

West Side Story (1961)



Review By Tim Dirks

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West Side Story (1961) is an energetic, widely-acclaimed, melodramatic musical - a modern-day, loose re-telling of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* tragedy of feuding families, although the setting is the Upper West Side of New York City in the late 1950s with conflict between rival street gangs rather than families. *West Side Story* is still one of the best film adaptations of a musical ever created, and the finest musical film of the 60s. It arrived at a time when the silver screen was realizing tremendous competition from TV and other genres of cinematic entertainment.

Like many other musicals of its time, Hollywood again looked to a successful Broadway stage play (first starring Carol Lawrence and Larry Kert) for its source material (e.g., in earlier years, *South Pacific* (1958), *Oklahoma!* (1955), and *Carousel* (1956) were chosen, among others) and it was no different for this film. An almost completely new cast was assembled, except for actor George Chakiris (who played Riff, NOT Bernardo, in the London production). After her success in *Spendor in the Grass* (1961), Natalie Wood was chosen for the lead female role after Barbara Luna was considered. And Richard Beymer, known for his performance as Peter Van Daan in George Stevens' *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959), took the lead male role which was also considered for Marlon Brando and Elvis Presley. Chita Rivera, the Broadway actress who played the part of the tempestuous Anita, was replaced by Rita Moreno, known for her role as Tuptim in *The King and I* (1956). Supporting actor Russ Tamblyn, known for many roles in films such as *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (1954) and *Peyton Place* (1957), played the role of Riff.

The same tale has been told numerous times in past cinematic history, including:

- *Romeo and Juliet* (1916) with vampish Theda Bara as Juliet
- *Romeo and Juliet* (1916) with Francis X. Bushman as Romeo
- George Cukor's *Romeo and Juliet* (1936) with elderly 'teen' lovers Leslie Howard and Norma Shearer, John Barrymore as Mercutio, Edna May Oliver as the Nurse, and Basil Rathbone as Tybalt
- Renato Castellani's *Romeo and Juliet* (1954) with Laurence Harvey and Susan Shentall in the leads
- Paul Czinner's *Romeo and Juliet* (1966), with ballet dancers Rudolf Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn
- Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968), with appropriately-aged star-crossed lovers Leonard Whiting and Olivia Hussey
- Baz Luhrmann's hip and updated *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996) with Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes

The ground-breaking, dynamic film of 1961 was based on the successful Broadway hit - a staged musical play (opening in 1957) by writer Arthur Laurents and directed/choreographed by Jerome Robbins. The play reworked the traditional love story material (of lovers that crossed racial/ethnic barriers) and translated it, in a radical, novel and revolutionary style for a musical, to include racial strife between rival New York street gangs (newly-arrived Puerto Ricans and second-generation Americans from white European immigrant families), juvenile delinquency and inner-city problems of the mid-twentieth century - in exhilarating musical and dance form. To capture the realism of the social tragedy and its urban environment, some of the film was shot on location in Manhattan (in abandoned West Side tenements around 110th St., and other settings), but most of it was actually filmed on sound stages with stylized, artificial studio sets.

[From Shakespearean Play to Screen: The Montagues became the Anglo Jets street gang, while the Capulets were transformed into rival Puerto Ricans. Puerto Rican Maria, played by Natalie Wood, and white Tony, played by Richard Beymer, were the two lovers. The killing of Riff by Maria's brother Bernardo paralleled the killing of Romeo's friend Mercutio by Juliet's cousin Tybalt, and the retaliatory murder of Bernardo by Tony was identified with Romeo's killing of Tybalt. Secondary characters were also modified - the Nurse became Anita, Juliet's friend and confidante, and Friar Lawrence became Doc, the neighborhood drugstore owner. (However, there wasn't a climactic double-suicide in the musical.)]

The stage book was rewritten and adapted for the screen by Ernest Lehman, and the film retained the beautiful and electrifying musical score, songs and lyrics of Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim. It was co-directed by two clashing individuals from the start - veteran director Robert Wise and exciting choreographer Jerome Robbins. Both shared credit for the film's direction although Robbins was removed after a few months due to schedule delays, the over-budget production, disagreements with Wise over the film's degree of faithfulness to the stage production, and Robbins' potentially-expensive demands for perfection. The four kinetic dance sequences that Robbins choreographed ("Prologue," "America," "Cool," and "Something's Comin'") and the jazzy, interpretative score of Bernstein rhythmically communicate the passionate intensity, frustration and tough violence of the streets.

