



A Little Night Music

Hugh Wheeler, Stephen Sondheim (Music & Lyrics)

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Set in 1900 Sweden, A Little Night Music explores the tangled web of affairs centered around actress, Desirée Armfeldt, and the men who love her: a lawyer by the name of Fredrik Egerman and the Count Carl-Magnus Malcom. When the traveling actress performs in Fredrik's town, the estranged lovers' passion rekindles. This strikes a flurry of jealousy and suspicion between Desirée; Fredrik; Fredrick's wife, Anne; Desirée's current lover, the Count; and the Count's wife, Charlotte. Both men – as well as their jealous wives – agree to join Desirée and her family for a weekend in the country at Desirée's mother's estate. With everyone in one place, infinite possibilities of new romances and second chances bring endless surprises.

A Little Night Music Details

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From Reader Review A Little Night Music for online ebook

ALLEN says

Of course you should see one of the many revivals of Stephen Sondheim's A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC (which originally played Broadway in 1973), or at least listen to the cast album. But why spend money on this libretto (or "book") which has no notes and staves, just words?

One reason to go for his affordable volume is to see how Hugh Wheeler's book integrates with Stephen Sondheim's songs. Another is to witness Sondheim's ingenuity-shot-through-with genius in the way he composes his lyrics: Here's a bit of "Night Waltz/The Sun Won't Set," as the chorus bemoans the refusal of the Midsummer Swedish sun to fully set, leaving potential lovers free to wander the woods in search of, shall we say, romance:

[QUINTET:]
The vespers ring
The nightingale's waiting to sing
The rest of us wait on a string
Perpetual sunset
Is rather an unset
Tling thing
The sun won't set
It's fruitless to hope or to fret
It's dark as it's going to get
The hands on the clock turn
But don't sing a nocturne
Just yet . . .

(I really like the carryover of "unset-tling thing.")

Overall, grandiosity and frustration -- how Edwardian. How marvelous!

Probably for professionals and people considering another revival of this estimable show, five stars would be in order instead.

Susan Liston says

I've never had a chance to see this on stage and I've always wanted to. The songs pop up on my Ipod here and there but I haven't read the whole play in years. Always a good idea to read Sondheim, I think, because his lyrics are so intricate you do lose some of it if you haven't.

Alexa says

I loved this play. I've heard the soundtrack my entire life (I always associate the music with trips to my

grandma and grandpa's house, as that's where I've heard it most). I saw it on the West End in May and cried throughout the production, not because it is sad, but because of my emotional attachment to the music. I bought the text at the Royal National Theatre Company's bookstore and was having difficulty getting through the last book I was reading, so I picked this up instead because I knew I could get through it quickly AND enjoy it.

The language in the script is fairly silly. One character, Anne, always refers to her son-in-law as something along the lines of "dear, silly Henrik," which sounds ridiculous if you or I say it out loud ... so I read the whole thing in a posh, British accent because OBVIOUSLY people in England speak like that. Of course, I did see a production in which everyone had posh, British accents, so it seemed natural that the characters should have those voices. But aside from the over-the-top language, I adored the text. Sondheim's lyrics never cease to amaze me. They are incredibly filled with double meaning, so reading the words versus hearing them enabled me to catch a lot of the story that I wouldn't have gotten otherwise.

I don't know that there is much else to say about *A Little Night Music*. I adored it, but I don't know that I would recommend it to anyone who is familiar with the musical as it's pretty weird and might throw off anyone who isn't already enamored with Sondheim.

Oh, and I want to sing "The Miller's Son" forever. And ever. And ever.

Wait, I just remembered, There's an introduction that tells how the play came to be and talks about the collaboration between Sondheim, Hugh Wheeler, and Harold Prince. Being someone who likes to think they know everything there is to know about musicals, it was really interesting to read the stuff that I did not, in fact, know. For that, I would recommend anyone who likes theatre to read this book.

Neil says

3.5 stars for the book, which easily goes to five with Sondheim's music. This adapts Bergman, combining a waltz musical with a country weekend sex comedy. This is a story for sophisticated readers, made into something special by a great set of songs from Sondheim's heyday.

Kat says

Basic Plot: Relationship entanglements and affairs in the early part of the 20th century.

Meh. Some plays read really well on the page and the dialogue is more than enough to keep me interested. Some plays you really just have to see on stage to enjoy. I have a feeling this play is the latter. I could tell there were intended to be some fun bits in there, and they probably are really funny on stage, but those bits depend entirely on the actors playing the parts and the directors directing the show. In and of themselves, they are flat on the page.

