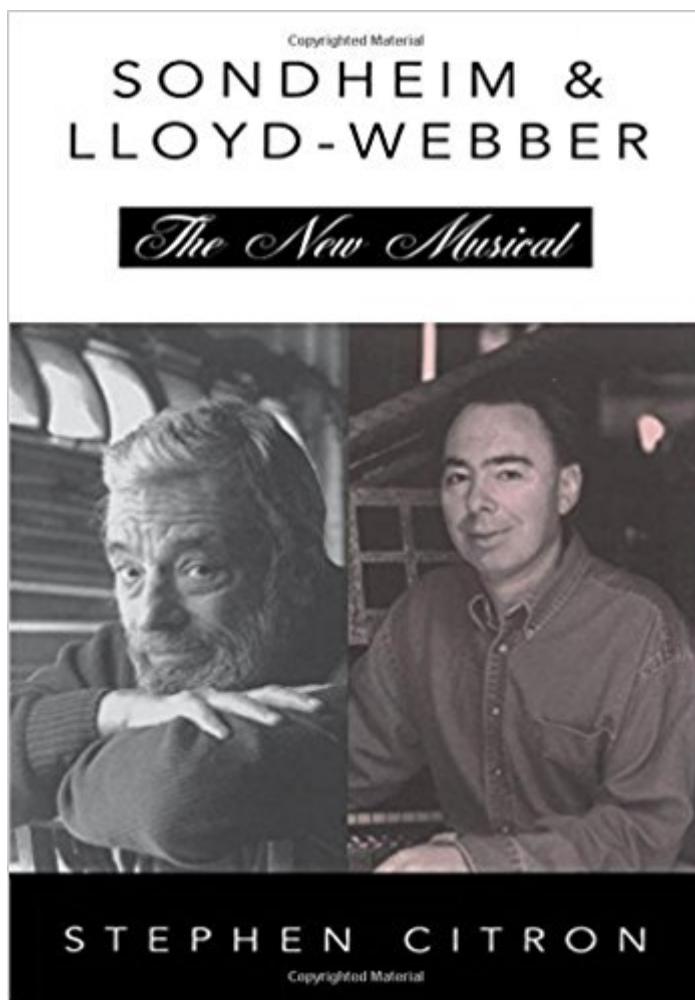


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# Stephen Sondheim And Andrew Lloyd Webber: The New Musical (The Great Songwriters)



## Synopsis

The New York Times called Stephen Sondheim "the greatest and perhaps best known artist in the American musical theater," while two months earlier, the same paper referred to his contemporary, Andrew Lloyd-Webber as "the most commercially successful composer in history." Whatever their individual achievements might be, it is agreed by most critics that these two colossi have dominated world musical theater for the last quarter century and hold the key to the direction the musical stage will take in the future. Here in the third volume of Stephen Citron's distinguished series *The Great Songwriters*--in depth studies that illuminated the musical contributions, careers, and lives of Noel Coward and Cole Porter (*Noel & Cole: The Sophisticates*), and Oscar Hammerstein 2nd and Alan Jay Lerner, (*The Wordsmiths*)--this eminent musicologist has taken on our two leading contemporary contributors to the lyric stage. His aim has not been to compare or judge one's merits over the other, but to make the reader discover through their works and those of their contemporaries, the changes and path of that glorious artform we call Musical Theater. In his quest, Citron offers unique insight into each artist's working methods, analyzing their scores--including their early works and works-in-progress. As in Citron's previously critically acclaimed books in this series, great significance is given to the impact their youthful training and private lives have had upon their amazing creative output. Beginning with Sondheim's lyrics-only works, *West Side Story*, *Gypsy*, *Do I Hear A Waltz?* through his scores for *Saturday Night*, *Company*, *Anyone Can Whistle*, *Follies*, *Pacific Overtures*, *A Little Night Music*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, *Sunday In the Park*, *Into the Woods*, *Assassins*, and *Passion*, all these milestones of musical theater have been explored. Lloyd-Webber's musical contribution from his early works, *The Likes of Us* and *Joseph to Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Evita*, *Cats*, *Starlight Express*, *Aspects of Love*, *By Jeeves*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Song & Dance*, *Mass*, *Sunset Boulevard* to *Whistle Down the Wind* are also thoroughly analyzed. The works of these two splendid artists are clarified for the casual or professional reader in context with their contemporaries. Complete with a quadruple chronology (Sondheim, Lloyd-Webber, US Theater, British Theater), copious quotations from their works, and many never before published illustrations, the future of the artform that is the crowning achievement of the 20th century is made eminently clear in this book. *Sondheim & Lloyd-Webber* is a must-read for anyone interested in the contemporary theater.

