

MUSIC THEATRE INTERNATIONAL

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Although we value all our clients, the twelve thousand high schools who perform our shows are of particular importance, for it is at these schools that music and drama educators work to keep theatre alive in their community. MTI shares with these educators the goal of raising the next generation of theatre artists and audiences. To help these educators, it has taken a leading role in theatre education by creating MTI THEATRICAL RESOURCES, a "theatrical tool box" designed to help not only ensure the success of each musical production, but also to establish the study of musical theatre as a permanent part of the school curriculum. These resources include: STUDY GUIDES designed to bring the study of specific shows into the classroom; MTI REHEARSCORES® which provide unlimited rehearsal accompaniment via an easy-to-use, fully interactive computer program on disk; professional TV SPOTS allowing companies to affordably advertise on television in local markets; LOGO PACKS to aide in poster and program design; TRANSPOSITIONS-ON-DEMAND to allow flexibility in casting and musical key changes; and VIDEO CONVERSATIONPIECES™ featuring video seminars with artists such as Martin Charnin, Stephen Sondheim and Scott Ellis discussing the creation of their shows from inception to production.

MTI is also a leader in providing materials to meet the increasing demand for symphonic arrangements of popular theatre music. The MTI CONCERT LIBRARY offers arrangements of selected songs, as well as full scores from Broadway shows.

Musicals are America's premiere contribution to the theatre and MTI is firmly committed to supporting and nurturing a musical theatre that will continue to develop and flourish into the next century.



COMPANY

A MUSICAL COMEDY

Music and Lyrics by STEPHEN SONDHEIM

Book by GEORGE FURTH

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CONTENTS

ABOUT <i>COMPANY</i>	3
THE CHARACTERS IN <i>COMPANY</i>	4
PLOT SYNOPSIS.....	5
THEMES AND TOPICS TO EXPLORE	9
The Dramatic Structure of <i>Company</i>	10
Exposition: The Opening of <i>Company</i>	11
The Characters in <i>Company</i>	12
Isolation.....	13
Communication	14
The Institution of Marriage	15
The Ending of <i>Company</i>	17
Company as Musical Theatre.....	18
The Elements of Musical Theatre Collaboration	20
The Original Production of <i>Company</i>	21
Create Your Own Musical.....	21
Critical Analysis.....	22
APPENDIX.....	23
About the Authors	23
About the Concept Musical	25
About <i>Company</i>	25
Critical Acclaim	26
RESOURCES.....	28

About **Company**

Company, the landmark show about marriage, which opened at the Alvin Theatre on April 26, 1970, has music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and book by George Furth. Setting new standards of sophistication and depth for the American musical, *Company* won (among its numerous awards) the Tony Award for Best Book, Best Music, Best Lyrics, as well as the prize for Best Musical. In creating the show, the authors, joined by director Harold Prince, choreographer Michael Bennett and scenic designer Boris Aronson crafted a concept musical in which the style of presentation was as vital to the meaning of the show as the story itself.

Company tells the story of a marriage-avoiding thirty-five year old bachelor named Robert and is a theatrical collage of his experiences with his married friends and with three women he is dating. A portrait of Robert's empty existence takes shape in a framework of fragmented time. The brilliant Stephen Sondheim songs define Robert's world, functioning as commentaries on the characters and the situations.

Vignettes about each of the couples examine the difficulty of sustaining meaningful emotional relationships in the complex world of contemporary urban America. The couples, who are all acquainted, observe each others lives, and they wryly comment on each other, much in the manner of a Greek chorus. They form a community connected by the challenge of seeking love and commitment in a landscape where there is little permanence.

Robert finally concludes, in spite of the imperfections of each of the unions he sees, that life without a significant other is untenable.

An unconventional, complex and challenging work, *Company* was described by critics as "simply in a league by itself," and "the season's best and most refreshingly original musical." Untraditional, inventive and ground-breaking *Company* proved to be a major turning point in the evolution of the American musical.

The Characters in *Company*

ROBERT

SARAH

HARRY, Sarah's husband

SUSAN

PETER, Susan's husband

JENNY

DAVID, Jenny's husband

AMY

PAUL, Amy's fiancé

JOANNE

LARRY, Joanne's husband

MARTA, a girlfriend of Robert

KATHY, a girlfriend of Robert

APRIL, a girlfriend of Robert

Plot Synopsis

Act I, Scene 1

The curtain rises revealing Robert alone onstage. He is in his apartment listening to his answering machine as it plays back various birthday greetings from some of his friends. After the funny, sardonic, odd messages are finished, Robert records a message of his own, announcing that it is his 35th birthday. Slowly, five couples — Joanne and Larry; Susan and Peter; Amy and Paul; Sarah and Harry; and Jenny and David — gather in Robert's apartment to give him a surprise birthday party. Each woman is carrying a wrapped gift. Robert acknowledges his friends, and the women, beginning with Sarah, each give Robert his gift. Sarah apologetically suggests Robert should return his unopened gift if he doesn't like it. Amy and Paul present their gift, which Amy announces is a ridiculously expensive sweater. Joanne baits Jenny, flirts with David, Jenny's husband, and ignores her own husband Larry. Amy enters with a lighted birthday cake. Everyone sings a monotone chorus of "Happy Birthday," telling Robert to make a wish before he blows out the candles. He closes his eyes, wishes and blows, but only half the candles go out. The women rush to blow out the remaining candles. Robert explains he didn't wish for anything. The guests pick up the furniture and go to their own apartment spaces. Music begins: it is a figure that sounds like a busy signal. The couples and Robert's girlfriends Marta, Kathy and April all call him, each employing a variant on the name Robert ("Bobby Baby"). Robert sings about his relationships with all of his married friends ("Company"). The song ends with the ringing of multiple telephones and doorbells, and city sounds, as we hear a montage of the characters experiencing typical moments in their days.

