

## Sondheim's review delivered to the Bow Valley

### Cornerstone Theatre's winter production brings a couple of familiar faces back to the stage

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Canmore Leader

As an actor and a director of the show, JP Thibodeau is looking forward to Putting It Together.

The complex Broadway-style music will be performed in the "upscale" slot provided in December at Cornerstone Theatre.

"Sondheim's kind of my weakness," Thibodeau, who's also the artistic director and general manager of at the theatre, said. "I like his work. It's not boring. It's not straightforward. . . . Sondheim's got meat to it."

Putting It Together comes together around a loose plot, the revue is spelled Review because the idea is Stephen Sondheim is reviewing his own work, Thibodeau explained.

"It's multi-layered within the music and you can hear other shows within the songs," he said. "The genius of his writing is pretty complex."

A mature couple and a younger couple are juxtaposed as loves in their winter or their spring.

As the wife in the mature couple, Karen Minish spends much of the show evaluating her life.

Well-known for her soprano solos Minish is taking on a role in Putting It Together made famous when played by Carol Burnett on Broadway in 1999.

"I really like the acting component in this show," Minish said during rehearsals. "I have to act when I sing classically as well, but this is a little more straight theatre for me."

"It's not so much about beautiful sounds it's about being really true to what you're actually saying."

Minish, who has a broad musical theatre background, called the challenge exciting. The role is a departure for her as she typically sings classical music.

"Anything I would normally sing has been dropped down about an octave," she said. "It's a very different kind of singing for me — this show."

What's challenging though she said is to sing in a healthy manner — the Broadway "belting" style can take a toll if not executed properly. "You have to sing intelligently," she said.

But interestingly Minish said, the song that she cherishes the most, comes at the end of the review and sits at the very lowest end of her range. Though when she was learning it she thought it might lack a melody. The poignant Like It Was comes at an intimate moment between Minish's character and her husband played by Joe Morris. It gives Minish a chance to talk as she sings.

It's the first time that Morris has performed in this "more serious" slot and performing the music of the man who has won far more Tony Awards as a composer than anyone else is a thrill for him.

Continued on page 17

Continued from page 16

"To do Sondheim is terrifying and exhilarating," he said. "Sondheim is as complex a musical director and composer as there is, I think. What he has more than anything is incredible emotion in his music."

Putting It Together transcends a typical revue and the story carries through.

"This one there's real emotional arcs, there's high points, and low points, there's conflict and resolution . . ."

But another thrill for Morris is working with Minish, whom Morris calls not only a "very gifted musician but a very generous performer."

"There are moments in this show where all I have to do is look at Karen (Minish) and we share this beautiful pathos together," he said.

Working with Minish adds excitement for Thibodeau as well. He's returning to the stage for the first time in four years to do so. They work together a couple of times a year, but have not performed together like this.

And for Thibodeau just getting back into the role of actor has been a lot of work.

As preparations entered their final stages last week Thibodeau said for everyone, the most important preparation now is absorbing Sondheim's words.

"Everyone who knows Sondheim knows it's all about the words, you don't typically leave the show humming a tune, this one though you probably will.

"But there's a purpose to this show. You will leave thinking about this show."

Putting It Together: Sondheim Musical Review runs Fridays and Saturdays, Jan. 15 to Feb. 6,

Starring Karen Minish, Joe Morris, Louisa O'Keane, JP Thibodeau and Parris Greaves, it features live music by Deborah Rosen, Hugo McLaughlin, Kent MacCrae and Jenna Strautman. Doors open at 6:15 p.m. the show starts at 8 p.m. Call (403) 609-0004 or visit [atthecorner.ca](http://atthecorner.ca) for ticket information.

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