Next on our stage:

**WEST SIDE STORY**  
JULY 16-AUG. 23

**DR. JEKYLL & MR. HYDE**  
SEPT. 17-OCT. 18

**HANDLE WITH CARE**  
NOV. 19-DEC 20

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**CITY LIGHTS THEATER COMPANY**

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**HIGHLIGHTS**

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A companion guide to the musical

Book by Arthur Laurents  
Music by Leonard Bernstein  
Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim  
Based on a conception of Jerome Robbins

*Highlights* is created by CLTC dramaturg Rebecca Wallace. A digital version with links is at cltc.org/highlights.
**Synopsis**

The world’s greatest love story takes to the streets of New York City in this retelling of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. *West Side Story* follows two idealistic young lovers who find themselves caught between warring street gangs: the American Jets and the Puerto Rican Sharks. Their struggle to survive amid hatred and violence becomes one of the most celebrated, relevant musical dramas of all time.

The musical, which premiered on Broadway in 1957, is the result of a collaboration among some of the titans of American musical theater. Based on a concept of Jerome Robbins, *West Side Story* has a book by Arthur Laurents, music by Leonard Bernstein and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim.

**Characters**

The 26-actor cast of *West Side Story* includes Katherine Dela Cruz and Max Jennings as the idealistic young lovers Maria and Tony caught between two worlds. Maria, a sweet, enthusiastic and very young girl, comes from the world of the Puerto Rican Sharks gang. Meanwhile, Tony was a founder of the Jets and now often keeps his distance, lost in dreams of a different, larger life.

Also featured are Danielle Mendoza and Nick Rodrigues as a very different couple: Anita and Bernardo. Handsome and swaggering, Bernardo is not only the leader of the Sharks but Maria’s brother. His girlfriend Anita, confident and knowing, tries to counsel Maria in the ways of men—and warn her about the boys she sees as the wrong kind.

The gang members clash over and over on New York’s streets, their girls just as defiant and determined that their side is best. Officer Krupke (Howard L. Miller) and Lieutenant Schrank (Frank Swaringen) try to keep order, without much success. Drugstore owner Doc (George Gemette) asks the boys in vain, “What’re you gonna be when you grow up?”

*Katherine Dela Cruz, Max Jennings, Danielle Mendoza and Nick Rodrigues. Photos by Susan Mah Photography.*
Important dates in the history of *West Side Story*

1917

**Arthur Laurents is born.** The playwright, director and screenwriter behind *West Side Story*’s book would grow up in Brooklyn, where he was taken to see musicals as a boy and fell in love with the stage. He would write for the theater for 65 years. Career highlights included directing and writing the book for *Gypsy*, which took the 1960 Tony awards for Best Musical and Best Direction of a Musical; and the 1973 film *The Way We Were*, for which he wrote the novel and screenplay. He also won a Tony in 1984 for directing *La Cage Aux Folles*.

1918

**Leonard Bernstein and Jerome Robbins are born.** An icon of classical and theater music, Bernstein would get his break in 1943 when a New York Philharmonic conductor fell ill and Bernstein got to take the baton. The concert was broadcast nationally, and his animated flair made him a star. As a composer, he wrote musicals, operas, symphonies, and ballet scores, penning such Broadway hits as *Candide* (1956). Bernstein created the jazzy, balletic *On the Town* (1944) with master choreographer Robbins, who lit up the dance world. Highlights of Robbins’ career included directing and choreographing *Gypsy* (1959) and *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964). He was still working with New York City Ballet weeks before his death in 1998.
1930

Stephen Sondheim is born. The onetime Williams College math major would end up with a music degree and an enduring status as one of the most innovative lyricists and composers on Broadway. His intelligent, complex musicals—a far cry from the glitzy, tap-dancing shows he grew up seeing—have included Sweeney Todd, Into the Woods, A Little Night Music, and Sunday in the Park with George. They have inspired revivals, movies, and countless productions around the world.

1949

Meeting agenda: Let's turn Romeo and Juliet into a musical. Robbins invites Laurents and Bernstein over to talk about his idea of a musical version of Shakespeare’s classic. “He wanted to do it in terms of contemporary slums. His idea of the slums then was the Lower East Side, with the story taking place at the coincidence of Passover and Easter (between Jewish and Catholic gangs),” Bernstein told author Mel Gussow. Bernstein read an opening scene by Laurents and pronounced it “very good and very harsh, but harsh in the wrong way. It didn’t have its own kind of magic language, which Arthur developed later.” The men shelved the project.

