

JASON ROBERT BROWN **AND STEPHEN SONDHEIM**

LIVE IN CONCERT



FEATURING

KATRINA LENK • LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA
ROB MCCLURE • SHOSHANA BEAN • JOSHUA HENRY

TOWN HALL • JUNE 24, 2019

JASON ROBERT BROWN AND STEPHEN SONDHEIM

LIVE IN CONCERT

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THE FIFTIETH CONCERT

You probably have certain images of Stephen Sondheim in your head. 27-year-old Steve at the piano in a shirt and tie while Leonard Bernstein is conducting the Shark Girls in a rehearsal of *West Side Story*. 40-year-old shaggy-haired Steve in a black turtleneck, chain-smoking through the recording of the *Company* cast album. Bearded Steve, eyes downcast, head resting on his hand, on the canary yellow cover of the 1980 sheet music collection *All Sondheim*. Grey-haired and wrinkled Steve smiling with eyes closed as Barack Obama places the Presidential Medal of Freedom around his neck.

I've got one you don't have. It's late in the afternoon of June 24, 2019, and a fragile but very alert 89-year-old Steve is directly across from me, sitting at a piano that is nested in the curve of the piano where I'm sitting, two Steinway grands like nine-foot-long commas on the stage of The Town Hall in midtown Manhattan. If he looks up from his music, he's looking across his piano right into my eyes; I am always looking at him. I don't turn away to glance at the keys, to turn the page; I'm right there to catch his eye, to reassure him that he's in the right place, to see from a twitch in his brow or a tilt of his shoulder that he's going to slow down or speed up or jump a beat, to be there no matter what. I am somewhat in shock that he's actually gotten here, actually made it to this rehearsal, and I think he is in shock about it too. In two hours, 1500 people are going to be sitting in the audience listening to us making music together on this stage.

Steve never much liked performing in public, and that was compounded at this age by his fear of losing his balance and his diminished eyesight. I was well aware of that when I first emailed him about this event back in March, and I had assumed that he would write back a quick but courteous no-thank-you. Instead, he wrote, "I'd feel privileged to be a part of anything you do. Count me in." That's what he wrote. I'm looking at the email right now, although of course I have that phrase burned in my memory forever.

The backstory is that I had been doing a residency, a different concert every month for the previous five years, at a music club called SubCulture. Most of the concerts featured a guest singer, Broadway royalty like Sutton Foster or Raul Esparza or Betty Buckley mixed in with younger singers and my stalwart, endlessly versatile band. But some nights I shared the stage with another theater composer – Tom Kitt, Stephen Schwartz, Shaina Taub, among others – and those nights were among my favorites of the entire residency. We'd play and sing on each other's songs, get to make music together, and have a real night of community, which is a somewhat elusive thing for the songwriters in this business.

Now we were coming up on the Big 50th Concert, and we wanted to celebrate on a much larger stage with an expanded orchestra and lots of singers, so we decided to do a charity concert at Town Hall that would benefit the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, an organization whose mission is deeply important to me and my family.

(When I say "we" in these paragraphs, the other person to whom I'm referring is Marc Kaplan, who founded SubCulture and became my close friend and concert manager. The concert recorded on this album was produced by me and Marc, by which I mean that Marc did all the hard stuff and I got to play music.) Now we just needed a hook that would make this show something that everyone in New York wanted to attend.

And that's how I ended up sending Stephen Sondheim an email.

It took about a month for our schedules to line up so that we could meet and figure out what exactly we would be doing. I knew Steve wasn't going to stay onstage the whole concert and jam with the band, but I figured we could get him to do about a half hour of the show. Steve's first proposal was just that we have an onstage interview, and then he could maybe sing one song. Honestly, even that sounded pretty special to me, but I pushed my luck.

I had already booked the astonishing Katrina Lenk, who had won the Tony Award for Best Actress the year before, to be the featured guest vocalist, and so I proposed that Steve and I should find a song on which we could accompany her together. OK, Steve said, I can probably do that.

But Steve and I agreed that it didn't feel complete just yet. So Steve came up with an idea for a musical game we could play, generated by our mutual love of Jacob Collier and his magnificently inventive re-harmonizations of classic songs. In this game, we would each send the other a melody of one of our own songs, stripping out the accompaniment, the lyrics, anything other than the notes and rhythms of the melody itself, and then we would write our own accompaniment and harmonization to the melody the other one had written. I picked mine immediately, sending him a single-staff version of the melody to "It's Hard to Speak My Heart" from *Parade*. A couple of weeks later, he sent me his, a song that had only ever been sung in a reading of *Wise Guys* in 1999 called "Make It Through The Night." (I never told him that I actually saw that reading and remembered the song.) As you'll hear, Steve delivered a wholly surprising, wonderfully Sondheim-y accompaniment for my melody, and we decided that one re-harmonization was probably enough for the audience. (I did, at any rate, monkey around with and rearrange enough of Steve's music for the rest of the concert to satisfy anyone's desire to hear what that would sound like.)

