

WU?@therep

FOLLIES

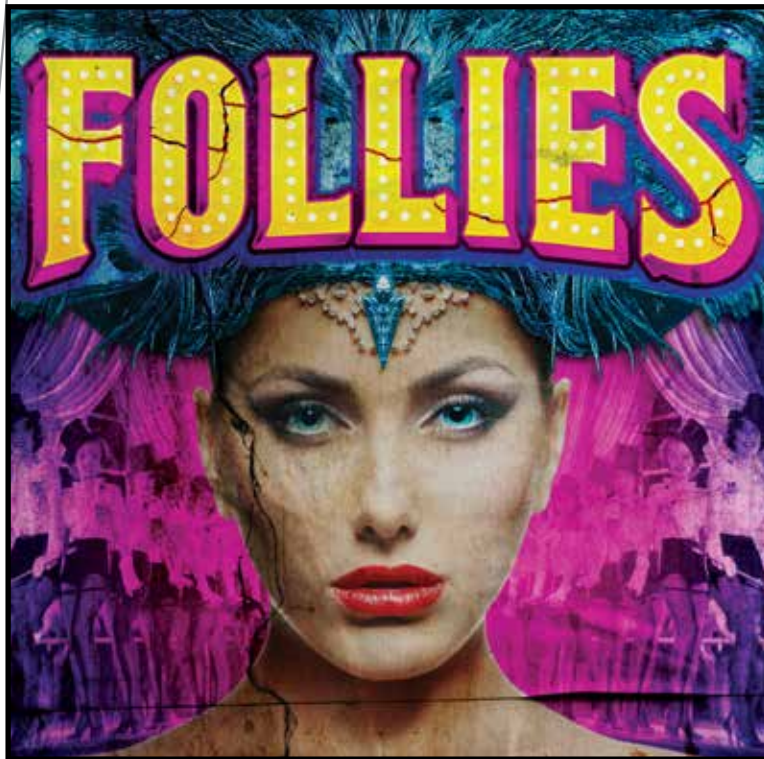
Book by James Goldman

Music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

Directed by Rob Ruggiero

CONTENTS

- 2 The 411
- 3 A/S/L & HTH
- 4 FYI
- 5 RBTL
- 6 F2F
- 7 B4U
- 8 IRL



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At The Rep, we know that life moves fast—okay, really fast. But we also know that some things are worth slowing

down for. We believe that live theatre is one of those pit stops worth making and are excited that you are going to stop by for a show. To help you get the most bang for your buck, we have put together WU? @ THE REP—an IM guide that will give you everything you need to know to get at the top of your theatergoing game—fast. You'll find character descriptions (A/S/L), a plot summary (FYI), biographical information (F2F), historical context (B4U), and other bits and pieces (HTH). Most importantly, we'll have some ideas about what this all means IRL, anyway.

CU@therep!



The Teacher's Lounge

In an effort to make our educational materials accessible to students and easy for educators to incorporate into the classroom, our study guide is written in a student-oriented format. We hope that you will circulate this guide among your students in the weeks preceding your visit to The Rep, encouraging them to browse it before and after class and as time allows, using it as a launch point for both pre- and post-performance discussions. You may also want to visit our website, www.repstl.org, for additional information including activity suggestions and behind-the-scenes information. Any materials, either from this guide or from our website may be reproduced for use in the classroom.

NEATO!

As always, we appreciate your making live theatre a part of your classroom experience and welcome your feedback and questions.

The desire to learn, insatiable when awakened, can sometimes lie dormant until touched by the right teacher or the right experience. We at The Rep are grateful to have the opportunity to play a role supporting you as you awaken the desire for learning in your students.

This is a play about the choices we make, the consequences of those choices and how we handle those consequences. Watching the paths chosen by the four main characters in their early 20s will give your students an opportunity to ponder if they would make the same choices in the same situation and to consider if there are lasting effects of the road not taken.

It would be a good idea to take a minute to give your students these quick theatre etiquette reminders:

- This show has one intermission; there will be time for bathroom breaks before the show and halfway through.
- The actors can hear the audience and appreciate the laughter, gasps and quiet attention to action. However, talking, moving around and eating is very distracting to others and can dampen the energy on stage.
- Pictures, phone calls and texting are not allowed at any time during the performance.

