

West Side Story – Reviews

Theatre Online

Pre-Show

Good Evening and welcome to the Theatre Royal in Nottingham. Tonight I am here to watching the opening performance of West Side Story. This is the Latest Performance from The Carlton Operatic Society. Although I have seen this show many times I am very much looking forward to be seeing it again.

West Side Story is a musical with a book by Arthur Laurents, music by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and conception and choreography by Jerome Robbins. It was inspired by William Shakespeare's play Romeo and Juliet.

The musical is about the rivalry between the Jets and the Sharks, two teenage street gangs of different ethnic backgrounds. Tony, a former member of the Jets and best friend of the gang leader, Riff, falls in love with Maria, the sister of Bernardo, the leader of the Sharks. The dark theme, sophisticated music, extended dance scenes, and focus on social problems marked a turning point in American musical theatre.

Bernstein's score for the musical includes "Something's Coming", "Maria", "America", "Somewhere", "Tonight", "Jet Song", "I Feel Pretty", "A Boy Like That", "One Hand, One Heart", "Gee, Officer Krupke", and "Cool".

This is a difficult musical for any group to perform but if any company can do it I am sure Carlton can. It is being directed by Amanda Hall who has been responsible for many previous successful productions for this and other companies.

After tonight's Gala Reception it is time to take our seats for the show that is starting in a few minutes time.

More on Theatre Online later.

Interval Report

Interval at West Side Story and I am finding it impossible to believe that this is an amateur performance. Everything so far has been quite perfect. From the outstandingly good principals through to the incredible dancing ensemble.

The choreography is stunning and it's execution by the men and women will take some beating even by professional performers. The routines are challenging and there is no dumbing down at all.

There are within the set piece dance scenes considerable individual choreography which is very effective.

The power of the performances are matching the power of Bernstein's amazing score.

The quality of musical performance is very high and the orchestra is wonderful. The sound quality is what I would call very comfortable and it is great to hear every word clearly but supported by the orchestra. Both are heard in absolutely the right balance.

The lighting plot is very imaginative and is enhancing the atmosphere of the scenes.

Scene changes are very quick and very smooth.

This is proving to be one of the best productions of this show I have seen both in the amateur and professional world. Amanda Hall's fantastic directorial skills are shining through every scene.

Above all this is a cast that are totally committed to telling this story and the depth of talent in this company is there for all to see.

Wow, this is quite an experience!!

Act 2 will be starting shortly.

Post Show

West Side Story After Show Notes

The show is now over and what a production it was. My comments on Act 1 remain true for Act 2. The way the "Officer Krupke" number was performed was the best I have seen. Also the dream sequence was beautifully choreographed and danced.

Carlton Operatic has once again proved itself to be one of the best in the area and this production is without doubt of a professional standard. The cast of principals and ensemble were unbelievably good and often left me feeling amazed at their talents. To be able to find a large cast who can sing and dance so well is a feat in itself.

Much praise must go to the production team of Amanda Hall (Director), Chris Rees (Musical Director), Rachael Rees (Choreographer) and Ross Lowe (Assistant Director) for creating a production of such high quality in all departments.

The audience gave the show a prolonged and enthusiastic ovation at the end. This was very well deserved. I enjoyed every minute of it.

In my opinion this is a production that all fans of musical theatre need to see before it ends at the Theatre Royal on Saturday. Get your tickets soon as after tonight when the word gets around there may not be many left.

Tomorrow evening (Wednesday) I will be at the Bonnington Theatre in Arnold for a performance of Little Shop of Horrors by the Kristian Thomas Company. See you there. (David)

Full Review

Review of West Side Story – Carlton Operatic Society – Nottingham Theatre Royal – May 30th 2017

I have seen this show many times over the years and have grown to love it, but tonight I saw a production that rocked me to my very core. The Carlton Operatic Society once more proved themselves to be one of the finest amateur groups in the Midlands. But this was no amateur production – it was professional in all the elements that make this musical one of the finest of the 20th century.

West Side Story is a musical with a book by Arthur Laurents, music by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and conception and choreography by Jerome Robbins. It was inspired by William Shakespeare's play Romeo and Juliet.

The musical is about the rivalry between the Jets and the Sharks, two teenage street gangs of different ethnic backgrounds. Tony, a former member of the Jets and best friend of the gang leader, Riff, falls in love with Maria, the sister of Bernardo, the leader of the Sharks. The dark theme, sophisticated music, extended dance scenes, and focus on social problems marked a turning point in American musical theatre.

