Disrupted and Stretched Linearity in Stephen Sondheim's *Company*

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This article analyses Stephen Sondheim's treatment of time in his seminal 1970-musical *Company*. I argue that his score presents two distinct temporal modes: disrupted linearity, whereby goal-directed motion is interrupted; and stretched linearity, whereby goal-directed motion is extended. These novel temporal categories are illuminated with respect to a range of songs from the show, with explanation as to how different musical parameters contribute to these experiences of time. I conclude by suggesting that this approach to time forms a backdrop to the unconventional narrative structure and thematic material, both of which resist chronological and linear characteristics.

Introduction: "Company" and the Structuring of Time

I begin this paper with an excerpt from "Company", the titular song from Stephen Sondheim's much-lauded 1970-musical, *Company*.[2] The number launches the "story" of the show (more on this point below) and comes as Robert, the New York bachelor and central character, blows out the candles on his 35th birthday. Readers are encouraged to listen to the version of the song from the Original Broadway Cast Recording[3] and note the following features of bars 3–24 (from 0:49):

1. The rigid and insistent rhythmic groove, established through the marked crotchet pulse in the middle register, which is countered by the fluctuations in metre, shifting between 6/4 and 4/4 to match the scansion of his friend's declamatory remarks

2. The predominance of oscillating harmonic patterns, two bars at a time; the initial pattern can be interpreted as $Ab^{(6/b9)}$–Gb/Ab; in bar 13, this changes to A^{6}/B–Gb/Ab; at bar 21, there is a further shift to a new pattern, Ebm^{11}–Fm^{11}

3. The cumulative processes in vocal layering – the song opens with fragmented utterances of "Bobby"; characters then take turns at singing a full line above repeated interjections of "Bobby", "Robert", "Bobby, honey"; finally, their multiple pleas to Bobby overlap, enhancing the *moto perpetuo* rhythmic character of this section

Taken together, there is a clear sense of the song building in harmonic, dramatic and textural intensity. Notwithstanding the chromatic harmonic and melodic inflections (e.g. the presence of *A-natural* and *G-natural*), the bass pedals and vocal lines intimate an impending turn towards D-flat major. A partial sense of resolution occurs at bar 25 (1:35), though in an unexpected way. On the one hand, the orchestral texture expands significantly and the characters abandon their polyphony in favour of a singular command sung in a glorious three-part harmony, "Bobby come on over for dinner, we'll be so glad to see you"; on the other hand, the hitherto rising bass line (*E-flat*–*F*) takes a further step upwards to *G*, not towards the anticipated *D-flat*. Having achieved this apparent breakthrough, the song's harmony sits on a *G* pedal for the next 15 bars, above which a new oscillating pattern unfolds (F/G–Em^{7}/G). The moment

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2 *Company* is a show with multiple cast recordings, as well as different score versions. None of the analytical points I make are contingent on one particular version of the show, however, some readers may notice reference to, say, different keys. Where useful I will provide timecodes, which refer to tracks from the Original Broadway Cast Recording album.

3 Sondheim 1970.

of release, texturally and vocally, is played off against the harmonic accompaniment folding back onto itself – a deceptive resolution that restarts a new anticipatory pattern. The ensemble sing to Bobby, "we love you", holding "love" for six bars, "you" for one bar, over the extended dominant chord, before Bobby finally begins his verse, now in the key of C major (1:59).

There are numerous discrete musical elements of interest here – harmony, to be sure, but also form, melodic phrasing, rhythmic articulation, instrumental and vocal texture. Yet, more importantly, this analytical vignette showcases Sondheim's idiosyncratic confluence and sequencing of musical events: this evokes a distinct manner of structuring our experience of time in music. The excerpt reveals two modes of related temporality, what I term *disrupted linearity* and *stretched linearity*. Disrupted linearity refers to a sense of motion towards a musical goal, which is then interrupted or diverted (e.g. the unexpected shift from D-flat major to C major); stretched linearity refers to a sense of motion towards a musical goal, which is drawn out, calling into question whether such a goal will be realised (e.g. the use of pedal notes and broadening texture). In this paper, I argue that these two forms of temporality pervade the score of *Company*, which is appropriate given the musical's thematic exploration of life and relationship trajectories. These variations on linear time emerge through a range of techniques: obscuring of tonic chords; stylistic and/or formal juxtapositions; slow harmonic rhythm (often set against rapid surface rhythms); and elongated passages of cadential expectation. I explore each type of linearity with respect to a range of songs from *Company*, before discussing in greater depth how these temporal features align with the show's narrative structure and content. Before proceeding to the analysis, however, it is necessary to examine the conceptual basis of time in music and musical theatre.

