

Mac-Haydn Theatre, Chatham. NY

**West Side Story**, Book by Arthur Laurents, Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim,  
Music by Leonard Bernstein, based on a concept by Jerome Robbins,  
based on Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet.

Directed and choreographed by Bryan Knowlton

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

**"Something's coming, something good."**

It's time to acknowledge a new reality: Jerome Robbins is dead. It's official and the proof is very much alive at the Mac-Haydn Theatre in Chatham, New York where Bryan Knowlton has stepped into Robbins' dancing shoes and donned his directing hat and produced a radically new edition of "West Side Story." The plot's the same; so is the dialogue and so are the songs. No one can really change the bones of this show. But it is the flesh that has been renewed by Knowlton. Right from the dynamic new opening to the emotionally stunning closing the show is wrapped in a different coat of many colors. The look of the show is different: Scenic Designer Alivia Cross gives us a new look at New York City. After thirteen Presidents have addressed us in their own spotlights Bernstein's musical prelude sets up the gangland dynamics with his mid-1950s sounds that suddenly seem so relevant to today. This show is no longer a period piece. It is a dynamic piece, period!



Anita (Arllellys Reynoso) and the girls sing and dance "America"; Photo: Ann Kielbasa

Maria meets Tony and romance is immediately in the air. They dance. They sing. They kiss. They cling. Even his killing her brother can't dissuade her, and when he believes her to be dead, he begs for a similar release to join her. But like the source material from William Shakespeare the delusion overtakes reality and their lives are forever altered. In this production

Juliet/Maria is sensitively played by Paula Gaudier who is lovely to look at, delightful to hear. Her Romeo/Tony is played by Jared Goodwin, an actor who sings his songs beautifully and is a dream to look at. Together they make music in the finest sense of that phrase. "One Hand, One Heart" is an apt description of their work together on stage.

His best friend, Riff, is portrayed by Griffin Wilkins and he is almost as attractive as Tony. His arch-rival, Bernardo - Maria's brother - is significantly portrayed by Caleb Bernejo. These two rivals are united in death and become a resonant pair of figures, impossible to forget or ignore.



Jared Goodwin, Paula Gaudier; Photo: Ann Kielbasa

Director Knowlton uses his many actors to present a picture of urban hostility that does still exist today. The policemen, Krupke and Schrank are well pictured in the hands of Bernard Scahill and George Phelps while the more sympathetic and emphatic Doc is handsomely played by Craig Capone. Anybodys, the Jet Wannabe teenage girl is given a fine interpretation by Abbie Ruff. The entire cast, actually, is well placed in their definitive roles.



The Jets; Photo: Ann Kielbasa

The costumes are as much now as then designed by Hannah Sadler and Andrew Gmoser's Lighting Design is his usual brilliant work. Emily Allen's hair and makeup work gives the characters their ideal appearance and Sound Designer Sean McGinley is the best this company has employed in a long time.

This is the new "West Side Story" - much the same but so different. I recommend it!

+ 06/14/2024 +

**West Side Story** plays at the Mac-Haydn Theatre, 1925 State Road 203. Chathan, NY., through June 23. For information and tickets go to [www,machaydntheatre.org](http://www.machaydntheatre.org) or call 518-392-9292.