

Contact: Randal West
Sondheim Center
Phone 641-472-2000
rwest@sondheimcenter.com

Stephen Sondheim Center
For the Performing Arts
200 North Main St.
Fairfield, IA, 52556

**Fairfield Arts &
Convention Center**

Press Release

For Immediate Release:

GOVAP

and

The Stephen Sondheim Center for the Performing
Arts

Presents an Original Musical Fantasy

June 29-July 2nd the original musical fantasy

“A Time Out of Rhyme”

will be presented in the Bridge View Center in
Ottumwa.

GOVAP and the Sondheim Center are launching their first Family Summer Musical with a production of “A Time Out of Rhyme”. The story behind the creation of this family musical is a unique one.

In 1972, Randal K. West arrived at the University of Redlands in Redlands CA. as a freshman undergraduate to study musical theatre. Brand new to college life he was invited by junior Ken Helms to audition for the University’s Concert Choir. Randy accepted the invitation to join the choir, for which Ken was the president, from that a life long friendship was born. Both Randy and Ken adored musical theatre and during the next few years they participated in many musicals as fellow actors and collaborators in the creative process. During his sophomore year, Randy began writing an original musical that ended up being called “*A Time Out Of Rhyme.*” It was a musical set in Mother Gooseland and filled with storybook characters. The first version won best play in the 1970 Western States writing competition. Ken was always going to be the composer contributing the music but during the creative process added many of his own lyrics and with Book by West -- Music by Helms and lyrics by West and Helms. A Time Out of Rhyme premiered on the main stage, at the University of Redlands, spring of 1971 as part of Randy’s honors project and Ken’s master thesis. It was well received and was performed five times in different theatres over a three-year period.

Randy became the musical theatre professor for three years at the University of Redlands, then the Theatre Coordinator for the city of Phoenix for five years. Ken became a music professor at Washington State University for three years and then moved back to his hometown in Ventura, CA with his wife Liz where he became a bank Vice President. The two best friends were reduced to phone calls and meeting every couple of years. In what would end up being Randy's last year in Phoenix he caught a project where he was allowed to collaborate for 6 months with Stephen Sondheim and George Furth on their musical "*Merrily We Roll Along*" and then directed the first Pre-Broadway workshop production of this re-vamped musical. As the project was coming to an end Sondheim suggested to West that he had "become a very large fish in an Arizona pond" and might want to consider a different market to work in. Sondheim suggested San Francisco and a month later Randy was directing professional musical theatre in the bay area, remaining there for 9 years. During Randy's tenure in San Francisco he directed and choreographed musical theatre, as well as directing TV commercials and infomercials. While there he met his wife Margaret Clair a professional lyric mezzo-soprano.

In the mid 90s, a theatre for which Randy worked was looking for a family musical to produce. They thought they wanted to do "Alice in Wonderland" but couldn't find a musical adaptation that worked very well. Finally, Randy said, "I wrote a family musical way back when; do you want to look at it?" They did and this led Ken and Randy to do a substantial re-write. This resulted in three more performances of "*A Time Out of Rhyme*" in Northern and Southern California. After these shows both Ken and Randy committed to truly finishing their musical so they were both happy with it and it could finally be published, but they didn't. In 2004, Randy and Ken met in CA. and made a real commitment to finishing their musical and laughed about neither one of them getting any younger and that they had better do this before one of them "shuffled off this mortal coil" but again things stalled a little.

In the spring of 2005, Randy got a call from Ken's wife Liz telling him that Ken was having a negative reaction to some gastric surgery he'd had and he had an internal infection that the doctors couldn't seem to defeat. Ken, meanwhile, had after years of working as a Bank Vice President and putting three kids through college and making music the other thing he did, (still managed to compose a full Mass, a full Requiem both for orchestra, choir and soloists, perform in 100's of musicals and operas, conduct two of Ventura counties finest choirs) he was ready to leave banking and become a full time Music Professor again. Before he could get back into music full time, his health began to fail him. Liz again called Randy and said that Ken was getting depressed over not being able to do much and could Randy get Ken back into working on "*A Time Out of Rhyme*." Randy said sure, contacted some theatres about doing TOR, and contacted some publishing houses. He then got back to Ken and started sending new lyrics for the songs they wanted to alter before they were done with the piece. Ken then landed in the hospital but Randy kept calling and discussing the new lyrics and the new song alterations he wanted them to complete. They discussed the work at length. On March 9, 2005, Randy was stranded in a hotel in Chicago trying to get back into Iowa when Liz called him on his cell phone. She said, "We lost Ken". Randy knew Ken was never too wonderful with directions but he couldn't imagine how the hospital could have misplaced him. It took minutes before Randy could even process the true meaning

of Liz's statement. Ken was only 54, he was just starting to get back to his music career, and they hadn't finished their show.

Randy spoke at Ken's funeral service and told Liz that he would see to it that "*A Time Out of Rhyme*" would get finished so both families children, and hopefully eventually, grandchildren could someday point to this project that was conceived from a lifetime of friendship between these two special men.

Randy returned to Fairfield, Iowa where he lives with his wife Margaret and their two sons and started work on *A Time Out of Rhyme*. He contacted his friend Patrick Bosold and asked if he had any interest in adapting TOR into a screenplay for a movie. Patrick did and began work right away. He contacted his friend Justin Hill, who had been Randy's musical director for two projects and was a published composer in his own right about helping to finish and polish the score and orchestrate the project. Justin said he'd love to work on it and a new collaboration was created.

The new screenplay was submitted to the Iowa Motion Picture Association Awards where it won the Award of Excellence as Best Non-Produced Screenplay. A couple of movie production houses have expressed interest in the screenplay with some looking at it as a possible live action musical and others expressing interest as an animated or CG musical, and one company that is interested in exploring live action with computer generated characters as well.

Margaret, Randy's wife is the conductor of GOVAP, (a sixty voice children's choir that performs throughout Iowa) and Randy is the Artistic Director for the Stephen Sondheim Center for the Performing and they proposed that the two organizations produce "*A Time Out of Rhyme*" as a co-venture. Wendy Bittner, the president of the GOVAP Board, and Randy are co-producing. Randy is Directing and Choreographing, Justin is the Musical Director and they have a cast of over forty drawn from Ottumwa, Fairfield and the surrounding area. GOVAP and the Sondheim Center are co-producing and the sponsor groups include: The Bridge View Center, the Fairfield Arts Association, Indian Hills Community College, the Fairfield Cultural Alliance, the Ottumwa Area Arts Council, and Ottumwa High School's Thespian Society.

In 1972, Randy was happy to just meet a new friend at his new school environment. In 2007, Randy and his very talented group of collaborators are very excited about being so close to finally finishing the project that started between two best friends who both loved musical theatre.

"A Time Out of Rhyme" plays June 29th, & 30th and July 2nd at 7:30pm and July 1st at 2:00pm at the Bridge View Center in Ottumwa. General Admission is \$15.00 for Adults and \$10.00 for students and seniors. Tickets can be purchase by calling 641-683-5842 in Ottumwa or 641-472-2000 in Fairfield. Tickets are also available at the Fairfield Arts and Convention Center Corporate offices in the basement of the Iowa State Bank building (NE corner of the square) and HyVee stores, and at the Bridge View Center in Ottumwa. Call or stop by any of the above locations. We accept Visa, MasterCard, Discover and American Express. Questions: please call Randy West at 641-472-2000.

