York City.

He began his professional career writing scripts for television shows such as *Topper* and *The Last Word*, as well as incidental music for the Broadway musical *Girls of Summer*. But it was his collaboration with Leonard Bernstein on *West Side Story*, where he was the lyricist, that launched his career on Broadway.

Sondheim's continual success on Broadway was a result of his ability to cross genres in music and theatre and to choose subjects that explored relevant issues of contemporary life, all while simultaneously challenging the form of the American musical. He had an innate gift to merge his lyrics with a style of music that developed the depth of his characters and, consequently, made them more relatable to modern-day audiences.

His accolades speak to his level of success: an Academy Award; eight Tony Awards, including the Special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Theatre; multiple Grammy Awards and Drama Desk Awards; and a Pulitzer Prize.

Sondheim continued writing up until his death in 2021, at age 91. He has left an incredible legacy of works behind that will continue to be loved by many, and he will be remembered as the most influential musical theatre creator of his generation, and those to come.



*Image 1: Stephen Sondheim (far left) with conductor and composer Leonard Bernstein, lyricist and playwright Adolph Green and actor Roddy McDowall in June 1962.*

# MUSICAL THEATRE

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

The genre of musical theatre was established in the mid-1800s in New York City, but there are elements of the style in forms that came before it, such as comic opera, burlesque, vaudeville and pantomime.

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

In 1927, Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein, two key composers of the genre, led musical theatre into a new stylistic period with their work *Show Boat* by integrating music within the narrative of

the story. In *Show Boat*, they employed American folk melodies and spirituals to American themes.

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

Musical theatre works are often adaptations of literature, cinema, mythology and recorded histories. In fact, most popular works on Broadway or in the West End are those with original stories that already had a popular following.

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

# THE MUSIC OF *FOLLIES*

**An interview with Musical Director, Phoebe Briggs.**

**Have you ever seen or worked on a production of *Follies* before?**

I saw a concert version of *Follies* at the Melbourne Recital Centre in 2016 and have seen a few productions online, such as the documentary of the Broadway concert performance and the production from the English National Theatre. But I have never worked on the show before.

**What are some of your favourite songs from *Follies*?**

I have always loved 'Broadway Baby' (a hopeful showgirl's dream of being on the stage...) and 'Losing My Mind' (a stunning ballad). I also really love the end of the Prologue, going into the Overture, where we jump from an eerie waltz that finishes with a timpani roll. This leads us into an upbeat swing number as the party scene begins.

**Can you please describe the orchestration in *Follies*?**

The orchestration consists of five reed players who cover a huge range of instruments between them: piccolo, flute, alto flute, E-flat clarinet, B-flat clarinet, soprano saxophone, alto saxophone, bass clarinet, tenor saxophone, oboe, cor anglais, bassoon and baritone saxophone. There is also a French Horn, three trumpets, three trombones (two tenor and one bass), percussion, drum kit, timpani, acoustic guitar, harp, piano/celesta and strings (four violins, two violas, two cellos, one double bass).

A stage band is also scored, which can be played in the pit. This consists of piano, trumpet, bass and drums.

**What role does music play to capture the follies of each character – both as their middle-aged selves and as the ghosts of their pasts?**

Sondheim writes in a pastiche style – for example, in a 1920s-1930s style for the ghosts ('You're Gonna Love Tomorrow'), the torch song for Sally ('Losing My Mind'), and almost a pantomime style for Buddy ('Buddy's Blues'). He writes a more modern style for the 'book' songs of the present-day characters as they progress through the night's reunion.

**What is it about Sondheim's music that made him such an innovator in the world of musical theatre?**

He had an incredible way of writing different styles and genres. In *Follies*, for example, he uses 1920s and 1930s styles such as swing, vaudeville and ballad to enhance scenes. Every musical he wrote was unique, but there is a particular 'Sondheim sound' that characterises his work. I think it is his use of harmony and rhythm, as well as his clever lyrics, which make his style so inventive and original. This, in turn, challenged traditional music theatre audiences and expanded the genre.

