

## **Review of West Side Story (for Arts Hub ) 2012**

*By Victor Kline*

Once upon a time you could read a book or you could go to the theatre, and if you were really wealthy you could go to the one or two symphonic or operatic performances your city offered that year. But that was two hundred years ago.

As far as the arts are concerned, some might say the years in between have been more about proliferation than about advances in quality. Now so many performance forms compete for our attention, that the one we go to see is often just the one with the biggest advertising budget or the smartest publicist. Things come and go with such rapidity there is no time for reflection, or even for word of mouth to get about.

So in a world of fast turnover and lateral competition from sport and the internet, the arts are forced to search for bigger and better eye catching novelty. Hence the birth of multi-media. Hence an early 1960s Hollywood musical projected on a screen that ought to have been used for world cup football, but with the score stripped out and played for us instead by one of the world's leading symphony orchestras.

It's a trick, it's an illusion, it's a grab for attention. But I loved it. In the end as much as I wanted to condemn this new form of conjuring, I had to sit back and admit that I was watching one of the greatest movie musicals reborn with the full power of Sydney's magnificent orchestra playing Leonard Bernstein's electrifying orchestral score live while the newly remastered film is shown in glorious high definition with the original vocals and dialogue.

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*West Side Story* famously transposes the feuding families from Romeo and Juliet to what the promoters call 'the gritty New York street gangs of the Jets and the Sharks'. I would prefer to say 'the schmaltzy high 50s effete choreography of the Jets and the Sharks'. But who cares? It's all part of the fun in watching an era gone by.

Directed by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins, it features songs by Stephen Sondheim and a screenplay by Ernest Lehman based on the fanciful book by Arthur Laurents. David Newman's conducting of the SSO fits his orchestra beautifully into the tone and tempo of the original, and if anything enhances it.

A fun multi-media night fit to win over the cynics.

Part of the Sydney Festival. Three performances only.

Jan 27-28 at 7 pm and Jan 28 at 2 pm.

Concert Hall, Sydney Opera House.