



**NEW RELEASES**

# West Side Story

After completing his film *The Post*, Spielberg felt the moment was right to embark on *West Side Story*. Although it was still very much in the planning stage, the director's vision was cohering: a fresh, original, unique perspective on the material.

'We needed to discover our voice so that [the new film] would be the same but distinctly different. We didn't want to fix what wasn't broken, but we did want to justify why we were telling the story again,' Spielberg says. 'Part of that is the cast. On stage the actors have largely not been Hispanic, and in the 1961 movie they're in their thirties, and many who were portraying the Puerto Ricans are white. I wanted to cast it authentically, to ensure that the actors playing the Shark boys and girls were one hundred percent Latinx, and young.'

The director also wanted to make clear in the film the context and landscape in which these rival gangs endured. 'The same wrecking ball was obliterating the turf of each fact on, entire neighbourhoods being torn down, populations being displaced. All of these kids – Jets and Sharks – were subjected to that upheaval. These kids are fighting for territory that's disappearing before their eyes.'

This was an issue the filmmakers would emphasise in their new version, even if, as Spielberg notes, it only increased the enmity between the gangs. Screenplayer Tony Kushner, on the same page, dove into the project with immense enthusiasm, conducting research into the background of the story, especially the destruction of an entire section of the Upper West Side.

The action of the new film occurs in the summer of 1957 on the streets of adjoining Upper West Side neighbourhoods, Lincoln Square and San Juan Hill. Together the neighbourhood encompasses the area west of Broadway from West 60th Street to West 70th Street to the very edge of the city at the Hudson River.

In the early 1950s, Robert Moses – the New York City Commissioner for Public Works – razed the entire stretch of land for the construction of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts and Fordham University, among other projects.

At the time, Lincoln Square was populated by the descendants of peoples who had immigrated to the U.S. during the 19th century, mostly from Europe. The residents of San Juan Hill were for the most part Puerto Ricans who were part of the mass migration from the territory to New York in the wake of World War II. The destruction of the neighbourhoods drove most of the area's inhabitants from their homes. Mostly the city relocated descendants of the early immigrants from Europe, as well as the recent Hispanic arrivals, elsewhere.

The displacement of these populations and its impact on the neighbourhoods form a crucial element of Kushner's screenplay. He describes the area at the start of the film as 'a vast wasteland of rubble, demolished and partially demolished tenements, crisscrossed by streets, all the way to the Hudson River.'

Faithful to Laurents' original libretto, and with the blessings of David Saint, the Leonard Bernstein estate, the Robbins estate and Stephen Sondheim, Kushner dug deep into not only the history of the destruction of Lincoln Square and San Juan Hill but also how it would affect the characters in *West Side Story*. In his retelling, Kushner portrays each character in the story as multi-dimensional with individual backstories that motivate their actions.

Kushner says, 'The story is both big and political, yet at its heart it's as private and personal as can be, two young people who fall fiercely in love; but the love that blossoms between them is murdered by the big political world surrounding them. The story is a warning: racism and nativism and poverty are democracy's antitheses, and if not resisted and rejected they will atomize the bonds that hold us together as a society. Love, as they say, is the answer – love can transform the world, it can transform malevolent reality, but love doesn't conquer all, or at least not all threats in the immediate moment. In a context of hatred, love is in danger. And that is tragic, that's the tragedy of *West Side Story*.'

This is one production I never wanted to see end,' Spielberg says. 'I had the greatest time making *West Side Story*. The last time I had a great time making a movie to this level was *E.T.* in 1981, and that movie certainly put in my head fatherhood and all sorts of things I never contemplated. Maybe this movie put in my head musicals and things I always have contemplated but until this time had never really had the courage to do.

'The message of *West Side Story* is what is going to live forever. It is even more timely today than it was in 1957, when they mounted the production on Broadway. Even more timely than it was with the film in '61-'62. What it's about is what we are living in this country today – a time of tragic division and distrust, and the waste of human life through violence, racism and xenophobia. And even though the story is a tragedy, like all great tragedies, including *Romeo and Juliet*, *West Side Story* suggests that hope can be born amid devastation and despair, and thanks to Bernstein's and Sondheim's score, there's a feeling that despite all the sorrow and ugliness, love transcends. So don't ever give up! That's why I wanted to tell this story right now. It is even more about now than it was about then.