The subject matter he used was also original. For example, the musical thriller *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*; the setting of an old movie for *A Little Night Music*; and a story of assassinated American presidents and their killers in *Assassins*.

**Can you explain your role as Musical Director, and how it changes throughout the rehearsal to performance?**

As Musical Director, I first work with the singers individually to help them learn their roles musically. Then, once production rehearsals start, I work with the director and the choreographer,

conducting the rehearsals each day to make our version of the work. These rehearsals are with piano.

Once the weeks of production rehearsals are complete, I then rehearse with the orchestra. In this case, with Orchestra Victoria, so we will do our orchestral readings at their studios. Then we move to the theatre (the Palais) and we have a rehearsal called the 'Sitzprobe', which is where the cast sings with the orchestra for the first time.

Next come the stage calls. The piano dress rehearsals are first, with the piano in the pit and all the stage elements, such as costume, lighting and sound. These are the director's rehearsals, so I conduct from the pit to keep things on track musically while stage moves and technical elements are worked through.

Then come the stage orchestrals. This is when the orchestra joins us again and all technical elements are included. From here on, I conduct the orchestra in the pit.

The final rehearsal is the 'General', which is ideally a full run of the whole show.

Then comes opening night and the run of performances.

**What does your preparation entail? Do you research the work or styles of music when preparing to conduct a musical theatre production?**

Yes, absolutely. I try to listen and watch as many versions of the show as possible, hopefully including the original Broadway production if it is available. It also helps to listen to other works by the same composer and to read articles and documents about the show, the composer, the director, the show's history or the way it was originally assembled.

Often shows change a lot as they are created in rehearsal, so it is fascinating to read about that process and the reasons for including or excluding certain musical numbers or text. If you're lucky, there are documentaries, firsthand interviews or writing about this process available.

**What does your relationship with the choreographer look like when preparing to stage a musical theatre production?**

I love watching a choreographer create and rehearse a dance routine. A musical director and choreographer work closely together as the music has to be the right speed consistently, so that the dancers feel comfortable.

**You're an amazing pianist, repetiteur and musical director with an astounding ability to play across musical styles and genres with ease. Where did your love of music come from and how did it lead you to such an amazing career?**

Well, that's very kind of you to say! I come from a family that loves music of all sorts, so I was pretty lucky to be listening to a wide range of styles as a child.

My teachers were also encouraging, and I was always involved with ensembles and choirs at school. I loved accompanying people on the piano, so I sort of fell into opera when someone suggested I should audition for a job as repetiteur (opera pianist) for Victoria State Opera's (VSO) schools company.

That led to mainstage opera with the VSO, then Opera Australia and now Victorian Opera. Along the way, I played for lots of commercial theatre as well, working as a repetiteur or deputy player in pit bands. So, it's been a real mix of styles all along.

# CHOREOGRAPHY

In the interview below, Yvette Lee talks about her role as choreographer for Victorian Opera's *Follies* as well as her creative process, the importance of collaboration and how she became such a versatile artist.

**I understand you come from a long line of entertainers. What was it like to grow up in that environment?**

It was so lovely to grow up in that environment. I grew up around singing and dancing. It was always very lively and positive and, as I often say, I always thought that everybody grew up in those environments and that everybody danced. It wasn't until I went to primary school that I realised it wasn't everybody's life.

**How did it influence what you went on to do?**

From my earliest memories I always knew I was going to be a dancer. I know some of that was ingrained in me, but I also just had this deep, deep passion for it at the same time. I had a real love for music, which came from my father because he was a musician. My mother was a dancer, and so my love of dance came from her. The two passions were ingrained in me, and it wasn't really like I was forced to do it. I had a deep love and connection to it from a very, very young age.

**Are you a fan of Stephen Sondheim's works? Have you seen a production of *Follies* before?**

I have not seen a production of *Follies* in the flesh before. I've actually just seen a lot of work on the internet. There have been so many different productions of *Follies* and they're all vastly different.