The plot focused so heavily on marital infidelity that I was bothered by it. I can't help it, it's a topic that simply bothers me. Also, the "twist" at the end was something anyone with eyes could see coming from the very first scenes of the play. I didn't feel terribly invested in any of the characters, either, except for the possible exception of the grandmother, who was a spitfire. I liked her.

Not really appropriate for high schoolers because of the implied lewdness, but honestly not all that bad because things are more hinted at than said directly. The play has one "classic" song in it ("Send in the Clowns") and that's about it for its memorableness.

Callie Rose Tyler says

This is the first time I've ever READ a musical. This one might be particularly difficult to appreciate since it seems several of the songs involve characters singing over one another.

The second half of the book felt a bit trite as everything turns out exactly as you expect, I guess when it comes to Sondheim I expect something a little out of the ordinary (Into the Woods/Sweeney Todd).

I enjoyed the dialogue and the lyrics but I think I will have to listen to the soundtrack to make a final judgement.

Gayle Turner says

Brilliant

Margarida Afonso says

Sondheim = Sarcasm
And I adore it!

This musical is funny, and, /some/ of its characters awake my desire to punch them in the face. Hey, I'm not naming names here, but if you've read it, or seen it live, then you know who I'm talking about.

Now, you may think this to be a bad thing, but hear me out. When you read a musical, with no other goal, but to entertain yourself, you have a tendency to rush through most dialogue. Why? Because you need to get to that sweet, sweet beat that made you buy the book in the first place.

This didn't happen here. I mean, I still got to that sweet beat (yes, I am looking at you "A Weekend in the Country"), however the story was fun to follow along, so nothing was rushed.

Was it Sondheim's lyrics? Was it Wheeler's writing?

Yeah, you guessed it. It was both!

Sondheim's brilliantly sarcastic lyrics are the perfect fit for Wheeler's bumpy waltz, as thus, a perfect cover for a Playbill.

Oh, also shout out to Charlotte! Your passive-aggressive jokes are on point!

Note: For a better experience, you can accompany your reading with the original Broadway soundtrack.

Bionic Jean says

A Little Night Music is a classic romantic comedy, a collaboration between the writer Hugh Wheeler and the composer Stephen Sondheim. It is possibly Stephen Sondheim's most famous piece. Sadly, it's not really my cup of tea. The performance I saw was this one at the National Theatre in London during September 1995. The stellar cast included:

Madame Armfeldt - Siân Phillips.

Desirée Armfeldt - Judi Dench (who spoke her part rather than sang it)

Fredrika Armfeldt - Claire Cox

Mr Erlanson - John Owen-Jones

Countess Charlotte Malcolm - Patricia Hodge

I enjoyed a couple of the songs, including "*Send in The Clowns*", but do feel overall that this musical play was wasted on me.

Tirzah Eleora says

If I were rating this book merely on the form and style I would give it at least 4 stars. It's very well structured. I particularly like how Sondheim uses the songs to advance the story and unfold the characters to us. In many musicals (love them though I do) the songs can feel as though they are just tucked in for fun, but they don't actually contribute to the story in any way; Sondheim knew how to fully utilize the musical as a medium of storytelling. The song "Night Waltz" is a personal favorite of mine, and was the reason I listened to the full musical in the first place, which led to me reading the libretto. The dialogue was also well done. Sondheim's dry wit was simply hilarious, especially for the characters of Charlotte and Madame Armfeldt. (In the play soundtrack I listened to, Madame Armfeldt was played by the glorious Angela Lansbury. SHE IS SO PERFECT. Such a bummer that her lines are so few.) Especially Charlotte!! Usually cynical humour annoys me, but Charlotte's lines were the best.

BUT. Form is not everything! Since I must rate this on the actual content as well, stars must be subtracted. The play gently pokes fun at human folly, but, given the charming and whimsical tone of the play, the picture of human nature given was done in an unnecessarily sordid way. The plot of the play revolves entirely around the gratuitous sexual experiences of the characters, all of which seem entirely devoid of a conscience. (Save the character who is studying for the church, and is constantly mocked by the other characters for his piety. But even he gives his conscience the sack by the end of the play, so there ya go.) In addition to this, there aren't really any negative consequences for immorality depicted. Obviously, NOT COOL. So, as much as I enjoyed Sondheim's creative talent, I can't recommend this story.