1954

Meeting agenda: Let's try this again. Bernstein and Robbins, sitting together by the Beverly Hills Hotel pool, come across a Los Angeles newspaper story about gang fights between Mexicans and native-born Americans. “A light bulb went off,” Bernstein told Gussow. “Why didn’t we think of that in the first place? The East Side wasn’t where it was happening.”

1955

Sondheim is hired to write West Side Story’s lyrics. The young composer sings an original song for a crowd at a party and impresses the heck out of Laurents, who introduces him to Bernstein. The match is an instant hit. “I just freaked out. I went up the wall. I never had the feeling of taking any risk. I was so convinced, because we thought the same way. We were word people and note people,” Bernstein told Gussow.
1957

September 26: *West Side Story* opens on Broadway. The explosive dancing, gritty realistic story, and groundbreaking music take the Great White Way by storm—even as the racial issues hit too close to home for some. The opening comes one day after troops have to be called in to integrate Central High School in Little Rock. Carol Lawrence, who played Maria, recalled being anxious about the response at the first out-of-town opening in Washington, D.C., earlier that year. “When the curtain went up for our curtain calls ... we looked at the audience, and they looked at us, and we looked at them, and I thought, “Oh, dear Lord, it’s a bomb!” she told WNYC. “And then, as if Jerry had choreographed it, they jumped to their feet.”

1961

The movie version is released. Besides taking the Academy Award for Best Picture and becoming a box-office and critical success, the film also stars such luminaries as Rita Moreno (Anita), who won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress, and Natalie Wood (Maria). The movie was directed by Robbins and Robert Wise. Despite her accolades, Moreno later said she still struggled as a Latina in show business. “Before *West Side Story* I was always offered the stereotypical Latina roles. The Conchitas and Lolitas in westerns. I was always barefoot. It was humiliating, embarrassing stuff. But I did it because there was nothing else,” she later told the Miami Herald. “After *West Side Story*, it was pretty much the same thing. A lot of gang stories.”

2009

A Broadway revival integrates more Spanish into the show. Laurents directs, and *In the Heights* creator Lin-Manuel Miranda handles the daunting task of translating some of Sondheim’s lyrics into Spanish. “It was the hardest bilingual crossword puzzle I’ve ever done,” Miranda told the New York Times. For his part, Sondheim gave his blessing. “I was only concerned that Lin observe the rhyme scheme.” The production ran for 748 performances and earned a Tony nomination for Best Revival of a Musical. *In the Heights’* Karen Olivo, who played Anita, won the Tony for Best Featured Actress in a Musical.
About the director

Lisa Mallette is in her 14th season at City Lights and 10th as Executive Artistic Director, and is thrilled to see the company continuing dramatic artistic and administrative momentum.

Lisa has appeared onstage at City Lights in The Language Archive, Clouds Hill, String of Pearls, Dead Man Walking, and August: Osage County. She has directed such shows as Jesus Christ Superstar, The Full Monty, Hair, Rent, Amadeus, the world premiere of Spacebar: A Broadway Play by Kyle Sugarman, and this season’s Build.

Lisa is a member of the Theatre Bay Area Board of Directors and chairs the TBA Theatre Services Committee, and she is also the 2014 recipient of the Silicon Valley Creates Artist Laureate Award. A native of San Francisco, she is the mother of two beautiful daughters, Sophie and Olivia.

Why did she choose West Side Story for City Lights? “I’ve always loved the musical. I think the music is unbelievable, and it’s such a beautiful story that I find completely relevant today,” she said, adding, “I personally am moved by stories that deal with racism, bigotry, anything that causes fear in one another because of our differences. The closet activist in me likes to find stories that deal with issues that we’re still working on as a community and as a society and as a people.”

West Side is a challenge for small theaters because its music needs a full, rich sound, and City Lights doesn’t have room for an orchestra. You can’t do Bernstein’s music justice with a small “unplugged” ensemble, either.

Then, last summer, City Lights used recorded orchestration for the first time in Monty Python’s SPAMALOT, to great success, and Lisa saw that West Side was possible. “It opened up a whole other genre of musicals that we can do here.”

Parodies, tributes and odd bedfellows (Little Richard and Alice Cooper?)

Have you played Anita, Maria and Officer Krupke? Have you seen the show 15 times in 5 states? We still bet you haven’t seen a spectacle like Cher singing EVERY role. Don’t believe us? Head to bit.ly/westsidecher.

Tribute and parody videos abound for this classic musical. For some reason, it has captured the American imagination—and taste for making fun of things—in a particularly vital way. Two more of our favorites: the gang in TV’s Scrubs facing off (surgical interns vs. medical interns), and the “Crazy/Cool” TV commercial for The Gap. Watch the videos at bit.ly/westsidescrubs and bit.ly/westsidegap.