I'm a fan of Sondheim's work, but never have had the opportunity to create for it. It's a totally different experience because the music is just so intricate. I work so much with different rhythm patterns, and the music style is quite different to what I'm used to. So, I'm finding the preparation process really interesting. I'm very excited about it.

**What does a choreographer do in a musical theatre production? Can you talk about your role?**

The role of the choreographer is to assist the show's storytelling. The choreographer is there as a vehicle to bring the storyline to life: musically and visually. So, the main role of the choreographer within a musical is very different to when you're preparing a dance for entertainment. In a musical, while that entertainment element is there, it's actually not the first thing. The first thing a choreographer should be doing is identifying what the main part of the story is that needs to be told and how that gets executed via movement... and to be very, very sure the movement isn't distracting from the storytelling.

**What are some of the styles of dance we'll see in this production?**

*Follies* is so exciting because there are many different styles. It begins with 'Beautiful Girls' from the 1930s, then there's partner dancing in 'Waiting for the Girls Upstairs' and 'Who's that Woman?', which is an amazingly technical tap routine. And 'The Story of Lucy and Jessie' is a strongly executed, 1970s style, jazz routine. The actual genres I get to play around with are great and exciting, because everything is not locked into one genre, we jump from the past to the present.



### **It must get your brain going.**

Yes! It's also about getting the research right as well. You want people who have experienced coming through those eras to watch it and get a sense of nostalgia because they're seeing something familiar. That's why I always try to do the right research on the eras, just to make sure we're portraying them properly.

### **Can you talk through the process of preparing for a work that has set choreography, what's involved?**

The very first thing I'll do is read the script because I want to make sure I understand the story. Sometimes when you listen to the soundtrack, you can get so carried away with the music, because it's so beautiful, that you're not really locking into the actual story. So, I read the words, figure out the relationships, and I make sure I have a real understanding of the characters, the story and the story arcs.

Then, I'll listen to the soundtrack. I break down each song so I have the lyrics, and then I write out the counts, and write out what I can hear within the orchestration. I bounce back to how I believe the movement can assist the storytelling in terms of the rhythm patterns and lyrics. Then, I work out how to create movement complementing both those things.

### **So, are you creating new steps for this production?**

I am.

### **I thought it was a choreography that was created for an original production that you're then recreating for Victorian Opera's production.**

No, so we are actually reworking the show in a new format for

Victorian Opera, which is so exciting because, as I say, all of the past productions have been so incredibly magical. We're really excited that we get the opportunity to develop a new work here.

### **So, what do you do once you've got all that sorted and how does it then move into the rehearsal room?**

Before I've even put one step together, I create a whole bunch of era mood boards. I get all the imagery from the eras about the shapes of how people moved in, for instance the 1920s, 1930s or 1960s, and I put them up all over my house. I just keep feeding all the imagery of the eras into my brain and, eventually, once I get into the studio, I feel like I'm armed with all the information I need in terms of storytelling, music patterns and eras.

Once I get into the studio, I workshop the choreography on the cast. I want to come in prepared with the story I want to tell, but I don't like to pre-prepare a lot of the choreography. I like to do that on the actors' bodies because I feel like you get the best result when you're choreographing and manipulating on someone's individuality. I don't want to come in and be prescribed, and say, 'this is exactly what it is', because the actors also have so much to offer.

The actors have a lot of ideas about who they think the character is, so it becomes a real collaborative process. I feel like you get the best out of the actor when they are working with you, as opposed to just being told what to do.

**How will we see the storytelling of each number play out in the choreography?**

Hopefully very well! It's a good question because I think it's a really fine line in musicals to not be so overpowering with the choreography that it detracts from the storytelling. A lot of the time I have to refine it and refine it to make sure I'm getting the right balance of entertainment and storytelling at the same time. It really takes a moment to find.

But look, Stuart [Maunder] is an amazing director, one of the best directors in our country. In between his direction and the way I implement movement, I think you will see that within each number, the choreography guides you through the story.