Time in Musicals; Musical Time

Notions and explorations of time are recurring themes in the literature on musical theatre.[4] This should be expected: on the one hand, it is a temporal art form; on the other, it is an art form that is frequently preoccupied with its own articulation of temporality. It is of no further surprise that time is a dominant theme in much of the academic and critical commentary around Stephen Sondheim.[5] A number of his shows explore unconventional relationships between temporality and narrative – such as the reverse chronology of *Merrily We Roll Along*; or utilise older musical styles to transport characters and audiences through time – such as the jazz age pastiches of *Follies*.[6] Furthermore, Sondheim's treatment of melody, harmony and form is often aligned with the unfolding dramaturgical content. Lovensheimer, for instance, addresses the repetition and reprisals of material across a show, connecting such developments of music with changes in a character or dramatic situation.[7] Other studies, predominantly from a music theory perspective, map harmonic processes in individual songs against lyrical and dramatic content.[8] Hudlow analyses "The Ballad of Giteau" from *Assassins* and argues that the modulatory scheme of Giteau's verses (rising in key with each repetition) reflects the character's actions as he slowly climbs to the gallows. Purin, on the other hand, explores songs of self-discovery in *Into the Woods*, and relates characters' moments of transformation to ebbs and flows in harmonic dissonance, ambiguity and prolongation of functional melodic movement.

These studies reflect two approaches that have predominated in the analysis of time in musical theatre: one that considers temporality across separate points over a longer duration (e. g. between songs of a show); and one that considers temporality within a shorter duration (e. g. in a song). In both cases, temporality is explored primarily through *narrative* – that is, the focus is on the changes of char-

4 Ellis 2011, 2022; McMillin 2006; Knapp and Knapp 2017. See also Siropoulos 2011.
5 Gordon 2019.
6 See Smith 1998.
7 Lovensheimer 2023.
8 Purin 2011; Hudlow 2013.

SJM-NF 42 (2025), S. 129–138.

acters and plot action through time; the musical content is then placed in homological alignment with these aspects of the story. While both approaches have fostered rich analytical insights, there is space for considering how to understand temporality when there is *not* such an explicit relationship between music and plot at a given moment, or when the repetition and variation of material does not reveal much about the characters and their journeys. As my opening analytical notes intimated, there is a third approach that is more concerned with the passage of time *in music* as distinct from the immediate narrative context. I propose that the broader concept of "musical time" facilitates this alternative analytical pathway, which, in turn, may lead to further observations about musical theatre compositional practices, as well as their relationship to dramatic narratives.

The notion of "musical time" draws principally from the work of Jonathan Kramer, who in *The Time of Music*[9] laid out a categorical framework for the different temporalities evoked in Western musical forms. At its heart is the distinction between linear time and non-linear time, each of which breaks down into further sub-categories, such as directed and non-directed linear time, multiply-directed time, and so forth. Much like the aim of this paper, many analysts have utilised these categories to make sense of distinct or unusual musical structures and patterns in classical works[10] and popular songs.[11]

These authors demonstrate how different musical elements may contribute to a particular temporal state or flow – often harmonic patterns and structural repetition/difference shape our experience of time; but melody, texture, dynamics and rhythm may also bear responsibility for influencing an interpretation. Moreover, Kramer's categories serve usefully as a methodological model, which then allows writers to illuminate how a given example conforms to or negates the criteria of a temporal condition, precisely as I seek to do here. My article focuses on *Company* primarily on account of the rich and inventive musical score, as well as its dramatic conceit of passing time, however, it should be emphasised that this case study also serves as explication of certain analytical tools, ripe to be used in other musical (theatre) contexts.