Scene 2

Robert has just finished dinner with Sarah and Harry at their apartment. As Harry, a recovering alcoholic, gets up to make Robert a drink, he mentions he's been on the wagon for a year and a half. Sarah says it has only been a year. They argue lightly about this. Sarah offers Robert a brownie, mentioning she's on a diet. Robert watches Harry sneak a sniff and then a swallow of Robert's drink, while Sarah eats a brownie as she pretends to fall behind the couch. Harry and Sarah continue their semi-jocose bickering. Harry asks Sarah to show Robert some of the karate she's been learning, which she refuses to do until Robert flirtatiously asks her to do it for him. Sarah and Harry begin to spar. First Sarah throws Harry to the floor, then Harry does the same to Sarah. She again throws Harry to the floor and pins him down. Sarah, Harry and Robert freeze as Joanne appears and sings a song about marriage and relationships ("The Little Things You Do Together"). Harry and Sarah continue to spar, freezing again as Joanne sings. Robert is caught in the middle of the fight as he tries to make himself another drink. After they all fall to the floor, they freeze, as the rest of the couples sing along with Joanne. The song ends, Sarah and Harry call the fight a draw and Robert leaves as "Bobby Baby" is heard again. Sarah sneaks another brownie as Harry steals a drink out of Robert's glass. Robert, now on the other side of the stage, looks up at Harry and asks if he's ever sorry he got married. Harry, with David and Larry (who have joined

Harry), share their ambivalence about marriage (“Sorry-Grateful”). After the song Robert takes an elevator to a terrace overlooking the city.

Scene 3

Robert is on the terrace of Peter and Susan’s apartment. Robert suggests he’d want to be the first to know if the seemingly happily-married couple breaks up. Susan and Peter respond by telling him they are getting a divorce. “Bobby Baby” is heard again as a stunned and puzzled Robert takes the elevator up to David and Jenny’s apartment.

Scene 4

David, Jenny and Robert sit in the playroom of Jenny and David’s apartment. Though they are smoking marijuana, Jenny insists it is not having any effect on her. They all start giggling as they get high. When an unseen neighbor yells at the trio to keep quiet, Jenny uncharacteristically swears back. This brings howls of laughter from both David and Robert. When Robert suggests he should have married Jenny, Jenny asks him when he is going to get married. Robert says he intends to — he just has not picked a time. Or a mate. In fact he says he’s not avoiding marriage at all. It is avoiding him. He mentions three of his current girlfriends, Marta, Kathy and April, as they all appear and sing about their frustrations with Robert (“You Could Drive A Person Crazy”) in an Andrews Sisters-style trio. When Robert asks if Jenny wants another joint, David tells her she doesn’t want one. Jenny goes to make everyone a snack as David tells Robert that Jenny is “square... dumb...” Robert starts to leave but is stopped by all the couples singing “Bobby Baby.” The women leave and the men tell Robert of the women to whom they could introduce him (“Have I Got A Girl For You”) — women more appropriate to dating than marrying. After all, they ask, “Whaddaya wanna get married for?” When the men leave, Robert sings about finding a woman who combines the best qualities of all the married women he knows (“Someone Is Waiting”). As each wife is mentioned, she appears with her husband.

Scene 5

Marta sits on a park bench. She sings about how New York is a city of strangers (“Another Hundred People”). Robert and April, an airline stewardess, appear and sit on the bench. April explains she moved from Shaker Heights thinking she was moving to Radio City, a city *close* to New York. Marta continues singing “Another Hundred People” when April leaves. Kathy enters and sits next to Robert. She tells him she is going to move to Vermont to get married because Robert never asked her to marry him. Marta finishes “Another Hundred People” when Kathy exits and then she relates to Robert her own peculiarly eccentric view of life in New York.

Scene 6

It is the morning of Paul and Amy’s wedding day. Amy, in a white wedding dress, is polishing a pair of men’s shoes as a woman in a white choir robe sings about how blessed a wedding day is. When Paul sees Amy polishing his shoes, he sings about how today is her special day. Amy franti-

cally sings about how she's not getting married ("Getting Married Today"). Amy, the woman and a choir continue the song as Robert, the best man, enters looking for Paul's cuff links. The song ends with Paul reaffirming his positive view, Amy her negative view, and an emotionless chorus giving their blessing to both views. It starts to rain. After the song, Amy is fixing breakfast for Paul and Robert. She works herself into tears and tells Paul she can't marry him. Paul is very visibly upset by this and he leaves. Robert suddenly asks Amy to marry him. As "Bobby Baby" is heard again, Amy turns down Robert's request. She realizes what a good thing she has in Paul so she goes off to find and marry him. Robert, alone onstage, suddenly feels the need to be connected with someone. But he is not yet ready for a full commitment ("Marry Me A Little"). The lights come up in Robert's apartment, where all the guests are gathered; Robert stares at Amy as she enters with the birthday cake.

Act II, Scene 1

It is Robert's birthday. With the birthday cake in front of him, he blows out most of the candles; the wives blow out the ones he missed. He announces he didn't wish for anything. "Bobby Baby" is heard as the guests leave. When Robert is alone he reflects on what it's like to always be "odd man out"; the couples join him in singing ("Side By Side By Side"). The couples sing about and celebrate his usefulness to them ("What Would We Do Without You?").

Scene 2

April and Robert are in his apartment. After some idle talk they move to the bedroom. As Robert and April embrace, Sarah and Jenny tell their husbands they are worried Robert spends too much time alone ("Poor Baby"). April tells Robert a story about a cocoon that had once been left in her care. When a butterfly emerged, it had been injured by her cat, and this led to an upsetting situation with the male friend who had given her the cocoon. Robert, in a desperately transparent ploy to continue the conversation, tells April a story he feels relates to her cocoon story. He tells her how once he became disoriented and was unable to locate the motel where a date was waiting for him. As April undresses, she expresses her upset for the lonely girl and for Robert, but wonders what his story had to do with hers. The lights go down as Robert takes out champagne, glasses and baby oil, and Sarah, Jenny, Amy, Joanne and Susan all sing "Poor Baby," commenting on the inadequacy of Robert's girlfriends. The lights come up on an exhausted Robert and April singing about her next flight attendant assignment ("Barcelona"). The song ends as April unexpectedly accepts Robert's suggestion to linger with him rather than report for work. Robert seems a bit nonplused at this acquiescence. The lights fade.

Scene 3

Robert and Marta are at Peter and Susan's apartment; Peter and Susan have divorced but are still living together happily, a fact that strikes Robert as being very "New York." The women depart, leaving Peter and Robert on the terrace. Peter brings up the subject of homosexuality and asks if Robert has ever had homosexual experiences. Robert says he has, and then Peter obliquely propositions Robert, who laughs it off and leaves Peter.