'This has been a journey without precedence: a joyful, stunningly moving, endlessly surprising encounter with the story and the score of one of the world's greatest musicals. My brilliantly talented, fiercely committed, generous and apparently inexhaustible cast and crew of hundreds have given our film everything they've got, and already I can say that the film owes everything to them, as does its immensely grateful director.

'And while I'm on the subject of gratitude: on every day of the past four years during which we've been preparing, casting, imagining *West Side Story*, I, and my team, cast and crew have been walking in the footsteps of four giants: Leonard Bernstein, Arthur Laurents, Jerome Robbins and Stephen Sondheim. For the light they'd shed on the world, for Stephen Sondheim's insight, guidance and support, and for the openhearted support of the Bernstein, Laurents and Robbins estates, I owe them more than I can possibly express.'

#### **Production notes**

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## WEST SIDE STORY

*Directed by:* Steven Spielberg  
*©:* 20th Century Studios  
*©:* TSG Entertainment Finance LLC  
*Made in Association with:* TSG Entertainment  
*Presented by:* 20th Century Studios  
*Filmed with the support of the:* New York State Governor's Office of Motion Picture & Television Development  
*Executive Producers:* Rita Moreno, Daniel Lupi, Adam Somner, Tony Kushner  
*Produced by:* Steven Spielberg, Kristie Macosko Krieger, Kevin McCollum  
*Co-producer:* Carla Raij  
*Associate Producer:* David Saint  
*Unit Production Managers:* Carla Raij, Daniel Lupi  
*Production Supervisors:* Leah Winkler, Corey Sklov  
*Production Accountant:* Pietro Lorino  
*New Jersey Location Manager:* Katherine Delaney  
*Post-production Co-ordinator:* Josh Woolf  
*1st Assistant Director:* Adam Somner  
*Script Supervisor:* Jessica Lichtner  
*Casting by:* Cindy Tolan  
*Screenplay by:* Tony Kushner  
*Based on the Stage Play (Book by):* Arthur Laurents  
*Based on the Stage Play (Music by):* Leonard Bernstein  
*Based on the Stage Play (Lyrics by):* Stephen Sondheim  
*Based on the Stage Play (Play Conceived, Directed and Choreographed by):* Jerome Robbins  
*Director of Photography:* Janusz Kaminski  
*A Camera Operator:* Mitch Dubin  
*B Camera Operator/Steadicam:* John 'Buzz' Moyer  
*Gaffer:* Steve Ramsey  
*Key Grip:* Mitch Lillian  
*Visual Effects Producer:* Jennifer Meislohn  
*Visual Effects by:* Iola | VFX, MPC, Mr. X  
*Special Effects Co-ordinator:* Mark Bero  
*Film Editors:* Michael Kahn, Sarah Broshar  
*Associate Editor:* Patrick Crane  
*Production Designer:* Adam Stockhausen  
*Supervising Art Director:* Deborah Jensen  
*Set Decorator:* Rena DeAngelo  
*Storyboard Artist:* Raymond Prado  
*Property Master:* Diana Burton  
*Construction Co-ordinator:* Joe Alfieri Sr  
*Costume Designer:* Paul Tazewell  
*Make-up Department Head:* Judy Chin  
*Hair Department Head:* Kay Georgiou  
*End Title Design:* Steven Spielberg, Adam Stockhausen  
*Titles Development:* Edward Bursch  
*Title Sequence Finishing:* The Mill  
*End Crawl by:* Scarlet Letters  
*Music by:* Leonard Bernstein  
*Lyrics by:* Stephen Sondheim  
*Music Performed by:* The New York Philharmonic  
*Additional Music Performed by:* The Los Angeles Philharmonic  
*Music Conducted by:* Gustavo Dudamel  
*Additional Orchestrations by:* Garth Sunderland  
*Original Orchestrations by:* Leonard Bernstein  
*Original Orchestrations with:* Sid Ramin, Irwin Kostal  
*Choreographed by:* Justin Peck  
*Original Choreography by:* Jerome Robbins  
*Sound Designer:* Gary Rydstrom  
*Sound Mixer:* Tod Maitland  
*Re-recording Mixers:* Andy Nelson, Gary Rydstrom

