

# WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

MARK LAMOS, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR | MICHAEL BARKER, MANAGING DIRECTOR

## Press Statement

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## Statement from Westport Country Playhouse on the Death of Stephen Sondheim

Westport Country Playhouse issues the following statement re the death of Stephen Sondheim:

During the summer of 1950, Stephen Sondheim was an apprentice at Westport Country Playhouse in Westport, Connecticut. He worked in a variety of capacities on 14 shows and appeared in a production of "The Life of the Party," written by the Playhouse's founder Lawrence Langner. Many of Sondheim's fellow apprentices that year continued as theater professionals, including composer Mary Rodgers, film director Frank Perry, theatrical agent Peggy Hadley, and Actors' Equity officer Conard Fowkes.

Fifteen years after his apprenticeship, Sondheim's own work appeared on the Playhouse stage with a production of "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" (1965). "A Little Night Music" (1975) and "Side by Side by Sondheim" (1978) followed in the next decade. Most recently, "Into the Woods" (2012) was directed by Mark Lamos, Westport Country Playhouse artistic director.

"Being Alive!" a world premiere conceived and directed by Billy Porter, took the Playhouse stage in 2007, with music and lyrics by Sondheim, who also provided collaborative assistance. The retrospective of Sondheim songs featured Chuck Cooper, Joshua Henry, and Leslie Odom, Jr., among others.

In 2006, the Playhouse honored its illustrious apprentice with a gala tribute performance, "The Ladies Who Sing Sondheim," with Laura Benanti, Kristin Chenoweth, Barbara Cook, and Patti LuPone, directed by John Doyle.

Mark Lamos, Westport Country Playhouse artistic director, said:

"The entire Westport Country Playhouse family is deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Stephen Sondheim.

"I got to know Stephen a bit over the years, mostly socially. He eagerly granted my request to appear in a tribute to Mary Rodgers, who he'd gotten to know while they were both apprentices here. She was our guest of honor when we saluted her father Richard Rodgers at Westport Country Playhouse's annual gala in 2009.

"Yet when I was directing 'A Little Night Music' for Baltimore Center Stage and tried staging a short musical sequence that made no sense to me, I emailed him to ask about it. In minutes, he answered right back. 'Oh you can cut that. It was something Pat (Birch, the original Broadway choreographer) and Hal (Prince, the legendary director) cooked up, but it's not needed at all.'

"And just a year ago he graciously agreed to participate in the shooting of a short-form documentary by filmmaker Doug Tirola that celebrates the history of Westport Country Playhouse. In the video clip he wished the Playhouse a happy 90th birthday, then jokingly wished himself the same, since 'we're the same age.' That's a memory that I find particularly poignant today."

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