**If you're a dance student, what would you take from the choreography in this production to apply to your own practise?**

I think the versatility of the performers is the most important thing to note for dance students. The ensemble cast have to cover so many different genres, eras and styles. We put them through their paces in the auditions and they had to act, do 1960s jazz, do 1920s showgirls, do 1940s tap and more. There are so many different elements they had to cover, showing why it's important for dance students to be versatile and to train in every style.

It doesn't necessarily mean you have to be the master of every style, it just means you have to have extensive knowledge and understand that dance isn't just one thing. Dance is many things.

**You're one of six members of the creative team for this production of *Follies*. How do you work with the other members of the creative team, and when does that collaboration begin?**

That's led by the amazing Stuart Maunder, our incredible director. He is such an amazing collaborator and it's why I love working with him. He's also got the incredible Roger Kirk in designing these costumes, which I don't think this country has ever seen anything like this before. Oh my goodness, they are something special!

The collaboration really has to begin early because as a creative team, we have to really understand Stuart's vision and the way he wants the story told. The most important thing I've learned about working with creative teams is that collaboration is everything. It can't be six people off doing their version of the show they think should be done. Stuart has such an amazing ability to harness a team and make sure we all understand that we're all telling the same story. It's working with the costumes, it's working with the lighting, and every department is just as important as the next.

As long as we're working together on the same trajectory, I think we're going to have a really amazing show.

**I wonder at the relationship between you and the musical director and having a live orchestra and dancing to a live orchestra. There would be a little bit of work that goes into that.**

Oh my goodness! Phoebe [Briggs] is absolutely amazing. Wow! Watching her play this music. Obviously, the music and the dance, they go hand in hand, so Phoebe and I have already started collaborating on bits and pieces of the show that, sonically, we're able to adjust.

**Can you give an example of that how you've worked with Phoebe. Is there a particular number that you've had to work through?**

Well, with 'Who's that Woman?', it's been about adjusting tempos because we're going to be working with tap dancing. We never change the score, but Phoebe has the ability to adjust sections. For us, it will mainly be the tempo because those girls will be singing and they'll be tapping.

We have the main cast and the ensemble cast on stage together, and we have to be telling various stories between them. So the music and the dance really has to work together.

**You're an incredibly versatile artist, not only on and off the stage, but also across artistic mediums. How did you expand into these different artistic areas?**

That's a good question. I was often told by senior people in my life that you must find one thing you're good at and become the master of that and stick to it. I just absolutely repel that theory, because I feel like, in this life, you can find many things you're good at.

I often think people can limit you to do just one thing and, therefore, you limit yourself to one thing. I just don't believe that should be the case. Everybody is really good at a lot of things and it's possible to branch off into different areas. I don't like the phrase, 'you've pivoted'. It's not a pivot, you're just finding something else you're good at doing as well.

I love choreography and I love direction and I love producing and I love camera directing and I love assisting with lighting. There are so many things in this industry I've loved, and so I've just tried to learn from people who are excelling in that area.

I enjoy being called a creative because I love doing different creative roles.

I think it's really important to encourage people, and I try to encourage the kids and dance students I work with. I tell them to learn everything when they're on jobs, look at what other people are doing around the room and talk to them, ask them questions. Even when working as a choreographer on TV shows, I'd always be talking to the tech team or the lighting team and all the screen content team. I work out what everyone's job is and I figure out what elements of that I like.

I think that in this lifetime, there are so many opportunities that you shouldn't ever limit yourself to being one thing.

**Do you find that understanding what other people do in their roles then also lends into your choreography and how you create things?**

Absolutely. I work so closely with lighting designers because they are so important in assisting the choreography. Sometimes it's more important than the choreography, because the lighting is what's guiding the audience's eye. You can have the most incredible piece of choreography, but if it's lit wrong or if it's too dark, you're going to lose the audience.

Lighting designers really need to be the choreographer's best friend. I only learned that by trying to learn what they do as a job, and then working out how to work with them because it has to be collaborative. So yes, learning what the other departments do has really changed the way I work as a choreographer.