Scene 4

Robert and Joanne are drinking at a nightclub table as Larry enjoys himself dancing. Joanne drunkenly and loudly tries to get a waiter's attention to order more drinks. She yells at some women at another table to stop staring at her. A spotlight hits her as the rest of the nightclub goes into a blackout. She sings a toast to the women who don't have to work and who spend lots of time shopping, drinking and having lunch; women, in fact, like herself ("The Ladies Who Lunch"). When Larry goes to pay the bill, Joanne propositions Robert for sex; he turns her down and asks angrily about marriage, "What do you get?" "Bobby Baby" is heard as Robert is left alone on stage. He sings about the fear of being alone and being uninvolved, suggesting, finally, he does want to have a meaningful relationship with someone ("Being Alive").

Scene 5

The scene shifts to Robert's apartment, and all the couples are waiting for Robert to arrive so they can yell "Surprise." (Robert observes this scene, though the couples are unaware of his presence.) This time Robert doesn't show up to his party. They all decide to leave, but before they do, they yell "Happy Birthday, Robert." Robert, alone on stage, blows out the candles and smiles.

Themes and Topics to Explore

Questions and Assignments

Our study guide focuses on a wide-ranging list of themes and topics suggested by the style and content of *Company*.

Avenues for exploring each theme and topic are suggested in the form of:

QUESTIONS: Designed to prompt in-class discussions before and after viewing or reading the show.

ASSIGNMENTS: Designed to be researched and written out of class.

The Dramatic Structure of *Company*

Questions and Discussion Prompts

- Tell the story of *Company* in one sentence.
- Select one verb that best describes the central action of *Company*.
- Identify the theme of *Company*.
- What are the various levels of meaning of the title *Company*?
- At what point did *Company* grab your attention? When did you become interested, start to care, become excited, thrilled or delighted?
- What is at stake for Robert? For his friends?
- Structurally, *Company* is an episodic collage. What does this phrase mean? Why do you think the authors chose this particular structure to relate this story?
- How are the sequence of the events in *Company* arranged? Why do you think the authors made this choice?
- *Company* has been described as a show about a main character experiencing a rite of passage. Do you think Robert changes in the course of the show? If so, how?
- April, Kathy and Marta make a “fantastic” intrusion into the scene with Robert, David and Jenny to sing “You Could Drive A Person Crazy.” Why do you think the authors chose to inject this surreal element into a naturalistic scene? What impact does this have on the audience? Do you find it effective?
- The suggestion has been made that the entire show takes place in an instant inside Robert’s mind as he tries to make a wish at the party that opens the show. Imagine the events of the show in this framework. What wish do you think Robert makes at the end?

Assignments: Writing and Research Prompts

- Tell the story of *Company* in a short paragraph. Be sure to include all main characters.
- How are we given information related to the theme of *Company* and the authors’ feelings about the theme?
- Make a list of the “episodes” in *Company*.
- *Company* follows the organizational pattern of many so-called “drawing room” comedies which emphasize social rituals. Read about the history of “drawing room” comedy and read several examples of the genre. Write a comparison between one of the comedies and *Company*.
- *Company* has been called a “cubist” musical. Research the term “cubist” and see if you agree with this description.

- Create a new story with a different theme and different characters that could be told as an episodic collage. Write several paragraphs about the story and list the episodes through which you would relate it.
- *Company* is a show about a specific individual's problem that dramatizes a deeper societal problem. Invent a show that dramatizes another societal problem through an examination of an individual's problem. Write a one-page synopsis of this show.

Exposition: The Opening of *Company*

Questions and Discussion Prompts

- What does the opening section of a movie, novel, play or musical have to accomplish? What are some of the devices used in each of these forms to reach these goals?
- What is exposition? List the expository devices you find in the opening of *Company*.
- Study the opening of *Company*. Where else does this scene recur? What do we learn about the characters and their histories in the opening? What does it tell us to expect from the show?
- When the party scene repeats, are we at one party or a different party? How do you know? Describe the way in which each of the party scenes differ from the opening?
- What intention do Robert's friends state during the opening that sets the show in motion? What has happened to this intention by the end of the show?
- What do the music and lyrics of the opening tell us about the show?
- What are "asides?" How are they used in the opening to provide the audience with information about the characters and situation?
- What does Robert reveal about himself when he cannot find anything to wish for after he blows out his birthday candles?

Assignments: Research and Writing Prompts

- Study the openings of five other American musicals. On the basis of what you observe make a list of the qualities you think an effective opening for a musical theatre piece should have.
- Imagine you have been given the task of finding a new opening for *Company*. Describe your opening. Explain why you have chosen it.
- Write a comic scene between two characters which includes asides to the audience.

The Characters in *Company*

Questions and Discussion Prompts

- Why do you think Joanne was chosen as the character who serves as a commentator? What qualities does she possess enabling her to function this way in this show? Why do the other characters put up with her blunt comments?
- April, Marta and Kathy compete for Robert's attentions, yet they sing a song which is filled with harmony in the style of the Andrews Sisters, a famous singing group during the 1940s. Harmony suggests unity. What unites these characters? What function do they serve in the show.
- Robert's life is examined only from the perspective of how he experiences relationships. We don't know what he does for a living, where he was born, etc. We also know very little in detail about most of the other characters. Does this matter? Why or why not?
- The characters surrounding Robert function almost as a Greek chorus. (The Greek Chorus was a standard device in Greek drama — it was the voice of the community, usually providing unheeded warnings or moral guidance to the drama's protagonist.) Identify the sections of the piece when they function this way. What do they contribute to the piece by assuming this community identity?

Assignments: Writing Prompts

- When playwrights create characters, they often invent "character maps" before they begin to write. Reverse this process and write an "after-the-fact" character map for Robert, Joanne, April, Marta, Harry, Sarah and Amy. In your map, describe their physical and emotional characteristics in great detail. Describe a typical day in each of their lives.
- Write an inner monologue (a speech of a character's inner thoughts) revealing what you think the character might have been thinking in one of these situations:
 - Robert, on the way to his birthday party.
 - Joanne, on her way home from the bar after she has unsuccessfully propositioned Robert.
 - Kathy, as she rides the train out of New York to get married.
 - Amy, as she rushes out into the rain to find Paul.
 - Robert, after Amy refuses his proposal.
 - Susan, on the way to Mexico to meet Peter.
 - Jenny, the first time she is alone after trying marijuana.
 - April, after leaving Robert's apartment.
- Is Robert someone you would seek out as a best friend or marriage partner? Why or why not? Is there any character in the show you would seek out as a best friend or marriage partner?

