

SWEENEY TODD – UTA – Auditions, August 2022

Intimacy/Violence/Language Content Disclosure

Director: Anne Healy

SYNOPSIS:

In nineteenth century London, Sweeney Todd, an unjustly exiled barber, returns home after fifteen years imprisoned in an Australian penal colony. He seeks vengeance against a lecherous judge and his spineless beadle who framed him. Helped in his escape by a virtuous but naïve sailor, Anthony Hope, Sweeney plans to reunite with his wife Lucy and daughter Johanna. However, he soon reunites with Mrs. Lovett, whose failing pie shop is in the building where his barbershop used to be. She tells Sweeney that the judge raped Lucy, who consequently took her own life, and took Johanna in as his ward.

Sweeney's road to revenge leads him to re-open his barbershop in its old location where he attempts to kill the judge. His attack fails and he goes mad, vowing revenge on not only the judge but all mankind. Mrs. Lovett, enamored with Sweeney, comes up with an idea to help dispose of the bodies by baking them into her meat pies. Her business starts to boom, but Sweeney's thirst for blood and her inability to keep up with demand lead to heartbreak, blackmail, and carnage beyond their comprehension.

SETTING:

Although envisioned as somewhat abstract, the production may be grounded in Victorian London during the 1800s with hints of modernism. The goal is for the audience to feel that all of this happened long ago, yet it could happen today.

Keywords: Grand Guignol: Theatre of Horror and Gore, Modern Victorian - Penny Dreadful, Neo-Victorian, Horror, Film Noir, industrialization, melodrama.

CHOOSING TO PRODUCE THIS MUSICAL: Although there is an overwhelming pessimism presented in this musical, there is also an undercurrent of love and hope. The themes presented in this musical are surprisingly relevant to the current state of our world. The show fundamentally questions our ability and resolve to effect change and to rise above. Pedagogically, this Sondheim musical is a seminal work in the musical theatre canon that will challenge both the artistic team and students alike.

DIRECTOR'S CENTRAL CONCEPT: Every human possesses both the capacity to love/for good and to hate/for evil – our ability to balance or control those forces can and will be altered by our susceptibility to the good and evil forces around us.

DIRECTOR'S THEME(S): Corruption of society and corruption of the soul. Loss of innocence. Motivations for, and consequences, of revenge. Revenge and vengeance will blind you to all opportunities for happiness. Good vs. evil.

CASTING: Our production will be collaborating with a full orchestra, so all music will be in the original keys from the published score. The ensemble will play a major role in this production and will fill out the minor and feature roles, such as Fogg, young man, young woman, quintet, etc. Our

production is looking to cast an inclusive and diverse company of actors who reflect the world we live in today.

In reference to the character descriptions below: The characters as written are on the binary and are written with he/him or she/her pronouns, which you will see in the following descriptions. But however limiting the descriptions are, our casting seeks to be as inclusive as possible, and we invite gender non-conforming, genderqueer, transgender and non-binary actors to audition for the roles they most identify with. We will also list race/ethnicity when specific to the character but are otherwise seeking all races and ethnicities. In addition, we will list disability when specific to a character, but are otherwise seeking actors with disabilities as well as non-disabled actors for all roles. Please let us know if you have any questions, concerns, or if there are any accommodations we can provide.

A note about accents: Accents listed are not expected at auditions and will be worked on throughout the rehearsal process. That said, if you're comfortable performing any of these accents, go for it.

Roles:

Sweeney Todd

Sweeney escaped from prison after being wrongfully accused and jailed for fifteen years. Formerly a proud barber, a loving husband and a happy father, Sweeney is now consumed by loss and revenge. He has returned to London to right the wrongs committed against him, his wife, and his daughter. Sweeney is charming but hot-tempered, ferocious yet vulnerable. Strong baritone/bass who can whistle. Speaks with an Estuary or London dialect.

Mrs. Lovett

An entrepreneurial meat pie shop owner who will do whatever it takes to survive. She is in love with Todd and hopes that he'll forget the past and build a new life with her. At first shocked by Sweeney's bursts of violence, Lovett turns his desire for revenge into a profitable business venture. She is resourceful, ambitious, charismatic, and has great comedic timing. Mezzo with belt. Speaks with a Cockney accent.

