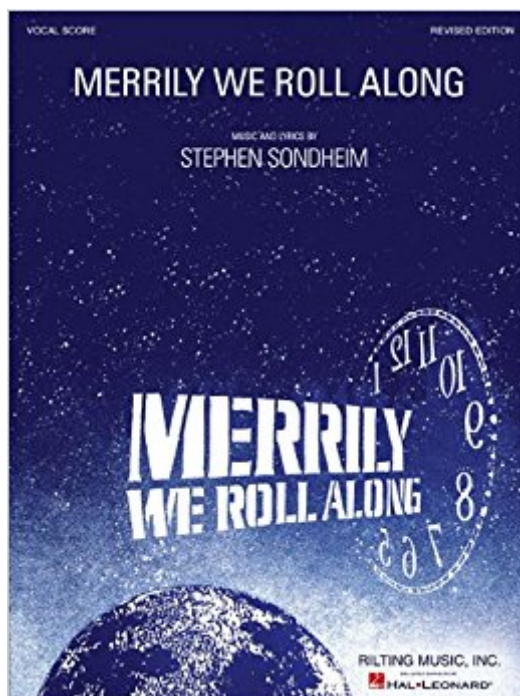


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Merrily We Roll Along Vocal Score: Revised Edition



Synopsis

Stephen Sondheim and George Furth's popular musical runs backwards in time from 1976 to 1955 to explore the lives of three people whose friendship is tested by time, events, ambition and fate. Our vocal selections folio contains 14 of the musical's enduring songs including: Growing Up * Not a Day Goes By * Old Friends * Opening Doors * Our Time * and more.

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Customer Reviews

If you love Stephen Sondheim, you'll want this vocal score. Very complete.

This gets five stars because it deserves it but truthfully, this version of "Merrily We Roll Along" is not anywhere as good as the original, particularly where music and lyrics are concerned. But the original vocal score is out of print so this may be it unless you luck out on eBay. I own both scores and have directed both productions. Typical of Sondheim, it's difficult for playing AND singing. But it's a very diatonic, form structured score so it never feels avant garde and once you get the music under your hands you'll play it well every time. The songs are all 16 and 32 measure form and the score is modular, pieces used and reused throughout the show, chunks of one song as an accompaniment to another and where "West Side Story" is based entirely on the tri-tone, "Merrily" is based entirely on the I chord to IVsus. All of it. And it's done brilliantly. But in this version the reason isn't clear because two critical scenes and the most important song in the show was cut. Let me explain: Both shows move backward through time from 1980 to 1957. The show begins with our

lead, Franklin Shepard, a famous composer and film producer, giving a speech at his alma mater's graduation. The graduates sing a song that he and his best friend, Charley Kringas, wrote for THEIR graduation 23 years before. It's a beautiful a capella piece in six part chorus called "The Hills of Tomorrow." We hear the song again at the end of the show (1957) at their own graduation. The entire score is based on the first four pitches of that song and the two chords beneath. But in THIS version, that song is gone, so unless you're really paying attention you don't notice and if you DO, you have no reason to know why. The Overture is a rockin' Big Band composition that's almost as skillfully written as Bernstein's "Candide." Sondheim, unlike most theatre composers, writes his own Overtures, scene changes and Bows. The Overture of the original is better because the really cool stuff is from songs that were cut. (Rich And Happy is the most important for the Overture. Ignore the drum solos-silence in music is powerful- and get ready for some seriously fast chromatic hand work. This score contains some of Sondheim's most clever songs ("Franklin Shepard, Inc", "Bobby and Jackie and "Jack", ""Now You Know", "Opening Doors") as well as his best, simple, moving ballads. ("Not A Day Goes By", "Good Thing Going"- the solo pop tune built from the cut "Hills of Tomorrow"- and "Like It Was".) "Our Time" is a remarkable anthem- one of only two he ever wrote (other: "Sunday") that closes the show, starting with Frank, Charley and the woman who becomes their best friend, Mary (a brilliant name choice for her character, hat's off to book writer, George Furth. The entire company-and it's big- joins them, leaving us warm, hopeful, and nostalgic. But Nostalgia comes from the Greek: Nostra means home, Algia, means "pain." Given that the show runs backward in time this means the storyline, seemingly ending on an up tone just as their about to start their careers, is a despondent tragedy on a level with Brecht or SatrÃfÆ'Ã Â³. The opening of the show gives us these characters 23 years later, addicted, divorced, estranged, and miserable. This is the reason the original didn't sell well: the audience works hard to follow the concept and story only to see that the entire point is like a big mirror for the audience reminding them of how their lives turned out in no way as we planned when we started. In an attempt to "fix" the show, James Lapine ("Into The Woods") got Sondheim to cut some, write some new songs, and Jonathan Tunick changed the orchestration. The new songs aren't as good as the cut ones, the loss of cello and Tuba is dry, and the addition of Frank's son from his first marriage requires three boy actors to cover one kid from baby to age 10. The ten year old sings 16 measures, for which there must now be a doll, a toddler, and a boy adding stress, cost, and staff to the production. A new song called "Growing Up" is nice but doesn't balance the loss of "Hills of Tomorrow." The changes take away warmth and the result is a meticulous, almost computerized musical that STILL depresses an audience. If you can find the first score (1980) get that. Only buy this one if there isn't one on eBay.

But you SHOULD have one of them as this IS a brilliant and important show. (SPOILER ALERT: I remind you that Sondheim LOVES the key of Gb major.)

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