*Supervising Sound Editors:* Gary Rydstrom, Brian Chumney  
*Dialogue Editors:* Marshall Winn, Richard Quinn, Marilyn McCoppen  
*Sound Effects Recordist:* Andy Aaron  
*Sound Effects Editors:* Steve Bissinger, André Fenley, Teresa Eckton, E.J. Holowicki  
*Stunt Co-ordinator:* Mark Fichera  
*Consultant on Puerto Rican Culture & History:* Julio Monge  
*Filmed at:* Brooklyn Steiner Studios, NY

## Cast

Ansel Elgort (*Tony*)  
Ariana DeBose (*Anita*)  
David Alvarez (*Bernardo*)  
Mike Faist (*Riff*)  
Brian d'Arcy James (*Officer Krupke*)  
Corey Stoll (*Lieutenant Schrank*)  
Josh Andrés Rivera (*Chino*)  
Rita Moreno (*Valentina*)  
Rachel Zegler (*María*)  
Iris Menas (*Anybodys*)

## Sharks:

David Avilés Morales (*Anibal*), Sebastián Serra (*Braulio*), Ricardo A. Zayas (*Chago*), Carlos E. Gonzalez (*Chucho*), Ricky Ubeda (*Flaco*), Andrei Chagas (*Jochi*), Adriel Flete (*Julito*), Jacob Guzman (*Junior*), Kelvin Delgado (*Manolo*), Carlos Sánchez Falú (*Pipo*), Julius Anthony Rubio (*Quique*), Yurel Echezarreta (*Sebas*), David Guzman (*Tino*)

## Jets:

Sean Harrison Jones (*Action*), Jess LeProtto (*A-Rab*), Patrick Higgins (*Baby John*), Kyle Allen (*Balkan*), John Michael Fiumara (*Big Deal*), Kevin Csolak (*Diesel*), Kyle Coffman (*Ice*), Daniel Patrick Russell (*Little Moly*), Ben Cook (*Mouthpiece*), Harrison Coll (*Numbers*), Garrett Hawe (*Skink*), Myles Erlick (*Snowboy*), Julian Elia (*Tiger*)

## Shark Girls:

Tanairi Sade Vazquez (*Charita*), Yesenia Ayala (*Clary*), Gabriela M. Soto (*Conchi*), Juliette Feliciano (*Cuca*), Jessica Delgado (*Ili*), Maria Alexis Rodriguez (*Isa*), Edriz E. Rosa Pérez (*Jacinta*), Ilda Mason (*Luz*), Jennifer Florentino (*Montse*), Melody Martí (*Pili*), Ana Isabelle (*Rosalía*), Gaby Diaz (*Tati*), Isabella Ward (*Tere*)

## Jet Girls:

Eloise Kropp (*Dot*), Paloma Garcia-Lee (*Graziella*), Leigh-Ann Esty (*Gussie*), Lauren Leach (*Karen*), Brittany Pollack (*Mack*), Kellie Drobnick (*Mamie*), Skye Mattox (*Maxie*), Adriana Pierce (*Natalie*), Jonalyn Saxer (*Rhonda*), Brianna Abruzzo (*Sorella*), Halli Toland (*Sweden*), Sara Esty (*Tat*), Talia Ryder (*Tessa*), Maddie Ziegler (*Velma*)

Andréa Burns (*Fausta*)  
Mike Iveson (*Glad Hand*)  
Jamila Velazquez (*Meche*)  
Annelise Cepero (*Provi*)  
Yassmin Alers (*Lluvia*)  
Jamie Harris (*Rory*)  
Curtis Cook (*Abe*)  
Nadia Quinn (*streetwalker*)  
Arianna Rosario (*puertorriqueña 1*)  
Natalie Toro (*puertorriqueña 2*)

USA 2021

156 mins

A Walt Disney Studios release

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## NEW RELEASES

### Titane

From Sat 1 Jan

### Memoria

From Fri 14 Jan

### Parallel Mothers (Madres paralelas)

From Fri 28 Jan

## RE-RELEASES

### The 400 Blows (Les quatre cents coups)

From Fri 7 Jan

### South: Sir Ernest Shackleton's Glorious Epic of the Antarctic

From Fri 28 Jan

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email [prognotes@bfi.org.uk](mailto:prognotes@bfi.org.uk)

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