Anthony Hope

A youthful sailor who helps Sweeney return to London and unexpectedly falls in love with Johanna. He is idealistic, romantic and a little reckless. His passions sometimes get the better of his reason and his enthusiasm sometimes makes him unintentionally comedic. Over the course of the show he awakens to the horrors around him and becomes disillusioned with London. Tenor. Speaks with a standard British accent (RP).

Johanna

Todd's long-lost daughter and Judge Turpin's young ward. Homeschooled and largely homebound. She has a rebellious, subversive and romantic streak and longs to escape her confinement. Johanna is aware that Judge Turpin isn't her real father and suspects that he might be a predator. Like her father, she has experienced trauma and possesses a buried capacity for violence. Although described as "pale" and "yellow haired," we are not taking this literally. Soprano. Speaks with a standard British accent (RP).

Tobias Ragg

A poor youngster apprenticed first to Pirelli and then to Mrs Lovett. He is industrious and eager to please, with a good sense of humor. Uneducated, but innately clever and observant, Tobias responds quickly to the kindness of Lovett but grows increasingly suspicious of Sweeney. After a betrayal, Toby experiences the violence and terror of this world and snaps. Or maybe he just becomes like everyone else. Tenor. Speaks with a Cockney accent.

Judge Turpin

A lecherous public official who portrays himself as a sanctimonious authoritarian. He takes advantage of his position to imprison Todd, assault Lucy, and take Johanna in as his ward. He is aware that what he wants and what he's done is wrong, yet chooses to ignore or push against his conscience. Embodies Puritanical hypocrisy: he lusts after Johanna, even as he professes to keep her innocent. Bass/baritone. Speaks with a standard British accent (RP).

Beadle Bamford

A pompous public official who is responsible for the health and safety of London. He possesses a dry, deadpan sense of humor and enjoys wielding his power. He is not a snivelling civil servant. He is deeply loyal to Turpin, though in his heart of hearts he believes he's better than the judge. The Beadle loves singing children's nursery rhymes, which remind him of his youth. Tenor with a strong falsetto. Speaks with a standard British accent (RP).

Beggar Woman/Lucy Barker

An eerie, poor soul living on the streets of London. She supports herself by begging and prostituting herself to sailors. The Beggar Woman is Sweeney's wife, Lucy, who lost her mind after being assaulted by Turpin and taking poison. She has occasional flashes of lucidity and distrusts Mrs. Lovett. Like the oracle Cassandra, She is the only one who sees what's happening but no one will listen to her. Mezzo. Speaks with a Cockney or Estuary accent.

Adolfo Pirelli

An Irish former employee of Sweeney's who has since developed a public persona as a flamboyant and flashy world-famous Italian barber. A charlatan who sells fake medicine and challenges other barbers to shaving contests. Pirelli is charming, calculating, and over-the-top comedic. Possess some anti-English sentiments and does not take lightly to being publicly embarrassed by Sweeney. High tenor. Speaks in both an Italian and Irish accent.

Jonas Fogg

The owner of Fogg's Asylum. Fogg sells the hair of inmates to wigmakers. Considers the inmates "children" and takes pleasure in showing them off to visitors. Chooses to ignore the human rights of his patients in the name of scientific progress. An authoritarian who is really a coward at heart. Speaking role who sings with the ensemble. Speaks with an Estuary dialect.

Ensemble

The ensemble acts as a Greek Chorus, commenting on the action and participating in the tale. They are the show's chief storytellers, taking on the roles of customers, townspeople, police, inmates at the insane asylum, Sweeney's thoughts, and Sweeney's victims. They stand in for us and there is a feeling of them always being nearby, watching. The ensemble gets ample opportunities for vocal challenges and is showcased with solos and harmonies throughout the show. Sopranos, altos, tenors, baritones, and basses. Accents not necessary.

CONTENT ADVISORY: (Discussed and/or witnessed in this show)

GENERAL:

Genre:

Horror/serial killer, revenge plot, anti-heroism, musical/psychological thriller, political/social satire, societal and class commentary.

Violence:

Murder, attempted murder, rape, attempted rape, assault, cannibalism (intentional and unintentional), blood, revenge, gore, sensationalism.

Language:

Plotting murder, discussion of acts of murder, propositioning for sex, discussion of rape, discussion of grinding up humans and putting them into pies, discussion of suicide, sexual innuendo, discussion of mental illness.

Program statement draft:

Sweeney Todd contains theatrical depictions of violence, death, and physical abuse.