Live theatre won't allow your students to take a passive role—they must work with us to create the experience which takes the learning deeper. Our unique ability to fuse words and images onstage allows your students to explore new ideas as well as excites their imaginations. We will do our part so your students will be stirred to understandings and self-awareness while delving into new and familiar worlds. You are doing your part by using The Rep to extend your intellectual and aesthetic curriculum. Thank you!

Marsha Coplon
Director of Education

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A/S/L

DIMITRI WEISMANN is the former director and producer of the Weismann Follies .

Former Weismann showgirl SALLY DURANT PLUMMER is haunted by her days on the stage. She may be married to Buddy, but she still has feelings for Ben, with whom she once had an affair.

BUDDY PLUMMER, a travelling oil man, was once dedicated to his marriage to Sally, but has since found comfort in the arms of another woman.

PHYLLIS ROGERS STONE, Sally's roommate from their showgirl days, was once filled with potential, but threw it all away to marry Ben.

BENJAMIN STONE, a retired politician and Phyllis' husband, finds himself questioning his choices and his past.

Other former WEISMANN GIRLS at the reunion include Deedee, Hattie, Solange, Emily, Carlotta, and Heidi, all with their own specific stories and talents.

ROSCOE was once a singer from the Weismann Follies .

*Ghosts of many of the characters' younger selves also appear on stage, reliving moments from the past alongside their present day selves.



H/H

AVER: To declare as true

BON VIVANT: Someone who enjoys a grand lifestyle

CAT'S PAJAMAS: A slang phrase from the 1920s used to express that is something is wonderful

C'EST LA VIE: A French phrase meaning "that's life"

DANDY: A fashionable man

ENNUI: A feeling of weariness and dissatisfaction

FOLLIES: A musical revue, which is a series of musical acts and comedy routines that typically ends with big production number featuring the entire company

HARA-KIRI: A form of Japanese ritual suicide

LIEBCHEN: A German term of endearment, like sweetheart or darling

MODUS OPERANDI: A particular way of doing something

MON CHER: A French term meaning "my dear"

SLOE-EYED: Having dark, almond shaped eyes

PUNDIT: An expert in a particular subject

RACONTEUR: A skillful storyteller

VAMP: A woman who purposely attracts and exploits men

VICISSITUDES: Often unpleasant changes in circumstances



SPOILER ALERT!

As *Follies* begins, we see an empty stage that was once home to the grand show-business spectacle called the Weismann Follies. The ghosts of showgirls emerge as Sally Durant Plummer, a former Weismann Girl, excitedly enters the theatre. Once the other former performers and their loved ones arrive, Dimitri Weismann welcomes his guests to the first and last reunion of the Weismann Follies, 30

years after their closing in 1941. To kick off the party, he invites the Weismann Girls to enter the stage one last time, accompanied by the old crooner Roscoe.

When the song ends, the guests begin to catch up with one another. As old roommates Sally and Phyllis spy each other, memories of their younger selves appear onstage, preparing for a performance. While their husbands Ben and Buddy reconnect, young Ben and Buddy also make an appearance. Both men claim to have given up fooling around outside of marriage, but as Ben and Sally notice one another, it is clear that they still have feelings for each other. As both couples come together, they reminisce about their many nights spent at the theatre and are joined in song by their younger counterparts.

Ben, Buddy, Sally and Phyllis are not the only ones to get caught up in memories of the past as several other ex-Follies stars perform their old routines. Ben reflects on the choices he's made as Buddy and Phyllis notice their spouses' mutual attraction, causing Phyllis to confront Sally.

The women's confrontation is cut short as showgirl Stella coerces the Weismann Girls to join in a performance of one of their old dance numbers. After the performance, Buddy tries to bridge the distance between himself and Sally by offering to



stop traveling for work and spend more time at home with her. Concurrently, Phyllis attempts to have a long overdue conversation with Ben. However, both Buddy and Phyllis are scorned by their respective spouses. Joined by their younger selves, we see Ben and Sally embrace as the act ends.

