

# *Kaleidoscope Radio Magazine*

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## "ASSASSINS"

FINALLY, COMPOSER STEPHEN SONDHEIM, AND PLAYWRIGHT JOHN WEIDMAN'S ARRESTING MUSICAL MEDITATION ON AMERICAN POLITICAL "ASSASSINS", HAS COME TO LOS ANGELES. THOSE FACELESS, MISGUIDED NOBODIES, WHO ARE SO EMPTY, SO ANGRY, THAT THEY AREN'T PART OF THE AMERICAN DREAM. THEY LYRICALLY DECRY "EVERYBODY'S GOT THE RIGHT TO BE HAPPY". AH HUH!

THE SONDHEIM, SIGNATURE OF ASKING SOCIAL QUESTIONS IN MUSICAL COMEDY, YES IT *IS* A COMEDY, WORKS AMUSINGLY WELL! HE AND WEIDMAN, DISSECT THE CHILDISH PHILOSOPHY THAT ONE'S SELF IS THE ONLY REALITY THAT EXISTS. NOTHING ELSE MATTERS, AS THESE PEOPLE, JOHN WILKES BOOTH, LEE HARVEY OSWALD, JOHN HINCKLEY WHO SHOT REAGAN, SQUEAKY FROMME AND SARA JANE MOORE WHO WENT FOR GERALD FORD, SAM BYCK ATTEMPTED A NIXON FINALE, GIUSEPPE ZANGARA TRIED TO GET F.D.R., CHARLES GUILTEAU GOT PRESIDENT GARFIELD, AND LEON CZOLGOSZ ENDED PRESIDENT MCKINLEY'S LIFE, ALL IN SOLITARY ACTS OF DESPERATION TRY TO BRING MEANING TO *THEIR* LIVES. UNFORTUNATELY, GUNS DON'T RIGHT THE WRONGS.

THESE PEOPLE ARE BROUGHT TOGETHER AND GATHER IN COMRADELY OVER THE DECADES TO CHEER ON AND ENCOURAGE NEW MEMBERS TO THIS EXCLUSIVE DELUSIONAL GROUP. NATURALLY BOOTH THE ACTOR, THE MOST CHARISMATIC AND ARTICULATE OF THE GROUP IS THEIR LEADER (TOM ZEMON EXCELLENT INTERPRETATION OF THIS EGOTIST). THE MOST PROFOUND, AND ELECTRIFYING STATEMENTS COME FROM THE GENTLE SAM BYCK (A BOISTEROUSLY FUNNY PAUL CARR AS A WINO IN A SANTA SUIT). THE TWO LOVE STARVED FROMME (FRIGHTENING ACCURATE PORTRAIT BY BRIDGET HOFFMAN) AND HINCKLEY (PATHETIC AND SAD STEVE JACKSON WILDE). THE BIZARRE HOUSEWIFE SARA JANE MOORE (DITZY JEAN KAUFFMAN), THE DESPERATION OF CZOLGOSZ (SEAN SMITH), THE ULTIMATE CON MAN GUILTEAU (SMOOTH TONGUED ALAN SAFIER), THE VERY ILL ZANGARA (GARY IMHOFF), AND THE BIGGEST PUZZLE TO THIS DAY OSWALD (THE PALE FRAIL LOOKING JOHN ALLEE). ROUNDING OUT THIS EXCEPTIONAL CAST IS PAMELA TOMASSETTI, AS EMMA GOLDMAN AND DAVID HOLLADAY, AS GERALD FORD.

SONDHEIM'S COMTEMPLATION ON "ASSASSINS" WHO HAVE THE VERY SAME DREAMS AS THE PRESIDENTS THEY LUNGE AT, DIRECTED BY PETER ELLENSTEIN, WITH A WELL CONCEIVED FINE BLACK BLANK SETTING WITH JAPANESE SCREENS, SET AND LIGHTENING DESIGNED BY ROBERT SMITH, MARVELOUS MUSICAL DIRECTION BY PAUL BAKER, SUPERB STAGING AND CHOREOGRAPHY BY KAY COLE, COSTUME BY DOUG SPESERT, SOUND DESIGN BY TOME GRIEP, AND A TOP NOTCH CAST, WITH GLEEFULLY ENTERTAINING PERFORMANCES. FROM THE CHARACTER OF BOOTH, AS HE REFRAINS WRITER TENNESSE WILLIAMS' LINE "ATTENTION MUST BE PAID!", AND IT SHOULD. THIS IS SPLENDID LIGHT HEARTED THOUGHT PROVOKING FARE, THAT IS NOT TO BE MISSED. WE HIGHLY RECOMMEND IT. IT'S OUR CRITIC'S PICK THIS WEEK.

"ASSASSINS" AT THE LOS ANGELES THEATRE CENTER, PLAYS THURSDAYS THROUGH SATURDAYS AT 8, AND SUNDAYS AT 2 AND 7. FOR TICKETS CALL THE BOX OFFICE AT AREA CODE (213) 485-1681.