DETAIL:

The text (dialogue and lyrics) will be performed as written. We will take the optional cuts on pages 38 and 43 as indicated. **Please read the libretto in detail as there may be instances that have not been specifically identified that are particularly triggering to you.**

The following represents intimacy, violence, and language imbedded within the script. All intimacy and fight/violence will be choreographed according to the principals and practices of Theatrical Intimacy Educators and Fight Choreography best practices according to the comfort level of the actors involved. Best practices will be followed for a safe rehearsal and performance space. The rehearsal process will include discussions of boundaries and strict adherence to protocols based on Theatrical Intimacy Education's model for creating a culture of communication, consent, and respect. All questions are welcome.

ACT I

PAGE	CHARACTER(S)	CONTENT	CONTEXT
2	Several Ensemble	Carry and bury a body bag	Setting the scene - prologue
2	Company	Lyrics "freely flow the blood"	Setting the scene - prologue
11	Mrs. Lovett	Lyrics "poppin pussies into pies"	Discussion of using cats as the meat in some pie shops
12-14	Mrs. Lovett	Lyrics "Poor Thing"	Retells the story of Lucy detailing Lucy's rape and subsequent descent into madness and death.
13-14	Judge/Beadle/Johanna (as Sweeney's young wife Lucy)	Simulated Rape at a masked ball. Beadle throws "Lucy" down	Mrs. Lovett is retelling the story of what happened to Sweeney's wife after he was sent to prison.

		and holds her, Judge “mounts” her. Ensemble as party goers move around them.	As she tells the story, a reenactment occurs at a “party” staged as a “dumb show” – highly stylized.
15	Mrs. Lovett	“She poisoned herself”	Describes Lucy’s suicide.
16-18	Sweeney	“for their hour has come” and song “My Friends”	Sweeney plots Turpin and Beadle’s murder. Mrs. Lovett is complicit. Ensemble comments on the action planned.
22	Beggar Woman, Anthony	Action: “she grabs at his crotch...”. Lyrics “Want it snugly...starboard”	Action: no physical contact made. A sexual proposition to Anthony to get money.
22	Bird Seller	“We blind’em, sir.”	Referencing that bird sellers do this in order to keep birds singing night and day.
23	Beadle	Action: uses truncheon to physically intimidate Action: “takes out the bird, wrings its neck and then tosses it away.”	Beadle is ordered by the Judge to dispose of Anthony and the bird gifted to Johanna by Anthony.
33	Pirelli	Action: described as excessively flamboyant Italian, glittering suit, thick wavy black hair, dazzling smile	Pirelli is of Irish descent, in hiding posing as an Italian.
54-56	Sweeney, Pirelli	Action: Pirelli and Sweeney struggle, fight, attempt to strangle, Pirelli is put in a trunk, eventually slashes his throat.	Pirelli has come to blackmail Todd. Todd is exposed and attempts to
56	Three Tenors	Lyrics for “Ballad”	Three tenors recount the murder of Pirelli.
57	Judge, Young Boy	“hang by the neck until you are dead”	The judge sentences the young boy to death by hanging.
57	Judge, Beadle	“I’ve decided to marry Johanna next Monday”	Judge discusses marrying his underage “daughter” (ward). The Beadle agrees.
57-61, 64	Johanna, Anthony	“Kiss Me” sequence	Johanna and Anthony embrace, kiss and then remain in an embrace., fall into each other’s arms, Anthony “crushes her to

			him, they kiss.”, they “sink to the floor”
70	Sweeney, Judge	“Pretty Women”	Plotting the Judge’s death, motions (pg 74) to slit the judge’s throat.
75	Judge	“Deceiving slut”	Describes Johanna for leaving him for Anthony
75-78	Sweeney	Epiphany	Sweeney describes killing the world, everyone deserves to die, breaks the fourth wall and confronts the audience.
78-79	Sweeney, Mrs. Lovett	Dialogue	Discussion of the disposal of Pirelli’s body.
79-87	Sweeney, Mrs. Lovett	“A Little Priest”	Mrs. Lovett comes up with the idea to use the dead Pirelli in her meat pies. Sweeney agrees.

