



[West Side Story](#) at Buxton Opera House

Directed by Paul Kerryson

Reviewed by [John Waterhouse](#) February 2018

This production of *West Side Story* can only be described as superb. After seeing the show, it came as a real surprise to discover that this was a local community production, directed by the CEO of Buxton Opera House, **Paul Kerryson**. The level of professionalism and polish could hardly be bettered by any West End production, with the energy and enthusiasm of the cast never wavering from start to finish.

There was an attempt here to re-invent the wheel. Anyone who is familiar with the multi-Oscar winning 1961 film will not be disappointed by this production, with crisp American and Hispanic accents, a plethora of exciting modern dance routines (full credit to **Debbie Norris**) and convincingly well-choreographed fight scenes by

Renny Krupinski

. The extensive backdrop of scaffolding is used to great effect by the cast and the musical ensemble, hidden in the generous pit area, did full justice to the great Bernstein numbers.

The costuming was interesting. The adult cast members were dressed perfectly for the period setting, with Shrank, the detective in a fawn raincoat and Do, the white-shirted druggist. I couldn't get over the huge beard sported by Officer Krupke, played by **Tavis Hill**, which would have been perfect had the story been set in nineteenth century Russia, but surely not right for 1950's New York! It initially seemed a little disappointing with all the younger members of the cast being just the right age for their parts, that they weren't dressed in identifiably 1950/60's American styles, with quite a lot of black worn but not much denim or cheque-patterns. The reason became obvious, since it gave the youth a timelessness, akin to Shakespeare being performed in modern or stylised dress.

The message of *West Side Story* is timeless, in so far as young people in disadvantaged areas can feel alienated and look to gangs for a feeling of identity, alongside ethnic youth feeling ghettoised, isolated and discriminated against. In such a situation, violence often all too easily follows and the police can appear as just another enemy to those on the fringes of society. These are scenarios that at times are all too obvious in our own society, with deaths from knife crimes in particular disturbingly high, especially in London, and guns not difficult to get hold of in high crime areas.

The other central theme of *West Side Story* is the forbidden romance between Maria and Tony, played with flair and feeling by **Alexandra Hazard** and

Jak Kelly

, each of whom delivered exquisite renditions of solo songs. Credit must also be given to

Natalie Coverley

as Anita and the cast as a whole was excellent, using to full advantage the high scaffolding which forms the basis of the set, whilst giving vibrant dance displays across the generous amount of floor space. There was an array of talent on display and this a show of which Buxton Opera House can be genuinely proud; a thoroughly enjoyable evening.

***West Side Story* is on until Sunday 25th February.**