# TICKET HOLDERS

by TRAVIS MICHAEL  
HOLDER

## Assassins

There are many people who abhor one of my favorite musicals, *Sweeney Todd*, because the piece is too dark. If you would prefer to see Marie Osmond in *The Sound of Music*, don't stop your holiday shopping for the Los Angeles Repertory Company's production of another controversial Stephen Sondheim musical, *Assassins*. Even darker, *Assassins* is a real-life *Sweeney Todd* -- and without the remorse.

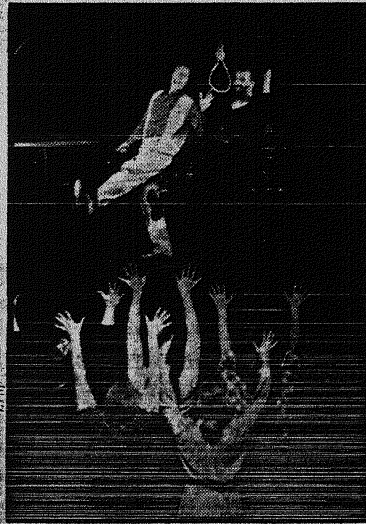
But if you love the innovation of Sondheim and love what he has contributed to musical theater that has kept the Osmond company out there touring the boonies wailing endlessly about their "Favorite Things," this L.A. debut of *Assassins*, surprisingly booked into the 99-seat Theater Four at LATC instead of the Ahmanson where it belongs, is one of the true highlights of our season, thanks to director Peter Ellenstein, who fought passionately for the rights to stage it here.

Where *Sweeney* introduced us to that delightful Demon Barber, in *Assassins* we're sung to by nine grisly historical figures: real assassins or attempted assassins who took aim at eight U.S. presidents.

These hills are alive with such infamous figures as John Wilkes Booth, John Hinkley, "Squeaky" Fromme and, of course, Lee Harvey Oswald, whose hesitation to pull the trigger is relieved as the other assassins transcend time and place to sing their encouragement in the Book Depository. As Booth tells Oswald, "The FBI can't get enough of you... Attention has been paid."

The message by Sondheim and book writer John Weidman is crystal clear: with a slight mutation, these people "leading lives of quiet desperation" could be you or me. "Everybody's Got a Right

to articulate leftist Emma Goldman (Pamela Tomassetti) to profess his love, she recognizes his desperation but not his obsession, and fuels his twisted designs by envisioning a "world where we not only are created equal but are able to live like equals."



Timothy Smith and Alan Saffier

Seventy-four years later, that grander purpose has vanished as Manson follower Fromme (Bridget Hoffman) discusses the origins of her less-compelling motive as she takes potshots as Col. Sanders' face on a KFC bucket with fellow Gerald Ford shooter Sara Jane Moore (Jean Kaufman): "Charlie says blood and

gore will choke our streets." What led to her attempt on Ford's life? "I just had an argument with my Daddy about my eye makeup or the bombing of Cambodia or whatever." Even more frightening is the subsequent attack by Moore, who brought her young son to the assassination attempt because she didn't have a babysitter.

The killers' stories are strung together by a Balladeer, played with his usual perfection by one of L.A.'s most gifted musical theater performers, Timothy Smith. Hoffman is scary as Fromme and Kaufman, reminiscent of Andrea Martin in her SCTV days, makes us laugh at the convoluted irony of Moore's situation while leaving us with a few goosebumps.

Softly appealing but deeply baritone Sean Smith is a standout as tormented Czolgosz, as are Tom Zemon as Booth and the ever-quirky John Alle, who portrays a pathetic vulnerability in Oswald. Gary Imhoff's talent is a bit wasted in the role of Giuseppe Zangara, who missed FDR but killed Mayor Cermak of Chicago, and the

sweet-voiced Steve Jackson Wilde looks enough like Hinkley to make Jodie Foster run in terror.

Paul W. Carr could be an excellent Santa-Claus-clad, Nixon-sighted Samuel Byck, but opening weekend his performance was hampered by obvious fumbling for his lines. Still, the only truly unfortunate performance is the annoyingly over-the-top work of Alan Safier as Garfield's killer Charles Guiteau. Perhaps Osmond's tour could use a new Baron; they play houses the size of Safier's delivery.

Ellenstein directs with a precise hand, complemented by the versatile set design of Robert L. Smith, featuring movable screens able to open endlessly like a living advent calendar to expose wonder after wonder, including a cityscape, a train station and even a car which unfolds out of the metal tubing of an industrial stair-

case.

I'd like to see a production of this work in a suitably grand venue with full orchestra (though the five-piece group assembled here deserves commendation, as does the dynamic musical staging and choreography of the inimitable Kay Cole), but this mounting by the reformed L.A. Rep is a glorious, noteworthy event, surely signalling wonderful things to come.

I love you, Stephen Sondheim. I only hope you'll create a sequel to *The Sound of Music* in which the youngest Von Trapp kid chops Maria into little bits before we're faced with Nancy Kerrigan in *The Sound of Music on Ice*. Now, that's realism.

*Assassins* is playing at the Los Angeles Theater Center, 514 S. Spring St., Downtown, through Jan. 15. For tickets call (213) 485-1681.