**Finally, what advice, if any, would you give to a young person who wants to do what you do?**

My advice to them would definitely be what I said before. Take any chance you get to talk to people within the industry and to learn from them. Take any experience in the room that you can get working with choreographers or working backstage. Even if your aim is to be a choreographer and you can't get a role with a specific person, you still should be in the room.

I'm still learning things from so many people and, each year, I find somebody doing something I would love to eventually be doing, and I try to learn from them. If you understand your amazing capacity to learn, and you can identify the people you would like a similar career to, or do the same things as, it's important to try to look on.

With dance students, my advice is to continue training, and to believe there's a place for everybody in this industry. There really is. You've just got to identify what you love and you've got to follow your dreams.

Another thing for students is not to feel overwhelmed. I think it can feel like the industry is just so vast and so big, and it can feel overwhelming. But you just have to start with yourself and identify what it is you love and stay on that path. I've seen it time and time again where people often get told what they should love. But I think people have to firstly figure that out for themselves. You can't really be told what the right place is in the industry for you, you've got to find it yourself.

# SET AND COSTUME DESIGN

Set and Costume Designer for Victorian Opera's *Follies*, Roger Kirk, discusses his role and how he works with other members of the creative team in the interview below. He also talks through his designs for the production, the many jobs he has had throughout his career, and what it was like to win a Tony Award.

## Can you explain the role of a set and costume designer?

A set and costume designer gives the play its atmosphere, whether it's set in a theatre or a motel room.

It's the same with the costumes: if the performer is meant to be a beggar woman, then you need to put her in rags, not in a suit. You're helping tell the story through the environment you're making with the set, and the characters in their costumes.

## Does your role differ when you design for different genres? For example, musical theatre, opera, television?

Not really — you're helping create characters and atmospheres, whether it's a realistic, period thing, or whether it's a modern piece. As I always say, the designer's job is to help the actor create the character. So, if they don't feel comfortable in what you put them in, they can't really do their job; they don't feel they're portraying the character the way they want to.

It's rare that we haven't been on the same wavelength. But in some cases they find it hard to grasp where they're placing that character, such as when the show is a modern interpretation of something and they want to do it in a modern costume instead of a period costume.

## How does your role work with others in the creative team?

That's the thing about any production, whether it be film, stage, TV, and whether it's opera or a play: the team has to be cohesive. Everyone has to get on and that's what's really good about working with Stuart Maunder. I've worked with him for over 35 years. He knows what I do, and I know what he's going to do.

The more things you do with a director or a lighting designer, the more shorthand you learn. It makes the process faster and you're not having to justify things. It's important to be on the same wavelength before you start.

## Can you talk us through your design process? Where do you begin and how do you get to the end design?

You really have to do a lot of research, especially if you're doing a period piece.

For example, if it's meant to be set in the 1920s or 1930s, then you've got to start at what people wore during that time. Even if you're doing a modern version of a period piece, you still need to go back to where it all started — you still need to find what people wore in the 1930s, and then find out what would look a bit like that in modern times.

You can't do any play, I don't think, without doing some sort of research, whether it be a musical or an opera. You need to do research no matter how you are going to attack it. You are going to attack it. I think people forget how important that is and how much time it takes.

### How long would you anticipate the process to take overall including that research?

It probably takes you about a couple of months to churn out a set and costumes for a show. You've got to talk to the director and everybody on the creative team about how you want to approach it and then you start to do the research. Then, depending on the venue, and if it's got to go to multiple venues, you need to check floor plans. You design the set to fit the first venue, but it needs to fit other venues as well. There's quite a lot involved before you actually sit down and look.

For instance, I started *Follies* probably six months earlier, but Stuart really hadn't pressed the button. So I'd already done a lot of research and drawings. Then when he cast it, I had to adapt it to the cast he'd chosen for those characters. We got Rhonda Burchmore, for instance, so what I might have designed for that character [Stella Deems] wasn't going to suit her, so I adapted it.

