

National Operatic & Dramatic Association

London Region



Society : Stage One Youth
Production : **WEST SIDE STORY**
Date : 13th September 2012
Venue : Desborough Suite, Maidenhead
Report by : Gordon Bird, NODA Representative, District 14

Report

Although I have seen the 1961 film many times, this was the first time I have watched the stage version of Leonard Bernstein's fabulous show and I would like to thank Stage One Youth for their very kind invitation to see their production. The book by Arthur Laurents and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim the original 1957 Broadway production and the later film were an immediate success. Based on Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, it set in 1950's New York and covers the rivalry of two street gangs from different ethnic backgrounds. Two teenagers, one from the Jets and one from the rival Sharks meet and fall in love with dramatic consequences.

There were a few niggles in this production— some of the accents were delivered so thickly that it made it difficult to understand, some of the performers spoke a little too quickly and swallowed their words, the makeup on some of the characters was too heavy and the choice of wigs did not always work.

However, this should detract from the overall impression of a superb production! Every once in a while you leave the theatre and find yourself talking and thinking about the production for days afterwards. It could be because the show raises issues that make you think or cause debate or that the show leaves you in wonder at the brilliance of the talent. This production certainly had the latter – the energetic dancing, the imaginative choreography, the wonderful singing, the excellent acting and the subtle understanding of the characters. It would put many adult productions I have seen to shame – such was the polished presentation. At one point I was watching the ensemble in a freeze, and not one person moved from their pose. And this was following an energetic dance routine and performed during a quite emotional scene. This required tremendous focus and concentration and they can all be congratulated for their application. In fact, the whole cast and production team can be applauded for their excellence in this production.

A special mention to **Tilly Mitchell** and **Thomas Kemp** for a wonderful dance routine they produced during the "dream sequence". Their lifts and movement was some of the best I have seen by youth performers during a theatre production outside the West End. The dance blended very well with the rest of the action creating a very memorable scene.

JAMES FAWCETT (Riff)

James sang and danced his numbers confidently and to my eyes and ears very competently. His portrayal of character of the gang leader was believable. The opening number “*Jet Song*” set the high standards for the rest of the show. The death scene at the end was very well acted out, as it could easily have over-acted, but this was very well measured. Well done an excellent performance.

DANIEL EMBLETON (Tony)

I was not sure at first about Daniel as Tony, it may have been nerves, but as the show went on, my goodness he delivered! There was a little struggle in “*Maria*” but overall the singing was very strong and well executed. The chemistry between you and Maria was excellent. I really believed in the emotions you were going through. This comment applies to you and to Lorna (Maria) as I was very impressed with the stage kiss. So many times youngsters get embarrassed by this stage direction but it needs to be performed with such sincerity to deliver the effect with conviction. To deliver a stage kiss is never easy, in front of your peers is uncomfortable, let alone to a packed out audience. However, these scenes were presented confidently and with assurance – making the scenes believable. Particularly the scene when you first met that ended in the embrace. Well done Daniel, this was a first class performance!

THOMAS KEMP (Action)

Thomas performed a very good characterisation of Action and consistently produced a good standard of singing and dancing throughout the production.

COURTNEY FLEMING (Bernado)

As the gang leader of the Sharks, Courtney produced a very believable character. His movement around stage was consistent of his character and I was impressed with the “death scene” which could so easily have been over-acted. Again, there were some excellent chemistry between him and “his girl”, making their relationship convincing. Well done.

BEN COOPER (Chino)

Ben performed, what is quite a difficult character of Chino, exceptionally well. His performance in the last scene was of a very high quality. Well done.

JOSIE WHITE (Anita)

Josie presented an accomplished performance as Anita, Maria’s best friend and Bernado’s girlfriend. Her singing was excellent – I particularly enjoyed “*America*” and “*A Boy Like That/I have a love*”. There were some moments that I found the accent a little too strong to pick out

what you were saying, but such was the strength of your acting I easily interpreted what you said.

LORNA YOUNG (Maria)

This was a first class performance by Lorna who acted, danced and sang superbly throughout the performance. Her last scene was acted with amazing tenderness, portraying her emotions superbly. Lorna also understood the journey her character makes, showing her naivety in the early scenes, and then showing her love for Tony. Her accent was delivered just right – not too strong that we could not understand but enough there to determine her ethnicity. Her signing was of the very highest standard. Well done Lorna, on an excellent performance.

