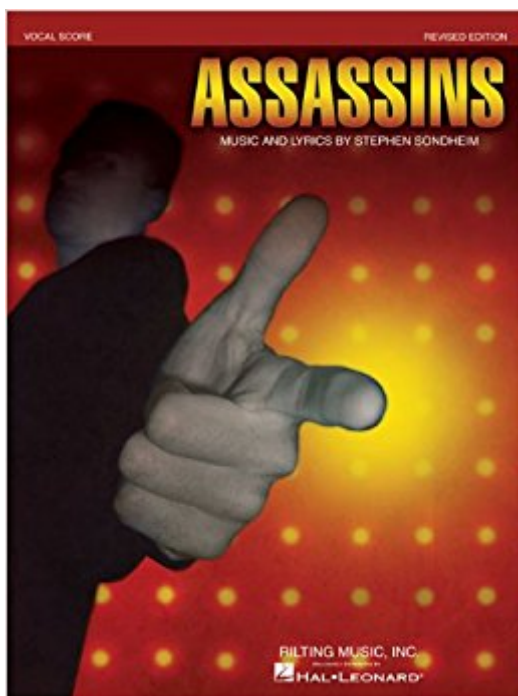


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Assassins Vocal Score - Revised Edition



Synopsis

(Vocal Score). This musical, with a book by John Weidman, explores the history of presidential assassination in America, from John Wilkes Booth to John Hinckley, Jr. Assassins climaxes in a surreal sequence where the assassins convince Lee Harvey Oswald that his act is the only way he will connect with them, with history, and with the world. Newly edited, with new music engravings. Based on the 2004 Broadway production.

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Customer Reviews

I was expecting this to be more of a songbook, but there is nothing that is left out. Fantastic, blew me away!

"Assassins" is a musical with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and book by John Weidman, based on an idea by Charles Gilbert, Jr. It uses the premise of a murderous carnival game to produce a revue-style portrayal of men and women who attempted (successfully or otherwise) to assassinate Presidents of the United States. The music varies to reflect the popular music of the eras depicted. The musical first opened Off-Broadway in 1990, and the 2004 Broadway production won five Tony Awards. A vocal score was published for each; this review compares the two in many ways, but it is the new "revised" score that sits before me now. "Assassins" is one of the most remarkable theatre pieces ever written and likely could have changed the world except the very things that it stood for were the things that brought it down a number of times. It's hard to comment

on History as it occurs and Since Assassinations and gun crimes ain't goin' nowhere, getting this production off the ground was a bit arduous. It opened at Playwrights Horizon in 1990 (I am one of the seventeen or so people who saw it and left the theatre humming the song "Another National Anthem") and was preparing to move to Broadway when, on January 15, 1991, George Herbert Walker Bush invaded Iraq to aid the country of Kuwait. At that point, the delicate and highly intelligent musical that looked at the characters behind U.S. Presidential Assassinations closed and was shelved for well over a decade. It was then scheduled to open when Bush's son, President George W. Bush, declared war on Iraq in a confusing two mouthed explanation of getting bin Laden and finding those weapons of mass Destruction that HE was certain were there. I own the vocal score for the 1990 production and just last week got the "revised Score" from the Broadway production which finally reached fruition after about fifteen years. (By the time Sondheim and Weidman's second Americana piece opened they were in litigation attack over their third which would begin as Wiseguys, Bounce and then finally, "Road Show." If you're not careful and do not listen closely enough you may think that this is a musical (written in virtually every American style of musical that's appropriate from traditional Folk music for the death of Lincoln to a Sousa March for the attempt on FDR) that justifies guns and killing (I say that the opposite is true) - the most confusing is "The Ballad Of Booth"- a twelve minute piece that begins our story and messes with the mind of the audience by claiming victory as well as delivering discomfort. The original key is F#, a brighter key than Gb, and the revised version is down a half step- no matter how good you are you will be grateful, since the time signature changes constantly to accommodate the folk melody but the first was written for Victor Garber and the second for Neil Patrick Harris. They're both tenors but their passagio is clearly a half step apart. Thus, if you hate sharps, this revised version will please you there. (And we all either prefer sharps or flats. Sondheim tends to write in Gb a lot- this is the only F# I can think of offhand. Some of the moments in this piece make this song a spectacular history lesson as well as a spectacular music lesson. Some of the lyrics ring so true yet few have had the nerve to say them before: "While traitors just get jeers and boos/ not visits to their graves / While Lincoln who got mixed reviews/ Because of you, John, Now gets only raves." He goes on to say, "Damn you, Johnny, you paved the way/ for lots of madmen to have their say / Lots of mad men have had their way/ but only for a day." This is a critical line in regard to understanding where the show was going and "Damn you, Booth!" is the last line in the opening number. This is a huge hint, n'est ce pas? "Unworthy of your Love" is a duet between John Hinckley and Squeaky Fromme. (If you don't know, Google it) The New Yorker originally slammed the song as sounding like a bubble gum teen love song. But as with most critics, and this is key to the ones who (unlike