ACT II

88-100	Tobias, Mrs. Lovett, Ensemble	“God, That’s Good” Lyrics	Tobias is now selling Mrs. Lovett’s “meat” pies, Ensemble “eats” meat pies with Ale in her shop.
100-105	Sweeney, and select customers wanting a shave	“Johanna Sequence”	Throughout this sequence, Sweeney takes customers into his shop and slits their throats.
101	Mrs. Lovett	Action: she tosses “objects” into the oven – presumably human bones.	Mrs. Lovett is doing the work is cleaning up the mess associated with disposing of bodies.
101	Beggar Woman	“City on Fire”	Beggar Woman describes a foul smell from burning bodies.
105	Johanna, Fogg, Anthony, Ensemble	“After Johanna”	An asylum is seen, Johanna is inside with other patients – a “madhouse”
106	Anthony, two police officers	Action: Anthony is briefly detained	Beadle attempts to restrain Anthony, the officers “jump on him” but before he is subdued, he breaks away and runs away. The police chase him.
108-112	Mrs. Lovett, Sweeney	Action: “She leans across and pecks him on the lips.” “Kisses him again.” “Again” – kissing him throughout the song with no response from Sweeney. There is	Mrs. Lovett is attempting to distract Sweeney from his preoccupation with killing the Judge. She is dreaming about what life could be like if they were by the sea and in love. This song is playful and flirty – the

		physical contact and touch.	touch by Lovett is playful. Sweeney does not reciprocate.
114	Quintet (five ensemble members)	Wigmaker Sequence	Quintet comments on Sweeney's plans to continue his revenge
116	Sweeney	"The Letter"	Sweeney sets up Anthony to be captured by the Judge.
122	Mrs. Lovett, Tobias	"After Not While I'm Around" – enter the bakehouse, discuss smell, use the meat grinder	Mrs. Lovett is making sure that Tobias is isolated and locks him in the backhouse.
128	Tobias	Finds a piece of fingernail in his pie. Beadle's dead body appears in the bakehouse. He is trapped.	Tobias begins to discover what is in the pies. He is confronted with Beadle's dead body. He is trapped inside the bakehouse behind a locked door.
129	Ensemble	"Fogg's Asylum"	Ensemble narrates Sweeney's murderous rampage.
131	Johanna, Anthony, Fogg, ensemble	Anthony raises a gun to Fogg, drops the gun, Johanna picks it up and shoots Fogg, everyone spills into the streets.	Anthony points gun at Fogg because he is discovered. He cannot bring himself to shoot and drops the gun. Johanna picks it up and shoots.
132	Johanna, Anthony, Beggar Woman, Ensemble	"City on Fire"	Chaos in the streets as the residents of the asylum create havoc in the streets. Beggar Woman accuses Mrs. Lovett.
136	Johanna, Anthony	"Searching Part II"	Reprise of "Kiss Me" – Anthony and Johanna kiss again as Anthony leaves her in Sweeney's shop. She hides inside the trunk.
138	Beggar Woman, Sweeney, Johanna (in trunk)	Action: Sweeney slits the Beggar Woman's throat and disposes of her.	Todd returns to his parlor and finds the Beggar Woman. The Judge is approaching so in haste he kills her and disposes of her body.
141	Judge, Sweeney	Action: Sweeney slits the throat of the Judge. Disposes of his body.	Sweeney finally has the opportunity to kill the Judge by insinuating that Johanna is in the shop with Mrs. Lovett.
142	Sweeney, Johanna	Sweeney "sits" Johanna in the chair, she escapes.	Sweeney does not recognize Johanna and thinks the "young sailor" has seen everything and is set to murder him.
142	Ensemble	Company sings of Sweeney's rampage.	Ensemble comments on the previous action.

143	Judge, Mrs. Lovett, Sweeney, Beggar Woman	Final scene: Judge's final moments, Mrs. Lovett goes to put the Beggar Woman into the oven, Sweeney discovers that the Beggar Woman is Lucy.	Judge grabs Mrs. Lovett's skirt, she takes his hand off, he dies. Mrs. Lovett attempts to move the Beggar woman toward the ovens.
146	Sweeney, Mrs. Lovett	Sweeney waltzes Mrs. Lovett into the oven.	Sweeney enacts revenge against Mrs. Lovett for lying to him about Lucy.
147-148	Sweeney, Beggar Woman, Tobias	Action: Tobias slits Sweeney's throat and then begins to grind meat.	Tobias kills Sweeney because he sees that Sweeney has killed the Beggar Woman. Tobias has gone mad.
148-150	ALL	"Ballad of Sweeney Todd"	All comment on the show's action. All confront the audience accusing them "to seek revenge may lead to hell, but everyone does it, if seldom as well..." etc.