## Book Information

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## **Customer Reviews**

Third in Stephen Citron's Great Songwriters series, Sondheim & Lloyd-Webber: The New Musical (preceded by Noel & Cole and The Wordsmiths) demonstrates how musical theater "has done a total about-face" since its inception. Just compare classics like Anything Goes, Oliver! or Guys and Dolls to Hair, Jesus Christ Superstar, Tommy, Rent and The Full Monty, says musicologist, composer and lyricist Citron, to notice the glaring differences between shows made between the 1920s and '60s ("It was a time when plot was secondary") and those made since that time, which have "gone in several directions" including the "oversize theatricality" of Lloyd-Webber and the "intellectual stimulation" of Sondheim. Tracing the two lives from childhood through early careers (initially, Sondheim was solely a lyricist, Lloyd-Webber solely a composer) to the present (the phenomenal, longstanding success of Cats; Sondheim's receipt of the Kennedy Center Honors Medal from then-President Clinton), Citron trains telescopic and microscopic lenses on the two most important living musical theater luminaries. B&w photos. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

In his latest entry of "The Great Songwriters" series (after The Wordsmiths, LJ 6/1/95), Citron profiles Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd-Webber, two of the late 20th century's most prominent composers for the Broadway and London stages, who, interestingly, share a birthday (March 22). In alternating chapters, the author traces their creative development from tentative neophytes to much-feted giants, integrating the various directions that musical theater has taken. Citron analyzes their productions from both musical and dramatic perspectives, providing relevant

excerpts from contemporary reviews and documents. Without sensationalism, he highlights aspects of their personal lives: Sondheim's being the only child in a dysfunctional family and his reticence about his own relationships; Lloyd-Webber's interactions with his composer-father and cellist-brother as well as his three marriages and control issues. The result is a coherent, enjoyable narrative. Recommended for all libraries. (Index not seen.) Barry Zaslow, Miami Univ. Libs., Oxford, OH Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This could have been a really interesting comparison, and there are some nice touches in this book, but ultimately the author skirts the most interesting questions in favor of some tired cliches. Other reviewers on this page have carped about Lloyd Webber's name. If they're referring to the hyphen, they should have read a little more carefully. He explains his use of the hyphen in a footnote on the bottom of page 49. On the positive side, Citron solves the task of the dual biography pretty well. One of the big problems in writing a book comparing two composers born 18 years apart is the use of time. Obviously, you have to tell the stories chronologically, you can't spend too much time on one of them without switching to the other, and then at some point, the issue of what each of them is working on simultaneously becomes interesting, so a constant 18 year delay would be off-putting. Somehow Citron manages to bring their narratives together around Harold Prince, and chronologically ties the two stories around the time when Prince went from Sondheim's *Sweeney* to Lloyd Webber's *Evita*. Before that, we're hearing about the shows on a weird time warp, and after that, it's fairly chronological. This is a neat touch, and Hal Prince is actually the main thing the two have in common. I found a pretty egregious example of plagiarism in the book, around a topic that gets short shrift in the book; musical analysis. On page 360, Citron cribs an 88 word passage from Joseph Swain's book *The Broadway Musical, A Critical And Musical Survey* (Oxford, 1990). Incredibly, even though the book he's borrowing from is by the same publisher, Citron doesn't credit the idea to its originator, nor does Swain's book even appear in the Bibliography. It's an unlikely and original idea he's stealing; comparing Lloyd Webber's dramatically random repeats of melody to Renaissance *Contrafacta*, which he wrongly pluralizes *contrafactums* later in the chapter. It doesn't call into question Citron's research, which appears to be fairly exhaustive, but it makes one wonder whether the book isn't just a collection of anecdotes, ideas and stories from other sources, hefully cobbled into a collection for the curious. Theatre fans have often put these two giants of music theatre against one another, a position neither has publicly taken. The conventional wisdom about the two is that Lloyd Webber is the consummate melodist, and that his detractors really only envy his popularity from the comfort of their ivory towers, and that Sondheim is an abstruse intellectual