The singing of both leads was dubbed: Jimmy Bryant for former child actor Richard Beymer, and Marni Nixon for Natalie Wood, and the vocals by Rita Moreno were enhanced by Betty Wand for "A Boy Like That". [Marni Nixon also dubbed Audrey Hepburn's singing voice in *My Fair Lady* (1964).] (Visit the official West Side Story website at: <http://www.westsidestory.com>.)

The much-praised, box-office blockbuster for United Artists received eleven Academy Award nominations and won all but one - Best Adapted Screenplay. Its achievement as a ten Oscar winner has only been surpassed by three films (all with eleven Oscars): *Ben-Hur* (1959), *Titanic* (1997), and *The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King* (2003). *West Side Story's* Oscar awards include: Best Picture, Best Director (Wise and Robbins - the *first* time that awards went to co-directors), Best Supporting Actor and Actress (George Chakiris in his first major film role and Rita Moreno), Best Color Cinematography, Best Color Art Direction/Set Decoration, Best Sound, Best Scoring of a Musical Picture, Best Film Editing, and Best Color Costume Design. Robbins was also awarded a special statuette for "his brilliant achievements in the art of choreography on film." Robbins was the only Best Director Oscar winner to win for the only film he ever directed. Robert Wise won his second directorial Oscar for *The Sound of Music* (1965). Natalie Wood was un-nominated for *West Side Story*, but she was competing for a Best Actress Oscar (that she lost to Sophia Loren for *Two Women*) for her role in *Spendor in the Grass* (1961).

[The Oscar-winning short film *West Bank Story* (2006) parodied the film, with Israeli and Palestinian gangs replacing the second generation Americans and Puerto Rican gangs - fighting over falafel stands.]

During the opening prologue, a breathtaking aerial shot of Manhattan from a bird's eye view captures the city with its bridge traffic and highway ramps, its waterfront docks, parks and skyscrapers. The camera passes over recognizable landmarks as it moves steadily to the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and then speedily zooms down and plunges into a concrete playground. A gang of 'cool' white youths are posed together in one corner of a basketball court, clicking their fingers to the syncopated rhythm of the musical score. The aggressive gang members leave the fenced-in playground and cross the tenement street.

In the famous, dazzling opening sequence, they gradually break into a highly-stylized dance and then burst into a daring, high-stepping sequence - an exhilarating, inventive, visual ballet of pirouettes, vigorous athletic moves, and running jumps that symbolizes their dominance and energy - they are readying themselves for a gang brawl.

They are members of the Jets composed of white teens, led by brown-haired, All-American type Riff (Russ Tamblyn). [They represent one side of the racial rivalry, similar to Shakespeare's tense and feuding families, the Montagues and the Capulets.] Two of the gang members face off against one member of a rival gang, Sharks leader Bernardo (George Chakiris), a darker-skinned, black-haired Puerto Rican immigrant. He is joined by his gang members, and they pick up the beat by clicking their fingers. The gangs both are vying for control of the streets, alternating between dominance and submission. Two of the members provoke each other, and after an extended confrontation, a full-scale brawl breaks out when the Jets come to rescue Baby John (Eliot Feld), the youngest member of their gang, from an assault by the Sharks.

The conflict is broken up by the arrival of a precinct patrol car, carrying uniformed Officer Krupke (William Bramley) and bigoted, plainclothes policeman Lieutenant Schrank (Simon Oakland) who have stopped similar fights between the "punks" many times before:

Schrank: You hoodlums don't own these streets. And I've had all the rough-house I can put up with around here. You want to kill each other? Kill each other, but you ain't gonna do it on my beat. Are there any questions?

Bernardo: Yes, sir. Would you mind translating that into Spanish?

Schrank: Get your friends out of here, Bernardo - and stay out - *please*.

Bernardo: (to his gang) OK Sharks, vaminos.

Schrank: Boy, as if this neighborhood wasn't crummy enough. (to the Jets) Now look, fellas. Fellas? Look, let's be reasonable, huh? If I don't get a little law and order around here, I get busted down to a traffic corner. And your friend don't like traffic corners. So that means you're gonna start makin' nice with the PRs [Puerto Ricans] from now on. I said nice - GET IT! 'Cause if you don't, and I catch any of ya doing any more brawlin' in my territory, I'm gonna personally beat the living crud out of each and every one of yas and see that you go to the can and rot there. Say goodbye to the nice boys, Krupke. Krupke: Goodbye boys.