At the start of Act Two, we find Ben and Sally exactly where we left them. Both Young Sally and present-day Sally beg for Ben's hand in marriage, but fail to earn his commitment. Buddy, unseen by Ben and Sally, has

watched the whole scene play out and angrily tells Sally that things are over between them, but Sally is too excited about the prospect of marrying Ben to care. Ironically, Ben, who never actually agreed to marry Sally, is busy trying to pick up yet another one of the Weismann Girls. Phyllis also attempts to find solace in the arms of another, but fails.

Ben asks Phyllis for a divorce, but she refuses to give him an answer. The couple is soon joined by Buddy and Sally, all four of whom are haunted by the decisions they made when they were young. As Ben, Buddy, Sally and Phyllis' disappointment and frustration grow they begin to confront themselves and each other in an eruption of anger and chaos.

As the confrontation reaches its peak, the chorus appears and pulls the angry group into the world of the Follies with an extravagant number. The young couples sing of the Folly of Youth and the present-day couples continue to vent their frustration in a series of Follies all their own. After the spell of the Follies breaks, will Ben, Buddy, Sally, and Phyllis be able to move on and reconcile their friendships and marriages? Or will they be left alone, haunted by their past?



RBT



NOSTALGIA

Follies is set at a reunion, so naturally the characters feel nostalgic for the days gone by. For Ben, Buddy, Sally and Phyllis, the Weismann Follies is where they spent the days of their youth—falling in and out of love, forging friendships and making big decisions. As the audience, we can literally see those memories and decisions haunting the characters as the ghosts of their former selves come back for one last night in the Weismann Theatre. Some memories are delightful, like the Weismann Girls reminiscing and even performing the songs and dances of their days on the stage. Other memories, like Sally's heartbreak, Ben's uncertainty of which girl to marry, Phyllis' unrealized potential and Buddy's unrequited love, cause painful feelings to resurface. In 30 years, what do you guess are the memories that will stay with you?

CHOICES

We make choices each and every day, some of which change the course of our lives forever. This musical is not just about making choices, but the way we deal with the choices we've made. In *Follies*, we watch as Ben, Buddy, Sally and Phyllis struggle to come to terms with their choices to marry one another. Ben fights regret for marrying a woman he's not sure he loves. Sally, sure that she loves Ben, is

ready to leave her husband—the sooner the better. Buddy beats himself up for not loving the right girl, whoever she may be. Phyllis does not mourn love, but the loss of her potential. As the night comes to a conclusion, Ben, Buddy, Sally and Phyllis face a new choice: accept the decisions of their past and make the best of it, or continue to dwell in their regrets. How different do you think the characters' lives would have been if they would have accepted their choices earlier in life?

MUSIC

Music plays an important role in this show, and not just because *Follies* is a musical. Music from the days gone by helps the characters remember the past (and the dance moves), relive their glory days, and reconnect with one another. But music also helps to separate the past from the present. As you listen to *Follies*, you may notice that some songs harken back to the days of vaudeville and jazz, while others sound more somber, dissonant and, well, "Sondheim." Sondheim did this on purpose (read more about this in the BTW section) to create a distinction between songs from the days of the Weismann Follies and songs of the character's present reality. While you watch *Follies*, try to determine when the characters are living in the present and when they journey back to the past.





STEPHEN SONDHEIM

Stephen Sondheim is an American musical theatre composer and lyricist whose large catalog of work ranges from *West Side Story* to *Sweeney Todd*.

Sondheim has won over critics and audiences alike with his witty lyrics and unique subject matter. In fact, he has received more Tony Awards than any other composer, for a total of eight wins. Sondheim has also earned a Pulitzer Prize, an Academy Award, multiple Grammy Awards, and in 2015 was honored with a Presidential Medal of Freedom.