Linearity and Sondheim

As a final precursor to the novel temporal categories – disrupted and stretched linearity – it is necessary to address the fundamental premise of my argument: that the score of *Company* is founded on musical devices that evoke *linear* temporal structures. Kramer defines linear time as "the determination of some characteristic(s) of music in accordance with implications that arise from earlier events of the piece".[12] That is to say, when we hear certain musical events, expectations arise as to what will follow; and, equally, our understanding of later musical events is shaped by what has occurred earlier. The practices of tonal harmony, and its influence on other musical parameters (such as melody), are the most familiar manifestation of these ideas: when a piece begins on a tonic harmony in a certain key, it establishes an air of anticipation for a return to this point of rest; if and when a dominant chord arrives prior to the tonic return, we recognise its significance because of what had previously happened (i.e. the opening appearance of a tonic harmony). The same might be said at a structural level, where we recognise a thematic recapitulation or the final chorus of a song as completing a structural journey that had started with the initial presentation of that musical material. As Kramer notes, "Linearity is intimately linked to the *progression* of a composition",[13] although, crucially, "progression" does not mean that every musical expectation must be fulfilled; it is the *establishment* of goal-direction and anticipation that is crucial, with the composer then having the option of realising, delaying or denying the achievement of this goal.

9 Kramer 1988.
10 Klein 2004; Taylor 2016.
11 Holm-Hudson 2002; Danielsen 2006; Malawey 2010; Malawey 2011; Osborn 2013; Mercer-Taylor 2013; Smith 2014; Braae 2021.
12 Kramer 1988: 20.
13 Kramer 1988: 21; italics added.

At first glance, Sondheim's music may seem to resist the characteristics of linear temporality. Indeed, when one combines the highly chromatic harmonic language with the angular melodic lines and the fractured, *style brisé* instrumental textures, it can be difficult to ascertain the requisite sense of forward musical motion. Yet these complex musical surfaces frequently belie goal-directed musical foundations in his songs. In part, this can be observed in the use of conventional structural templates (e.g. AABA form and related variations) that allow for a processional journey away from and back towards the initial section. In part, also, the underlying harmonic structures of Sondheim's songs are tonally-grounded. As Drew Nobile details, even at his most chromatic, such as in *Sweeney Todd*, beneath the jagged sonorities are functional tonal practices: "Sondheim's compositional framework allows striking dissonance to pervade the harmonic layer without obscuring listeners' sense of key".[14] With the songs grounded in tonality and overarching goal-directed formal templates, we can identify an underlying linear impetus. The point of analytical interest, then, is how these expectations are treated as they come to the musical surface in different dramatic contexts.

Disrupting Linearity: Emergent, Absent and Fragile Tonics

In the opening excerpt from "Company", the promise of linear musical motion emerges, for the most part, from the harmonic sonorities – notably, the Gb/Ab chord, which has frequently been referred to as the "soul dominant" in popular music literature.[15] Yet at no point is there the forceful articulation of the intimated D-flat major key. The initial harmonic content, in tandem with the subsequent textural growth, is evoking a state of linear time – suggesting movement towards a goal – but it is disrupted by the lack of arrival. This particular disruption is short-lived, as "Company" slips into C major; although, as noted earlier, it still takes 15 bars for this tonic chord to be emphatically stated with Bobby's entrance. It is pertinent to refer here to Mark Spicer's three-part typology of examples where tonic harmonies do not appear with structural prominence. The start of "Company" is an example of an "absent" tonic: one that is promised but never materialises. As the song progresses and we come to hear C major as the tonic chord, we would likely term this an "emergent" tonic: one which is "initially absent yet deliberately saved" for a moment of structural importance, in this case, Bobby's first vocal line.[16] Now, we can recognise that the earlier expectations have been realised – the build-up in dramatic and musical intensity has lead us somewhere – but this linear process has been characterised by a sense of possible uncertainty as to the destination.

A more pronounced example of an absent tonic occurs in "Barcelona". This is a duet sung by Bobby and one of his girlfriends, April, the morning after a night of romance. The pair awkwardly lie in bed, stumbling their way through a stilted conversation about where April (a flight attendant) is travelling to next (Barcelona). Bobby implores her to stay; the sub-text is that this request is borne out of perceived politeness and nothing more. The verse of "Barcleona" spends much of its time rocking between a Gm chord in first inversion and an $Fm^{7(add4)}$ chord. Already, there is a lack of harmonic directionality. One interpretation is that we are in the B-flat Mixolydian mode with the progression oscillating between alerted tonic (I^{6}) and dominant ($v^{7/add4}$). Another reading is that we are in E-flat major. Bobby and April's main vocal melodies start on *B-flat* and fall to *G* and then *F* in each phrase, as if trying to enact a descent through the tonic triad. In this context, both harmonies can be heard as weak dominant chords (V^{6}–V^{7sus4}/F), but which never resolve. After sixteen bars (0:44), there is a turn towards flat-side harmonies (Db^{maj7}–Gb^{maj7}–Cb^{maj7}–Fb^{maj7}). It might be expected that this more expansive chordal palette should lead to a cadence that would harmonically ground the song. But it is not to be. At the end of this four-chord sequence, the song drops back into the original pattern, which continues until it simply stops.