Except for the song Night Waltz. Listen to the Night Waltz!!!

Anjum Choudhury says

I love the unique characters, but as of right now, it's a little hard for me to get behind some aspects of the storyline. Mostly just the strangeness of Anne and Fredrick's marriage. However, the lyrics are predictably amazing--Sondheim really at his best here, especially with Now, Later, Soon.

Each character is a real person, flawed, but most are still likeable in some way. Anne is very naive and somewhat annoying, but loving. Fredrick is, let's face it, a little gross in marrying Anne, but he and Desiree are sweet. Desiree is kind of a man thief, but ultimately a pretty good mother. Or at least, she tries to be. And then there is the wonder that is Charlotte. Uproariously hilarious, but just in the saddest way possible. It's a shame her character is so realistic.

The many, many characters are very balanced within the show. Somehow it's bearable to keep track of them and their twisted love...octagons. I'm not exactly sure *what* the leibesleiders are...but I hope that I figure it out. Given that I'm playing one.

Anyway, one of Sondheim's best. But, unfortunately--unless we're talking from a strictly intellectual standpoint--Sondheim isn't my favorite.

And the gray area regarding incest is just a little hard to swallow.

Carrie says

Just came back from seeing this show on Broadway (Angela Lansbury!). Reading the libretto let me appreciate the very clever lines I'd missed in the flutter of the large multi-person numbers, e.g. "My boots! Pack everything I own / That shoots." I was delighted to find that the introduction describes the play from the orchestrator's vantage point, novel for me, and the perfect way to get into the nitty-gritty of the music.

Kenny says

Perpetual anticipation is good for the soul But it's bad for the heart.

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC Stephen Sondheim

I go back and forth on this question. What is Sondheim's greatest solo show? Sometimes I vote for **SWEENEY TODD**, other days it's **A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC**. Both are brilliant. Of late, my choice is falls with **A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC**.

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC is a brilliant romantic musical comedy, perhaps the best ever written for the stage. It centers on love's desires, follies, regrets, and second chances. **A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC** is not just a show about love, but about the redemptive power of love.

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC, set in Sweden at the turn of the 20th Century, soars on the strength of Sondheim's magnificent music and gorgeous, clever lyrics. Sondheim is matched every step of the way by

Hugh Wheeler's witty book, inspired by the 1955 Ingmar Bergman film **Smiles of a Summer Night**.

Songs and situation are perfectly integrated in **A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC**. You see this most clearly in the pivotal relationship between the lawyer Fredrik Egerman, and his old flame Desiree Armfeldt. Sondheim's lyrics become riveting mini-plays within the play.

Attention is paid to every detail and character in this musical made up of love, sex, death, memory and midsummer magic.

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC is a beautifully crafted romantic musical comedy. It may be Wheeler's finest script which is high praise indeed considering he has written so many amazing shows. **A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC** is vibrant palette of swirling romanticism with shadings from the pervading sadness of approaching middle age, and the realization of missed romantic opportunities is caught with piercing truth and ravishing music.

Brian says

I recently saw an excellent professional production of “A Little Night Music” so I decided to read it, because I knew the libretto and Sondheim’s lyrics would be worth reexamining. I was correct in that assumption. Reading it made me appreciate the performance I had seen even more.

The libretto (book) by Hugh Wheeler is one of the best I have encountered in a musical. Good characterization, a nice flow from scene to scene, and unlike the book of many musicals, the story feels complete with the songs, not merely a tool for them.

Something that I noticed in reading “A Little Night Music” that I did not catch fully in performance is the juxtaposition of the two scenes, which follow one another that contain the songs “Send in the Clowns” and “The Miler’s Son.” It is brilliant. The former scene/song explores the idea of not taking what you need/want when it is presented to you and being passed by and made a fool (or clown). The scene/song “The Miler’s Son” is just the opposite. Life will make a fool of you from time to time, so you have to jump at any chance and happiness that you can get when presented. This thematic device is simply presented in very effective dialogue, and in the two most profound lyrics/songs of the piece.

Read “A Little Night Music” and then see a good production. It’s worth the effort.

Richard Steinberg says

What a wonderful play. Reminiscent of a Shakespearian Comedy. People are in relationships that don’t seem to go together. This is a great way to develop frank and funny dialog. Unlike Shakespeare there is the music of Sondheim. Like Shakespeare the couples all resolve properly.