- Select one of the married characters in *Company* and write about what you think might happen if that character became single again.
- Imagine the central character of *Company* is a woman named Roberta instead of a man named Robert. Who would Marta, April and Kathy become? What else would change? Which of the husbands would try to seduce Roberta as Joanne tries to seduce Robert?

Isolation

Questions and Discussion Prompts

- Characters in *Company* experience a sense of isolation in spite of the fact they are living in Manhattan. How is this possible?
- Why do you think the authors chose to set *Company* in Manhattan?
- In what ways does the nature of contemporary city life make establishing enduring relationships more difficult?
- Our society is often described as increasingly dehumanized. In what ways do you feel this in your daily life? In the lives of others in your family or community?
- How does this dehumanization make one-to-one relationships increasingly difficult?
- Is individuality becoming more difficult to maintain in the world in which we live?
- What do you think is meant by the phrase “lonely crowd”?
- Robert reaches out to three women during the show — April, the stewardess; Marta, a naive soul seeking a sophisticated new life in Manhattan; and Kathy, who eventually settles for marriage in New England. What does Robert find in each of these relationships? How do they add up to a portrait of his behavior in connecting with a potential “significant other”?
- In the original production of *Company* the set design reflected the architecture of contemporary urban life — high rise buildings filled with isolated chambers constructed of chrome and glass. How does this architecture contribute to a sense of isolation? Compare this style of living to a rural village environment, to a contemporary suburb and to farm life. Are residents more or less isolated in these social settings?
- What do we learn about the plight of single women from the lyric of “You Can Drive A Person Crazy”?
- Robert describes the ideal woman who could end his loneliness in “Someone Is Waiting.” Does he really want this person?
- Do you think involvement with another person makes it possible for you to escape yourself?
- When *Company* was originally produced, some critics suggested Robert was homosexual. Do you find evidence that this is true? Would it alter the underlying meaning of the show as an examination of a failure to commit if it were true?

Assignments: Research and Writing Prompts

- Write about a time when you experienced a sense of isolation in the midst of a crowd.
- The characters in *Company* are torn between commitment and fear of commitment. Write about your view of the pros and cons of committing to another person in a long term relationship.
- Find two other musical theatre works set in Manhattan. Compare the view of life in Manhattan presented in each. Compare the nature of the relationships experienced by the main characters in each. How is the nature of these relationships shaped by the city?
- Robert is ambivalent about needing someone else in his life. Write about someone you felt you “needed” in your life. How did the realization you needed someone else make you feel?
- Robert does not want to make himself vulnerable to failure by wanting anything too much. Write about a time when you experienced a sense of failure because of wanting something or someone “too much.”
- Stephen Sondheim brilliantly portrays Manhattan in the song “Another Hundred People.” Write a poem or song lyric describing the feeling of being an individual in the place where you live.
- Create another story which also has isolation as its theme. Use a different set of characters and set it in a different time and place. Write a one-page synopsis of this story.

Communication

Questions and Discussion Prompts

- The telephone busy signal Robert hears symbolizes a failure to communicate in an impersonal society. Since the original production, busy signals have largely been replaced by the introduction of “call waiting.” What does “call waiting” symbolize about our society?
- We each use different language codes in different situations. For instance, if you were driving your father’s car and had a serious accident in it, how would you describe it to your father? To the insurance company? To your best friend?
- Robert discovers each set of his married friends has a secret code between them he cannot decipher. Describe what is really going on in the karate scene between Sarah and Harry and the marijuana scene with David and Jenny.
- Do you have secret codes, a particular way of speaking and behaving with friends or family members others cannot understand?
- Do you know a married couple who seems to have a code of its own?

Assignments: Writing Prompts

- The lyric to “Another Hundred People” incisively illustrates lack of communication. Using the following lyric as your inspiration, write a short story about two people who meet under such circumstances:

“AND THEY MEET AT PARTIES THROUGH THE FRIENDS
OF FRIENDS WHO THEY NEVER KNOW.
WILL YOU PICK ME UP OR DO I MEET YOU THERE
OR SHALL WE LET IT GO?
DID YOU GET MY MESSAGE? ‘CAUSE I LOOKED IN VAIN.
CAN WE SEE EACH OTHER TUESDAY IF IT DOESN’T RAIN?
LOOK, I’LL CALL YOU IN THE MORNING OR MY
SERVICE WILL EXPLAIN.”

The Institution of Marriage**Questions and Discussion Prompts**

- In *Company*, Robert sees marriage as an imperfect institution which requires two flawed individuals to remain bonded together for life. Do you agree or disagree with this view of marriage? Why?
- Why do Robert’s circle of married friends conspire to find him a wife?
- Do you think Susan and Peter benefit from their divorce?
- Why is Amy afraid of being married to Paul, who adores her, even after they’ve lived together for a long time?
- Amy and Paul are from different religious backgrounds. Is this still a problem for you and your peers?
- What is the nature of Joanne’s marriage to Larry?
- We see the married couples in the show through Robert’s eyes. What influences his perception of those marriages? Do you believe the marriages we see are good or bad?
- What are some of the inevitable trade-offs in any marriage?
- What are some of the reasons for the current divorce rate? What impact do you think this has on our society?
- Do you believe marriage should be until “death do us part.” Why or why not?
- What are some of the delights the characters in the show find in marriage? What kinds of anguish have they discovered?
- Would any of the marriages depicted in *Company* fit the description “happy ever after”?
- What are some of the social rules and rituals surrounding marriage represented in *Company*?

- When the husbands sing “Have I Got A Girl For You” to Robert, are they envious of his freedom? Why or why not?
- When *Company* opened, there was a critical debate over whether it was pro- or anti- marriage. Do you think the show is pro- or anti- marriage?
- What truths does *Company* explore pertaining not only to what we think of as traditional marriage, but to all personal relationships that include emotional involvement?