Riff speaks to his gang members and arouses their immature gang mentality. He directs his hatred toward the Puerto Ricans and their turf-encroachment. Convinced of the Jets' own strength and invincibility, he is adamant about checking the Sharks' expansion and influence in the neighborhood while still avoiding a life-threatening rumble with blades or zip guns. However, Riff would consider battling the rivals with weapons if challenged:

Riff: Now we fought hard for this turf and we ain't just gonna give it up...The Emeralds claimed it. We shut 'em out. The Hawks, remember, they tried to take it away, and we knocked 'em down to the cellar.

Members: Yeah, but these PRs are different. They multiply. They keep comin'. Like cockroaches. Close the windows. Shut the doors. They're eatin' our food. They're breathin' all the air. The end to free enterprise...

Riff: Hey, you heard what that Lieutenant Schrank said, eh? We gotta make nice with 'em Puerto Ricans or else. We gotta let 'em move in right under our noses and take it all away from us, or else.

Gang: No!

Riff: You're damned right NO. So what are we gonna do buddy-boys? I'll tell ya what we're gonna do. We're gonna speed fast. We're gonna move like lightnin'. And we're gonna clean them Sharks up once and for all so they ain't never gonna set foot on our turf again. And we're gonna do it in one, all-out fight...The Sharks want a piece of this world too. And they're real down boys. They might ask for blades, zip guns...I say this turf is small, but it's all we got, huh? Now I want to hold it like we always held it, with skin. But if they say blades, I say blades. If they say guns, I say guns. I say I want that just to be the number one - to sail, to hold the sky...OK cats, we rumble. Now, protocolity calls for a war council between us and the Sharks, to set the whole thing up. So I would personally give the bad news to Bernardo.

Riff proposes getting help from Tony, a young Polish boy and ex-leader of the Jets who has grown away from them and taken a respectable job: "We need Tony. He's got a rep that's bigger than the whole West Side...He always came through for us and he always will." Tony could serve as the Jets' lieutenant for the impending showdown.

The Jet Song:

(Sung by Riff and others)

(Riff) When you're a Jet, you're a Jet all the way
From your first cigarette to your last dyin' day!
When you're a Jet, let 'em do what they can
You've got brothers around, you're a family man!
You're never alone, you're never disconnected, you're home with your own
When company's expected, you're well-protected!
Then you are set with a capital J
Which you'll never forget till they cart you away
When you're a Jet you stay a Jet

Riff suggests persuading Tony, who founded the gang but has since moved on, to "stand up" with him and the Jets at the local dance and challenge rival gang-leader Bernardo to a rumble:

Riff: Now I know Tony like I know me and I guarantee you can count him in.

Action: (Tony Mordente) In, out, let's get crackin'.

Gee-Tar: (Tommy Abbott) Where you gonna find Bernardo?

Baby John: It ain't safe to go and be in our territory.

Riff: He'll be at the dance tonight at the gym.

A-rab: (David Winters) Yeah, but the gym's neutral territory.

Riff: A-rab. I'm gonna make nice with him! I'm only gonna challenge him.

Ice: (Tucker Smith) Great, Daddy-o!

Riff: So listen, everybody dress up sweet and sharp. Meet Tony and me at the dance at ten. And walk tall!

A-rab: We always walk tall!

Baby John: We're Jets!

Another member: The greatest!

The Jets Song (continued):

(Snowboy) When you're a Jet, you're a top cat in town
You're a gold medal kid with the heavyweight crown!
(Ice) When you're a Jet, you're the swingin'est thing
Little boy, you're a man, little man, you're a king.
(All Jets) The Jets are in gear, our cylinders are clickin'
The Sharks'll steer clear, 'cause every Puerto Rican's a lousy chicken
Here come the Jets, like a bat out of hell
Someone gets in our way, someone don't feel so well
Here come the Jets, little world, step aside
Better go underground, better run, better hide
We're drawin' the line, so keep your noses hidden
We're hangin' a sign, says: 'Visitors Forbidden'
And we ain't kiddin'
Here come the Jets, Yeah, and we're gonna beat
Every last buggin' gang on the whole buggin' street
On the whole...Buggin'...Ever...Lovin'...Street...Yeah

Tony, an ambitious, level-headed young man who is responsibly employed and works for a living at Doc's, the neighborhood drug and candy store, resists Riff's invitation to the dance, to confront the Sharks that "walk bad" and "fight hard" on neutral turf. Riff pleads for one last favor from his idealistic best friend who has left his past behind and dreams of moving on to something "just around the corner":

Tony: Every single night for the last month, I wake up. And I'm reachin' out.