14 Nobile 2023: 36.
15 Spicer 2017: [3].
16 Spicer 2017: [1].

The bridge further adds to this state of disrupted and halting progress: both the melodic line and accompaniment become more expansive and flowing, yet never reach a destination. Ironically, this section begins on an E-flat major chord, but with a flattened seventh, signalling a turn towards A-flat major (1:03). When this chord *does* arrive after 24 bars (with decorative major seventh and ninths; 1:27), the sense of A-flat major has been overridden by the sliding chromatic bass line and the melodic trajectory, extending upwards and coming to rest on an *F*. In the subsequent bars, the underlying chords slip to an embellished F^7 harmony, suggesting a move to B-flat major; this sonority duly appears over the barline, but only in the weakened form of the verse pattern (i.e. the altered Bb^6) and the ambivalence recommences. Thus, throughout the song, the harmonic and melodic material is consistently suggesting movement towards certain goals, without ever reaching them in an emphatic or unambiguous manner. The textural design is important in fostering this impression. In the bridge, the accompaniment pattern heightens in rhythmic activity, as well as dynamic range, crescendoing to the orchestral climax at Ab^{maj9} chord, 24 bars into the section. This instrumental growth suggests motion towards a goal, which is duly undercut by the unexpected harmonic and melodic trajectories. On the other hand, the verse, with its anticipatory setup of E-flat major, is countered by a static and constrained accompaniment: repeating rhythmic figures on the acoustic guitar and sustained strings and "lute" organ. There is no dynamism here. The net effect is that of movement, to be sure, but in a stilted and directionless manner.

Finally, the disrupted linear temporality also comes about through the presence of "fragile" tonics, those which are present but substantially underplayed in their hierarchical status. This aligns well with "Someone is Waiting", which flirts with both E major and B major, the melody and harmony often playing off against each. The opening vocal phrase, for example, sounds like it is in E major, but the harmonic pattern appears to begin off-tonic in B. As the verse builds, through swelling orchestral textures and ascending melodic contours, an *A-sharp* is finally incorporated into the vocal line, perhaps signalling a comparatively definitive turn towards B major. Yet the conclusion of the verse four bars later has Robert leaping to a high *E* under which the orchestra supports him with lush B dominant chords. We have turned back, as it were, to E major. In the final phrase of the song, Robert's vocal melody begins to descend *E–D-sharp–C-sharp*, clearly marching towards a *B* tonic note, but it ends stranded on the second scale degree; the chords again fall into a two-bar rocking motion, E–F#/E, with no resolution. On balance, it would seem most logical to describe "Someone is Waiting" as in B major, yet the lacking structural prominence of this chord hints at its fragility. This fragility engenders a quality of grasping and searching for a goal, without it ever being securely reached.

Structural Ruptures

As a piece of music progresses, a sense of smooth linear temporality can be felt at a structural level, in part through the expected sequence of sections (e.g. the return of "A" material), and in part through the transitions from one idea to the next. Linear time implies a journey – which thus allows for new destinations to emerge, yet with an understanding as to *how* we have reached certain points along the way. In a number of songs, the overall linear movement is disrupted through structural ruptures[17]: sharp sectional changes in style, tempo and/or key that instantaneously and rapidly transport the song into a different musical space. "Getting Married Today" presents the most striking example of this feature. In the song, Amy, a friend of Bobby's, is due to be marrying Paul. Struck down by an acute case of cold feet, Amy rapidly runs through all the reasons why she is not getting married today, which is set against Paul's effusive praises of his bride-to-be. The song divides into three broad sections: a chorale pastiche sung by the "choir girl", which sets the "blessed" tone for the day; Paul's aria-like interludes; and the verbose patter of Amy's panicked verses. What is noticeable is that there are no real transitions between these