Assignments: Research and Writing Prompts

- Describe an ideal marriage (for you) in essay form.
- Write about the strongest marriage you have observed, analyzing the reasons for its success.
- Robert plays the role of the “extra person” for his married friends. What does his presence bring to their relationships? Write about an experience where you were an “extra person” to a couple.
- Write a short story based on the premise “To commit is to live.”
- Write about the importance of the institution of marriage to society at this point in history. Examine the premise that in a world of increasing chaos and global uncertainty, the order and meaning provided by a relationship is of increasing importance in everyday life. Is this more true today than it was twenty five years ago? Fifty years ago? Two hundred years ago?
- Stephen Sondheim creates a portrait of marriage using two words — sorry and grateful. Using only two words describe:
 - a. War
 - b. Peace
 - c. Old age
 - d. Infancy
 - e. Adolescence
 - f. Success
 - g. Failure
- Write an essay discussing the meaning of the following lyric from the song “Sorry-Grateful”:

“YOU ALWAYS ARE WHAT YOU ALWAYS WERE
WHICH HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH
ALL TO DO WITH HER.”
- Write a short story called “The Balance of Opposites,” exploring a relationship that works because of the differences between the partners.
- At times Robert seems to covet his friends’ wives. Do you think he would be interested in them if those women were single and available? Write about a time when you wanted something you knew you couldn’t have.

- Do you believe every adult must either become part of a couple or else remain undefined? Write an essay defending your answer.

The Ending of *Company*

Questions and Discussion Prompts

- Does something in Robert's relationship with his married friends change when Joanne tries to seduce him?
- Why doesn't Robert appear at the birthday party his friends are giving him at the end of Act II?
- While *Company* was being developed, the authors considered different endings. In two of these endings Amy did not get married to Paul at the end of Act I. Instead, Robert proposed to her at the end of Act II. In one version, Robert suggested to Amy they get married, but compromise between independence and commitment. In another, he truly wanted to marry her — no compromises. Would any of these endings work for you? Why or why not?
- What is being expressed by the ending that now closes the show? Do you believe this ending? If not, how would you have ended the show?
- What do you think happens to Robert after the curtain goes down? What happens to the other characters?

Quick Takes: More Prompts for Discussion and Writing

- Why does the show take place on Robert's 35th birthday? What do you think this birthday signifies to him? Have you had a birthday that seemed to take on much greater significance than any other?
- What do Harry's drinking problem and Sarah's eating problem tell us about their lifestyles? Are alcoholism and overeating problems for people you know?
- Why do you think Robert is encouraging David and Jenny to experiment with marijuana?
- Do the wives in *Company* really want Robert to get married? Why or why not?
- Does Robert enjoy spending so much time with his married friends? If not, why does he do it?
- What purpose does Robert serve in the lives of his married friends?
- Does Robert's inability to form a permanent relationship coincide with his apparent inability to take action in other areas of his life?
- Think of a time you were hesitant to take a life-changing step. What made you apprehensive? How did you overcome the apprehension?
- Do you think the cocoon described in April's story signifies more than the subject of her anecdote?

- *Company* was first produced in 1970. If you were going to produce it now, would you feel anything about it was out of date? Is its basic message as strong now as it was then?
- Cast the roles in *Company* with current stage, film and television stars.

Company as Musical Theatre

Questions and Discussion Prompts

- When *Company* was first produced, it broke with established traditions of musical theatre. What are some of the ways in which it broke with those traditions?
- *Company* has been called stylistically terse, cynical and sardonic. Define these terms. What are specific examples of terseness in the show? How is cynicism displayed? Which character seems the most sardonic? How does the presence of these stylistic elements influence other aspects of the show?
- What is the one song in the show not directly about relationships? Why is it in the show?
- How does Stephen Sondheim reflect the frantic social life of the characters, their brief encounters and their lack of real connections in his choice of lyrics? Look for such stylistic choices as the length of words and phrases and the use of rhyme.
- Could these songs be sung by characters from another socio-economic group? Make a list of specific images in the lyrics that place the characters on the social landscape.
- In many of the individual numbers in *Company*, Stephen Sondheim uses musical styles which sharply contrast with the thoughts expressed in the lyrics to make an ironic statement about a character or situation. Identify the numbers where you observe this.
- Rhythm is an important tool for a composer. Stephen Sondheim uses familiar musical rhythms — Latin dance rhythms, tap dance rhythms, rock rhythms — to express the situation of Robert and his friends. Identify some of the different rhythmic styles in the show and discuss what they might be saying about the characters. For example, does the Latin dance rhythm of “The Little Things You Do Together” tell you anything about Sarah and Harry? If the song had a stately waltz rhythm, how would that change its meaning and effect?
- Many of the songs in *Company* are funny. The lyrics carry humor in a more obvious way than the music, but much of the music in *Company* is also humorous. Composers sometimes create musical humor by juxtaposing contrasting musical styles; sometimes music with strong associations (church music, cartoon music) is used in unlikely situations. Listen to “Getting Married Today” and discuss the different ways the music conveys humor.
- The script of *Company* mentions the music of the song “Company” sounds like a busy signal. Listen to the song and identify the “busy signal”; is it in any of the singing? Is it in the background instrumental accompaniment? Does it recur throughout the show?
- Many of the songs in *Company* contain a significant build-up of energy. One way to achieve this is by carefully planning the build and release of tension. Sometimes tension can be manip-

ulated by volume; increasing the tempo or the number of singers or the instrumentation can also create a build-up of tension. Sometimes changing the flow of a song in an unexpected place can build the tension. Listen to “Company,” “Another Hundred People,” “Side By Side By Side” and “Being Alive.” Identify the ways tension is built through the course of the songs.

- Listen to “Someone Is Waiting.” Does anything about the music make you uncomfortable? Does everything sound “right” to you? If the music sounds “strange” at any point in the song, what does that make you think or feel about Robert or what he is saying? Do you believe him? Do you think he understands what he is saying in this song?
- Comment on the fact Robert can only express his yearning for affection in song. Trace his emotional progress between “Someone Is Waiting” and “Being Alive.”
- Listen to “Another Hundred People.” Identify the elements in the music that evoke the crowded streets the lyrics tell about.
- “Poor Baby” is a blues sung by all the wives. Identify the “blues” elements of the song, in both the vocal parts and the instrumental accompaniment. The “blues” has many associations, many of them sexual. What is the significance of the fact this song is a blues?
- The song “Barcelona” doesn’t feel like it “goes anywhere,” musically; it hovers around one place. Discuss what this says about Robert and April.
- How does the score provide a structure for the episodic script of *Company*?
- Could the episodes in *Company* be rearranged? Discuss what the effect would be of rearranging the episodes and songs.
- Identify the songs in the show that define the primary issues.
- *Company* does not offer a frivolous, soothing experience; instead it is disturbing and unsettling. What musical theatre works have had this effect on you? What other kinds of social issues do you think musical theatre authors should be exploring?

