

BEYOND THE SCORE

ISSUE SIXTEEN



SYNOPSIS

THE BRILLIANT
BERNSTEIN &
REMARKABLE
ROBBINS CREATE
A DANCE
MASTERPIECE

MUSICAL THEMES:
ACCEPTANCE &
PREJUDICE

SHOW SPOTLIGHT:
WEST SIDE STORY

A CLOSER LOOK AT MUSICAL THEATRE

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SHOW SPOTLIGHT

WEST SIDE STORY



SYNOPSIS

It's 1950's New York City, and two gangs are at their wits end with one another. The two gangs are named the Jets and the Sharks. The Jets have been around for awhile, while the Sharks are new to town, immigrating from Puerto Rico. The Jets aren't happy about their new neighbors, which causes tension between the two groups. They decide to set up a meeting to have an ultimate fight. Before the fight, however, the Jets must convince a past Jets member, Tony, who was their best fighter, to join them. He's reluctant, but eventually agrees. At a dance later that night, Tony shows up and meets Maria, who just so happens to be a sister of one of the Sharks. They fall in love, but realize that their love would not be accepted on either side. Maria tells Tony that he must stop the fight from happening because fighting would get the two gangs



nowhere. Tony arrives at the fight, tries to stop it, and out of self defense, kills Maria's brother. Maria and Tony decide to run away, but before they can run away, Tony is killed by a member of the Sharks. Maria, suddenly surrounded by both gangs who look solemn, stands up to everyone and gives some passionate statements about hate. After her outburst, a Jet comes to her side, consoling her. The story ends there, with both Jets and Sharks coming together.

THE BRILLIANT BERNSTEIN & REMARKABLE ROBBINS

Create a Masterpiece

Leonard Bernstein is one of America's most beloved composers and conductors. He composed for ballets, operas, operettas, comedies, and theater. He is well-known in all areas of music, and his work continues to be celebrated today. *West Side Story* is one of his many huge successes. This musical would not be what it has become without Bernstein's talent and creativity. The score itself needs no words to express the emotions that he is trying to portray. The lyrics were written by the legendary Stephen Sondheim, yet the music is what made those lyrics jump out into the audience. What makes the music so remarkable in *West Side Story*, is the usage of the full orchestra, the percussion, and the varying tempos.

Jerome Robbins also made his mark in *West Side Story* by cleverly creating movement that mimicked the same energy as fighting, without it looking like a real fight. He did a fantastic job at distincting the Sharks and the Jets from one another through movement. What was so intriguing was Robbins' choice to have ballet be a foundational aspect for both gangs. Ballet is typically seen as soft and graceful. Grouped with the jazz movements and the strong poses, the ballet became more modern and fierce.

Together, Leonard Bernstein and Jerome Robbins created a masterpiece. The choreography and the composition weave together seamlessly from the very start, drawing the audience into the story. In order to see this magic for yourself, click on the photo to watch "Prologue". What's amazing about "Prologue" is that it is the very first scene the audience witnesses. There is no dialogue and no singing. It's just the music and choreography working together to set up the main conflict of the story.



MUSICAL THEMES: ACCEPTANCE & PREJUDICE

This musical deals with many subjects: love, family, and culture. However, two of the most prominent themes are acceptance and prejudice. If you haven't read *Beyond the Score Issue 15: Diversity in Theater*, I highly recommend it! It goes hand in hand with the themes from this story.



***West Side Story* demonstrates how the Jets are uneducated about race and culture which makes them fearful. The Jets decide to manifest their fear into violence, sparking a feud between them and the Sharks, who are Puerto Rican. By the end of the story, when lives have been lost, and no love seems possible, both sides realize the pitfalls of judging others who come from different backgrounds. This is known as prejudice. It showed the Jets and the Sharks that violence would never be the answer in understanding and accepting one another.**

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