

WEST SIDE STORY

Gloucestershire Drama Association Review

by Dora Brooking

13 June 2006

With such a brilliant score, this production can be transformed into a dazzling spectacle by a talented cast and brilliant choreography. I was therefore excited - if not a little apprehensive - when invited to adjudicate this production. Numerous successful productions and winner of ten Academy Awards, has captured the hearts of audiences all over the world and prompted people to hail it as the greatest musical ever. Having previously adjudicated a number of your productions, I am fully aware of your long experience and the high standard you can achieve! Because of its popularity and so many interpretations by so many directors, I was particularly curious as to how the company would tackle the many intriguing episodes inherent in this particular musical. Suffice to say, that any doubts and questions I may have had were totally unnecessary! For these reasons, you understand that I found your Production to be outstanding in every way and one that was as near professional as any I have seen on the amateur circuit. In fact I have witnessed, and actually adjudicated, shows in the West End, which I would have considered far inferior to the one I had the privilege of viewing last night. To put it in layman's terms - I was utterly and completely 'gob-smacked'!!

Set

Your set was terrific, so cleverly and imaginatively conceived! It was so strong and safely constructed and gave so much scope for those wonderfully acrobatic teams of Sharks and Jets! It also afforded great opportunities for interesting exits and entrances on so many different levels. I congratulate your designer and construction team, together with your Stage Manager and fantastically efficient crew members for the speed and accuracy they achieved in scene changes, etcetera!

Music

A magnificent Orchestra and Musical Director. You all deserve to be proud of your achievement and professionalism. Quite often an orchestra can be somewhat overwhelming but the music invariably blended well with the feelings and emotions portrayed by the actors. I was particularly impressed with Scene 5 i.e. the Balcony Scene and Tony and Maria's 'Tonight'. As well as the tenderness of the pair of lovers, the music pulled at the heartstrings! I can only extend to you all my most sincere congratulations.

Choreography

The words that spring to my mind are fantastic, exhilarating, stunning, etc. etc. I was simply amazed by the extremely high standard your dancers achieved, and indeed I do not believe they could be faulted. From the very first scene I was simply stunned and continued to be so throughout. One could well imagine that Sara had auditioned for a cast of acrobats *as* well as actors! To have the combination of both talents was so extraordinary! You must be particularly proud of the incredibly high standard your dancers achieved. They were all outstanding. Your 'positionin' at all times was superb. The mind boggles!!

Wardrobe

A magnificent collection of costumes. What more can I say? They were colourful, exotic as well as cheeky, sexy and gorgeous garments. The Sharks, being Puerto Ricans, gave an opportunity for the most exciting and stunning costumes and the dream sequence, when the whole company were in white, was particularly outstanding - but I could go on to repeat the same remarks throughout this remarkable production.

PROPS

All your sets were imaginatively contrived with all the appropriate properties. Everything was speedily set and unobtrusively removed. Well done everyone!

MAKE-UP

What make-up was called for, was again superb.

LIGHTING

I had the opportunity on my way out to congratulate some of the lighting team. I thought the design was excellent. Your spots were always precise and accurate and well used by the cast. Timing was 'spot on'. Thank you so much!

DIRECTION

I find this part of my job very difficult - in fact I know I keep implying this throughout my criticism. Normally, it is possible to give constructive criticism on various scenes, ideas etc. but as far as this production is concerned I do not feel able to do so because I found your whole show to be as near perfect as could be possible.

Speed and pace was always excellent with never a dull moment! The visual impact of each scene was superb. I liked to close my eyes for a split second and then open them to see beautifully constructed and visually pleasing 'pictures'. I continually saw the most amazing positioning and 'pictures' throughout this production. I know you to be very experienced and this show must be another highlight in your career. The energy your cast produced and the slickness achieved by your whole team was simply amazing. If I had a **very very** minor criticism it would perhaps be the following:- I had a little difficulty in the opening scene in understanding some of the dialogue between Riff and the Jets. However, almost immediately this righted itself and everyone slowed down a trifle and really 'got into' the accent - not an easy task. From then on, everything went perfectly and the Jet song was terrific! I admire the movements in the fight scene, which were strategically plotted without losing the almost animalistic hatred and cruelty. You made sure that you used your splendid set to its best advantage. My most sincere congratulations on this amazing production!!

ACTING

Tony - An amazing performance. It must be difficult for you to decide on an acting or musical career, because you are superb in both talents. You are very tall - particularly having such a petite leading lady but one was never conscious of this. You handled your positioning and stance superbly and your voice sent shivers up and down my spine - in an exceptionally pleasurable way I hasten to add! Your duets with Maria were incredibly tender and pulled at the heartstrings. I recently saw a production of Romeo and Juliet in Stratford and although I considered it the best production of this play I have seen to date, I found your balcony scene with Maria even more heartbreaking, and funnier, when Maria kept calling you back. You responded superbly to all the emotions demanded of you. Your energy was absolutely stunning. I envy your enormous lungs for you were always in control of your breathing despite singing and dancing together for quite long sequences. You are unquestionably a star! Your performance will remain in my mind for a long time! Thank you!

