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'West Side Story' to open

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 April 11th, 2003 by Genevieve Guzman

Students practice in the final rehearsal for the Ram's Head Theatrical Society production "West Side Story," which is set to open tonight.

Every nine years, Ram's Head Theatrical Society decides that it is time for the classic American musical adaptation of "Romeo and Juliet" to return to the Memorial Auditorium stage. "West Side Story" is opening this weekend for Ram's Head annual spring show.

"It's the most enduring musical ever," said producer Lauren Kramer, a sophomore. "It speaks to any time period."

"West Side Story" is playing at 8 p.m. April 11, 12, 17, 18 and 19 in Memorial Auditorium. Admission is \$15, or \$9 for Stanford students.

"West Side Story" is about the star-crossed love of Tony and Maria, forbidden by racial tensions between the Americans and the Puerto Ricans in 1950s New York. Tony is a member of the Jets, an Anglo street gang representing the Montagues. Representing the Capulet family is the Sharks, the rival Puerto Rican gang lead by Bernardo, Maria's brother.

Sophomore Meredith Kendall, cast as Maria, commented that it is a huge honor to play her character.

"It is definitely the role of a lifetime," she said.

David Baron, cast as Tony, explained, "It's the hardest role I've ever played in my life. I go from complete jubilation to utter desperation."

The production of "West Side Story" is the first acting that Baron, a freshman, has done at Stanford.

According to Kramer, the big names among the credits of "West Side Story" are a big selling point.

"A musical that has the backing of Sondheim and Bernstein . . . captures the best of Broadway," she said.

Famous lyricist Stephen Sondheim and composer Leonard Bernstein collaborated on the music of "West Side Story."

The original idea for the play was conceived by Jerome Robbins, who directed and choreographed the original stage production. The 1961 film version, winner of 10 Oscars including best picture, was also directed by Robbins and Robert Wise. The screenplay was written by Ernest Lehman.

Stanford "West Side Story" director Sean Fenton, Class of 2002, decided that for this Ram's Head production, he would stay true to the original "West Side Story."

"The original show is powerful in and of itself," he explained. "We didn't have to do anything gimmicky with it just to feel like it is our own."

Managing the cast of "West Side Story," which is 40 strong, has been the most difficult and the most fulfilling aspect of the production for the Fenton.

"Directing a production on this scale is a huge challenge," he said. "Bringing all the elements together — costumes, set, extremely difficult choreography, lights — is hard, but it's very rewarding to see people put in the effort."

For Kramer, the cast was also the best aspect of working on "West Side Story."

"It's amazing to see the talent Stanford produces," she said.

Kendall agrees with the director and producer's perception of the quality of the cast.

"There are no weaknesses," she said. "Everyone is performing at their top potential. I can't help sitting backstage during rehearsal and smiling."



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