With the set, because they pressed the button very late, I had to design it quite quickly to get it costed and then start building. Some big opera companies in Europe, and even Opera Australia, often want the designs 12 months ahead of when it goes on stage. But I've done shows on Broadway where I'd gone to America, sat in a room for a month and designed the show and then left. Then we'd go back to get it together and put it up. So it's horses for courses.

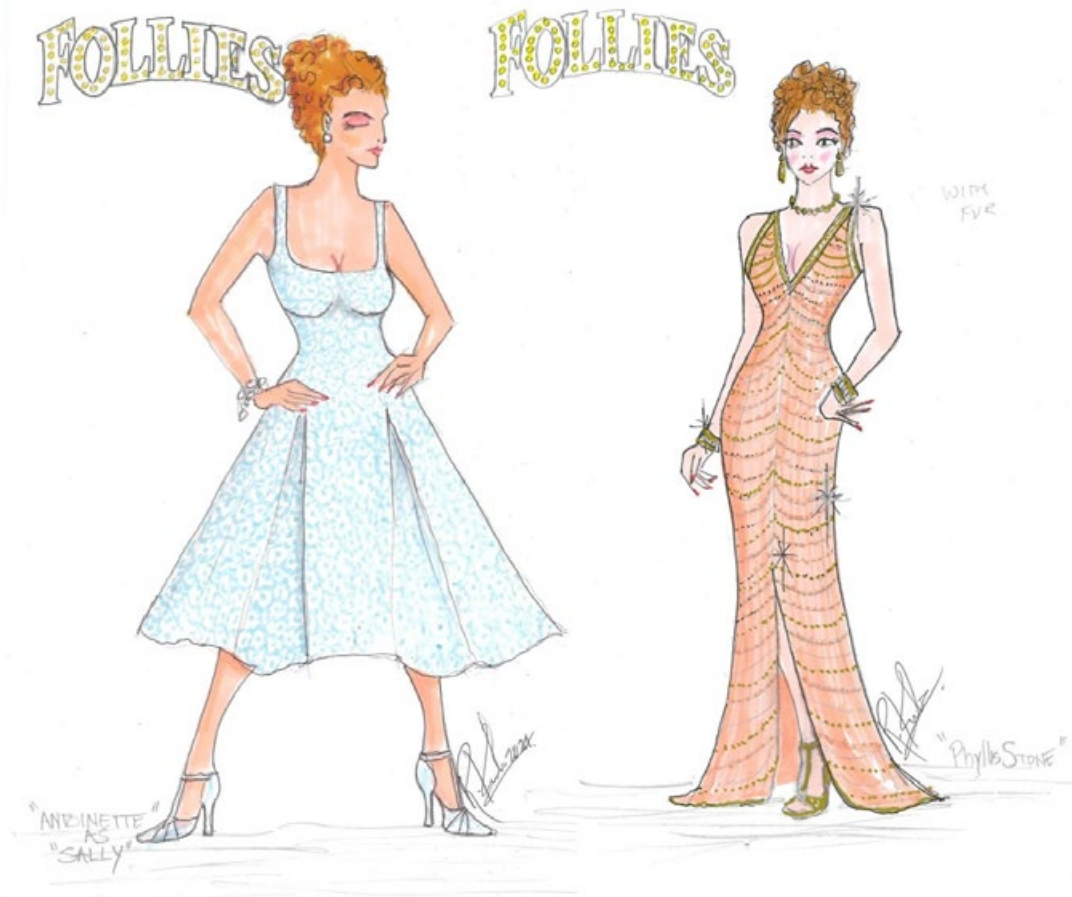
### Have you ever seen a fully staged production of *Follies*?

Yes, I have. I saw the London production in the 1980s. I'm not sure what date it was, but it was by Cameron Mackintosh and had Eartha Kitt singing 'I'm Still Here'. I mean she hardly lifts a finger but she's riveting. And you believed every word she said. It was very amazing.

