

MUSICAL THEATRE VOCABULARY

Below are selected terms that are specific to Stephen Sondheim musicals.

11 o'clock Number : A emotional powerhouse of a number that comes at the end of a show, which originally fell right around 11 o'clock in the early decades of musical theatre

[Click here](#) to view one of Sondheim's 11 o'clock numbers, "Rose's Turn", from the movie version of *Gypsy*

Ballad: A song that tells a fairly strict narrative, typically of one particular character. One example of a ballad is "The Ballad of Sweeney Todd" from the musical *Sweeney Todd*.

[Click here](#) to view to another Sondheim ballad, "The Ballad of Booth" from *Assassins*

Book: All the words the performers say, rather than sing, in a musical.

Chorus: A line or group of lines repeated at intervals in a song.

Curtain raiser: A big number that opens a musical, such as Sondheim's famous "Comedy Tonight."

Ensemble: The performers who fill out big production numbers in a musical.

Lyrics: All the words performers sing in a musical.

Overture: A compilation of tunes from the show that the orchestra plays before the musical starts to give the audience a taste of what the piece will be like.

Patter song: A song in which a character sings extremely rapidly. "The Worst Pies in London" or "Gee, Officer Krupke" are examples from Sondheim's work.

Show-stopper: A huge or emotionally powerful song to which the audience responds so positively that their applause temporarily stops the show.

Verse: metrical or rhymed composition as distinct from prose that forms part of a song.



Cast of *Follies* Photo: Joan Marcus