

# Sweeney Todd Character Breakdown

August 16, 2019

Yale Dramatic Association · P.O. Box 209037 · New Haven, CT 06520 · (860) 531-8224



## *Sweeney Todd* Character Breakdown

A note about casting: Today, London is—as it has long been—one of the most diverse cities in the world. Historically, productions of *Sweeney Todd* have whitewashed this fact. Reimagined for the 21st century, our production of *Sweeney Todd* is looking to cast an inclusive and diverse company of actors who reflect the world we live in today.

In reference to the character descriptions below: The characters as written are on the binary and are written with he/him or she/her pronouns, which you will see in the following descriptions. But however limiting the descriptions are, our casting seeks to be as inclusive as possible and we invite gender non-conforming, genderqueer, transgender and non-binary actors to audition for the roles they most identify with. We will also list race/ethnicity when specific to the character but are otherwise seeking all races and ethnicities. In addition, we will list disability when specific to a character, but are otherwise seeking actors with disabilities as well as non-disabled actors for all roles. Please let us know if you have any questions, concerns, or if there are any accommodations we can provide.

A note about accents: Accents listed are not expected at auditions and will be worked on throughout the rehearsal process. That said, if you're comfortable performing any of these accents, please let us know during auditions!

### **Roles:**

#### Sweeney Todd

Sweeney escaped from prison after being wrongfully accused and jailed for fifteen years. Formerly a proud barber, a loving husband and a happy father, Sweeney is now consumed by loss and revenge. He has returned to London to right the wrongs committed against him, his wife, and his daughter. Sweeney is charming but hot-tempered, ferocious yet vulnerable. Strong baritone/bass who can whistle. Speaks with an Estuary or London dialect.

#### Mrs. Lovett

An entrepreneurial meat pie shop owner who will do whatever it takes to survive. She is in love with Todd and hopes that he'll forget the past and build a new life with her. At first shocked by Sweeney's bursts of violence, Lovett turns his desire for revenge into a profitable business venture. She is resourceful, ambitious, charismatic, and has great comedic timing. Mezzo with belt. Speaks with a Cockney accent.

#### Anthony Hope

A youthful sailor who helps Sweeney return to London and unexpectedly falls in love with Johanna. He is idealistic, romantic and a little reckless. His passions sometimes get the better of his reason and his enthusiasm sometimes makes him unintentionally comedic. Over the course of the show he awakens to the horrors around him and becomes disillusioned with London. Tenor. Speaks with a standard British accent (RP).

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### Johanna

Todd's long-lost daughter and Judge Turpin's young ward. Homeschooled and largely homebound. She has a rebellious, subversive and romantic streak and longs to escape her confinement. Johanna is aware that Judge Turpin isn't her real father and suspects that he might be a predator. Like her father, she has experienced trauma and possesses a buried capacity for violence. Although described as "pale" and "yellow haired," we are not taking this literally. Soprano. Speaks with a standard British accent (RP).

### Tobias Ragg

A poor youngster apprenticed first to Pirelli and then to Mrs Lovett. He is industrious and eager to please, with a good sense of humor. Uneducated, but innately clever and observant, Tobias responds quickly to the kindness of Lovett but grows increasingly suspicious of Sweeney. After a betrayal, Toby experiences the violence and terror of this world and snaps. Or maybe he just becomes like everyone else. Tenor. Speaks with a Cockney accent.

### Judge Turpin

A lecherous public official who portrays himself as a sanctimonious authoritarian. He takes advantage of his position to imprison Todd, assault Lucy, and take Johanna in as his ward. He is aware that what he wants and what he's done is wrong, yet chooses to ignore or push against his conscience. Embodies Puritanical hypocrisy: he lusts after Johanna, even as he professes to keep her innocent. Bass/baritone. Speaks with a standard British accent (RP).

### Beadle Bamford

A pompous public official who is responsible for the health and safety of London. He possesses a dry, deadpan sense of humor and enjoys wielding his power. He is not a snivelling civil servant. He is deeply loyal to Turpin, though in his heart of hearts he believes he's better than the judge. The Beadle loves singing children's nursery rhymes, which remind him of his youth. Tenor with a strong falsetto. Speaks with a standard British accent (RP).

### Beggar Woman/Lucy Barker

An eerie, poor soul living on the streets of London. She supports herself by begging and prostituting herself to sailors. The Beggar Woman is Sweeney's wife, Lucy, who lost her mind after being assaulted by Turpin and taking poison. She has occasional flashes of lucidity and distrusts Mrs. Lovett. Like the oracle Cassandra, She is the only one who sees what's happening but no one will listen to her. Mezzo. Speaks with a Cockney or Estuary accent.

### Adolfo Pirelli

An Irish former employee of Sweeney's who has since developed a public persona as a flamboyant and flashy world-famous Italian barber. A charlatan who sells fake medicine and challenges other barbers to shaving contests. Pirelli is charming, calculating, and over-the-top comedic. Possess some anti-English sentiments and

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does not take lightly to being publicly embarrassed by Sweeney. High tenor. Speaks in both an Italian and Irish accent.

### Jonas Fogg

The owner of Fogg's Asylum. Fogg sells the hair of inmates to wigmakers. Considers the inmates "children" and takes pleasure in showing them off to visitors. Chooses to ignore the human rights of his patients in the name of scientific progress. An authoritarian who is really a coward at heart. Speaking role who sings with the ensemble. Speaks with an Estuary dialect.

### Ensemble

The ensemble acts as a Greek Chorus, commenting on the action and participating in the tale. They are the show's chief storytellers, taking on the roles of customers, townspeople, police, inmates at the insane asylum, Sweeney's thoughts, and Sweeney's victims. They stand in for us and there is a feeling of them always being nearby, watching. The ensemble gets ample opportunities for vocal challenges and is showcased with solos and harmonies throughout the show. Sopranos, altos, tenors, baritones, and basses. Accents not necessary.