

# **WEST SIDE STORY**

**Braintree & Witham Times Review – Ron Fosker**

**It is somewhat gratifying for those of us who remember the premiere of West Side Story more than 50 years ago that today's teenagers are keen to perform it. For this was their choice: it was not foisted on them.**

**This is not a happy-go-lucky High School Musical-type musical. It is almost operatic, occasionally balletic and ultimately tragic.**

**It is also energetic, frenetic and chaotic – and extremely demanding.**

**Yet WOW once again rose to the occasion superbly. This was a performance of depth and poise, bringing home both the joy and the pathos of the star-crossed lovers borrowed from Shakespeare.**

**They conquered the complicated dance routines, handled the American and Latino accents with aplomb and coped without difficulty with the harmony and counterpoint required by the challenging score.**

**The two leads, Thomas Holland and Zoe Rogers, shone, as they always do, particularly in the dramatic numbers with their unusually wide range. The showstoppers Maria, Tonight and Somewhere require strength and control and they were more than equal to it.**

**In a story with themes that still resonate today such as gang mentality and intolerance – ‘you don't belong here: go back where you came from’ – they were given excellent support by a strong cast.**

**Jake Davis and Josh Read captured the menace and bravado required of the two gang leaders, Max Holland and Elliott Elder brought some light relief as the thorn-in-the-side younger members of the gang, James Simpson was sneeringly nasty as the police lieutenant, and Gemma Gray, Matilda Bourne, Faith Rogers and Martha Lawless brought life to their backing roles.**

**And it was especially pleasing to see the excellent Sam Carlyle given a role she could get her teeth into. She was at her most minx-like as Anita.**

**With a vast cast to engineer about the stage, director Angela Briley and choreographer Natalie Wilson had their work cut out, as did the fight coordinator Peter Fishwick.**

**Their efforts were well rewarded – by an excellent company and a very appreciative first night audience.**