By the way, Cher is not the only musician to take on these tunes. Did you know that music from West Side Story has also been recorded by Shirley Bassey, Yes, Jose Carreras, Tom Waits, Trisha Yearwood, the Pet Shop Boys, Little Richard and Alice Cooper?
Meet *West Side Story*’s costume designer

Melissa Sanchez is new to City Lights, but we already can’t imagine the place without her. Besides cheerfully handling costumes for 26 actors in *West Side Story*, she has also signed on as costume designer for *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. This play, which opens in September, is an adaptation by Jeffrey Hatcher of the classic Robert Louis Stevenson novella.

Melissa had been working as a wardrobe supervisor in Los Angeles after earning her bachelor’s from San Francisco State in technical theater with a costume-design concentration. Back in the Bay Area, she heard City Lights needed volunteers, and offered to help where she could be useful. Hey, how about dressing a bunch of Sharks and Jets?

Though Melissa has designed opera and original works, this is her first time designing a musical, and she’s having a great time. Ever since she was a student, she wanted to be a part of the stage. “Even if it was sewing hems, or wardrobe supervising or helping people change out of their costumes. I just wanted to be involved,” she said.

To approach *West Side Story*, she spent time with the movie and script, sat in on rehearsals, and thought a lot about colors. “The Jets are blue and white. The Sharks are more jewel tones, reds and silvers,” she said. “And I didn’t want them to look like they were wearing old pieces from the ‘50s. I wanted them to look modern, but period.” Shark girl Anita, for example, wears a halter-top dress in a rich berry.

“I get to know the actors, so I put their personality into what their characters are,” Melissa said. “When they put it on and feel great in it, when they get excited, it makes me happy that they’re going to enjoy performing in it.”

Like many designers, Melissa is a history buff. What’s her dream period to work in? Fortuitously, it’s the Victorian era of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

“I love the corsets, the bustles, the men’s coats. The whole look of it is so romantic,” she said. So too is the concept of getting dressed being an art form. “The elegance of putting on a whole ensemble for going about your daily life is a romantic notion that is lost. But it’s not lost in theater.”

As Anita, Danielle Mendoza will wear this jewel-toned dress.

Photograph by Susan Mah Photography.

The stage chemistry isn’t faked: our cast really has this much fun together. Visit our back wall to see goofy rehearsal photos, and quotes from the actors about what this show means to them.

Audience members can contribute quotes on Facebook. Tell us about the first time you saw *West Side Story*, or just why you love the show. We’re at [facebook.com/citylightstheater](http://facebook.com/citylightstheater).
City Lights Theater Company presents *West Side Story* from July 16 through Aug. 23, 2015. Shows are Thursday-Saturday at 8 p.m., Sundays at 2 p.m., and three 8 p.m. Wednesdays (Aug. 5, 12, 19), at 529 S. Second St., San Jose. Details: cltc.org, 408-295-4200

*West Side Story* credits

Director: Lisa Mallette  
Choreographer: Jennifer Gorgulho  
Music Director: Katie Linza  
Stage Manager: Charnnee’ Young  
Assistant Stage Managers: Alexandra Zvargulis, Ivette Deltoro  
Scenic Design/Production Manager: Ron Gasparinetti  
Lighting Design: Nick Kumamoto  
Costume Design: Melissa Sanchez  
Props Designer: Miranda Whipple  
Sound Design: George Psarras  
Stage Tracks Operator: Dylan Golden  
Spotlight Operator: Belinda Hirsch

Cast

Chris Antunes, Melissa Baxter, Jenni Chapman, William Corkery, Dominic Dagdagan, Katherine Dela Cruz, Suzanna Dinga, Paul Estioko, Naomi Evans, Yuliya Eydelnant, Josiah Frampton, Sara Frondoni, George Gemette, Darrell Hubbard, Max Jennings, Lillian Kautz, Zoey Lytle, Jomar Martinez, Danielle Mendoza, Howard L. Miller, Amanda Nguyen, Sean Okuniewicz, Brittany Pisoni, Nick Rodriguez, Jeremy Ryan, Frank Swaringen.

Entire original production directed and choreographed by Jerome Robbins.

*West Side Story* is presented through special arrangement with Music Theatre International (MTI). All authorized performance materials are also supplied by MTI, 421 West 54th St., New York, NY 10019. Phone 212-541-4684. Fax: 212-397-4684. www.MTIShows.com