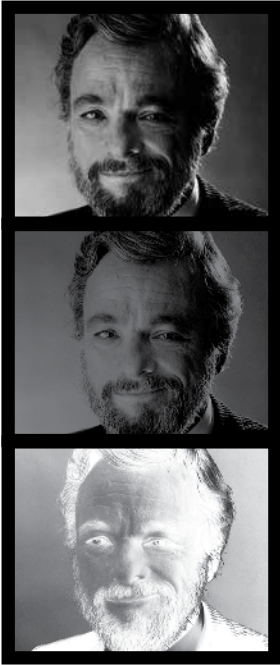
However, Sondheim's early life did not progress in such a grand fashion. Shortly after a young Sondheim saw his first Broadway show at age nine, his parents divorced. While Sondheim may not have received the attention and love he needed from his parents, he does claim that his father passed on his cynicism, and his mother a tendency to hysteria. Not to worry though, Oscar Hammerstein (of the dynamic duo Rodgers and Hammerstein, composers of hits like *Oklahoma!* and *South Pacific* from the Golden Era of musical theatre) took young Sondheim under his wing after he befriended Oscar's son, Jamie. Oscar Hammerstein served as a surrogate parent and mentor to the budding composer.

After graduating from Williams College in 1950, Sondheim struggled to make a living, writing music for films and television and even trying out for game shows. Sondheim finally got a lucky break in 1957, writing lyrics for *West Side Story*. After serving as a lyricist for another hit, *Gypsy*, Sondheim finally

found success composing both music and lyrics with *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* in 1962.

Next, Sondheim forged a relationship with Broadway producer and director Hal Prince, bringing musicals including *Company*, *Follies* and *Sweeney Todd* to life. During this phase, Sondheim solidified his reputation for creating musically complex and highly thematic productions. This continued as Sondheim partnered with James Lapine for *Sunday in the Park with George* (the musical for which Sondheim won the Pulitzer Prize) and *Into the Woods*.

After *Into the Woods*, Sondheim's work output slowed. His last musical was *Road Show* which premiered Off-Broadway in 2008, though he is said to be working on a new production now, which will premiere in 2017. His many shows continue to be performed around the world, and his legacy is honored with revues of his work like *Side by Side by Sondheim* and *Sondheim on Sondheim*.



BU

ZIEGFELD FOLLIES

Did you know that the *Weismann Follies* are based on a real musical revue, the *Ziegfeld Follies*? The *Ziegfeld Follies* ran from 1907 to 1931 featuring song, dance and comedy routines that often addressed current events. These *Follies* were known for their extravagance, elaborate sets and choreography, as well as the beautiful showgirls.

Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr. created the *Ziegfeld Follies*. The son of Dr. Florenz Ziegfeld, founder of the Chicago Musical College and owner of a nightclub, young Ziegfeld was sent to Europe to scout talent for his father's nightclub act. After returning to the United States, Ziegfeld moved to New York with his wife, Anna Held, who he discovered performing in Paris. He began to produce shows with petite Anna as the star, surrounded by tall chorus girls. These productions, which Anna compared to those at the Parisian Folies-Bergère, were the basis for the *Ziegfeld Follies*.

The first *Follies* opened on July 8, 1907. Quickly gaining in both popularity and profit, the show flourished throughout the early 20th century. Distinguishing it from other musical revues of the day, the *Ziegfeld Follies* cast 100 chorus girls where other shows only cast 12, and raised the bar with spectacular visuals from set designer Joseph Urban.

The *Ziegfeld Follies* made a name not only for themselves, but for many rising stars including Fanny Brice, the comedian and singer who inspired *Funny Girl*; Will Rogers, cowboy and humorist; and Billie Burke, who went on to play Glinda the Good Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*. Famous composers George Gershwin, Irving Berlin and Jerome Kern also did work for the *Ziegfeld Follies*. In fact, Berlin's "A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody" became the show's theme song.

As the 1920s came to a close, Ziegfeld's extravagance, the cost of producing the *Follies*, and the start of the Great Depression left Ziegfeld with many financial troubles. He produced his last show in 1931. After the *Follies* closed, the Ziegfeld Girls continued to host annual reunions. In fact, a brief *New York Times* article about the Ziegfeld Girls' 35th

reunion in 1966 helped inspire Sondheim and book writer, James Goldman, to create the musical, *Follies*. Although the show may have ended, Ziegfeld's influence on musical theatre and culture continues to this day through countless productions that pay homage to his artistic legacy.