There is so much fine music in Bernstein's blistering score including "Something's Coming", "Maria", "America", "Somewhere", "Tonight", "Jet Song", "I Feel Pretty", "A Boy Like That", "One Hand, One Heart", "Gee, Officer Krupke", and "Cool". Dance is at the heart of the show and there is also some very fine instrumental to accompany it.

By the interval I was totally overcome by the standard of this production from the wonderful set piece dance routines to the superbly performed vocals of both principals and ensemble.

The principal line up was incredibly strong: Matt Wesson plays Tony, who falls in love with Maria, a young girl from Puerto Rico, played by Ella Greenwood. Both of these actors have incredible voices and their solos and duets were sublime. Matt has an extraordinary voice, with a wide vocal range; he never once strained to hit the top notes, while maintaining a smooth and very calm tone. Ella sang beautifully, with a sweetness and power that was captivating; her duet with Matt, "One Hand One Heart" was quite frankly, sublime. Both of them are also very skilled actors whose characterisations of the star crossed lovers were spot on.

A vocal highlight for me, among many, was the beautiful quintet and chorus work in 'Tonight' at the end of Act One. Hats off to the Musical Director and all the performers who must have worked so hard to perfect this.

Another superb actress and singer is Judie Matthews, who played Maria's friend, Anita. She was able to show the character's toughness and sassiness alongside her vulnerability and empathy for others. Her voice is so powerful and her renditions of 'America' - also a wonderful ensemble piece for the Shark girls - and 'A Boy Like That' with Maria, were as good as you will ever hear.

Playing the role of the leader of the Jets, Riff, was Patrick McChrystal: an engaging and powerful characterisation, delivered with passion and intense physicality. Paice Lees, as his rival from the Sharks, Bernado measured up to him with a controlled and simmering resentment which made a lovely contrast- great play from both of them.

I cannot mention in detail all the rest of the cast, as there are too many and in many respects this is an ensemble piece; all are important and many have small cameo roles. They must be mentioned though, as this was one of the best ensemble casts I have seen.

The Jets were: Patrick McChrystal (Riff), Liam Hall (Action), James Murray (A-Rab), Matty Collins (Baby John), Alex Tilley (Showboy), Sam Ward (Big Deal), Joseph Smith (Diesel), Rosie Cotter (Anybodys) – Their Girls: Amy Rogers Gee (Graziella), Sophie Petruccio (Velma), Charlotte Barrington (Minnie), Celine McKeown (Clarice), Abby Wells (Joanne), Katherine McNamara (Pauline), Sarah Millington (Marilyn), Eva Shappard (Diana), Laura Thurman (Delores), Beth Wear (Julia).

The Sharks were: Paice Lees (Bernado), Alex Huntley (Chino), Ray Mcleod (Pepe), Khalil Derrache- Thompson (Indio), Callum Hall (Juano), Andrew Dennis (Nibbles). The Shark Girls were: Helen Tunnicliff (Rosalia), Charleigh Hurst (Francisca), Jess Royce (Consuelo), Laura Ellis (Conchita), Sarah Hill (Josephina), Georgia Hodgett-Young (Isabel), Ellie Monterosso (Carmen), Soliel Quarless (Catalina), Bekki Wilson (Teresa).

The Adults were: Mike Newbold (Officer Krupke), Graham Ward (Lieutenant Shrank) and Adam Collishaw (Doc).

The choreography was stunning throughout and its execution by the whole cast would take some beating, even by professional performers. The routines were challenging and there were no compromises made: the choreographer had a vision and the cast realised it. The dancing was often accompanied by difficult gymnastic movements and within the set piece dance scenes there was considerable individual choreography – I believe some added by the performers themselves - which was very effective. The choreographer, Rachel Rees did a wonderful job.

Although I enjoyed all of the scenes, I want to particularly mention how good the 'Gee, Officer Krupke' number was. I think it was probably the most enjoyable I have ever seen, both in its choreography and performance. Also, the dream sequence – which can seem dated- was beautifully choreographed and danced, so thoroughly engaging.

The power of the performances certainly matched the power of Bernstein's amazing score and with that in mind I cannot praise enough the 28 piece orchestra conducted by Chris Rees. It was quite simply one of the best I have heard for some time. It was behind the set and I could hear every word that was said or sung; despite the power of the score they never overpowered the singers.

Another very impressive element was the lighting plot by Tom Mowat. It was carefully planned and delivered and established the atmosphere and focal points of the scenes most effectively.