Assignments: Research and Writing Prompts

- Compare *Company* to other classic musical theatre works such as *West Side Story* or *The Music Man*. How do they compare in terms of heroes and heroines, plot structure and subplots?
- Rather than having characters sing their emotions, the creators of *Company* used many songs as commentary on, and counterpoint to, the action. Research the dramatic theory of the playwright Bertolt Brecht to better understand the use of this technique as a theatrical device.
- Some writers have referred to *Company* as a “revusical,” combining the words “musical” and “revue.” Research the history of the revue in 20th-century American theatre. Is the revue form still alive?
- Some writers refer to *Company* as a “concept musical.” Research the term “concept musical.”
- Select one of the following songs of *Company*:

“Company”
 “The Little Things You Do Together”
 “Sorry-Grateful”
 “You Could Drive A Person Crazy”
 “Have I Got A Girl For You?”
 “Someone Is Waiting”
 “Another Hundred People”
 “Getting Married Today”
 “Marry Me A Little”
 “Side By Side By Side”
 “What Would We Do Without You?”
 “Poor Baby”
 “Barcelona”
 “The Ladies Who Lunch”
 “Being Alive”

Summarize the contents of this song. Discuss:

- a. What do we learn about the character or characters and their personal philosophies from the lyrics and the music?
 - b. What do we learn about the larger themes of the show from the lyrics and music?
- Repetition is a powerful theatrical device. Find examples of repetition in *Company*. Why do you think the creators choose to use repetition in each of these instances? Explore how repetition functions in another performing or visual art form.
 - Why is rhyme used in musical theatre lyrics? What is internal rhyme? Find examples of it in *Company*.
 - How do the lyrics seem to relate to the language of the dialogue? Are you ever aware that the dialogue and the lyrics were written by two different people?

The Elements of Musical Theatre Collaboration

Questions and Discussion Prompts

- Musical theatre is a highly collaborative art form. What is the meaning of the word collaboration?
- In what other fields is collaboration an important element?
- How can collaboration and competition be reconciled?
- Is compromise inevitable in collaboration? Must an artist sacrifice artistic vision to be part of a collaboration?

- Stephen Sondheim writes both lyrics and music, but collaborates with bookwriters and directors. What would you imagine some of the advantages would be to writing both lyrics and music? The disadvantages?

Assignments: Research and Writing Prompts

- Look at a program from a musical theatre production. List all the collaborators involved in getting a musical from the page to the stage.
- Write about a collaboration in which you participated. What was positive about the experience? What made it difficult?
- Write a short story with another person. What made this process better than writing alone? What made it more difficult? If you had the choice, would you write alone or with someone else?
- Many long-term musical theatre collaborations include not only the same team of writers, but the same director. Stephen Sondheim and Harold Prince had a legendary collaboration. Read about this collaboration and its impact on American musical theatre history.

The Original Production Design of *Company*

Assignment: Research and Writing Prompts

- The set for the first production of *Company* became an important part of the concept of the show. It was created by one of the greatest set designers in American theatre history, Boris Aronson. Research the life and career of Boris Aronson.
- The costume and hair designs for the first production of *Company* reflect the fashions and hairstyles of 1970. Design costumes for a production of *Company* set today.
- How would the furnishings in the apartments of Robert and his friends differ from those of 1970?

Create Your Own Musical

Assignment

- Create a musical about a group of people from your own generation and your own community. Focus on the issues of individual and group relationships and how the world around you affects those relationships.
- Make a list of characters and create character maps for each of them.
- Decide on a physical setting and draw sketches of the setting.
- Write an outline of the story you will tell, deciding whether you will use a linear or fragmented structure.
- Write the opening scene.
- Write a lyric or melody or both for one of the songs.
- Create costume and set designs for your show.

Critical Analysis

Assignment: Writing Report

- Write a review of a performance of *Company*. You may wish to include any combination of the following elements in your review:
 1. Did the show hold your interest? How and why?
 2. Describe the manner in which the story was presented to the audience. What was the dialogue like?
 3. What was the structure of the story? Was there a simple story or were there multiple stories?
 4. Describe the way music and lyrics worked in the show.
 5. Describe the sets, costumes, lighting and musical accompaniment. How did these elements add meaning to the show?
 6. Describe the effectiveness of the performers.
 7. Discuss the ideas presented in the show. Analyze their importance to your reader.
 8. Explain why your reader should make an effort to see the show.

APPENDIX

The following background material and bibliography are designed to enrich your exploration of the Themes and Topics.

About The Authors

GEORGE FURTH (bookwriter) was born in Chicago and graduated from Northwestern University; he did postgraduate work at Columbia University. He has worked extensively as an actor, appearing in many feature films, including *The Best Man*, *Oh God!*, *Doctor Detroit*, *Young Doctors In Love*, *The Man With Two Brains*, *Cannonball Run*, *Hooper*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *Blazing Saddles*, *Shampoo*, *Sleeper*, *The New Interns* and *Myra Breckinridge*; he has also acted in many major television shows. In addition to *Company*, he has written the Broadway shows *The Act*, *Twigs*, *The Supporting Cast*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, *Precious Sons* and *Getting Away With Murder*.

STEPHEN SONDHEIM (composer/lyricist), one of the most influential and accomplished composer/lyricists in Broadway history, was born in New York City and raised in New York and Pennsylvania. As a teenager he met Oscar Hammerstein II, who became Sondheim's mentor. Sondheim graduated from Williams College, where he received the Hutchinson Prize for Music Composition. After graduation he studied music theory and composition with Milton Babbitt. He worked for a short time in the 1950s as a writer for the television show *Topper*; his first professional musical theatre job was as the songwriter for the unproduced musical *Saturday Night*. He wrote the lyrics for *West Side Story* (1957), *Gypsy* (1959) and *Do I Hear A Waltz?* (1965), as well as additional lyrics for *Candide* (1973). In addition to writing music and lyrics for *Company*, he wrote *A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum* (1962), *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964), *Company* (1970 — 1971 Tony Award Music and Best Lyrics), *Follies* (1971 — 1972 Tony Award Score and New York Drama Critics Circle Award; revised in London, 1987), *A Little Night Music* (1973 — Tony Award Score), *The Frogs* (1974), *Pacific Overtures* (1976 — New York Drama Critics' Circle Award), *Sweeney Todd* (1979 — Tony Award Score), *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981), *Sunday In The Park With George* (1984 — New York Drama Critics Circle Award; 1985 Pulitzer Prize for Drama), *Into The Woods* (1987 — Tony Award Score), *Assassins* (1991) and *Passion* (1994 — Tony Award Score). He composed the songs for the television production "Evening Primrose" (1966), co-authored the film *The Last of Sheila* (1973) and provided incidental music for *The Girls of Summer* (1956), *Invitation to a March* (1961) and *Twigs* (1971). *Side By Side By Sondheim* (1976), *Marry Me A Little* (1981), *You're Gonna Love Tomorrow* (1983; originally presented as *A Stephen Sondheim Evening*) and *Putting It Together* (1993) are anthologies of his work. He has written scores for the films *Stavisky* (1974) and *Reds* (1981), and composed songs for the film *Dick Tracy* (1990 — Academy Award for Best Song). He is also co-author, with George Furth, of the comedy-thriller *Getting Away With Murder* (1996). He is on the Council of the Dramatist Guild, the national association of playwrights, composers and lyricists, having served as its president from 1973 until 1981, and in 1983 was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 1990 he was appointed the first Visiting Professor of Contemporary Theatre at Oxford University. He was also recipient of a Kennedy Center Honor in 1993.

