

West Side Story programme notes for Act 1
Saturday August 9th 2014 2.30pm
Audio describer: Pauline Raw

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls and welcome to the Theatre Royal Plymouth for this production of West Side Story in association with BB promotion with Sundance Productions Inc., NY and Sir Howard Panter for Ambassador Theatre Group. Produced by Michael Brenner. With choreography by Jerome Robbins, book by Arthur Laurents, an unforgettable score by Leonard Bernstein and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, **West Side Story** changed the face of musical theatre for ever. Now Joey McKneely's vibrant stage production is thrilling audiences once again. The musical director is usually Ben Van Tienen in charge of 19 musicians.

Packed with unforgettable songs including Maria, Tonight, Somewhere, America and I Feel Pretty ; West Side Story opened on Broadway in 1957 and it still remains one of the most successful stage shows of all time. The 1961 film version won ten Academy Awards.

Synopsis

Based on Shakespeare's Romeo And Juliet, West Side Story is set on Manhattan's Upper West Side in a Summer of the 1950's and explores the rivalry between two teenage gangs; one white, the Jets , the other Puerto Rican, The Sharks.

When Tony falls in love with Maria, the sister of the rival gang's leader, the feud takes on a new dimension, and, as their love blossoms so begins a fatal journey overshadowed by violence and hatred.

Characters and costumes

There are 30 in the cast therefore I will acquaint you with only the main characters.

Maria , a gentle naive young brunette from Puerto Rica, and her star-crossed American lover Tony lead the cast with the pivotal role of feisty dark haired Puerto Rican Anita balancing the action. In the rival gang is tempestuous, foolhardy Riff, Tony's best friend and co-founder of the Jets. His lieutenant is Diesel, big and slow, but steady and nice. A-Rab is an explosive ferret with Baby John, the timidest member of the group as his buddy. Bernardo is the leader of the Sharks, swarthy skinned, lean, handsome and powerful. His lieutenant is Chino, a fearless fighter. Their girls are lean and mean and support their men loyally.

The Sharks are suited in jewel bright colours with dark t shirts underneath. The Jets are khaki clad in shirts and trousers with orange ties and Riff occasionally sports a silver bomber jacket. They both revert to coloured sleeveless vests and trousers later in the story.

The Shark girls' costumes are full skirted, petticoated and bright in contrast to the boys. The Jet girls wear cropped tops, shorts or miniskirts and alternate with simple floaty tea dresses for some of the scenes.

Sets

The unadorned red curtain is in place and lifts to reveal, on either side of the street, double tiered balconied metal gantries linked by fixed ladders and hinged ones with spaces beneath them for entries and exits. A black backdrop is replaced by a New York skyline. The Jets, are enjoying their territory until Bernardo, handsome and proud and the leader of the Sharks interrupts them. He is seen off but returns with the other Sharks until the supremacy of the Jets is threatened and mild warfare breaks out with trippings and spitting. The area empties until A Rab appears and is suddenly outnumbered by the Sharks. The Jets pour on but the action is stopped by a police whistle and Krupke, a rotund policeman and Lieutenant Shranke a long suffering intolerant plainclothes policeman arrives to break up the escalating fight.

We are outside the drug store where Tony works and he is in a blue shirt with a white apron around his waist. The rest of the street is in the backgrounds. Riff is trying to persuade Tony to re-join the Jets and go to the dance but Tony wants to lead a different life.

We meet Maria and Anita, in the Bridal shop where they both work, two very different girls who ultimately want the same thing, a good man and a good life. Two mannequins are dressed as a bride and groom and are in the window space with a small bench placed in front of them. Two clothes rails flank the window. Bernardo, Maria's brother and also Anita's lover and Chino calls for them. Bernardo is very protective of the girls.

The two gangs are with their girls in a dance Hall, but they do not mix despite the best efforts of the organiser Glad Hand. Tony and Maria first see each other across the room and are instantly attracted, much to the annoyance of Bernardo.

Tony finds out where Maria lives and uses the fire escape to reach her on the now extended gantry and balconies and share some passionate kisses, before they have to part to make way for Bernardo and the girls who are hotly discussing their independence and freedom of spirit against a backdrop of dingy tenements strung with washing.

We are in the drugstore owned by Doc, a small bearded man who stands no nonsense. On the right, a long counter is facing us and four stools behind it with a Jukebox in the centre of the room. The Jets are planning a War Council but are aggravated when the girls turn up. When the Sharks arrive, the girls are dismissed by a snap of the fingers. They, in turn, have to abandon their plans when Shranke comes in.

