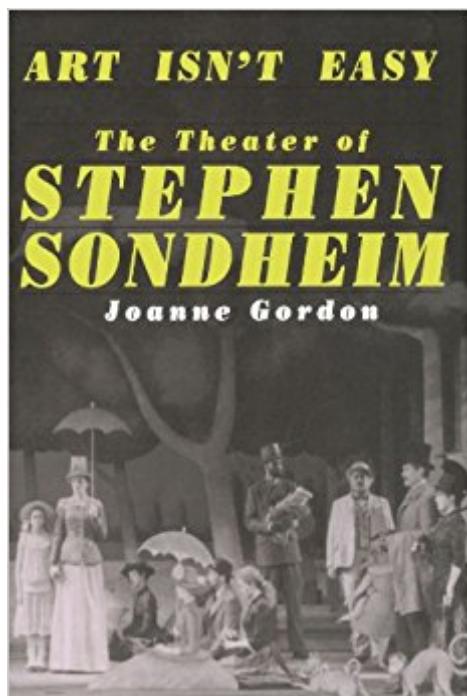


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# Art Isn't Easy: The Theater Of Stephen Sondheim



## **Synopsis**

The musical theatre of Stephen Sondheim probes deeply into the most disturbing issues of contemporary life. By challenging his audience with intricate music, biting wit, and profound themes, he flouts the traditional wisdom of the musical theatre. Tracing Sondheim's career from his initial success as lyricist for "West Side Story" and "Gypsy" to his most recent work - "Into the Woods" and "Assassins" - Joanne Gordon emphasizes not only the disturbing content of Sondheim's work, but his innovative use of form. In shows such as "A Little Night Music", "Sweeney Todd", and "Sunday in the Park with George", Sondheim's music and lyrics are inextricably woven into the fabric of the entire work.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Joanne Gordon is Head of the Directing Program at California State University. Art Isn't Easy, written with the full cooperation of Sondheim himself, is her first book.

This book takes us musical-by-musical through some of the most famous and artistically valuable of Sondheim's musicals (the latest entry being Assassins). Each chapter looks at the musical with a critical eye (or listens with a critical ear, as the case may be) and responds to criticism about the musical in question. This is not a book simply about selling Sondheim - when the author is unimpressed, she lets us know. But Gordon finds much to admire in Sondheim's musicals, and helps us to appreciate that. Each chapter outlines in detail the plot, characters, and songs -

especially useful for in-depth study. You can't get much more specific without actually taking out the libretto or following along in the score! All her arguments are well-founded and supported with examples from the text. The use of lyrics is especially appropriate. This book is especially valuable from a literary and theatrical standpoint. The observations on the music itself are correct, but not plentiful, as Gordan's expertise is in theatre, not music. Accessible to the casual audience member and the Sondheim groupie.

This is a remarkable consideration of the works of Sondheim. There is a clear understanding of the origins of SS's skills and techniques as well as the musical and literary backgrounds which underwrite his work. This is not a chatty easy read, it is an academic and searching document which is evidence of considerable research. It will appeal to those who are students of Music Theatre and lovers of The Sondheim catalogue.

The book provided a reasonably good review of the Broadway career of Stephen Sondheim. However, the author is too much of an avowed Sondheim fan, and tends to provide only a one-sided, superpositive view of Sondheim's oeuvre. His misses (e.g., *Merrily We Roll Along*) are glossed over. Still, for Sondheim devotees, this is a helpful book.

Of all the books currently published on Sondheim's musicals, Gordon gives the best academic treatment to his works. Mainly a formal analysis of the shows, she peppers in enough historical and biographical facts to provide any reader with a better understanding of the plays. The chapter on *Sunday* is particularly good. It does help to be familiar with the shows before reading, as Gordon wastes little time on plot synopsis. A must for any Sondheim scholar.

Whether you are well versed in all of Sondheim or have just seen a show once this books covers everthing from plot, to technique, to reviews. I used this for my thesis on Sondheim and found it very informative.

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