

I want to do that

Ron Loyd has built his career on “and” not “or”

As a boy in Texas, baritone Ron Loyd watched Stephen Sondheim’s musicals on television, sparking a fascination that would lead to a career performing those same shows. “My first exposure,” Loyd recalls, “was my mom giving me a VHS tape of the [Angela] Lansbury/[George] Hearn *Sweeney Todd*. I looked at it and I thought, ‘That’s amazing.’ Then *Into the Woods* came right after that, and watching Bernadette Peters, specifically when she’s pleading with her daughter to stay and the transformation she goes through just with the way her expression changed, made me say, ‘I want to do that!’”

Loyd has realized that youthful ambition: So far in his career he has played Sweeney Todd and the Baker in *Woods* as well as Fredrik Egerman in *A Little Night Music*, Pseudolus in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, Herbie in *Gypsy* and even the Captain in *Candide*. Non-Sondheim roles include Tevye, Henry Higgins and Harold Hill, but his repertoire is not limited to American musicals. His operetta work encompasses Strauss and Lehar, Gilbert and Sullivan and even a *zarzuela* sung in the original Spanish, while his concert and opera appearances range from Bach, Handel and Mozart to Verdi and Puccini.

During high school and college, Loyd remained focused on a career in musical theatre. He made his initial foray into Sondheim at West Texas A&M University, playing Buddy Plummer in *Follies*. “It was an interesting first Sondheim exposure because it’s so complex and has so many different layers and generations, but I was completely sold as to the whole magnificence of his creativity.”

At this same time, however, opera presented itself as a possible calling. “When I originally started,” Loyd explains, “I wanted to do musical theatre, but [the model then] was more of a Tommy Tune, tall, thin, lithe, dancery-type, and I had this big voice that didn’t always fit into an ensemble. I asked a few friends about career options, and it led to a position in the Fort Worth Opera chorus, which is where I fell in love with the opera.” He subsequently made his professional debut with Amarillo Opera and began to perform at other regional companies. Nevertheless, musical theatre continued to beckon, with Sondheim again providing the spark: “I did [Count] Carl-Magnus in *A Little Night Music* at Brevard [Music Center in North Carolina]. I remember the conductor coming up to me and saying, ‘You’re really great at that. You should think about Broadway.’ I was like, ‘I’m supposed to be an opera singer,’ but it was the first teetering: ‘Where do I go?’”

Ultimately, Loyd did not have to choose between the two. A talent for comic opera led him to Gilbert and Sullivan, which in turn led him

to Light Opera Oklahoma (LOOK), as Tulsa’s summer stock company was then known. During his first season, Loyd played not only operetta title roles in *The Sorcerer* and *The Little Barber of Lavapiés* (his venture into *zarzuela*), but also Emile de Becque in *South Pacific*. LOOK cast him as *Sweeney Todd* the next summer, and other musicals followed in Tulsa and elsewhere.

This unexpected expansion of his repertoire reflects what Loyd now sees as an ongoing convergence of opera and Broadway for performers as well as audiences: “Whereas it used to be seen as ‘You are either an opera singer or a musical theatre singer,’ it’s starting to blend. And that’s great, because as an American singer, I think that musical theatre really has to be part of the tradition of a well-rounded, versatile artist.”

Unsurprisingly, even as Loyd prepares new operatic roles such as *Rigoletto* (“the Sweeney Todd of opera,” he contends), he remains eager to do more Sondheim: “I want to do *Follies* again, but I want to do *Ben*. And I would love to do *Company*, although I’m too old [laughter], but if I could convince [LOOK] to do it, I would. I relate to ‘Being Alive’ a lot.”

What is Loyd’s key to performing Sondheim? “Take the really big, broad acting and pull it down to shave off all the unneeded things, just like he would shave away all the unneeded words. All you need to do is really just deliver in a very heartfelt way his lyrics, and the show will take care of itself.” [TSR]

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PHOTOS BY TRINA FOWLER

Ron Loyd played two high-profile roles in Summer 2012 productions for Light Opera Oklahoma: He was Herbie in *Gypsy* (top) and Pseudolus (below) in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*.