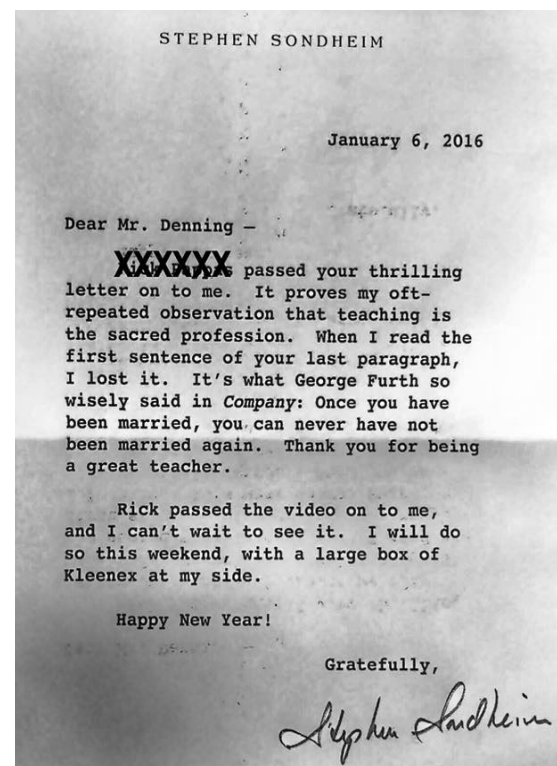




Seniors Ezra Hankin (left) and Kendrick Knight (center), and junior Riley Simpson (right) perform in the theatre department's production of Sondheim on Sondheim. Photo by Zoe Hocker.



Sondheim's letter to Mr. Joshua Denning. Photo provided by Denning.

# Sondheim on Sondheim on Sondheim

After being impressed with show, lawyer connects MacTheatre with famous producer

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staff reporters

After the successful run of MacTheatre's *Sondheim on Sondheim*, theatre teacher and director Joshua Denning was ready for strike. While approaching the stage, however, he was stopped by a man who told him, 'I represent God.'

"I thought he was a religious activist, or from a church or something, and I didn't quite understand," Denning said. "So I was like, 'Oh...?' There was a song in the musical called 'God' about Stephen Sondheim, and I was clearly confused. Then he said 'I'm Stephen Sondheim's lawyer.'"

The lawyer proceeded to ask for a DVD copy of the show, promising that the theatre department wasn't in trouble for violating copyright law. On the contrary, he loved the show, and wished to send it to Musical Theatre International, a very big musical publisher, and Stephen Sondheim.

"He said, 'It's been [MTI's] goal for high schools to do their productions and a lot of high schools are scared to do them because the music is so hard,'" Denning said, quoting Sondheim's lawyer. "I want them to see that this is possible

and that it can be done really, really well."

Sondheim's lawyer asked Denning to write a letter addressed to him, to Sondheim, to the head of MTI and to Broadway director James Lapine, explaining the process of directing and rehearsing the show. Sondheim recently got back to him.

"[Sondheim's letter] was dated Jan. 6, and he said he was going to watch it the next weekend, so I'm assuming he's seen it already," Denning said. "I hope he just loves it. I hope he sees and feels the purity of having his work interpreted by young artists doing something that adult professionals could do."

When rehearsing *Sondheim on Sondheim*, Denning made sure all of the actors in the production put their best efforts into it. When he found out that Sondheim was seeing the play, Denning felt blessed.

"I feel really honored," Denning said, "I don't know what else I could do in this life that would actually be a higher honor than that. He is, in terms of musical theatre, the most brilliant artist that we have in the world. I mean, there isn't really anyone who has a reputation for being any more innovative, or brilliant, or accomplished, or heartfelt, or amazing

than Stephen Sondheim."

While this is an amazing accomplishment for the theatre community at McCallum, Denning said it shines a bright light upon the school as a whole.

"McCallum, every year, seems to get stronger across the board, the whole school seems to get better and better, and I love how the reputation for the school is growing and becoming more positive," Denning said. "That's just a huge feather in the cap of all the teachers and students at McCallum. That's something for the yearbooks and the history books for sure."

Bragging rights excluded, Denning believes students gain so much from the opportunity to go to a school like McCallum.

"I think, once you feel like you're important, you have something to offer," Denning said. "The Grammy makes us feel like we're important artists, like we're important teachers, and this makes us feel important. I don't mean important like we're better than other people or arrogant, but I mean important like what we do matters. What we do is worthwhile, there's value in what we do in terms of education, in terms of building a community in Austin, in terms of making the world a better place, one artist at a time."