Riff: For what?

Tony: I don't know.

Riff: A dame?

Tony: It's right outside the door. Just around the corner. But it's comin'.

Riff: What is?

Tony: I don't know. It's like the kick I used to get from bein' a Jet, you know?

Riff: Oh, well now you're talkin'. Oh man, without a gang, you're an orphan. With a gang, you walk in twos, threes, fours. And when your crew is the best, when you're a Jet, you're out in the sun, buddy-boy. You're home free home.

Tony: Riff, I've had it.

Riff: Tony, Tony, look at me, will ya? Come on, look at me...Now, I never asked the time of day from a clock, did I? I never asked nothin' from nobody. But I'm askin' you: 'Come to the dance tonight.'

Tony: I promised Doc I'd clean up the store tonight.

Riff: Then do it after the dance. Tony, I already told the guys you'd be there. If you don't show up, I'll be marked lousy.

Tony: What time'd ya tell 'em?

Riff: Ten. For me Tony, for Riff!

Tony: Ten it is. (They shake)

Riff: Womb to tomb!

Tony: Birth to Earth. And I'll live to regret this.

Riff: Who knows? Maybe what you're waitin' for will be twitchin' at the dance tonight?

Tony sings: "Something's Coming," a song of expectancy about the coming night:

Something's Coming:

Could be, who knows? There's something due any day.

I will know right away, soon as it shows.

It may come cannonballin' down through the sky, gleam in its eye, bright as a rose!

Who knows? It's only just out of reach, down the block, on a beach, under a tree.

I got a feeling there's a miracle due, gonna come true, coming to me.

Could it be? Yes it could, something's coming, something good.

If I can wait, something's coming, I don't know what it is, but it is gonna be great...

His dance under many clotheslines heaped with laundry transitions with a match-cut to a scene in the back of Madame Lucia's Bridal Shop where fabric hangs. There, a young, newly-arrived (a month earlier), innocent-looking Puerto Rican girl, Maria (Natalie Wood in her second adult film role), speaks in a heavy accent to Anita (Rita Moreno) while she makes alterations to Maria's dress for the evening's dance. Maria begs her to lower the neckline one more inch on her dress, as she slightly pulls down on her own bodice ("How much can one little inch do?"). However, Maria's over-protective brother Bernardo (and Anita's boyfriend), who wants to prevent her from growing up too fast, has already forbidden it: "Bernardo made me promise." Maria's older brother has brought her over to marry Chino (Jose de Vega), but she feels no romantic attraction to him:

Maria: When I look at Chino, nothing happens.

Anita: Well, what do you expect to happen?

Maria: I don't know. Something. What happens when you look at Bernard?

Anita: It's when I don't look that it happens.

When Maria tries on the plain white dress with a wide red belt, she complains: "White is for babies," but after trying it on, she becomes ecstatic: "It is a beautiful dress!"

Bernardo (regarded as a "watchdog" by Maria) views his sister as "a precious jewel."

Maria: My brother is a silly watchdog.

Bernardo: Ah, my sister is a precious jewel.

Anita: What am I, cut glass?

Maria is thrilled and excited about her 'coming out' that evening: "It is most important that I have a wonderful time at the dancing tonight...because tonight is the real beginning of my life as a young lady

of America." She spins backwards, and a rainbow of colors envelopes her - the background behind her turns black, and becomes the spinning shapes at the gym dance.

The gymnasium dance sequence dissolves into view. [Most of the Jets' couples are dressed in light-colored party clothes, while the Sharks wear darker colors. The Jets dance with more bold movements, the Sharks with sinuous, sleek steps.] Glad Hand (John Astin), a 'square' social worker who has organized the dance, separates the warring factions in the middle of the gym floor, and naively announces to the "boys and girls" (or "kids") something special: a "get-together dance" to "make new friends" and "get closer to old ones."
I want you to form two circles...boys on the outside and girls on the inside...When the music stops, each boy dances with whichever girl is opposite.

