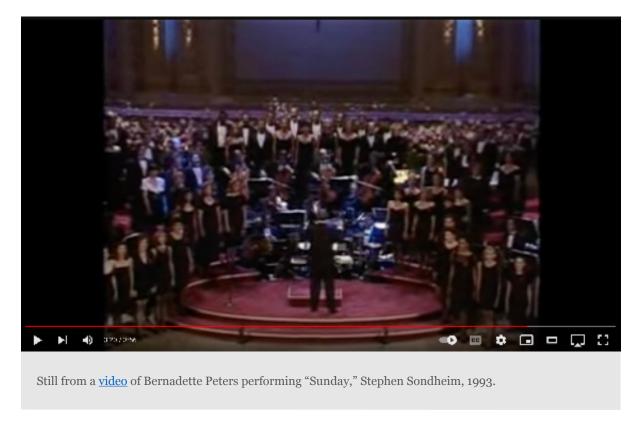
Pausing on a Sunday: What Kind of Secular is the American Musical?

Kathryn Lofton



- ¹ Scholarship on the American musical rarely discusses religion save as a spectacularized subject of certain <u>Bible productions</u>, of <u>satire</u>, or as an ethnic identifier (<u>Jewish</u>) for a large number of librettists.¹
- ² The work of Stephen <u>Sondheim</u> (1930-2021) allows a close look at the sound, feeling, and sexuality of the American musical's secularism.² Of particular focus is this song, central to *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), which follows the assemblage of the <u>Seurat painting</u>, *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* (1884). Celebrations of Sondheim invariably use this song as the climactic choral assembly. (This performance, held <u>at Carnegie Hall</u> on June 10, 1992, is one of many such instances.)
- The musical in which this song appears includes archetypal depictions of the modern artist and his attendant gendered capacities and failures. The song appears as a resolution at the end of both acts. Sondheim would point out: its lyric is a single sentence; it is a description of a process; it includes a word, "forever," that he observes makes him cry.³
 - © Kathryn Lofton

Citation Guide

1. Kathryn Lofton, "Pausing on a Sunday: What Kind of Secular is the American Musical?" Object Narrative, *MAVCOR Journal* 6, no. 3 (2022), doi: 10.22332/mav. obj.2022.10.

Kathryn Lofton. "Pausing on a Sunday: What Kind of Secular is the American Musical?" Object Narrative. *MAVCOR Journal* 6, no. 3 (2022), doi: 10.22332/mav.obj.2022.10.

Notes

- 1. Henry Bial, *Playing God: The Bible on the Broadway Stage* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015); Jake Johnson, *Mormons, Musical Theater, and Belonging in America*, Music in American Life (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019); Andrea Most, *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004).
- 2. Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Stephen Sondheim," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, April 7, 2022. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Stephen-Sondheim.
- 3. Stephen Sondheim, Look, I Made a Hat: Collected Lyrics (1981-2011) with Attendant Comments, Amplifications, Dogmas, Harangues, Digressions, Anecdotes and Miscellany (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 6; James Lapine, dir., Six by Sondheim, HBO Documentary, 2013.



Yale

Copyright 2016 Yale University All rights reserved.

MAVCOR Journal is a born-digital, double-blind peer-reviewed publication of the Center for the Study of Material and Visual Cultures of Religion at Yale University (mavcor.yale.edu).