17 Smith 2014.

stylistic worlds. On occasion, the final word of one section overlaps with the start of the new section (e.g. from Paul's first interlude into the patter; it is also in the same key), but there is no preparation for such a drastic shift in tempo or accompaniment type. The juxtaposition is even more noticeable between the patter and chorale sections on account of the textural change: from oscillating chromatic quavers on the piano and mid-register strings to sustained notes on the church organ and reed instruments. More striking again is the transition between these sections for the second time (2:53) – Amy's patter singing ends in G-flat major, there is a slight pause, and the chorale begins in D major. While there is the common-tone of *F-sharp*/*G-flat* between the two keys, this note is not emphasised within the instrumental or vocal texture, and thus there is no sense of continuity. The same occurs in reverse at the end of this section, which has now modulated to B major (3:24). Paul provides the vocal upbeat over a B dominant harmony, yet this does not lead anywhere, so much as become the first chord of the final patter verse (reinterpreted as C-flat major), and the song duly picks up in tempo once more.

What is crucial here is that the adjacent sections present their own internal musical logic and goal-directed motion – we are sitting in a linear temporal mode, but this flow through the song as a whole is broken and halted at each sectional marker. In other instances, such linear motion is disrupted via unprepared and unexpected modulations across sectional barlines. Thus, in "Marry Me a Little", Bobby ends the first A section with a glorious proclamation, "I'm ready [to be married] now", over a long-held dominant harmony; his melody line comes to rest on 7 (*A-sharp*), ready to resolve up to the *B* tonic. However, when he sings "now" on the leading-note, there is a shift in the harmony underneath to VII^{sus4} ($A\#^{sus4}$). After a fermata, the song picks up from this suspended chord and resolves into a new tonic – *B-flat* (harmonically reinterpreted from the preceding section). Without any preparation, the song has slipped down a semitone, and the B section takes off in this new tonal space.

There is a reverse trajectory in "Another Hundred People". In this instance, the A section is in C major, while the B section begins in C-sharp minor, albeit with some very subtle harmonic preparation. After 19 bars, the A section moves drives to its cadence point via a secondary dominant of V (an altered D^7 chord; 0:28). Two bars later, the treble pattern remains in place (emphasising *C*, *E*, *A*, *F-sharp*), but the bass slips to *B*. This gives us a highly embellished B dominant chord (e.g. Am^6/B), which deceptively resolves to C-sharp minor (i.e. vi of E). Concurrently, Marta's vocal line concludes the A section on *A* and starts the B section on *G-sharp*, offering an effective 4-3 resolution over the barline (0:35). It is clearly possible to identify the melodic and harmonic logic underpinning this sectional transition, but such processual elements are offset by the obscure and unexpected harmonic movement (i.e. the initial bass shift from *D* to *B*; the interrupted cadential resolution), and more so, by the sharp instrumental change. Immediately into the B section, the bass completely drops out of the rich orchestral texture, leaving muted horns, pizzicato cello (in its high register), sparkling woodwinds and violins. While there is a crescendo leading into the sectional shift, the transformation of the texture is sudden and dramatic. Any continuity at a deeper tonal level is thus overshadowed by the discontinuities in surface harmonies and timbral profile. As with the previous two examples, we find the same effect of the forwards motion of one section being ruptured briefly, before picking up again and resuming its course.

Stretched Linearity: Phrase Rhythm, Harmonic Pacing and Prolonged Cadences

As alluded to above, the varied forms of disruptions to linearity can create a temporal flow marked by jolts and halting momentum or a sense of wandering without direction. Throughout *Company*, we can observe other means through which Sondheim toys with linear time. Let us return to the beginning of "Another Hundred People". The *moto perpetuo* accompaniment is characterised by broken chords split between left and right hand. The dual voices in the bass register outline a syncopated rhythm over two bars: quavers grouped into a 3+3+3+3+2+2 (i.e. double tresillo) pattern. When Marta starts singing, her

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opening line, "Another hundred people just got off of the train and came up through the ground", does not fit into these two bars. There is an extra bar, therefore, tacked on to the end of this pattern, creating an asymmetric and unusual grouping of accents of three bars (3+3+3+3+2+2 // +3+3+2). After a repeat of these three bars, there is further variation in the second phrase: here the "extra" bar (with its 3+3+2 grouping) is heard three times to accommodate the list form of the lyrics.