### Tell us about your costume designs for *Follies*.

*Follies* is probably a designer's dream, because you're not only designing characters who had been showgirls in their day, you also get to design characters who are ghosts of the showgirls.

It's a sort of *Follies* within the *Follies* and about creating a spectacle – you don't often get that sort of opportunity at all. The set is meant to be an old theatre that's starting to be pulled down to make way for a car park, and the characters are having a party in this ruined theatre. The Palais [Theatre] is good place for this, because it's an old theatre, too.



**How have design trends changed over your career? Do you think the design approach when *Follies* debuted in 1971 would be very different to 2025 and how so?**

I think style of scenery has changed, which you can see when you look back to set designs from the 1930s and 1940s and compare them to how it's done today. Even with costumes, there are certain things to consider when you're recreating a costume now. People's body shapes are different, too.

You can often pinpoint when costumes were designed, because it still has a fashion element in it. For example, you may be creating a period hairstyle, but it still has an influence of the day.

**What are some of the key differences between designing for a dancer and a singer?**

Dance costumes are totally different, because you might have to give a look of a 1920s up-and-down dress, but the cast has to dance in it. So you've got to cut them in a way that, when they stand still, the dress is still hanging straight. They've also got panels in them at the back or down the sides, so when the performer is dancing, the dresses can be thrown over shoulders or be turned on their head. Dance costumes are really particular in that way, and you learn the tricks of that as you go.

**Can you tell us about your career as a designer? What made you become a designer and how did you get into it?**

My family was very interested in theatre. I had two brothers and an elder sister, and we were always taken to pantomimes when we were kids. When we got older, my mother and my grandmother would take us to musicals.

Even at school, we were taken to see Shakespeare, and to the Sydney Symphony Orchestra where you'd hear an explanation of everyone's role, what they played, and how conductor pulls it all together.

So, I guess I had a background in going to the theatre. I was intrigued by the scenery and the world they created. As a kid, it was a magic. And I wanted to learn how to create that magic.

When I left school, I got a job as a stagehand at Channel 7. I then moved to England and worked backstage in the West End doing props, operating the fly, and had a great time doing all those sorts of things backstage. When I came back, I got a job as a stagehand at Channel 2 in Sydney. From there, I eventually became a designer. My first job as a designer was *The Norman Gunston Show*, which I took over.

My next break was designing *The Marcia Hines Show*. The Head of Design at the time was meant to design the show, but had booked flights to England and I said, "put my name on it". He said, "I can't as I've got other senior designers here who aren't busy, I need to give them the job". And I said again, "put my name on it". He did, and I got the show. That took my career off.

I was working on *The Marcia Hines Show* with Ross Coleman as the choreographer. Ross and director Richard Wherrett were going to do *Chicago*, and it was perhaps the first time a Broadway musical was allowed to have new design and direction. I asked Ross to tell Richard that I'd love to do the costumes (I knew Brian Thomson was already doing the set). Richard gave me the job as the costume designer, and that set my career off as a theatre designer. On *Chicago*, I worked with Geraldine Turner for the first time as well as Nancy Hayes, and Judi Connelli. It was fantastic.

Brian and I both did *The King and I* in Australia. That went to America and kicked off my international career.

### What are the highlights of your career?

One of the highlights was *The King and I*. We did it in New York first, then it went to London, I did a version of it in Canada and it went to many other places. I won the Tony for that, so it was probably one of my biggest shows.

Then I did *42nd Street* in New York, which I was nominated again for a Tony Award. I also did that in London, Stuttgart, many places. I did a ballet with Graham Murphy at Munich Opera House, that was fabulous. Then they asked me back to do another ballet.

I've done *Whistle Down the Wind*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, lots of Andrew Lloyd Webber shows. I've had a bit of a charmed career.

### How did it feel to win the Tony Award?

Well, I guess it was like a dream come true. I remember arriving in New York and Brian Thomson, who had designed the sets, and I were staying in the same hotel. When we met at the bar, he had newspapers that had Tony Award tips for who was going to win, and we were both on there. That gave us goosebumps.