The scene changes were very quick and very smooth under the control of the Stage Manager, Vicky Johnson and her excellent crew. I must also mention the beautiful costumes which, particularly in the dazzling 'Dance at the Gym' scene, not only reminded us of the time in which the action is set, but underlined the differences between the two groups.

Much praise must go to the production team of Amanda Hall (Director), Chris Rees (Musical Director), Rachael Rees (Choreographer) and Ross Lowe (Assistant Director) for creating a production of such high quality in all departments.

Amanda Hall has produced many outstandingly good shows in a number of local theatres, but this must rate as one of her finest to date. Her incredible directorial ability shone through the whole show. She was, of course, very well supported by her team of Chris Rees (Musical Director), Rachael Rees (Choreographer) and Ross Lowe (Assistant Director). Together they have most certainly created a production of high quality that will be talked about for a long time to come.

In my opinion this is a production that all fans of musical theatre need to see before it ends at the Theatre Royal on Saturday.

Get your tickets soon, as when the word gets around there will not be many left.

(David)

East Midlands Theatre Review

Phil Lowe

West Side Story updates Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* to 1950s New York. For many musical theatre fans it is the greatest show of all time. It's score is far more demanding of its singers than a standard musical. It is agreed that the two leads Maria and Tony must be sung by two performers with some classical voice training otherwise they will lack the range and stamina to sing their parts. Composer Leonard Bernstein wanted to prove that there was no intrinsic difference between a Broadway musical and a serious opera. In fact he is quoted as saying that 'a good musical can be as good as a good opera and far better than a bad opera'.

West Side Story also has many other things that have aided its success professionally and in many an amateur production, namely the solid and poetic lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and the breath – taking book by Arthur Laurents. The often balletic choreography of Jerome Robbins depicting the passionate and spasmodic violent nature of the Sharks and The Jets opposing gangs is something the audiences and musical theatre companies themselves are eager to see well done. Then, of course there are the famous songs 'Something's Coming' 'Maria' 'Tonight' 'One Hand One Heart' 'I Feel Pretty' 'Somewhere' 'Gee Officer Krupke' 'America' and 'A Boy Like That'. Is it any surprise that this enormously popular musical, jam packed full of memorable songs and dance numbers and an emotionally powerful story should be a favourite amongst theatre goers and thereby a real challenge for the company presenting it?

So, after all this preamble, how do Nottingham's very own multi – award winning Carlton Operatic measure up in their *West Side Story* playing at Nottingham Theatre Royal Tue 30 May -Sat 3 June 2017. The five stars below might be a bit of a giveaway.

Directed by Amanda Hall with Assistant Director Ross Lowe, Carlton Operatic's *West Side Story* excels all expectations and is as near a true professional standard as any amateur company would ever, in their wildest dreams, hope to attain. Chris Rees' musical direction and live orchestra of twenty-seven are superb. Choreographer Rachael Rees has done an fantastic job with the whole company in bringing this show high kicking and Mamboing to glorious life. The fight scenes are especially well done and blend seamlessly with the choreography. The whole show is well supported by an impressive and versatile set, crystal clear sound (Rob Kettridge) and atmospheric lighting (Tom Mowat). The backstage crew and technicians work tirelessly with the super cast to make this production of *West Side Story* a very engaging and gripping experience. This musical is celebrating its 60th year of existence and its story of a doomed love affair and of future hope is still as relevant today.

The months of hard work right across the board with both cast and crew really shows in the way the stage is inhabited during the many and varied scenes. Every single cast member looks comfortable in and knowledgeable about their role – big or small. There is a clear division between the physical and vocal attitudes of the Puerto Rican Sharks and the Polish-American Jets. Such attention to physicality and detail is what makes this particular show the great piece of thrilling musical theatre it is. All the cast look like they are having the time of their lives. And they are! The scene transitions are very slickly actualised taking us quickly from one dramatic moment to the next.

The singing is spot on throughout and this ain't an easy musical to sing. No it ain't Daddy! Timing has to be perfect. There are some superb performances from the principals both in the singing and acting. Patrick McChrystal (Riff) has great presence as leader of the Jets always out for a rumble. Paice Lees (Bernardo) and Alex Huntley (Chino) have Hispanic attitude and danger to spare and are very convincing in their roles.

Matt Wesson hits all the right vocal notes as Tony and has some genuinely tender moments with the outstanding actress Ella Greenwood playing her heart out as Maria. Greenwood's renditions of all her songs melt your heart.

