



Director	Matt Wolfe
Producers	Don, Jude, & Brach Thomson
Choreography	Taavon Gamble
Music Direction	Ian LeRoy
Scene Design	Richard Haptonstall
Costume Design	Allen Story
Lighting Design	Bryan Kaschube
Sound Design	Jeffrey Salerno

# Overview

This version of West Side Story was staged at the Bigfork Summer Playhouse in Bigfork, Montana in the summer of 2014. You can click the following link to view a brief highlight reel of the production.

I saw West Side as a story about hope. Everyone in this story already lives in a tragic situation, and everyone hopes for a better life. The problem is, Tony and Maria are the only ones who can see something to hope for outside of their neighborhood, out “somewhere”. Their family and friends can’t see past the present conflict and the idea of claiming a home on their immediate “turf”. That collision of priorities brings about the final tragedy. The Jets and Sharks themselves are the antagonists in this story.



In this production of West Side Story, I sought to place the design square in the period it was intended for, 1957/58. The main goal was to create a harsh, realistic world – a place of urban decay from which one would want to escape - which could stand as a strong contrast to the romantic dreams of Tony and Maria.



# Scenic

The set was made largely of a backdrop and four, double-sided, rolling units that could toggle between interior and exterior scenes. This gave us a chance to really give the audience a sense of geography, creating different locales within the city. A lot of care was taken to tighten up transitions from the original production, making them as fluid and fast as possible to help the momentum and tension of the piece.







# Tony and Maria

For the most part, this was a faithful and traditional take on West Side. However, I took a cue from the original “Somewhere” sequence where Tony and Maria’s dream allows them to escape the city, and I looked for moments in the show to heighten the romantic moments that Tony and Maria share. I wanted to see how their imagination could help them escape their harsh surroundings. For instance, the “Tonight” sequence found Tony and Maria’s balcony physically escaping the city, moving downstage onto the thrust over the audience. As the song progressed, the buildings of the city gave way to a field of stars. Their meeting at the dance found them suspended out of time, as if the world around them had stopped.





# Lighting

The goal for lighting was to create a harsh, realistic look in the “real life” book scenes. When the Jets or Sharks sang about their hopes and dreams in songs like “Cool” or “America” they were given highly saturated colors to heighten their desires in starkly contrasting blues and reds. Tony and Maria were given their own, romantic light motif to accompany their own unique vision.









# Costumes

Trapped within a harsh, urban and fairly monochrome world, individual appearance is one of the few things the gang members would have control over, so this is where we allowed color to really pop in the show. We chose cool colors for the Jets, and vibrant, hot, Latin colors for the Sharks. We avoided giving the Jets a “uniform” but gave them a unifying theme, each having homemade “Jet gear” unique to each gang member. The Sharks were given a higher sense of fashion to portray their sense of pride in their culture and heritage. Tony and Maria were meant to live in their own world visually as they came together, in a more neutral palette.







## Final Scene

Rather than letting the show end in darkness and sorrow, I adjusted the timeline of the night so that Tony dies just before sunrise. The idea was that Maria would look up to see the romantic light motif she and Tony had shared. She would stand on her own, without any assistance, choosing to walk forward in the vision of hope she and Tony had shared in “Somewhere”, a vision that the two warring sides may someday find forgiveness and hope. That image, rather than the image of the funeral procession leaving, was to close the show.

