

'West Side Story' updated – but not too updated – for modern world



MaryJoanna Grisso and Jarrad Biron Green as Maria and Tony. COURTESY OF AMY BOYLE

By Betsy Price

The News Journal

The big buzz on “West Side Story” when it was revived on Broadway in 2008 was that songs and dialogue had been updated so a chunk of the play was performed in Spanish.

That caused quite the flurry of inclusional patter. But what worked on the Great White Way didn’t necessarily fly in the hinterlands as the show went on the road last year.

Audiences didn’t like it, and the amount of Spanish the Sharks sing and speak in has been dialed back to be about 10 percent of the show, says Jarrad Biron Green. He stars as Tony in the production that opens today for

eight performances at the DuPont Theatre.

The Spanish does serve to deepen the emotional experience of the show, Green says.

Audiences also will find it much grittier than the candy-colored version they remember from film and other productions. Producers warn the show is PG-13 and needs parental guidance.

But the same timeless songs – “Something’s Coming,” “Tonight,” “America,” “I Feel Pretty” and “Somewhere” – by Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim (it was his Broadway debut) and the original Jerome Robbins choreography is still splashed across the stage. The traveling show is directed by David Saint, who was the

associate director on the Broadway revival.

“It’s been so strange to work with a tweaked contemporary script of ‘West Side Story,’ since I’m so used to hearing the old script,” Green says. “But I love working with this new script. It really makes the show more edgy and gritty and it makes sense. It makes the whole piece make much more sense.”

“West Side Story” is Arthur Laurents’ updated Romeo and Juliet, following the story of Tony and Maria, star-crossed lovers who can’t break free of the hatred and intolerance of the 1950s that surrounds their lives.

He is a typical American youth of

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Theater: Green taking hiatus from NYU studies

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the neighborhood; she's Puerto Rican.

For Green, starring in the show has meant taking a hiatus from school. He's nearly finished his degree at New York University, but when he landed the role of Tony, he decided to take a break.

"It was upsetting to my senior year at NYU, but I go to school for vocal performance with a concentration in musical theater ... so getting an iconic role like Tony was an incredible opportunity I could not turn down." He has taken a leave of absence and plans to return to school next fall to finish.

The 21-year-old Massachusetts native started rehearsing a month and a half ago.

The tour opened Nov. 5, with only five people from last year's show joining this outing.

One of the keepers was MaryJoanna Grisso, who plays Maria.

"She's been an absolute blast to work with," Green says. "She's the best Maria I've ever seen or heard. She's beautiful."

Green had starred in some shows at school and in summer stock, but he'd just finished playing Tony in a show that only had two performances at school when he decided to go to an open audition for the road show. He didn't think he'd get the job, but he did think he'd get some experience auditioning.

Instead, he's headlining the tour.

His favorite moment in the show, he says, is when he's singing the balcony song or "Tonight," having his first private moment after meeting Maria.

Green says the movie of "West Side Story" when he was in fourth or fifth grade helped inspire him to be an actor and singer. He'd already thought he would like that career, but really loved the music and the dancing.

"It really does inspire change in people," he says.

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IF YOU GO

WHAT: The modern "West Side Story," featuring Spanish language songs and some dialogue

WHERE: DuPont Theatre, 1007 N. Market St., Wilmington

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. today, Wednesday and Thursday; 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday; 2 p.m. Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday

TICKETS: \$35 and up
FOR MORE INFORMATION: (302) 656-4401; duponttheatre.com

OF NOTE: The producers repeatedly warn in press releases the show is recommended for ages 13 and older due to strong language, violence and some sensitive subject matter. Parental guidance is suggested.