Judie Matthews always succeeds in whatever role she is given and makes it her own but as passionate Puerto Rican Anita she makes her character set fire to the stage in her dancing and songs. The words seem to soar from deep within and Matthews performance is several of the great moments of this wonderful *West Side Story*.

Abby Wells deserves a special mention for her beautiful rendition of the iconic song 'Somewhere'.

In this necessarily youthful and exuberant cast we also enjoy the performances of the older guys Mike Newbold (Officer Krupke and Gladhand), Graham Ward (Lieutenant Shrank) and Adam Collishaw (Doc). Rosie Cotter also makes a sympathetic Anybodys.

The whole hard working ensemble of Carlton Operatic's *West Side Story* work their bobby socks off on stage and make this winning and thrilling show one the highlights of the Theatre Royal Nottingham calendar. *West Side Story* runs Saturday 3rd June.

Nottingham Post

Arguably one of the most beloved and critically-acclaimed iconic musicals of all time, based on the play "Romeo and Juliet", the plot is as timeless as when Shakespeare first penned it.

It's no surprise then that The Carlton Operatic Society chose to revive this theatrical masterpiece of song, dance and story of forbidden love as their 2017 production.

Under the expert guidance of production team, Director Amanda Hall, Musical Director Chris Rees, Choreographer Rachael Rees and Assistant Director Ross Lowe, the talented cast shine in this classic retelling. Set in Manhattan's gang-ridden immigrant communities of the 1950's, Arthur Laurent's dialogue is delivered with razor-tongued accuracy.

Violence is in the air as we witness the on-going rivalry between two rival teenage street gangs, on one side the Polish-American Jets, and on the other the Puerto Rican Sharks, just as two young lovers find themselves caught on opposite sides of this dangerous turf war.

As the two leads, Matt Wesson & Ella Greenwood excel as star-crossed lovers, Tony and Maria. Greenwood delivers a heartbreaking portrayal as Maria, a wonderful voice matched by equally fabulous acting. They are surrounded by a marvellous supporting cast. Special mention must also go to the fiery energy of Judie Mathews as Anita.

Filled with romance, wit and raw emotion, it is when the emotions of the audience are pulled strongly either way that we get the stand out musical numbers, courtesy of Stephen Sondheim. Despite it's baggage 'America' is a feel-good moment and The Jets riotous Officer Krupke overflows with the angst of a misunderstood generation. The real goose pimples moment comes with Abby Wells' beautiful delivery of the anthemic love ballad Somewhere.

Visually exciting choreography and talent keep this landmark work of art and its lessons fresh and alive in a plot which can easily relate to the uneasy world today.

Hey What's On Notts

Lucy Dalgress

What an amazing privilege it was to be invited along to the opening night of the Carlton Operatic Society's 2017 production of *West Side Story*, a forever-favourite of mine, and absolute classic brought to the stage by an all-round talented cast and crew.

Pre-show, the Theatre Royal had an atmosphere I had quite honestly, never seen before for such a large show. Excitement buzzed through the hallways from family members eagerly awaiting the performance of loved ones to long-time Musical lovers waiting to see a favourite on stage.

We went straight to our seats infected by the excitement and we were greeted by an incredible open set. The initial staging was perfection, with several balcony's playing homage to the Musicals origins from Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Dank, corrugated iron sheets and clever billboard advertising drew us into the 1950's back streets of Manhattan emphasised by the cast already on stage and moving around their daily lives, I felt I had truly dropped right into the story.

The opening number perfectly depicted the rivalry between the American Jets and the Puerto-Rican Sharks, the choreography did not shy away from the Movie's iconic dances (including mandatory clicking and ballet) with well-rehearsed high energy stunts performed by all of the cast. The Costume choices were key, making the rival Sharks (dressed in deep purples and red) and Jets (neutrals) stand out from one another in a huge cast. Each member was 1950's to a tee, right down to the Chuck Taylors. Maria's transition from innocent child to heartbroken wife was portrayed beautifully in her costume changes and her final look as she leaves the stage deserves a special mention.

As the story progresses the Set Design really comes to life, seamless changes into Doc's Drug Store and the Bridal shop are simple yet stunning and fit well with the rest of the scenery, of which every inch is used, particularly in the Rumble scene.

The talent is unquestionable, leads Ella Greenwood as Maria and Matt Wesson as Tony are clear choices, with their performance of 'Tonight Tonight', showing off both of their incredible talent. Maria's accent never falters throughout.