HAROLD PRINCE (producer/director) attended the University of Pennsylvania, where he began writing, acting and directing shows as a member of the Penn Players. After graduation, he began working as a writer for a short-lived television production company set up by the legendary Broadway writer/director/producer George Abbott. After the company disbanded in 1949, he became the assistant to Robert Griffith, Abbott's production stage manager. In 1953 Prince and Griffith formed a producing partnership; their first show, *The Pajama Game* (1954), was a huge success, playing over 1,000 Broadway performances and winning the both the Tony Award and the Donaldson Award. The Griffith-Prince partnership went on to produce *Damn Yankees* (1956 – Tony Award Musical), *New Girl in Town* (1957), *West Side Story* (1957), *Fiorello* (1959 – 1960 Tony Award; Pulitzer Prize for Drama), *Tenderloin* (1960), *A Call on Kuprin* (1961) and *They Might Be Giants* (1961, London). After Griffith's death in 1961, Prince produced *Take Her, She's Mine* (1961), *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962 – 1963 Tony Award), *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964 – 1965 Tony Award), *Poor Bitos* (1964) and *Flora, The Red Menace* (1965). He began directing as well as producing shows with *She Loves Me* (1963) and went on to direct and produce or co-produce many shows, including *It's A Bird, It's A Plane, It's Superman* (1966), *Cabaret* (1966 – 1967 Tony Award), *Zorba* (1968), *Company* (1970 – 1971 Tony Award), *Follies* (1971; co-director with Michael Bennett – 1972 Tony Award), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *Candide* (1974), *Pacific Overtures* (1976) and *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981). He has directed numerous musicals, plays and operas, including *Evita* (1978, London; 1979, NY — Tony Award), *Sweeney Todd* (1979 – Tony Award), *Madama Butterfly* (1982), *Turandot* (1983), *Phantom of the Opera* (1986 – 1987 Tony Award), *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1993) and *Showboat* (1994 – Tony Award). He has directed the films *Something For Everyone* (1970) and *A Little Night Music* (1978). He is the recipient of 17 Tony Awards and numerous Critics Circle Awards. He was also recipient of a Kennedy Center Honor in 1994.

MICHAEL BENNETT (choreographer), born in Buffalo, NY, had a short career as a chorus dancer, appearing in *Subways Are for Sleeping* (1961), *Here's Love* (1963) and *Bajour* (1964). He began his career as a choreographer with *A Joyful Noise* (1966) and *Henry, Sweet Henry* (1967); he was hired by producer David Merrick to replace choreographer Gillian Lynne on *How Now, Dow Jones* (1967), contributing at least one memorable number, "Step to the Rear." His next show, *Promises, Promises* (1968), was his first commercial success. Bennett's work on *Coco* (1969) showed him to be moving into a more directorial direction. He choreographed *Company* (1970), the first of this two shows with director Harold Prince, but with *Follies* (1971), he and Prince shared director credit. *Follies* earned Bennett two 1972 Tony Awards, for Director of a Musical (shared with Harold Prince) and Choreographer. Bennett next directed and choreographed *Seesaw* (1973), earning another Tony Award for Choreography. His next show was the innovative *A Chorus Line* (1975), which he initiated and directed, and which earned him two Tony Awards, for Direction and Choreography (shared with Bob Avian). He received another Tony Award for Choreography (shared with Bob Avian) for *Ballroom* (1979). He won his seventh Tony Award (for Choreography – shared with Michael Peters) for his work on the hugely successful *Dreamgirls* (1981). Bennett died in 1987.

About the Concept Musical

The term “concept musical” refers to a musical that is not held together by a linear plot or a strong story-line. After *Showboat* appeared in 1927, most successful musicals were centered around the interaction of characters in a story: the story would be set up at the beginning of the show and events would drive the characters and the story forward. Songs grew out of the needs of the story and usually expanded a character’s feelings or knowledge; the songs were expected to carry the story forward. Musicals which use this model include *South Pacific*, *The Sound of Music*, *The Music Man* and *Damn Yankees*. Rodgers and Hammerstein were masters of this type of musical. In a concept musical the plot is no longer the unifying element of the show; a concept musical might be held together by dance (for example in *A Chorus Line*) or by an idea (the different faces of contemporary New York relationships in *Company*) or may combine a plot with elements which exist outside of the story and comment on the story and the characters (for example in *Cabaret*). An early concept musical was the 1948 Kurt Weill/Alan Jay Lerner show, *Love Life*, about a troubled marriage. The show, featuring a couple who never aged, contained book scenes which took place over different historical eras; song numbers, which commented on the play and did not carry the story forward, occurred in between the book scenes. *Love Life* (like *Company*) resembled another classic theatre form: the revue. In a revue, performers appear throughout the evening as different characters and they perform songs, dances and short scenes not necessarily related to each other by a plot. A revue might feature caricatures of political characters and events; it might feature new performers and writers; or it might feature numbers all commenting on one idea.

About Company

Company was originally an evening of eleven one-act plays George Furth had written for actress Kim Stanley; some of the plays centered around the marriages of Furth’s Southern California friends. A 1968 Broadway production directed by Anthony Perkins was planned. There were problems raising money for the production, and in early 1969, Furth, looking for advice, showed the plays to Stephen Sondheim. Sondheim, in turn, sent them to his friend Harold Prince. Prince suggested turning the plays into a musical about contemporary marriage, structuring the show as a type of revue — using a small cast in a series of episodes.

