

Mac-Haydn Theatre, Chatham, NY

To Sondheim, With Love. Conceived and starring Meredith Lustig.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“Well, I say don’t. . .don’t be afraid.”

Telling her own story Meredith Lustig exposes her life to her audience through the songs of Stephen Sondheim. Complex and often difficult to grasp on first hearing the songs cover a wide range of years, both for him and for herself. It is always a great delight to listen to the man’s work and moreso when the performer’s voice and interpretive talent is up to the job, which Meredith Lustig certainly is. The leading actress in this season’s production of “Kiss Me, Kate” takes the stage and with only a few simple props performs her nearly solo show; she is joined for two songs, in the performance I saw, by James Benjamin Rodgers who made a highly musical combination of lovely voices with Lustig. Rodgers’ wife Jillian Zack is at the piano for this show and she is a most welcome asset, playing Sondheim exquisitely.

Her songs are drawn from many Sondheim shows including “Anyone Can Whistle,” “Sweeney Todd,” “Saturday Night,” and “Evening Primrose,” a TV show that contributes the lovely ballad, **Take Me to the World**, an extraordinary song which should be heard more often, especially as performed by Lustig. She is

best heard in the latter half of her program once her voice is completely warmed up. She and Rodgers had a perfect theatrical moment with **Finishing the Hat** from “Sunday in the Park with George.” Lustig’s personal story of her *relationship* with Sondheim reveals more about him than it does about her and it is exactly what I anticipated.



Meredith Lustig with Jillian Zack at the piano;
Photo: Ann Kielbasa



Meredith Lustig;
Photo: Ann Kielbasa

Lustig dresses simply for this performance and under Kevin Gleason’s subtle lighting appears to be a Chanel-clone. With some of the most sophisticated material she truly engages her audience. The show is short with nineteen songs but it feels quite complete and satisfying. I recommend it whole-heartedly.

+ 09/14/2022 +

To Sondheim, With Love has one more performance on Sept. 16 at the Mac-Haydn Theater, 1925 NY Rte 203, Chatham, New York. For information and tickets call 518-392-9292.