Amanda Hall's direction shines throughout, but especially during the incredible performance of the Jet's Officer Krupke, I cried with laughter as the boys throw themselves around in an incredible portrayal of physical comedy. The beautiful ethereal staging of 'Somewhere.' Is also a wonderful choice, Abby Wells' vocals are stunning and both scenes create a beacon of light during the hard-hitting second act of the show.

The finale is carried out sensitively with the right amount of dramatic flair from Ella as she mourns the death of her star-crossed lover. The emotion is felt rippling through the rest of the cast and into the audience as they take their well-deserved bows.

Overall Carlton Operatic Society's West Side Story was an enchanting and energetic production, keeping true to the classic but involving some very clever modernisation. The show will leave your ears ringing with 'I like to be in America' for days to come. West Side Story runs until the 5th June and tickets are available through www.trch.co.uk

Nottingham Live

Laura Somers

It's strange to think that West Side Story turns 60 years old this September. Especially when you consider the musical addresses a number of issues that are still pertinent over half a century later. But then much like the show itself, themes of love, rivalry and indeed, gang-related violence are seemingly timeless.

That being said, Carlton Operatic Society more than succeed in putting a fresh spin on this classic musical based on Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Tonight, tonight, it all began tonight (at Nottingham's Theatre Royal). Now that the obligatory groan-worthy song reference is out of the way, we can all move on.

Set on Manhattan's Upper West Side, our story focuses on two teenage sweethearts, Tony (Matt Wesson) and Maria (Ella Greenwood). Typically the course of true love never did run smooth as our star-crossed lovers hail from two rival factions. In place of Montagues and Capulets, we see teenage gangs running amok, fighting a small-scale turf war to reclaim the streets in their own name.

In one corner we have the Jets, a group of red-blooded American boys lead by the charismatic, if not single-minded, Riff (Patrick McChrystal). In the other we have the Sharks, a Puerto Rican gang fiercely headed by Maria's brother, Bernardo (Paice Lees). Both sides are blinded by hate.

The Jets loathe the Sharks because they've trespassed on their territory and perceive the influx Puerto Ricans to be bad for American businesses. The Sharks despise the Jets on account of their casual racism and the decidedly unpleasant welcome to American culture they've been given. The presence of Lieutenant Shrank (Graham Ward) and his bigoted views only serves to add to the animosity. Although this type of narrow-minded attitude was typical of the 1950s, it's sadly not too much of a stretch to draw parallels to Trump's America in 2017.

Anyway, political observations aside, it all kicks off at a neighbourhood dance where Tony and Maria fall in love. You'd better believe this testosterone-fuelled feud soon escalates with tragic consequences, buddy boy.

Originally written and directed by Jerome Robbins, West Side Story gets a contemporary makeover here from Amanda Smith which results in many more light-hearted moments than I had been anticipating. That's not to say this approach doesn't work – because it does, fantastically so. The numerous jokes and innuendos dotted throughout the performance are executed by a cast with impeccable comedic timing,

Wesson and Greenwood's voices complement each other beautifully as evidenced during a skin-tingling rendition of 'Tonight.' Both leads have a truly impressive vocal range and their easy chemistry was a joy to watch.

Unsurprisingly 'America' was the stand-out performance of the evening. I say unsurprisingly because it's arguably West Side Story's most famous number. Even those who have never seen the show would struggle not to recognise this energetic, jaunty tune.

Hats are well and truly off to Judie Matthews who plays Anita, Maria's sharp-tongued best friend with a heart of gold. Her flawless vocals coupled with some tight choreography from the Shark ladies made for an aesthetically (and euphonically) pleasing performance.

The only fault to be found within the show was the slightly shaky initial number which can be put down to opening night nerves and is easily forgiven. The entire ensemble fully recovered and then some to deliver a production that earned more than a few standing ovations in the stalls.

Fair Verona may have been substituted for downtown Manhattan but soul of The Bard's classic still rings true albeit with a marginally less tragic ending. Emphasis on the marginally. I would be surprised if you didn't find yourself blinking back tears by the end of the performance.

Sardines Magazine

David Supper

West Side Story is the musical that changed musical theatre forever. The mixture of dance (to tell the story instead of dialogue) and songs (who has not heard 'Maria', 'Tonight', 'I Feel Pretty' etc?) was revolutionary at the time and its influence is still present today more than 60 years on.