Sondheim, Furth and Prince began work on the musical; a major problem was deciding on the musical’s form. Only two of Furth’s original eleven one-acts were used in the show; three new ones were added. They decided the show would focus on the relationship of Robert (who is single) with his friends (five couples) and three of his girlfriends. Because the show is a series of vignettes, without a strong, driving plot-line, Sondheim decided against using a traditional Rodgers and Hammerstein-style structure, where songs expand a character’s feelings and flow directly out of the plot. Instead, he wrote songs which occur unexpectedly and which comment on the theme of the show.

As work progressed on the writing during the spring of 1969, Prince left for Germany to film *Something For Everyone*. Sondheim was also working with writer James Goldman on another musical, *The Girls Upstairs* (which later became *Follies*); it was scheduled to go into rehearsal in the fall of 1969, so rehearsals for *Company* were planned for the spring of 1970. Difficulties in

getting *The Girl Upstairs* produced almost postponed work on *Company* until Prince agreed to produce the Sondheim-Goldman musical after *Company* opened. Boris Aronson, the set designer, discovered his idea for a multi-leveled set of five apartments accessible by an onstage elevator while looking at the multi-leveled buildings of Lincoln Center. The cast of 14 had to do everything — sing, act and dance. Choreographer Michael Bennett decided to hire only one professional dancer, Donna McKecknie. He wanted the rest of the 14 member cast to look like real people when they danced. The orchestrations were done by Jonathan Tunick.

The show opened at the Alvin Theatre on April 26, 1970, with Dean Jones as Robert, Barbara Barrie as Sarah, Charles Kimbrough as Harry, Merle Louise as Susan, John Cunningham as Peter, Teri Ralston as Jenny, George Coe as David, Beth Howland as Amy, Steve Elmore as Paul, Elaine Strich as Joanne (a role which Furth wrote especially for her), Charles Braswell as Larry, Pamela Myers as Marta, Donna McKecknie as Kathy and Susan Browning as April. *Company* ran on Broadway for 706 performances and went on to win the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Musical and seven 1971 Tony Awards – Musical, Producer of a Musical (Prince), Director of a Musical (Prince), Book of a Musical (Furth), Lyrics (Sondheim), Music (Sondheim) and Scenic Design (Aronson). Strich was succeeded on Broadway by Jane Russell and Vivian Blaine. The year-long national tour featured George Chakiris as Robert and Elaine Strich as Joanne; international productions include a 1972 British production, a 1973 German production and a 1986 Australian production. The original cast recording is available on Columbia CK 03550; a London release, starring Larry Kert and the Broadway cast, is available on CBS Records 70108. A film by D.A. Pennebaker, *Company: The Cast Recording*, is currently available in videotape and laserdisc.

Critical Acclaim

There is nothing fragile about “Company,” produced and directed by Harold Prince. Casting an acerbic eye on the state of contemporary marriages in general, and contemporary marriages in New York in particular, it is by turns brassy, brittle, sympathetic, cynical, romantic, calculating and alive—oh so very much alive. It’s been a long time since a musical has come along with so many show-stopping numbers, the kind that get cheers and whistling from the good folk in the balcony as well as the fat cats in the orchestra... Stephen Sondheim’s music and lyrics add up to one of the best scores on Broadway currently... “Company” is the best musical of the year.

John O’Connor, *The Wall Street Journal* (April 28, 1970)

Let’s hear it for “Company,” the newest and slickest thing in town. As smooth as the steel-and-glass buildings of midtown Manhattan and as jumpy as an alley cat, it is Broadway’s first musical treatment of nerve ends. Brilliance is all in this show. George Furth’s book is diamond-sharp, funny and chilling both. But Stephen Sondheim’s songs, while equally scintillating, shine through time and again with a welcome and essential warmth. They make the evening. How nice to have another New York show, and such an adroit one.

Douglas Watt, *Daily News* (April 27, 1970)

“Company” is quite simply in a league by itself. Artistry, excitement, intelligence and professionalism have been so long gone from Broadway that it’s almost easy to forget when the musical theatre held the promise of greatness, and yet that was only as long ago as the last work Leonard Bernstein (“West Side Story”), Jerome Robbins (“Fiddler on the Roof”) and Stephen Sondheim (“Anyone Can Whistle”). Sondheim’s new musical, which opened Sunday night at the Alvin Theatre, is a tremendous piece of work, thrilling and chilling, glittering bright, really funny (and not so funny), exceedingly adult, gorgeous to look at and filled with brilliant music. The show is magnificent.

Martin Gottfried, *Women’s Wear Daily* (April 27, 1970)

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SARAH SCHLESINGER is the Associate Chair of the Graduate Musical Theatre Writing Program at New York University. She is a lyricist and librettist whose work has been seen Off-Broadway and at Regional Theatres around the country. She has been commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera Guild to write the librettos for two new operas — *The Amazing Adventures of Alvin Allegretto*, which premiered in 1995 and *Different Fields*, which premiered in 1996. With Nashville composer Mike Reid, she has written *The Ballad of Little Jo*, a new musical developed in the Harold Prince-Denver Theatre Center Musical Theatre Program. She is the co-librettist and lyricist for *Love Comics*, a new musical which has been optioned for Off-Broadway. She is also the author of recent non-fiction works published by Villard/Random House and William Morrow. She is also the author of recent non-fiction works published by Random House/Villard, William Morrow, Avon Books and the Princeton Book Company.

FRED CARL, co-author, is the archivist of the Harburg Foundation. He has worked as a researcher for the following book: *Who Put the Rainbow in The Wizard of Oz? Yip Harburg, Lyricist* by Harold Meyerson and Ernie Harburg; *The Broadway Musical: Collaboration in Commerce and Art* by Bernard Rosenberg and Ernie Harburg; *Fascinating Rhythm: The Collaboration of George and Ira Gershwin* by Deena Rosenberg. He has taught classes in the history of popular music in America at Ramapo College and New York University. He has composed the score for the short film *Over*, by Carl Capotorto; music for the jazz theatre piece *...in the waiting room of the 21st century*, text by Hattie Gossett; and a number of art songs for voice and piano. He is a graduate of the New York University's Musical Theatre Program.

The Music Theatre International Study Guides are edited by John W. Lowell. Tom Dunn and Robert Lee are associate editors.