

Village Theatre KIDSTAGE

Production Preview Guide for:

Sweeney Todd

Music and Lyrics by: Steven Sondheim

Book by: Hugh Wheeler

July 15th – 24th, 2022 at Village Theatre's First Stage Theatre, 120 Front St N

The show will run approximately 2.5 hours with a 15-minute intermission.

Parent/Guardian Note

Only parents/guardians are qualified to determine what is appropriate for their children. This Preview Guide and a copy of the script are available at the box office of Village Theatre's First Stage Theatre to help you make the decision that is right for you and your family.

The Program and Process

The Summer Independent program is the pinnacle experience for KIDSTAGE students. It provides autonomy, resources, and mentorship to select, mount, and produce their own full-scale show from start to finish. Students take on every aspect of production, from performing, directing, and stage management, to designing and building sets, creating costumes, running sound and lights, marketing, production management, and more.

The Summer Independent program is focused on the professional development of the production team. The production process by nature offers many opportunities to build skills that allow students to become independent—and potentially professional—artists in their respective disciplines. Each member of the production team is assigned a professional in the field to mentor, support the process and provide feedback and suggestions on how to overcome challenges to achieve a successful production. Performers' learning opportunities in this program differ from other KIDSTAGE production programs, where the focus is on the actor's educational development. Performers in Summer Independent are most successful if they are self-directed and self-disciplined and, most importantly, are patient with the production team as they develop new skills.

Synopsis

"An infamous tale, Sweeney Todd, an unjustly exiled barber, returns to nineteenth century London, seeking vengeance against the lecherous judge who framed him and ravaged his young wife. The road to revenge leads Todd to Mrs. Lovett, a resourceful proprietress of a failing pie shop, above which, he opens a new barber practice. Mrs. Lovett's luck sharply shifts when Todd's thirst for blood inspires the integration of an ingredient into her meat pies that has the people of London lining up... and the carnage has only just begun!" – MTI

Script Content Details

Please note: the following contains plot spoilers.

Language:

- Act 1; Scene 2: (*No Place Like London*) Sweeney Todd sings “It’s filled with people who are filled with shit.” He later sings the same line in *Epiphany*
- Act 1; Scene 4: The curse word “bloody” is used for the first time with Mrs. Lovett’s, “bloody Australia.” The British slang is used often throughout the remaining show.
- Act 1; Scene 9: (*Pirelli’s Miracle Elixir*) Miracle Elixir said to “Smell like piss” first by Sweeney Todd then is compared to “piss” multiple times
- Act 1; Scene 16a: (*Pretty Women (Part II)*) Judge Turpin says: “Johanna elope with you? Deceiving slut...”
- Act 2; Scene 20a: The Beadle says, referencing Anthony: “That’s the sort of scalawag that gets this neighborhood into disrepute.”

Sexual Content:

- Act 1; Scene 2: (*No Place Like London*) Beggar Woman insinuates prostitution throughout her solo and repeatedly when her character is present throughout the show and references genitalia when she sings “looks to me, dear, like you got plenty there to push!”
- Act 1; Scene 15: (*Kiss Me (Part II)*) Johanna and Anthony kiss and later sink to the floor together. They kiss several more times in the show.
- Act 2; Scene 21: (*By The Sea (Part I)*) Mrs. Lovett kisses Sweeney Todd throughout this song and twice more during the scene following the second part of the song.

Drug/Alcohol Usage:

- Customers drink ale at the Mrs. Lovett’s pie shop throughout the show and several drunk customers are shown
- Act 1; Scene 4 (*Poor Thing*) Implication that Lucy’s drink is being drugged by masked men.
- Act 2; Scene 20b: (*I Am A Lass*) Sweeney Todd cleans his pipe.

Violence:

- Prologue: (*The Ballad of Sweeney Todd*) “Who never thereafter were heard of again”, “They went to their maker impeccably shaved”, two men throw body in a bag into a grave and a woman spreads ashes on top, “Swing your razor wide, Sweeney!”, “Freely flows the blood”,
- Act 1; Scene 2: (*No Place Like London*) Todd gestures as if to strike Beggar Woman
- Act 1; Scene 2a: First time we see Mrs. Lovett with a sharp knife, cutting meat. She has a knife in hand many times throughout the show. There are later references to “brandishing your weapons,” and other violent tools.
- Act 1; Scene 3 (*The Worst Pies in London*) Mrs. Lovett implies another pie shop is killing people’s pet cats: “Popping pussies into pies”

