

An awesome West Side ensemble

**NOMADS should inspire a new generation of theatregoers with this lively production
NOMADS: West Side Story, at The Corn Exchange, from Wednesday, October 7 to
Saturday, October 10**

Not a society to be afraid of a challenge, that was exactly what the NOMADS took on with their latest production. Did they win through? They certainly did.

From the first double beat of the exciting overture, it was obvious that Bernstein's gorgeous music had been mastered with all its drama, quirky rhythms and pathos by Nic Cope and his orchestra and this set the mood as the curtain went back on downtown New York.

With 28 parts, plus a chorus of the Jets and Sharks girls, West Side Story demands endless rehearsing, much work on choreography (here in the safe hands of Jacqui Trumper and director Jeanette Maskell) and stacks of good performers. NOMADS had the lot.

If the opening dance number was not at its slickest on Friday, everything quickly got into gear and the clashes between the two gangs, either fighting or dancing, were realistic and electrifying.

Impressively led by Daniel Maskell (Riff) and Jon Lovell (Bernardo) the gang members built the tension well, every single lad making the conflicts come alive. Action (Andy Pocock) and Anybody's (Meryl Day) were particular examples of this consistently good acting.

Neil Harvey had everything, vocally and dramatically, as Tony, the gang member who falls in love with a girl from the opposition. He played the part faultlessly. The strong-voiced Pippy Wiseman was a lively, charming Maria "the craziest girl on the block". A remarkable performance from a 17-year-old. Pippy will surely be even better in the years to come, I look forward to seeing her.

Claire Bowden as volatile Anita was the whole package whether singing, dancing or acting. The America number was one of the best in a show of good dance performances.

A memorably musical moment came from a part listed as 'solo girl', in this case Steph Richardson, (also playing Graziella) who sang the yearning Somewhere simply and quite beautifully.

There were so many good performances in this colourful, lively production and the young people NOMADS have attracted obviously enjoyed it all as much as their audience. A knock-on effect of younger performers meant an audience with a far lower age average than is often the case. If anything will inspire them to join in and have fun on the stage themselves it is productions like these.

Well done director Jeanette Maskell, and well done NOMADS.

CAROLINE FRANKLIN