whose music is mired in boring repetitive structures that are incomprehensible to the public, but which are feted and admired by pointy heads who want to feel smart. Citron falls into these old cliches time and time again, missing the far more interesting issues to be probed. For example, the portrait Citron paints of Lloyd Webber is one of a man utterly at the mercy of his lyricists and librettists for what happens on the stage, and there are a number of swipes (deservedly) taken at Sir Andrew's compositional technique, his supposed plagiarism (which is ironic, considering the source), and his orchestrational deficiencies. Any examination of Lloyd Webber's work must ask questions of how these qualities play into his work as a whole. The best Citron can come up with is to compare him to Richard Rodgers, which is an attractive thought until one remembers that Rodgers was not at the mercy of any lyricist or librettist, although he could usually command the best. In fact, Rodgers wrote music and lyrics for *No Strings*. And Rodgers knew harmony, melody, and the power of a reprise to do dramatic work, not just to sell a tune. It would be foolish to say that Lloyd Webber doesn't know what he's doing, but a full picture needs to address his foibles as craft issues, not merely as the carping of the intellectuals. Can you be a great musical theatre composer without caring which lyrics your tune gets assigned to? Maybe so. Sondheim doesn't fare much better. Citron says at the end of the book that Sondheim started in the Hammerstein "heart-on-the-sleeve tradition", then abandoned it for the "honesty of ambivalence" I'm not sure what he means by "heart-on-the-sleeve" Is he referring to *West Side*? or *Gypsy*? or *Saturday Night*? None of those seem sentimental. (except for lyrics that Lenny probably wrote) What Sondheim got from Hammerstein was not treacly Americana, but the integration of material and story, and he learned it so well that he wrote what the story and his methodology demanded, whether the audience liked it or not. This question of whether the structural and dramatic integrity is enough to make a masterpiece without popularity is an important issue Citron isn't bothering with. This reader would like to see somebody tackle the Sondheim/Lloyd Webber duality along more serious lines, because the answer to the questions these men pose writes the next 25 years of musical theatre. Sadly, we won't find it here.

I found the book fascinating, as it is filled with interesting details and tidbits about these two men and their shows. It is especially useful because it focuses on the music, often showing musical examples and shedding light on things like melodic teeming and form. The other two reviews stated that Lloyd Webber's name was misspelled. Apparently, they didn't read carefully enough because it explains the reasoning for this deliberate decision is because when Lloyd Webber was knighted he chose to hyphenate his name. The book tends to favor Sondheim, but is full of interesting

information about both of them and each of their shows. I can't promise that is 100% free of factual errors, but it is still a must have for anyone looking for in-depth information on these two great men.

What a terrible book this is. As with Citron's other books, this is LOADED with factual errors and misunderstandings of the shows he discusses. The first big clue is that he misspells Andrew Lloyd Webber's name throughout the entire book -- where were his editors? And he says that the period between the 1920s and 1960s was "a time when plot was secondary" in musicals. Oh really? Like in Carousel, West Side Story, Show Boat, Pal Joey, South Pacific, My Fair Lady, Camelot, Gypsy, The King and I...? I feel sorry for anyone who wastes their money on this the way I did. Stay away from books by this guy -- there are so many GOOD books on musical theatre out there...

Citron's book is an embarrassment to any serious student of musical theater. Many of Citron's facts are erroneous (beginning with Lloyd Webber's last name which is NOT hyphenated, but appears hyphenated in every instance throughout this book). His approach to this material is very condescending. For example, he implies that A Little Night Music and Passion only won Tony Awards because there were no other decent shows that opened those years, thereby dismissing other good shows and offering backhanded compliments to Sondheim. Rumors are that the Really Useful Group is extremely embarrassed by the Lloyd Webber sections. Wait for the forthcoming Yale series on Broadway composers.

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