I had to pinch myself, how had this happened? But I guess I was given the opportunity. And nearly all the people I worked with treated me like they treated any other. They were really good to me, and I was very lucky I had that sort of support.

### If you were to give one piece of advice to a student interested in pursuing a career as a designer, what would you say?

If you don't give up, if it's something you want to do and you pursue it, then you get rewarded. It's difficult, but you can't give up. And if you're in the right spot at the right time, then the doors open.





# GLOSSARY

**Arrangement** – In music, a reconceptualization of a previously composed work.

**Baton** – A white stick used by conductors to conduct with, allowing the conductor greater visibility.

**Beat** – The regular pulse of the music.

**Book** – The spoken dialogue in a musical theatre production that often informs the plot.

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

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

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

**Chutzpah** – Extreme self-confidence or nerve. **Andante**: translates

**Composer** – The person who writes the music.

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

**Designer** – The person who designs the overall look of the production, including the sets, costumes, props and lighting.

**Director** – The person who controls the artistic and dramatic aspects of the production, realising the conceptual and interpretation of the work.

**Ensemble** – A group of people who perform together.

**General rehearsal** – Often the final rehearsal of all the component parts of the production in full costume.

**Harmony** – The structure of chords in a musical composition that contrasts to the main melody line.

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

**Orchestration** – The use of instruments within an orchestra in the writing of a composition.

**Overture** – An instrumental composition to introduce an opera or musical theatre work.

**Pantomime** – A form of theatrical entertainment, mainly for children, which involves music, topical jokes and slapstick comedy, and is based on a fairy tale or nursery rhyme.

**Pit** – Also known as the orchestra pit, a section under the stage in which the orchestra perform from during a performance.

**Principal** – One of the main characters.

**Pulse** – The underlying beat of a piece of music.

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

**Rhythm** – The pattern of notes of different length in the music.

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

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

**Tempo** – The speed of a composition.

**Vaudeville** – A type of entertainment that includes humorous performances and variety shows.

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

**Ziegfeld** – United States theatrical producer noted for a series of extravagant revues known as the Ziegfeld Follies.

# REFERENCES

## Websites

Broadway Direct (2024). A Complete Roundup of every Sondheim Musical. Retrieved from <https://broadwaydirect.com/a-complete-roundup-of-every-sondheim-musical/>.

Broadway: The American Musical Online (1998). Stephen Sondheim. Retrieved from <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/broadway/stars/stephen-sondheim/>.

Music Theatre International (2012). *Follies*. Retrieved from <https://www.mtishows.com.au/follies>.

New World Encyclopedia (2018). Musical Theatre. Retrieved from [https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Musical\\_Theater](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Musical_Theater).

Pender, R (2019). *Follies*. Retrieved from <https://everythingsondheim.org/follies/>.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (1998). Musical. Narrative Genre. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/art/musical>.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2024). Stephen Sondheim American composer and lyricist. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Stephen-Sondheim>.

The Late Show with Stephen Colbert (2021). A Tribute To Stephen Sondheim - Extended Interview With Stephen Colbert. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fyXRnmxfTXA&ab\\_channel=TheLateShowwithStephenColbert](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fyXRnmxfTXA&ab_channel=TheLateShowwithStephenColbert).

The Stephen Sondheim Society (2024). About Stephen Sondheim. Retrieved from <https://www.sondheimsociety.com/stephen-sondheim>.

## Publications

McEntee, A (1994). 'The Funeral of "*Follies*": Stephen Sondheim and the Razing of American Musical Theater' from *Ars Lyrica*, Vol. 8, pages 49-62.

Mordden, E (2013). 'The Sondheim Handbook' from *Anything Goes: A History of American Musical Theatre*. Published by Oxford University Press, New York.

## Images

Image 1 retrieved from <https://loc.getarchive.net/media/stephen-sondheim-bernstein-adolph-green-and-rodny-mcdowall-june-1962>



Department  
of Education