A week before the concert, we did a rehearsal in a basement studio at the Steinway showroom in midtown, just him and me (and my assistant Eddie to help Steve with page turns). He did about a half hour of hemming and hawing and excuse-making, but then, having exhausted all of his insecurities, he played the first measures of "Not While I'm Around," and I stopped breathing. There he was, the composer I admired most in the world, playing a song he'd written

forty years earlier, and even though the accompaniment was the same simple notes I'd heard countless times before, there was something undeniably powerful, unexpectedly authoritative about the way he played them. There was a current running through the piano, something that had started bubbling up on the Upper West Side in 1930 and wended its way through Doylestown and Williamstown and Turtle Bay and Mallorca and the old Uris Theater and now here it was flowing on 43rd Street, and I was there to hear it. I was someone in a tree.

On the afternoon of the concert, Georgia and I rehearsed with the orchestra and the soloists from 2 pm until 6 pm, and then everyone was told to leave the building so that Steve and I could rehearse in private. (Daisy sat in the audience gently guiding the lighting and sound folks, and I can't quite imagine what it felt like for her to look up at the stage – there's that guy who's one of her best friends and collaborators playing piano with that guy who she's known since the day she was born.) We played through his song. We played through Katrina's number. We played through the harmonization. We talked, we made little musical jokes, we both made lots of mistakes and laughed about them. A half hour passed, then 45 minutes. I could feel the silent pressure of our stage manager trying to get me to wrap up rehearsal so we could get the theater ready to open, but I let Steve play through it all again, gave him all the time he needed, and when he finally looked relaxed and relieved, I gave him a hug and guided him to his dressing room.

The rest of the night is what you'll hear on this album. When it was done, we had raised \$300,000 for Brady, a triumph by any definition. But on a personal level, something even more significant had happened. At a certain moment during "Not While I'm Around," I looked at Steve and he was mouthing along with Katrina, eyes closed, smiling, in a way I had never seen him: joyful, content, immersed. Most people don't get to say thank you to the artists who truly change their lives, but on that one night in 2019, I reached out to Stephen Sondheim, the man who gave me so much, and gave him the only gift I really knew how to give: the chance to make music. Whatever else I accomplish in this life, I'm holding on to that. I am so profoundly, overwhelmingly grateful that he let me walk him to that piano.

The last time I saw Steve was at Hal Prince's memorial. I was standing in the wings about five minutes before the performance began, getting ready to walk out and conduct the overture, when a door opened and Steve was escorted backstage to a chair right next to where I was standing. I mentioned that he could surely watch from the audience – his speech wouldn't happen for at least an hour into the program – and he smiled and said, "This is the only place I want to be."

—JASON ROBERT BROWN
SEPTEMBER, 2024

TRACK
ONE

FRANKLIN SHEPARD, INC.

FROM *Merrily We Roll Along*
MUSIC & LYRICS BY Stephen Sondheim

VOCALS: Jason Robert Brown, Lin-Manuel Miranda

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TRACK
TWO

MELINDA

MUSIC & LYRICS BY Jason Robert Brown

VOCALS: Jason Robert Brown

VIOLIN: Todd Reynolds

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administered by Penny Farthing Music (ASCAP) c/o Concord Music Publishing

TRACK
THREE

CHILDREN AND ART

FROM *Sunday in the Park with George*

MUSIC & LYRICS BY Stephen Sondheim

VOCALS: Jason Robert Brown

FLUGELHORN: Tony Kadleck

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TRACK
FOUR

ANOTHER LIFE

FROM *The Bridges of Madison County*
MUSIC & LYRICS BY Jason Robert Brown

VOCALS: Katrina Lenk

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TRACK
FIVE

CASSANDRA

FROM *The Connector*
MUSIC & LYRICS BY Jason Robert Brown

VOCALS: Katrina Lenk

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TRACK
SIX

LAST MIDNIGHT

FROM *Into the Woods*
MUSIC & LYRICS BY Stephen Sondheim

VOCALS: Katrina Lenk

© Riltig Music Inc (ASCAP)



