

Texent Reviews

Steven Spielberg's new West Side Story, 60 years after the original. What's it worth?

Steven Spielberg, one of the most well-known filmmakers of the century just came out with the remake of a classic, *West Side Story*.

This romantic and dramatic musical, inspired by Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, tells the story of two gangs mainly composed of young people on the West Side of Manhattan, New York. At the time, the film had a huge success and was nominated 11 times for an Oscar. For Spielberg, it was difficult to top this, he knew he was exposing himself to criticism, for example, "The first version was better", but he did not back down and said

"West Side Story has been that one haunting temptation that I have finally given in to."

Why this remake?

When he was 10 years old, Spielberg first heard *West Side Story*'s soundtracks, produced at the time by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins. Since then he dreamt of making a new version of the film. Moreover, today's issues gave Spielberg a golden opportunity to make his dream come true by creating a more modern version of this musical. The story focuses mainly on territorial conflicts but also on racial ones.

Differences

This more modern retelling of the film seems similar to the original but in reality, there is a multitude of differences. Firstly, the story is now, as we told you earlier, also centered on racial conflicts. Unlike the first version, a black actor appears in the scene, and he sells a gun to Riff at a bar counter. Secondly, actors of Latin American origin play the "Sharks", which was not the case in the 1961 version, as some white actors were cast as Puerto Ricans and dressed up for the occasion. Moreover, if you have watched this film, you have probably realised that the Spanish dialogue is neither translated nor subtitled. But this is not an oversight, we think that Spielberg wanted to make these passages incomprehensible so that we

can put ourselves in the shoes of the "Jets", the Americans, for a more immersive side (if you understand Spanish, well, it's missed!). Finally, if you are a fan of the 1961 film, you might be surprised by the order of the songs since in Steven Spielberg's *West Side Story* it has changed. While they are still all there, they aren't all in the same order. Spielberg has followed the original order of the Broadway musical.

Summary

On New York's West Side, two gangs are at war: the "Jets", white Americans led by Riff, and the Sharks, Puerto Rican immigrants led by Bernardo. At a ball where the Jets schedule a date to fight the Sharks for territory, Bernardo's sister Maria meets Tony, the former leader of the Jets, who has distanced himself from the gang after going to jail for

almost beating a kid to death. As they fall in love, the rivalry between the two clans escalates because of them, as the fact that a Latina woman could date an American is unimaginable.

Highlights

The iconic scene of Tony and Maria meeting at the ball is considered the very moment that the real story of the film begins. A scene that combines music, dance, (peaceful) confrontation, and of course love.

The balcony scene. This one reminds us of "Romeo and Juliet" but in a much more urban setting. In short, in this scene, we see the former leader of the Jets climbing the fire escape to reach his beloved. From this comes a beautiful, rather high-pitched song sung by both of them and obviously ends, like a cliché, with a kiss.

Fun facts

Rita Moreno, the

unforgettable Anita in 1961's *West Side Story*, did not refuse the opportunity to appear in

Steven Spielberg's version. This time she plays Valentina, the widow of the late Doc who takes Tony under her wing after his release from prison.



- *West Side Story* is Steven Spielberg's first musical direction gig. Indeed, Steven

Spielberg has directed almost everything from adventure films to science fiction and dramas but he has never been

seen directing a musical.

- The remake arrives exactly 60 years after the original version. Coincidence !?

- Fight in the salt factory.

Even though the scene is a bit short compared to the preparation of this fight, it is still unforgettable. It is in this warehouse that the film takes a completely different turn. A cult one-on-one fight that is both immersive and thrilling.



Our opinion ★★★★★

We gave this rating to the film because, overall, it has a lot of catchy songs, choreographies that are fun to watch. It makes us want to dance. However, these are sometimes inconsistent with the situation, which leads to a loss of realism. It is worth mentioning that the decors are sumptuous.

By Tedy and Maixent



SOURCES :

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