While these unusual phrase lengths could be interpreted as disrupting the directional movement of the section, it feels more like a flexing of the temporal progression – as if the accompaniment reaches the end of the phrase before Marta and thus sits in its state of "almost progressing" for a little longer to stay aligned with the singer. The linear motion is thus stretched before continuing. Central to this particular conception of stretched linearity is the juxtaposition of harmonic directionality and continuous surface rhythm – both of which create a sense of propulsion – alongside the inconsistent sense of pacing – in this case evoked through the extension of the phrase beyond its expected length of two bars. This is similar to what we experience in the opening number, where, as noted earlier, the fluctuations between 6/4 and 4/4 time signatures create a gentle unevenness in phrase continuity.

Elsewhere, the temporal extensions come about through glacial harmonic rhythm. In "Getting Married Today", the patter section is characterised by intense quaver motion in the inner voices, yet it takes 12 bars to move away from the tonic, before moving through a ii–V pattern over six bars. In tandem with the rising melodic contours and introduction of the refrain lyric, there is a clear sense of progression through the verse, but after a long wait for the structural motion to begin. The same can be said about "Marry Me a Little" – again, the harmonic movement through the verse is conventional, directional (following the initial tonic, a circle-of-fifths pattern) and slow. The song sits on the tonic for eight bars, before a change in chord every two bars thereafter. Because of the continuous quavers in the accompaniment, the song's temporal flow is never halted, so much as feeling as if we are moving steadily at a drawn-out pace.

Thus far, the examples of stretched linearity primarily pertain to the *initiation* of motion within a section; that is, the manner in which the linear journey commences from the tonic harmony. At the opposite end of this trajectory – where the motion comes to a close – Sondheim's cadences are an equally rich site for exploring stretched linearity. Indeed, as William Caplin notes, a cadence, in Western musical forms, is the "device that most readily expresses musical closure" and thus experimentation in this realm will consequently shape our experience of temporality.[18] Consider "Sorry - Grateful", the early number in which Bobby's friends explore the contradictory impulses of being married. The vocal line for much of the song is built on a short, syncopated motif, the contours of which rise in the opening half of each phrase and fall to the tonic, *D*, at its conclusion. In the final section of the verse (0:59), the initiating phrase (mostly sitting in a tonic space) is countered by a cadential phrase (1:11), which lasts four bars – already there is a sense of stretching by virtue of this lengthy timeframe to achieve closure. Through these four bars, the closing melodic gesture (the descent to the tonic) simply repeats, ready to conclude but without the support of the chordal pattern. It remains on V for two bars, falls back to the supertonic minor, before a final dominant chord and resolution. Further underscoring this flexibility of time is the change in time signature: out of the song's 6/4 and into 4/4 for the final two bars. Here, the elision of two beats from the phrase provides a slight push in the pacing, hurrying along the final movement into the cadence, having been resting in the state of anticipation previously. What this example shows is Sondheim's willingness to toy with the addentant temporal expectations that emerge from cadences.

Other examples are comparatively straightforward in elongating linear time. We have already observed in "Company" the extended dominant harmonies at the ends of various phrases and sections, which steadily build anticipation towards the impending release (which is both realised and denied on different occasions). This strategy of lengthening the perfect cadences is found in a number of other

18 Caplin 2024: xiii

songs, with the stretching of time getting more prominent through a song. Thus after the first verse of "Getting Married Today", the subsequent section-ending dominant chords (as part of the ii–V cadential motion) are extended to eight bars in length. In "Marry Me a Little", the first perfect cadence in the verse lasts four bars, the second lasts six bars, the third (occurring in the verse section after the bridge) lasts for eight bars. These extensions of the cadence align with Robert's extra lyrics, one line each time – "I'm ready // I'm ready // I'm ready *now*!" – as if he is willing himself more and more towards marriage.

The most striking instance of this feature occurs in finale of *Company*, "Being Alive", in which Robert finally sees the virtues of opening himself up emotionally to a long-term relationship (maybe...more on this interpretation below). The verses of "Being Alive" are underpinned by an accompaniment with busy surface rhythm and a slow harmonic rhythm, creating the same drawn-out sense of motion heard earlier in the show. At the end of phrases, the song pauses on a richly-embellished dominant chord. The first three appearances of this pattern have the V chord held for four or eight bars, underscoring the dialogue between Robert and his friends. On the subsequent iteration of this pattern, Robert sings the title lyric four times as the chord lasts six bars (2:10). Immediately after this verse, there is a key change up a semitone – the emotional intensity ramps up accordingly. The subsequent cadential phrases follow similar patterns of a repeating dominant chord with its churning textural pattern and a lyric repetition (or similar – for instance, "Being alive, make me alive..."). In sequential phrases, these moments last for four bars, six bars and then a glorious ten bars out of the bridge to lead into the final verse (3:46). The relentless nature of the accompaniment adds to overwhelming build of tension, until the moment when Robert finally asks for "someone to crowd me with love". There is an apparent breakthrough, which comes after the song's temporal motion has been stretched seemingly to its limits.