- Act 1; Scene 5: (*My Friends*) Sweeney Todd implies violence when discussing his barber knives: "Soon you'll know splendors you never have dreamed... you shall drip rubies. You'll soon drip precious rubies..."
- Act 1; Scene 8: Judge Turpin threatens Anthony saying "you'll rue the day you were born" and Beadle approaches Anthony with a truncheon and later says "Next time, it'll be your neck!" after wringing Anthony's bird's neck
- Act 1; Scene 10: Pirelli gives Tobias a swinging blow on the cheek, trying to cause a toothache, and then later kicks Tobias as Tobias carries their caravan off. There are many implications of domestic abuse in this scene.
- Act 1; Scene 12: Mrs. Lovett motions and states that Anthony's throat is "the throat to slit, dear." Discussions and threats about wanting to slit people's throats like this are made frequently throughout the show.
- Act 1; Scene 12a: (*Pirelli's Death*) Sweeney Todd strangles Pirelli then stuffs him in a chest (not dead yet) then slits his throat. His murder is later referenced and Mrs. Lovett comments "All that blood!"
- Act 1; Scene 16a: (*Pretty Women (Part II)*) Sweeney Todd leans in to slit Judge Turpin's throat multiple times but is interrupted. Judge Turpin later jumps on Anthony and grabs his arm.
- Act 2; Scene 19: (*God That's Good*) Implied death of Man with Cap as he approaches Todd's barber shop where Todd is holding a razor. Also a potentially disturbing visual of a meat grinder present.
- Act 2; Scene 20: (*Johanna (Act II Sequence)*) Sweeney Todd slashes two more customer's throats then disposes their bodies down the chute built into his parlor. One of their mouths drops down when their throat is slit in a disturbing replication of speaking. Throughout the show there are references to the many murder victims.
- Act 2; Scene 22: (*Wigmaker Sequence*) Anthony given gun by Sweeney Todd who says "For kill if you must. Kill." to which Anthony replies, "I'll kill a dozen jailers if need be to set her free."
- Act 2; Scene 24b: (*Parlour Songs (Part III)*) Tobias finds human fingernail in his pie then witnesses the just-murdered body of The Beadle exit the chute.
- Act 2; Scene 25a: Mr. Fogg grabs several inmates by the hair and pulls Johanna across the floor by her hair. Later Johanna shoots Mr. Fogg with the pistol when Anthony fails to and Mr. Fogg begins to approach Anthony with scissors.
- Act 2; Scene 28: (*The Judge's Return*) Sweeney Todd slits the Beggar Woman's throat and throws her down the chute. He later slits Judge Turpin's throat and throws him down the chute.
- Act 2; Scene 29: (*Final Scene*) Judge Turpin, not quite dead, clutches Mrs. Lovett's skirt while covered in blood. Later Sweeney Todd pushes Mrs. Lovett into the fire after discovering the Beggar Woman is Lucy. Sweeney Todd pushes Tobias aside when Tobias comes into the room and sees Todd over Lucy's body and then Tobias slits Todd's throat with a razor and Todd dies over Lucy's body.
- Epilogue; Scene 29b: (*The Ballad of Sweeney Todd*) References to the blood and death we have already seen made throughout the song.

Underage Sexual Predation/Pedophilia/Sexual Assault:

- Act 1; Scene 2: (*No Place Like London*) Sweeney Todd tells the story of the “Pious vulture of the law” pursuing his young wife (underage). Thereafter the story of Judge Turpin relentlessly pursuing the underage wife is referenced many times.
- Act 1; Scene 4: (*Poor Thing*) Judge Turpin and Beadle rape Sweeney Todd’s wife.
- Act 1; Scene 7: (*Ah, Miss*) Beggar Woman grabs at Anthony’s crotch and lifts up her skirt
- Act 1; Scene 8: Judge Turpin says while lustfully gazing at Johanna “Dear Child. How sweet you look in that light muslin gown.
- Also speaks on plans to “wed [her] on the morrow.” Turpin then comments on how she looks in her gown again and then drops to his knees to propose. Throughout the rest of the show he speaks about Johanna predatorily.
- Act 2; Scene 20 (*Johanna (Act II Sequence)*) Sweeney Todd speaks creepily about his daughter, calls her his pet etc. Implication of desires for incest.
- Act 2; Scene 28 (*The Judge’s Return*): Anthony references sexual assault while saying, “Thank heavens the sailor did not molest her.”

