



St Edmund's School: *West Side Story* - a beautifully crafted piece of theatre

As NSTA representatives, we had the pleasure of attending St Edmund's production of *West Side Story* on Tuesday 17th March 2026. Under the assured direction of Mr Darrington, the performance was a vibrant, gripping, and beautifully crafted piece of theatre.

West Side Story is a powerful musical set in 1950s New York, reimagining *Romeo and Juliet* through the love story of Tony and Maria amid gang rivalry and prejudice. The original 1957 Broadway production ran for 732 performances, and earned two Tony Awards. With its iconic Bernstein music and Sondheim lyrics, it is one of the most challenging and rewarding shows for a school to perform. This musical requires precision, passion and an extraordinary level of ensemble discipline, and St Edmund's delivered all three in abundance.

The opening dance sequence set the tone: dynamic, sharply choreographed by Mrs Da Silva, and full of attitude. The tension between the gangs was instantly palpable, and the choreography captured both the aggression and the artistry that define this musical.

The audience was drawn into a world of simmering conflict and youthful energy. With a large cast, often filling the stage with movement, it takes real skill to maintain clarity and focus. The singing, dancing and acting were tightly synchronised, and the cast handled the complex rhythms and harmonies, arranged by Mr Fabien, with impressive maturity.

The artistic design was equally impressive. Costumes - ranging from the sharp, colour-coded Jets and Sharks outfits to Maria's delicate dresses - were thoughtfully chosen to reflect character and cultural identity. The set - with its graffiti textures, laddered entrances, and clever use of projection - created an authentic urban atmosphere and allowed for seamless transitions between scenes.

Maria, played by Eva, was outstanding. Her pure, expressive vocals and radiant stage presence made her instantly compelling. She navigated Maria's innocence, hope, and heartbreak with remarkable emotional depth. Her musical performances were moving, from "Tonight" to her contribution in "A Boy Like That", which showcased both vocal control and heartfelt sincerity.

Will, as Tony, provided an earnest portrayal of Tony's optimism and vulnerability that felt entirely genuine and emotionally connected with the audience. His stage presence during "Maria" and "Tonight" was commanding, where he displayed a keen understanding of musical nuances. His chemistry with Maria was undeniable; their balcony scene was tender and filled with the kind of quiet intensity that held the audience in complete stillness. Every



moment between the two was captivating, from their well-crafted first meeting to Maria's grief at Tony's death, demonstrating great skill and connection.

Bernardo, played by George, was portrayed with impressive maturity and a commanding stage presence. Evan gave a confident and energetic performance as Riff, showcasing strong leadership, sharp timing, and notable rapport with fellow performers. Anita, played by Lauren, was a tour de force, capturing the character's fiery temperament with strong vocals, a convincing accent, and a feisty demeanour.

The supporting cast was equally strong. Tabi brought grounded, maternal strength to the role of Doc, while Kit, as Lieutenant Schrank, brought authority and nuance to the role. His use of voice was particularly effective, especially in the scene at Doc's when the rumble is planned.

The Jets and Sharks ensembles were electric; every performer was fully committed to the physicality and emotional stakes of the story, ramping up the tension throughout the performance. Ensemble numbers were consistently impressive. "Cool" was executed with razor-sharp precision, blending choreography, character, and musicality into a tense, captivating performance. "Somewhere" was hauntingly beautiful, with harmonies that filled the auditorium and created a moment of collective stillness. Achieving such cohesion is a testament to the dedication of both cast and creative team.

What shone through most was the cast's commitment and enjoyment. Their professionalism, seamless scene changes, expressive storytelling, and emotional honesty made for a compelling and memorable production. Moments of humour landed perfectly, while the tragic final scene was handled with sensitivity and genuine pathos. This was a sophisticated, thoroughly rehearsed performance that had the audience enraptured from the very first note to the very last.

With its vibrant performances, emotional depth and unwavering commitment to storytelling, St Edmund's *West Side Story* did not simply restage a classic - they made it pulse with fresh life. It is a performance that will linger long after the final echo fades, reminding us all of the extraordinary power of young artists when they dare to dream boldly and perform bravely.

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