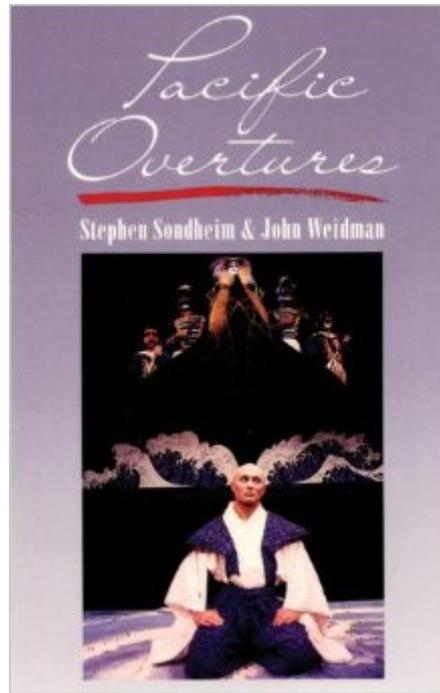


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Pacific Overtures



Synopsis

"Priceless and peerless...a thrilling work of theatricality."--Wayman Wong, San Francisco Examiner
--This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

Hardcover: 144 pages

Publisher: Theatre Communications Group (January 1, 1993)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1559360259

ISBN-13: 978-1559360258

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 0.6 x 8.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (4 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #2,087,304 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #77 in [Books > Humor & Entertainment > Sheet Music & Scores > Composers > Sondheim](#) #293 in [Books > Humor & Entertainment > Sheet Music & Scores > Historical Period > Modern Popular](#) #293 in [Books > Humor & Entertainment > Sheet Music & Scores > Forms & Genres > Musicals](#)

Customer Reviews

Incredible piece of avant garde musical theatre. Best when seen, but great to read and listen to the cd too! Seldom produced, it combines the techniques of Kabuki Theatre with Western Musical Theatre in a way that only Sondheim could conceive.

"Pacific Overtures" is the political euphemism used by Commodore Matthew Perry in 1853 when Japan was persuaded to open up trade relations because of the display of naval power put on by the United States. The clash of cultures as the "Floating Kingdom" was forced to end centuries of enforced isolation is the subject of this unique musical, which dramatizes Perry's expedition to Japan. John Weidman's original idea, which first came to him in a Harvard lecture hall in 1966, was realized a decade later when director-producer Harold Prince decided to adapt various Japanese theatrical techniques and conventions, and Stephen Sondheim was brought in to write the music. The cast of "Pacific Overtures" was entirely Asian or Asian-American, a casting commitment that makes "Pacific Overtures" a rare musical to see in performance, which is a shame because of not only its presentation of history but because of its imaginative use of Kabuki. Among the Kabuki traditions adapted to the show were the use of males to play the female roles, the Reciter who

comments on the proceedings, stage hands completely clothed in black, and on-stage musicians. Act I ends with a Kabuki lion dance, which provides the image for the album cover. While it would never be a very popular show, this musical is certainly a fascinating attempt that is of much interest to the Westernization of Japan as it is to devotees of the American stage. Ultimately, Prince has a bigger impact on the show than Sondheim, which takes some doing to be sure. That is why it this book might be an even better way of approaching this show than listening to the CD, although the best approach, of course, is to do both.

Stephen Sondheim and John Weidman's musical is something that all countries around the world should read. Sometimes, though, the lyrics may seem a bit toooo sophisticated for such a universal play. But, it is probably one of the best books for a musical you could find.

Although this is an unusual idea for a musical, the opening of Japan in the 1850's is certainly a dramatic enough incident to warrant some treatment. The focus of the musical is to see the events through the eyes of the Japanese. The Americans were the only nation to successfully shatter Japanese isolation which has been in place since the early 1500s. The musical works well in the first act but gets mired down in the second dealing with relations with other nations and the emergence of Japan as a force within the world. Here it loses its intimacy. I saw this musical on Broadway during its limited run in the mid 1970's. I had the same opinion then as now. It still has some interesting elements of theatre and shows Sondheim experimenting with different forms to find new ways to express himself and appeal to an audience.

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