Mentions of Cannibalism:

- Act 1; Scene 18: (*A Little Priest*) Mrs. Lovett sings an entire song where she suggests and plans to use Sweeney Todd’s murder victims for meat in the pies she sells, making it so shop-goers unknowingly engage in cannibalism. Thereafter any customers shown eating pies are engaging in cannibalism unbeknownst to them.

Additional Content:

- Sexist Depictions:
 - Act 1; Scene 14: (*Ladies In Their Sensitivities*) The beadle sings a song that makes offensive and creepy remarks about women in response to the Judge talking about wanting Johanna to be open to him romantically.
 - Act 2; Scene 21a (*By The Sea (Part II)*) Mrs. Lovett makes a sexual reference when suggesting Todd and her should marry, saying “Me rumpled bedding legitimized.”
- Reference to death:
 - Prelude; Scene 1: Gravediggers dig a grave as an organist plays funeral music
 - Act 2; Scene 21a: Mrs. Lovett references her deceased husband.
- Negative Religious Imagery:
 - Prologue: (*The Ballad of Sweeney Todd*) “Demon barber of fleet street” sung many times and word “devil” used throughout the show; “He served a dark and vengeful god”
 - Act 1; Scene 2: (*No Place Like London*) Todd says “There’s many a Christian would have done just that and not lost a wink’s sleep for it, either.”
 - References to devils, hell, witches, and evil made throughout the show
- Negative depictions of lower class (classist undertones and anti-homeless depictions)
 - Act 1; Scene 2: (*No Place Like London*) Character of Beggar Woman first introduced here then depicted negatively the rest of the show
 - Act 1; Scene 12 (*Wait*) Mrs. Lovett mocks Beggar Woman’s begs for money
- Insensitive references to mental illness:

- o Act 1; Scene 2: (*No Place Like London*) Anthony says “She was only a half-crazed beggar woman.” The Beggar Woman is described with insensitive terms like “looney” several times throughout the show.
 - o Act 2: Scene 20a: (*After Johanna (Act II Sequence)*) Johanna is kept in a madhouse/asylum. Mentally ill people are represented poorly in it, with stereotypical shrieking and moaning etc.. They are also described, represented, and treated negatively from then-on in the show.
 - o Act 2; Scene 22: Disturbing descriptions of hair being taken from mentally-ill people for wigs.
 - o Act 2; Scene 29: (*Final Scene (Part 1)*) Through Mrs. Lovett we find out The Beggar Woman was Todd’s wife Lucy all along and that she became mentally ill after ingesting poison. The Beggar Woman is a depiction of someone mentally ill/disabled that is in poor taste, additionally there are descriptions of her in this song that are insensitive.
- Police Brutality:
 - o Act 2; Scene 20a: Police attack Anthony and Beadle orders them to “Bash him on the head if need be!” The
- Mentions of alcohol:
 - o Act 1; Scene 3 (*The Worst Pies in London*) Mrs. Lovett sings “Would you like a drop of ale?” then proceeds to pour ale
- Mentions of Suicide/Self-harm
 - o Act 1; Scene 4: Mrs. Lovett tells Sweeney Todd that “[Lucy] poisoned herself. Arsenic from the apothecary on the corner.”
 - o Act 1; Scene 11: (*Johanna*) Judge Turpin whips himself while singing about his guilt about his sexual desires towards underage Johanna.
 - o Act 1; Scene 13: (*Kiss Me (Part 1)*) Johanna panics about the idea of marrying Turpin and says: “I’ll swallow poison on Sunday, that’s what I’ll do, I’ll get some lye.”
- Implications of being held captive:
 - o Act 1; Scene 6: (*Green Finch and Linnet Bird*) Johanna sings about her life in Judge Turpin’s home: “My cage has many rooms, damask and dark...”
 - o Act 1; Scene 11: (*Johanna*) Judge Turpin sings about Johanna: “I’ll keep you here forever... The world will never touch you”; It is revealed later that her door is locked and the window has been shuttered and barred the last 3 days.
 - o Act 2: Scene 20: (*Johanna (Act II Sequence)*) Johanna is shown behind bars, incarcerated in a madhouse/asylum
- Animal Abuse:
 - o Act 1; Scene 7: Bird Seller says “We blind ‘em, sir. That’s what we always does. Blind ‘em and, not knowing night from day, they sing and sing without stopping, pretty creatures.”
 - o Act 1; Scene 8: Beadle wrings the neck of Anthony’s bird and tosses its body