Riff - An admirable 'Mercutio'! Best friend to Tony. Another splendid, riveting and energetic performance. I thoroughly enjoyed your dancing and singing and your splendid interaction with the rest of your gang. I hope you had as much fun and enjoyment in rehearsals as you gave in your performance. I am sure this was so. Never once did you get out of character and your handling of the more aggressive members of your gang in the later scenes was excellently portrayed. What a shame you had to be killed off but what a stage presence when you were alive and

kicking!

The Jets - You were such an excellent team with superb teamwork, it does not seem appropriate to select a single member for additional comment. You worked, danced and played together so brilliantly. However, I was also very impressed with 'Action' and his hostile aggressive attitude throughout! 'Anybody's' worked my sympathy with her un-rewarded attempts to be one of the gang. She was a sprightly, energetic little body who played her role magnificently.

The Jet Girls in general were an awesome bunch with so much vivacity and energy. Velma, Graziella and Roxanne were particularly accomplished in all aspects of this production and there were splendid riveting and energetic performances from all three of you. I bet you had lots of fun and pleasure in rehearsal - you certainly gave the audience great pleasure!

The Sharks

Bernardo - A tremendous performance. Your facial expressions were superb and I watched your dance and stylised positioning in Scene 8. It really was superb, your interaction with Anita was terrific and I loved your seductive dancing with your admirable partner! I was interested to see that you will be taking part in N.Y.T.'S 50th Anniversary show in London. My own Granddaughter (Shakira Brooking) has been given the female lead in a play commissioned especially for the N.Y.T. (Hope you meet up!) Lots of luck for the future. See you in Broadway!

The Sharks Team - Again, fantastic team work with Chino, Bernardo's right hand man. The costumes were so colourful (as far as the girls were concerned) and suited the flamboyant abandoned element of their movements and dancing. Again I am loath to single out any individuals because you all worked together superbly, but here - as in the Jets, all the girls worked amazingly well together but I am forced to mention Rosalia, Consuela and Francisca whose singing and dancing brought the house down. They were particularly awesome with some of their songs with Maria e.g. Act 2 Scene 1 in the Bedroom Scene - 'I Feel Pretty'. That was great! The whole team worked so well together and the fight scene between the two gangs was well synchronised and had such abundant energy. I liked Anxious and all the rest of the gang who contributed to such an enjoyable evening.

The Leading Ladies (who I have kept for last but certainly not the least!!) **Anita** - I seem to have run out of adjectives but the ones that spring to mind are vibrant, seductive, fiery, tempestuous. All this accompanied by a most authentic accent, wonderfully abandoned dancing and tremendous charisma! What more can I say?? When you were slumped against the stage right wall movements and actions were so sexually suggestive the atmosphere in the theatre must have been steaming, apart from the high temperature in general! Your vocal chords must be in peak condition the way the songs were belted out e.g. 'America', 'Tonight'! In Act 2 Scene 3 your duets with Maria - 'A Boy Like That' and 'I Have a Love' were excellent. A wonderful invigorating performance. Thank you so much!

Maria - I think you have a most wonderful voice and believe me when I tell you, you are going to have an abundance of wonderful golden opportunities in the future. The world is, quite literally, your oyster! You have outstanding acting and singing ability and I enjoyed every minute of your performance. I loved the balcony scene with Tony in Act 1 and your timing and sense of comedy when calling him back - just the exact time elapsing between each call. You are such a pretty talented young lady with, I am convinced, a most successful career ahead of you. I loved your innocence and naivety in Scene 1 Act 2 - 'I Feel Pretty' and the Bedroom scene with Anita i.e. 'A Boy Like that' and the heart-breaking 'I Have A Love'. The Finale - Scene 6-I am sure brought many a lump to the throat. A truly wonderful performance!!!

Schrank - A smaller Schrank than I have been used to seeing but goodness me what a great stage presence! This was a most compelling performance. You moved easily about the stage and 'managed' the two gangs with great authority and also the right amount of understanding. I loved every minute of your performance. You stamped your authority from your first appearance. Well done indeed.

Doc - A most solid believable performance typical of the sort of person who would own the drug store and who would try his best to control the rivalling mobs. You played your part well. Thank you!

Krupke - An able assistant to Schrank. Looked good in his uniform. Act 2 Scene 2 in the famous 'Gee Officer Krupke' everyone excelled themselves with such ingenious excuses for their delinquent behaviour!

Gladhand) - Cameo roles but beautifully executed.

Girl) -

Memorable Scenes (additional)

Act I Scene 6 - 'Cool' Riff and Jets and Co. The choreography depicted barely contained the sense of aggression. I loved the climax. In the so-called reconciliation scene I was most impressed with the barely concealed hatred between the two gangs, all of which was hastily camouflaged at the entrance of Krupke. I also admired the Master of Ceremonies who bravely tried to conduct the dance and to encourage the rival gangs to tolerate one another.

Act I Scene 7- 'One Hand. One Heart' - The Bridal Shop. Very tender, beautifully staged and romantically sung in a perfect blend of voices. Orchestra beautifully restrained and unobtrusive.

Act I Scene 8 - 'Tonight' The ladders provided different levels. The positioning here was most effective and visually so pleasing. There was exciting contrast here between the hopes and desires of Maria and Anita and the frenzy of the Sharks and Jets.

The Curtain Call - Absolutely and completely tremendous!! I haven't enjoyed myself so much in a very long time. Thank you all so much for a wonderful evening!

Dora Brooking
Adjudicator