JETS (KYLE WATSON, SAM LEWIS, NIVEN WILLET, SAM MACGREGOR, ISABEL ADAMS, TORRIE MARTIN, EMILY-JANE SHAW, BETHAN DALEY, KIERA ASH, BETHANY YATES)

I have put all the Jets together as many of the comments cover all of you. From the opening scene and right through to the last moment of the production, the energy was amazing. The dance routines looked slick, very well rehearsed and presented without any hitches. So many groups concentrate on one discipline over another, but I am pleased to say that these fine actors and actresses could sing, dance and act. It was a shame that the orchestra were a little too loud during “*Jet Song*” because I could not hear the individuals who sung but overall the volume by the youngsters was excellent – I could hear every word. The only exception being that some of the accents were too strong and some of you spoke a little too fast. This could be nerves so make sure you relax before coming on stage. I will not pick on individuals as I think that is unfair, but remember this note in future for your consideration.

SHARKS (ANDREW KING, LIAM COUCHER, BRUNO SOARES, CAMERON ROJOW, TILLY MITCHELL, LUCY MARSHALL, AMELIA WALL, LAURA COOPER, KIRSTIE BRADBROOK-ARMIT, LEAH THORN-DAVIS & CLIONA MCBRIDE)

Like the Jets, I have put your comments as one as many of the comments apply to you all. You all knew what you were doing, where you were going and what your characters were about. I have seen many shows where the “chorus” or “non principal” roles disappear into the background and look bored and uninterested. I am so pleased to say that everyone one looked like they enjoyed every moment on stage, and added to this superb performance. Accents were a little to thickly applied in some parts, meaning that it was difficult to pick up what was being said, but, the accents were consistent which is not as easy as one may think, Well done to you all.

ADULTS (HARRY MORGAN, ZAC ABBOTT, NICK DAVIE, JOSEPH MOORE)

Well done to you all for your performances. **Joseph (Glad Hand)** certainly got the well deserved laughs during his scene and thought **Zac (Shrank)** nailed his character from the first scene,

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looking, sounding like a policeman. **Harry (Doc)** performed with conviction (especially strong scene with Tony) and **Nick (Krupke)** interpreted his character very well.

Stage Manager/Props (MAGGIE KEARNEY)

The stage was efficiently managed with smooth scene changes and all props were in place and suitable to the scenes.

Set

The open set was effectively presented. Two scaffolding balconies, down stage right and left, gave the set symmetry and it was very well used (particularly for the balcony scene). The backdrop clearly showed us an urban view, and the set was decorated with leaves and litter. Maggie mentioned in the programme that she would try to deliver the directors brief and to my mind she certainly delivered.

Sound (BRIAN COX, EMILY MARTIN)

The balance of orchestra and performers was on the whole very well executed. Only a couple of numbers where the orchestra were too loud for the performers (and I think these were not miced?). Overall the sound was presented very well and Brian and Emily should be complimented for their efforts.

Lighting (ANDY NICHOLSON, MAC, BRADLEY COX, NOA MESHOUAM)

I enjoyed the lighting of this production. The overall setting was fairly dark with a strong lighting from the front with a gobo – giving a chequered lighting effect. This was very effective. I also liked the way that the songs were enhanced by changing the colours. Clearly a lot of thought had been given to provide different moods to each song and this worked. Well done.

Wardrobe and Costumes (ISABELLE FOLEY, JEAN GULRAJANI)

All of the costumes looked good, particularly the Latin-American dresses! To dress 33 performers could not have been easy so well done to all the efforts of those involved in finding, making, hiring the costumes.

Choreography (URSULA EMBERTON)

The choreography for this show was energetic and interesting. This is busy show as many of the characters dance at some point but it looked to me that everyone knew exactly what they were doing, where they were going and performed with conviction. The routines were clearly very well rehearsed as they were slick in their presentation.

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I also would like to congratulate **Tilly Mitchell** and **Courtney Fleming** who I understand set the routine for “America”. This was well thought out and was interesting to watch from an audience perspective. Well done and hope this is first of many more!

Musical Director (PETER JOHN DODSWORTH)

Peter is to be congratulated on ensuring a very high quality of singing from all of the performers, be they soloists or chorus. I did feel the opening number struggled with the balance between the orchestra and singers but this was the only number as all the other numbers were very well balanced. Some of the harmonies were wonderful to listen to and it was clear that the performers were comfortable with what had been set. Well done – this was an excellent show.

Director (LLOYD WHITE)

All of the entrances and exits were clearly defined, entrances with purpose and energy when required. The movement around the stage was well defined, without any being masked. Lloyd also ensured that the stage was perfectly balanced at all times – not easy to do with 33 members on stage. The characterisations of all the actors and actresses were superbly drawn, making the performance so enjoyable. Everyone had a unique character and this was clear from the outset. There was also a good ensemble feel about the group, which was evident when I met some of the cast after the show.

Programme

The 16 page programme was packed with photographs, comments from the chairman, director, musical director, choreographer and production that helped set the background to the production. I would like to have seen more information about the group – but that is me being nosy and new and will sure rectify this over the forthcoming years.

I thoroughly enjoyed this excellent performance and cannot wait to see next year’s show.

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