

Analysis of Sweeney Todd

I believe that Sweeney Todd by Stephen Sondheim is the hallmark for the musical genre, due to his clever use of musical elements, lyrics, and the messages he induces through his music throughout the entirety of the work.

Before we get started, Sondheim liked the Sweeney character, because it reminded him of some features of himself. Sweeney is a social recluse, subject to depression and exhibits ill faith in humanity. The whole of the story is based around a passion for forbidden love, and how this is a downfall for all of the cast, most especially Sweeney.

1st of all: Hermann chord for harmony diminished 7th. Leitmotifs for melody. **Ostinato for suspense.**

①

Instrumentation: The brass is used for proclamatory and important statements. While the string and woodwind section is often used to create tension.

Leit Motif

Misterioso, con moto

1st.MAN (Bass or Baritone),•

1

no

pp sempre legato

TODD

You there my friend Come, let me hold you,

p

a tempo

This is the Sweeney Todd Motif used in the Prologue. Here, it is an underlying ostinato of undulating quavers. This motif is used whenever Todd is about to do something evil, and it reflects how his mind is 'bubbling away' with the thoughts of revenge. The instrumentation is one of woodwind and strings, in order to create underlying suspense. (1st extract 6 / 8)

②

The theme comes back again in song 6: 'My Friends'. This motif is building suspense as Sweeney is reunited with his razor. (2nd extract in 3 / 4)

③

Let's wait Cont.



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A variation of the motif is used later in the musical in song 15: 'Wait'. It is still 'wavering', this time in 6 / 8. Here, the motif is used to show how his anger is bubbling inside of him as he is waiting for the Judge Turpin who has taken Sweeney's wife. (3rd extract)

4

The final extract, in 4 / 4, is taken from "Epiphany", where Sweeney now vows to kill not only the judge, but other people too. This underlying ostinato motif builds up the suspense to when Sweeney ultimately goes out into the streets to confront and threaten his enemies.

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