Performing in the magnificent Theatre Royal in Nottingham must be every actor's (amateur and professional) dream and Carlton Operatic's production is not out of place in this temple to the performing arts. Indeed it would be difficult to fault the enthusiasm and professionalism of the cast, director and choreographer in this production. The singing is just magnificent and I would single out Matt Wesson's rendition of 'Maria' and Ella Greenwood's dynamic 'I Feel Pretty' as the best of a very high standard. I was also captured by the fine all-round performance of Judie Matthew's Anita, which is both raunchy and vulnerable at the right times.

Praise must also go to much of the casting, the PR's are utterly convincing both in looks, voice and demeanour and the boys(?) as the Sharks move and dance with a dynamism rarely found in the amateur theatre. They are matched (almost) by the Sharks and the dance routines, on which the show is dependent, are for the most part excellent. I

particularly like the use of the whole stage space and the innovative groupings as the two rival factions faced each other, time and time again.

But, and there's always a but, I was disappointed with the quality of the sound, which at times screeches out Leonard Bernstein's wonderful score, drowning out some of the quieter moment of the more reflective passages. Whether this was the fault of the theatre's sound system I could not say. It was a great pity that the orchestra were hidden away* thus eliminating the link between performers and musicians, but whatever the reason it jarred an otherwise first-rate production.

* Since this review was posted, we have been reliably informed that the production is backed by a 28-piece live orchestra who are playing at the back of the stage, behind the cyclorama! The size of MD Chris Rees' orchestra means they simply can't fit in the pit at the Royal safely, resulting in the decision to move behind the back curtain.

NODA

Company: Carlton Operatic Society
Production: West Side Story
Director: Amanda Hall
Musical Director: Chris Rees
Choreographer: Rachael Rees
Assistant Director: Ross Lowe
Venue: Theatre Royal Nottingham
Date: 31st May 2017

West Side Story is one of my favourite musicals. With the perfect match of storyline based on Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, music by Leonard Bernstein and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim it is a work of collective genius that manages to be greater than the sum of its parts. It therefore presents a significant challenge to any company, professional or non-professional, to rise to the challenge and do it justice, and happily tonight Carlton Operatic did just that.

First and foremost was the delivery of Bernstein's music which was simply magnificent. Chris Rees and his 28-piece orchestra brought out every nuance of the score and never at any time overpowered ensemble or soloist alike. From the energy soaked 'Cool', 'Dance at the Gym' and 'America' to the light and airy 'I Feel Pretty' and 'Officer Krupke' to the poignant 'Tonight', Chris and the orchestra provided every cast member with a superb musical canvas from which, in every case, their voices took flight. The work that Chris had obviously done throughout the rehearsal period was clear in the depth of harmony from his ensemble cast and the jaw dropping quality of 'solo' numbers throughout the evening.

Matt Wesson had a clarity and flexibility in his voice that I have rarely heard before, bringing when required great power but also a gentle beauty in 'Tonight'. Ella Greenwood shone all evening. Her range of delivery, matching mood to music was especially apparent in the key duets 'One Hand, One Heart' and 'A Boy like that & I Have a Love' and was a pleasure to witness.

Judie Matthews was simply outstanding as Anita managing to bring out every facet of her character from sassy alpha female leading the Shark ladies, and her conflicting loyalty to Maria. Judie was committed in every scene, in dance, acting and vocal delivery and always drew your attention without a hint of over-performance.

Patrick McChrystal managed to pack a significant amount of energy and passion into his Riff. He very effectively conveyed the confusion of his loyalty to both his friend Tony and the Jets making his ultimate fate all the more moving. As to the rest of the 'Gang members' and 'Adults' there were simply too many individual performances of great quality to name all concerned, so please do not be offended if you are not called out here.

Rachael Rees once again delivered a quality of choreography that was perfectly matched to the production. It challenged the cast while being well judged to the ability of the group and at all times supported and enhanced the production especially in 'America', 'Dance at the Gym' and 'Officer Krupke'.

The action on stage was enhanced by the universally high quality of costume, set, sound and lighting design throughout the production. The challenge of delivering the balance of sound with the orchestra being behind the set rather than in the pit, was exceptionally well managed by Rob Kettridge and team.

Clearly a production of this quality doesn't happen by accident and Amanda Hall and Ross Lowe must of course be congratulated for their vision, attention to detail and skill in bringing this production of West Side Story to such vivid life. I had a great night at the theatre so many thanks to you and all at Carlton Operatic.