

## THEATER

# Sondheim revue looks at man and music



PHOTO BY SUZANNE MAPES

Barbara Carlton Heart, from left, Kevin McMahon, Jake Novak, Shaina Knox, Stephanie Fredicks and Josh Wise make up the cast of "Sondheim on Sondheim."

By **Richard Guzman**

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There's no arguing that Stephen Sondheim is one of musical theater's greatest composers and lyricists.

After all, he's the man behind such celebrated musicals as "Into the Woods," "Sweeney Todd" and "West Side Story." He also has several Tony Awards and a Pulitzer Prize to show for his effort.

Yet, while his fans may know his songs by heart, not many know the man behind the beloved music.

The International City Theatre plans to change that.

Sondheim fans will get a peek beyond the music at the composer and his creative process by hearing the story from the man himself, with help from his music, of course, during the Los Angeles premiere of "Sondheim on Sondheim," a musical revue created by frequent Sondheim collaborator James Lapine.

"He's an inspiration to most singing actors," said

## SONDHEIM ON SONDHEIM

**When:** Opens 8 tonight. Runs 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday through Nov. 8.

**Where:** Center Theater, Long Beach Performing Arts Center, 300 E. Ocean Blvd.

**Tickets:** \$46-\$48; \$54 opening night and \$34 previews.

**Information:** 562-436-4610, [www.ictlongbeach.org](http://www.ictlongbeach.org)

Kevin McMahon, one of six performers in the ensemble cast for the musical that opens tonight and runs through Nov. 8.

"This is a dissection of his work and a look at what makes him tick," McMahon added.

The show is part musical review, part documentary with about 20 Sondheim songs performed onstage integrated with video footage of Sondheim as he talks about his life. He touches on topics like his childhood, his relationship with his parents, his work habits and his famous Broadway scores.

The songs are taken from shows produced

throughout his three-decade-long career such as "Follies," "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum," and "Sunday in the Park With George."

"A lot of people have been listening to his music forever. His pieces are so dense with thoughtful impact," said DJ Gray, the show's director.

Like most involved in musical theater, Gray is an admirer of Sondheim's work and was also part of the original show's Broadway run in 2010 as assistant choreographer.

The Long Beach version is smaller than the Broadway show, however, with a single screen projecting Sondheim instead of about 60 TV sets throughout the stage as in the original production. The Broadway cast also had eight actors, while this local version will have six. But the smaller scale could make this a more animated version of the revue.

"I can really fill the space with more staging and movement that helps move the story along," Gray said. "Here there is a lot more movement than

what was experienced on Broadway. We're just taking a lot more chances in that direction."

Gray isn't the only one involved with this production who has had prior experience with Sondheim's work.

McMahon has been in several Sondheim musicals throughout his career and hopes the Long Beach performance reflects the significance of the composer's impact on musical theater.

"There's a great feeling of responsibility, of honoring the material," he said.

Joining McMahon onstage is Redlands resident Shaina Knox, who at 21 years old has already had a lot of experience in musical theater with several shows under her belt. This will be the first time she will perform in a Sondheim musical, although she counts the composer as a major influence on her career.

"He tells honest and true stories in his music," she said. "This has given me a better sense of who he is as a person and how he is able to write the music he writes."