Maria and Anita are coming to the end of the day in the Bridal Shop and Maria is trying to clear the way for Tony to call but Anita is still there when he comes in by the back door; she is not happy but leaves them to their tryst.

Some of the gang are seen in spotlights, eagerly anticipating a fight, while Anita, Maria and Tony are planning their very different evenings.

Its nightfall and we are under a large metal bridge by a mesh wire fence stretching across the width of the space. Both gangs are there and Bernardo and Riff are ready to have a fist fight, Tony tries to intervene but things start to get out of hand when Bernardo and Riff produce knives.

Cast

Maria	Katie Hall
Tony	Louis Maskell
Anita	Djalenga Scott
Riff	Jack Wilcox
Bernardo	Javier Cid

Adults

Doc	David Delve
Lieutenant Shranke	Jason Griffiths
Officer Krupke/ Glad Hand	Sion Tudor Owen

The Jets

Action	Matthew Hawksley
Baby John	Fraser Fraser
A-Rab	Bruce Aquilar Rohan
Big Deal	Samuel Salter
Snow Boy	Scott Rayner
Diesel	James Pullum
Anybodys	Charlie Cameron
Graziella	Rachael Crocker
Velma	Fenia Tsikitikou
Pauline	Rachel Ensor
Minnie	Danielle Cato

The Sharks

Chino	Niko Wirachman
Pepe	Sergio Giacomelli
Anxious	Sergi Terns
Nibbles	Devon Mc Kenzie Smith
Indio	Nathan Ryles
Moose	Liam Paul Jennings
Consuela	Sinead Kenny
Rosalia	Charlotte Baptie

Estella
Francisca
Teresita

Katie Singh
Challyce Brogdon
Nicola Coates

Set, Costume, lighting and sound by Paul Gallis, Renate Schmitzer, Peter Halbsgut and Rick Clarke.

**West Side Story – Act 2
Audio Describer - Denise Reeves**

Welcome back everyone to this moving and yet exciting performance of West Side Story.

I am Denise your audio describer for Act 2 which runs for approximately 45 minutes.

The orchestra introduces the opening scene with the song *I Feel Pretty*. The curtain then rises on the bedroom of Maria's apartment, which opens out onto the fire escape, showing balconied gantries of the apartment block. Opposite is a door between the bedroom and parlour beyond.

Maria daydreams of seeing Tony with her friends. Francisca, a dark haired girl in a pretty dress, sits on one end of the bed flicking over the pages of a magazine whilst Consuela happily sits at the other end trying on various wigs. Rosalia, a young girl with long dark hair tied back over her shoulders, is examining herself in the mirror to check that she looks good for the party. Maria is still getting dressed and appears in a white dressing gown over a white silk slip. Her hair is already tied back from her face with pretty curls falling onto her shoulders.

They are all blissfully unaware of the gang's plans for that night and as they sing the song *I Feel Pretty* Maria daydreams of seeing Tony with her friends.

That is until Chino interrupts them. His clothes are dirty and torn and his face is smeared from the fight. He tells Maria that something bad has happened.

As Tony and Maria try to run away from the violence that surrounds them the walls of the city disappear and they find themselves in a dreamlike world of peace with only space and air around them.

The white lit stage is bare except for Tony who is dressed in white shoes, trousers, belt and 'T' shirt. Maria is in a soft white dress and bare foot. As they dance in a ballet like sequence others join them all similarly dressed in white. The boys in white vests or 'T' shirts and the girls wear varying white floaty dresses. The moving strains of a girl singing *Somewhere* is heard as they share in making a world that Tony and Maria want to be in.

Finally as we return to the neighbourhood, its original gantried apartment blocks are now jagged with dark shadows of what has gone before and indeed what is about to happen. This moving sequence portrays well the feuding between both gangs, the Jets and the Sharks and how the consequences of their actions affects the lives of two people who simply had the misfortune to fall in love.

There are no new characters in Act Two to introduce you to, so sit back and enjoy the rest of this classic musical, with music, dance and more songs like, *Gee Officer Krupke*, *A Boy Like That*, and *I Have a Love*, so interwoven into the fabric of the story that it captures every emotion one feels in a lifetime.

Please note the next audio performance is George Orwell's classic 1984 on Saturday 13th

September at 2:30 p.m.