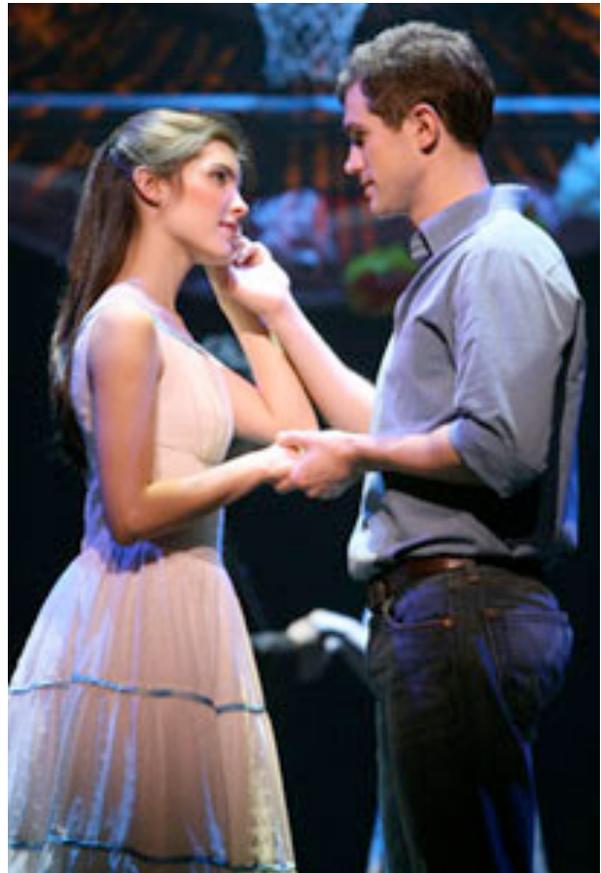


Reviews

West Side Story

Reviewed By: [David Finkle](#) · Mar 20, 2009 · New York

Were Arthur Laurents, Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim, and Jerome Robbins tackling *West Side Story* in today's gentrification mode, it wouldn't be about the destruction that two warring 1950s street gangs wreak on themselves, but a tale of romance between star-crossed heirs to competing gourmet delicatessens. Fortunately, because Bernstein's music, Sondheim's lyrics, much of Laurents' book -- phrases like "Daddio" notwithstanding -- and Robbins' choreography are still 100-percent vital more than 50 years since they were first seen on Broadway, the Laurents-directed revival of [West Side Story](#), now at Broadway's Palace Theatre, proves to



Josefina Scaglione and Matt Cavanaugh
in *West Side Story*
(© Joan Marcus)

be no more outmoded than *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare's frequently footnoted tragedy on which it's based.

Among other attributes, there's still undiminished vigor and urgency in the brilliant Robbins choreography -- carefully and athletically recreated by Joey McNeely -- and in the Bernstein score as played bracingly by a 28-piece orchestra (among them, two percussionists in facing auditorium boxes) that Patrick Vaccariello conducts.

Meanwhile, the biggest shift in the production is in Laurents' libretto, so that when the Puerto Rican Sharks and their women are among themselves, they speak both Spanish and English. Moreover, *In the Heights*'s Lin-Manuel Miranda has been enlisted to work (with Sondheim's blessing) on writing all-Spanish lyrics for "A Boy Like That" and "I Feel Pretty."

Much of the current *West Side*'s appeal depends on the cast -- which is to play off a Sondheim lyric -- not only large and funny and fine, but up to fulfilling the tragic dimensions that Shakespeare and Laurents built into the show. The real discovery here is Argentinian import Josefina Scaglione, who has every ounce of innocence required of Maria and whose soprano is pure and steady. Matt Cavanaugh, last seen on Broadway in *A Catered Affair*, is a tough yet compassionate Tony, and his singing of "Something's Coming" and "Maria" is all a fan of the seminal tuner could ask.

In the supporting roles, Karen Olivo is a fiery, understanding Anita, while George Akram, Cody Green, Curtis Holbrook, Joshua Buscher, Tro Shaw, and Joey Haro as various Sharks and Jets sing, dance, and act with zip-gun zip. As the adults, Lee Sellars is a properly beleaguered Officer Krupke, Steve Bassett fumes well as Lt. Schrank, and Greg Vinkler conveys the frustration of convenience-store proprietor Doc.

In revising *West Side Story* to guarantee it feels as persuasive as possible, Laurents does make a few missteps. The most obvious is the scene at the very end when Maria is tending to

Tony's fallen body in the playground. Originally, members of both chastened gangs formed a respectful retreat while the policemen looked on. Now, claiming that no law enforcement officer would allow such a brazen removal of evidence, Laurents has trimmed the number of witnesses and keeps them on the spot. At the very least, he should have brought all gang members back -- and contrite -- at the slow curtain.

But although Laurents dilutes the ending of his own work, he nonetheless retains the heated theatrical magic that always was and always will be *West Side Story*.

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West Side Story is a musical with a book by Arthur Laurents, music by Leonard Bernstein and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. It was inspired by William Shakespeare's play Romeo and Juliet. The story is set in the Upper West Side of New York City in the mid 1950s, a multiracial, blue-collar neighborhood. The musical explores the rivalry between the Jets and the Sharks, two teenage street gangs of different ethnic backgrounds. The members of the Sharks, from Puerto Rico, are taunted by the Jets, a white gang West Side Story was originally an ill-fated love story about a Jewish girl and an Italian Catholic boy on Manhattan's East Side. It was to be set during Passover, a holiday time important to both religions. The fact that all four of the show's creators were Jewish or of Jewish heritage may still account for the themes of persecution and alienation in the final version. In a 1984 interview, the artists could not stress enough how much West Side Story was a collaborative effort. Laurents tried to put it into words West Side Story is a beautifully-mounted, impressive, emotion-ridden and violent musical which, in its stark approach to a raging social problem and realism of unfoldment, may set a pattern for future musical presentations. February 20, 2013 | Full Review | Whitney Willaims. Variety. Top Critic. West Side Story grows on the viewer. It is that kind of motion picture that will want to be seen again and again. September 1, 2020 | Full Review | Das provokante Fingerschnippen der Straßengangs, das Aufheulen der Polizeisirenen, die fliegenden Röhre der Puerto Ricanerinnen über den Dächern New Yorks, ewige Liebe und verhängnisvolle Feindschaft in den heruntergekommenen Hinterhöfen der West Side – nur wenige Töne der weltberühmten Kompositionen Leonard Bernsteins wie Maria, Tonight, Somewhere, America und I Feel Pretty genügen, um Bilder wie diese wachzurufen. Opera Australia, GWB Entertainment and BB Group present West Side Story Imprint.