TRACK
SEVEN

A SONG ABOUT YOUR GUN

MUSIC & LYRICS BY Jason Robert Brown

VOCALS: Jason Robert Brown

VIOLIN: Todd Reynolds

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TRACK
EIGHT

**NOTHING'S BIGGER
THAN KONG**

MUSIC & LYRICS BY Jason Robert Brown

VOCALS: Jason Robert Brown

BACKUP VOCALS: Anastasia Talley, Adee David

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TRACK
NINE

I LOVE BETSY

FROM *Honeymoon in Vegas*

MUSIC & LYRICS BY Jason Robert Brown

VOCALS: Rob McClure

BACKUP VOCALS: Jason Robert Brown,
Anastasia Talley, Adee David

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TRACK
TEN

THE NEXT TEN MINUTES

FROM *The Last Five Years*

MUSIC & LYRICS BY Jason Robert Brown

VOCALS: Jason Robert Brown, Shoshana Bean

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TRACK
ELEVEN

MOVE ON

FROM *Sunday in the Park with George*
MUSIC & LYRICS BY Stephen Sondheim

VOCALS: Joshua Henry, Katrina Lenk

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TRACK
TWELVE

SONDHEIM INTRODUCTION

TRACK
THIRTEEN

GOOD THING GOING

FROM *Merrily We Roll Along*

MUSIC & LYRICS BY Stephen Sondheim

VOCALS: Stephen Sondheim

PIANOS: Stephen Sondheim, Jason Robert Brown

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TRACK
FOURTEEN

SONDHEIM INTERVIEW



TRACK
FIFTEEN

**IT'S HARD TO
SPEAK MY HEART**

FROM *Parade*

MUSIC & LYRICS BY Jason Robert Brown

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**IT'S HARD TO SPEAK
MY HEART (REHARMONIZATION)**

MUSIC BY Jason Robert Brown
& Stephen Sondheim

PIANOS: Jason Robert Brown, Stephen Sondheim

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TRACK
SIXTEEN

NOT WHILE I'M AROUND

FROM *Sweeney Todd*

MUSIC & LYRICS BY Stephen Sondheim

VOCALS: Katrina Lenk

PIANOS: Stephen Sondheim, Jason Robert Brown

© Rittling Music Inc (ASCAP)



TRACK
SEVENTEEN

**WAIT 'TIL YOU
SEE WHAT'S NEXT**

MUSIC & LYRICS BY Jason Robert Brown

VOCALS: Jason Robert Brown

BACKUP VOCALS: Anastasia Talley, Adee David

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ORCHESTRA

Georgia StittCONDUCTOR

Jason Robert Brown PIANO
James Sampliner PIANO, CONGAS
Gary SiegerGUITAR
Justin Goldner.....GUITAR
Randy Landau..... BASS
Jamie Eblen.....DRUMS, PERCUSSION

Kristy Norter REEDS
Robert DeBellis..... REEDS
Tony Kadleck..... TRUMPET, FLUGELHORN
Jennifer Wharton TROMBONE
Todd Reynolds CONCERTMASTER, VIOLIN
Katherine Livolsi-Landau..... VIOLIN
Louise Owen..... VIOLIN
Orlando WellsVIOLA
Monica Davis.....VIOLA
Mairi Dorman-Phaneuf CELLO
Adele Stein CELLO

ORCHESTRATIONS BY JASON ROBERT BROWN

except "I Love Betsy" BY DON SEBESKY

and "Move On" BY MICHAEL STAROBIN AND JASON ROBERT BROWN

Michael Aarons..... MUSIC COORDINATOR
John Blane, Eddie Bean MUSIC PREPARATION



ALBUM PRODUCTION CREDITS

PRODUCED BY Jeffrey Lesser and Jason Robert Brown

CO-PRODUCED BY Sean Patrick Flahaven

RECORDED BY Jon Weston

EDITED AND MIXED BY Jeffrey Lesser

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PRODUCTION MANAGER: Jill Dell'Abate

ART DIRECTION & DESIGN BY Derek Bishop

CONCERT PHOTOGRAPHY BY Erika Kapin

CONCERT EXECUTIVE PRODUCER Marc Kaplan

CONCERT PRODUCTION MANAGER Jeff Markowitz

CONCERT GENERAL MANAGER Elie Landau

CONCERT DIRECTED BY Daisy Prince

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Larry Lees and Jody Edwards (MTI), Steven Clar,
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A portion of proceeds from this album will support Brady, the national organization uniting gun owners and non-gun owners alike in the comprehensive solutions that will end the gun violence epidemic.

www.bradyunited.org

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Ali Tesluk Case – **PRODUCING MANAGER**

Imogen Lloyd Webber – **SVP MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS**

Haydyn Meythaler – **MUSIC MARKETING MANAGER**

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