Conclusion: The Temporal Backdrop of *Company*

The analytical vignettes of this paper present the varied methods by which Sondheim experiments with linear temporal states in *Company*. Such techniques are more widespread in the musical than is outlined here: absent and fragile tonics are also characteristic of "Another Hundred People" (in the bridge section), as well as through "Have I Got a Girl For You"; "The Ladies Who Lunch" typifies the slow harmonic motion at the outset of sections and is also notable for its prolongation of the tonic chord *after* the song's final perfect cadence; and there are several songs in which constrained textural growth disrupts or obscures an overall sense of trajectory through the song, as with "Barcelona" (e.g. "Sorry Grateful", "The Little Things You Do Together", "The Ladies Who Lunch"). Disrupted and stretched forms of linear time are thus rife throughout Sondheim's striking and original musical score.

This paper has offered a new conceptual basis for understanding musical temporality, not only in the context of Sondheim's works, but in the broader analytical study of musical theatre. The application and extension of Kramer's notion of "musical time" have illuminated the idiosyncratic nature of the harmonic, melodic, rhythmic and textural features of *Company*; this should provide a prompt for further analytical explorations in a theatrical context to understand how other composers shape our experiences of time onstage. In particular, there is much to glean from analysing the inter-relationships between musical time, as songs unfold, and narrative time, as the overarching story unfolds – particularly in instances (as is so often the case with Sondheim) where the latter dismantles linear chronologies.

This leads me to reflection on the broader significance of the analytical findings in the context of *Company*. As per the work of Purin (2011) and Hudlow (2013), there are instances in which the particular temporal mode can be interpreted in neat alignment with the immediate narrative context. "Being Alive" is surely the most pronounced example – the extended cadential moments embodying Robert's final struggles, but ultimate emotional breakthrough vis-a-vis commitment and relationships.[19] Conversely, the overplayed tonic prolongation at the end of "The Ladies Who Lunch" (as Joanna incessantly

19 Banfield 1993: 172 offers further intriguing layers to this interpretation – that while there is an apparent moment of self-realisation, the repetitive and cyclic nature of the song, perhaps, paints this transformation as somewhat artificial and contrived.

repeats the word "rise") captures her cynical view of the upper-class Manhattan socialites. Alternatively, again, the absent tonics and halting momentum of "Barcelona" reflect the stilted and awkward interactions between Robert and April, and, in particular, *her* desire to progress their relationship and *his* resistance to this idea.

But beyond such examples, I am less certain that the varied forms of linear temporality map precisely onto the lyrical and plot details. I would argue instead that all of the disruptions and extensions of linear time create a broader temporal backdrop to the unconventional narrative structure of *Company*. It is well-stated that *Company* was a pioneering "concept" musical, one feature of which was a "linear plot [being] abandoned or downgraded in favour of vignettes".[20] Moreover, there is general ambiguity over the chronological sequencing of these vignettes – there is a recurring scene of Robert's birthday, suggesting that the other scenes are either imagined or have taken place in the past, and implying, also, that clock time does not pass through the duration of the show. The composer himself, on the other hand, revealed that "Bobby is not so linear that he does not *learn* from the episodes in *Company*".[21] This, then, implies that there is some degree of development and progression within the narrative. The very structural fabric of *Company* presents aspects of linearity (Robert "learning"), while also disrupting the corollaries to this temporal state (i.e. a sequence of events). As also befits the "concept" nature of the show, the musical temporality, with its fluctuations of momentum, speak to the questioning of a life progression – Robert is unsure about "moving forward", his friends offer ambivalent advice on the matter, but we are left thinking that he (probably – or maybe) has made a choice to pursue the linear pathway foisted upon him by society. In identifying and analysing the stretching and disrupting of linear musical time, it does not necessarily provide us with an "answer" to the narrative conundrums of *Company*, but we can better understand how Sondheim's structuring and manipulation of time may resonate with the characters and their actions onstage.

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20 Banfield 1993: 147.
21 Banfield 1993: 148; italic stesses are from the original.

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