BTW

In addition to honoring the *Ziegfeld Follies*, Sondheim's

Follies also pays homage to many other musical greats in the form of a pastiche. A pastiche is an artistic work in a style that imitates that of another work, artist or period. In the case of *Follies*, Stephen Sondheim wrote many of his songs in musical styles that harken back to the first half of the 20th century. To make the songs from the days of the fictional *Weismann Follies* (1918–1941) more authentic, Sondheim drew inspiration from composers and lyricists like Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers, Jerome Kern, George Gershwin, Oscar Hammerstein and Noël Coward.

For example, "Who's That Woman?" (which the Weismann Girls refer to as the Mirror Number) is a pastiche that imitates both the lyrics of Cole Porter and the music of Richard Rodgers. Porter was known for his extravagant, sometimes campy lyrics that are still heartfelt despite their often ostentatious heights. To balance out the Porter-like lyrics of "Who's That Woman?" Sondheim emulates the, in his words, "spikier" music of Richard Rodgers.

While "Who's That Woman?" mimicked specific artists, other songs simply simulate more general forms of music from the 20th century. "Rain on the Roof" is Sondheim's take on a novelty song. Novelty songs typically included a repetitive gimmick, which in this case are the punctuated kisses. "The-God-Why-Don't-You-Love-Me Blues," is another general pastiche, this time for vaudeville chase music and patter lyrics. As you listen to the music of *Follies*, try to figure out which songs are pastiche and which songs are pure Sondheim.

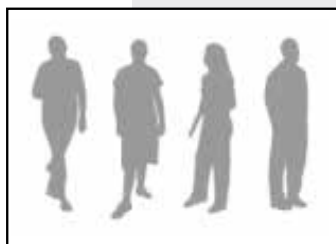


IRL

AMERICAN IDOL. GLEE. DANCING WITH THE STARS. These shows and others like them have captured the attention of viewers around the world. But why do millions of people tune in night after night to watch these programs? The answer is simple—people are fascinated by show business. Irving Berlin knew this in 1946 when he wrote the famous song “There’s No Business Like Show Business;” Sondheim and Goldman knew this in 1971 when they created *Follies* (Sondheim even wrote two more musicals about show business—*Gypsy* and *Merrily We Roll Along*); and film, television, and theatre artists still rely on this phenomenon today, 70 years after Berlin coined his infamous phrase.

But what exactly about show business is so appealing? Do productions about show business draw us in for the chance to catch a glimpse of behind-the-scenes magic?

Or perhaps for the underdog story of artists coming together to create stunning performances despite all the odds? Or is there a part of all of us that secretly yearns for our turn in the spotlight? We could hypothesize about this topic all day, so instead let’s turn again to Irving Berlin for an answer: “Everything about it [show business] is appealing.”



- * Do you have a favorite movie, book or TV show about show business? What is it?
- * What do you like so much about it? Is it the plot, the characters, the world of show business? Why?

BTW

If you enjoy *Follies*, you may like other musicals about show people including:

Chicago

Music: John Kander, Lyrics: Fred Ebb

Book: Fred Ebb and Bob Fosse

This musical, set in the roaring 20s, follows female celebrity criminals in the women’s cell block at Chicago’s Cook County Jail, including vaudeville star Velma Kelly and aspiring starlet Roxie Hart.

Cabaret

Music: John Kander, Lyrics: Fred Ebb

Book: Joe Masteroff

Adapted from the novel *The Berlin Stories* by Christopher Isherwood, this musical, set largely in a cabaret, follows singer Sally Bowles and the people surrounding her—fellow performers, housemates, and writer Cliff Bradshaw—as they navigate the tumultuous politics of pre-World War II Berlin.

A Chorus Line

Music: Marvin Hamlisch, Lyrics: Edward Kleban

Book: James Kirkwood, Jr. and Nicholas Dante

A Chorus Line, based on a series of taped workshops with real life Broadway dancers, follows a group of performers as they audition for a Broadway musical. As the audition progresses, the dancers’ share their stories—their triumphs, failures and love for their craft.

Gypsy

Music: Jule Styne, Lyrics: Stephen Sondheim

Book: Arthur Laurents

Loosely based on the memoirs of Gypsy Rose Lee (who appeared in the *Ziegfeld Follies*!), this musical follows the story of the ultimate stage mom, Rose. Rose devotes her entire life to helping her daughters find success on the stage, but yearns for her own turn in the spotlight.