myself who has a PhD in music and 36 years experience in theatre) have we mustn't rule out idiocy. If Hinckley and Fromme WERE to sing a love song to Jodie and Charlie and write it themselves it wouldn't be the brilliance that is typical Sondheim. Just as it takes remarkable singing skills to sing badly on purpose, it takes remarkable writing skills to create a mediocre pop song- something The New Yorker critic failed to see. (I tried to find his name, I really did. You should know that Frank Rich of the New York Times said of the first [production- i.e. the first time people were exposed to the material: "Assassins will have to fire with sharper aim and fewer blanks if it is to shoot to kill". The subtle, intelligence of both the music and lyrics is not looking to "kill anything," something many critics of "Assassins" failed to see. The Hinckley/Fromme duet is brilliant BECAUSE of the things for which it is criticized and for the multiple subtleties that lie beneath the surface. Hidden beneath the predictable harmonic structures and the simple lyrics are a myriad of foreshadowing and interesting clues that virtually scream of the insanity of guns in the hands of maniacs. Again, the critics missed it. Jodie Foster-, who has spent her life trying to escape this traumatic event that scarred her freshman year of college, is instead immortalized in a Sondheim musical, something that will cause her to last much longer into the future than her two Oscars and her brilliance as a director and actor. (Sondheim's score has helped to keep both Hinckley and Manson locked up and that too is important.) "Assassins" went out for licensing in about 1992 after a highly successful run in London and it contained a new song called "Something Just Broke" which is about where I was when I heard the President was shot. It's clear in listening to it that Sondheim was in the middle of composing the score for "Passion" (only because of the melody that is virtually the same as "I watched you from your window") However, the song remains in the style of "Assassins" and since this is the only song in the show that isn't an American period piece, it's quite appropriate because this song adds the final touch of humanity for those who still might have some curiosity regarding what Sondheim and Weidman set out to say. "Something Just Broke" Was added, in my opinion, for those audience members who were a little less than bright and were still on the fence about whether or not this score supported guns or not. Let's make it clear: This is a show that the NRA would blow out of the water and the only reason this hasn't occurred is because it's on a par of brilliance with everything Stephen Sondheim has written. Look: A gun kills many men before it's done, Hundreds. Long before you shoot the gun Men in the mines and in the steel mills Men at machines, who died for what? Something to buy- A watch, a shoe, a gun, A "thing" to make the bosses richer, But a gun claims many men before it's done. Just one more..."And we're off with a song about the murder of President Bill McKinley. It's critical to remember that what you're buying here is a professional rehearsal score so that it's important to remember that what you need to do as a pianist is to use

this score to re-create an orchestral sounding accompaniment to support what must be flawless singing and acting. This score is a tool; it is not music. It's the recipe to MAKE music. And anyone who follows a recipe exactly as written is a mediocre cook at best. If you are able to play piano with a moderate amount of ability then don't shy away from this. It's a challenge, yes, but mastering Sondheim is as satisfying as mastering your first Chopin Fantasy or Bach Prelude. So, from a man who directed the show in 92 and in 06, even if you already own the first score, the second has enough differences that warrant owning them both.

This has every song. Even the incidental music. Great show.

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