After a brief stand-off, members of both gangs form two circles and play one round of the game - it fails miserably. Male gang members refuse to dance with members of the opposite sex from the camps of their hated enemies. In the volatile atmosphere, dozens of couples from both gangs display their rivalry and compete for center-stage dance-floor space. Their snappy, exuberant gyrations are shot from a floor-level camera.

From across the dance floor, Maria and Tony spot each other and become magically entranced - everything around them is blurred and in soft focus. As the lights around them go out, they are drawn to each other - it is instantaneous love at first sight. As a couple, they perform a light ballet to the tune of "Maria." The black sky behind them is dotted with multi-colored stars.

Tony: You're not thinkin' I'm someone else.

Maria: I know you are not.

Tony: Or that we met before?

Maria: I know we have not.

Tony: I felt - I knew something never before was gonna happen, had to happen, but this is so much more.

Maria: My hands are cold. (He touches and takes her hands) Yours too. (She gently caresses his cheek with her right hand) So warm.

Tony: (He is guided to touch her face) So beautiful.

Maria: Beautiful.

Tony: It's so much to believe. You're not makin' a joke.

Maria: I have not yet learned how to joke that way. I think now I never will.

When their romantic reverie ends and the lights come back up, Bernardo pushes the American away from improperly kissing his appealing sister:

Bernardo: Get your hands off, American...Stay away from my sister.

Tony: Sister?

Bernardo: Couldn't you see he's one of them?

Maria: No. I saw only him.

Bernardo: There's only one thing they want from a Puerto Rican girl.

Tony: That's a lie!

Riff: (restraining him) Later, Tony.

Chino: Get away.

Tony: Stay out of this, Chino. (To Maria) Don't listen.

Bernardo: She will listen to her brother before she listens to you.

Maria must abide by her familial obligations. Bernardo orders Chino to take Maria home. Riff uses the incident as an opportunity to call a "war-council" with the rival gang leader. Bernardo accepts the proposal to meet at midnight at Doc's candy-store. As Tony walks from the dance in a love-sick daze and the settings change behind and around him, he sings a lyrical love song about "Maria," his newly-found loved one:

Maria:

The most beautiful sound I ever heard
All the beautiful sounds of the world in a single word - Maria
I just met a girl named Maria, and suddenly that name
Will never be the same to me.
Maria - I just kissed a girl named Maria
And suddenly I found how wonderful a sound can be
Maria - say it loud and there's music playing
Say it soft and it's almost like praying - Maria
I'll never stop saying Maria, Maria, Maria...

Now that the lovers are in the midst of increasing conflict between the two gangs, Bernardo lectures at his sister for stepping over forbidden boundaries:

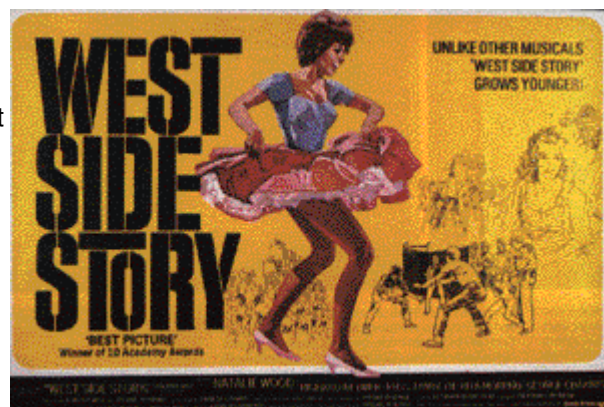
Bernardo: Now I will not say these things to spoil your evening or to hear myself talk. I am here longer than you, Maria...Someday, when you're an old married woman with five children, then you can tell me what to do. Right now, it's the other way around. Now go to bed.
Anita: (To Maria) He's the old married woman. (To Bernardo) You know, she has a mother. Also a father.
Bernardo: They do not know this country any better than she does.
Anita: And you do not know it at all. Girls here are free to have fun. She is in America now.
Bernardo: Puerto Rico is in America now.
Anita: Sometimes I don't know which is thicker. Your skull or your accent.

On the rooftop of their tenement building, Bernardo's wise and feisty girlfriend claims that the gang leader used Maria's love for someone of a different culture and race as an excuse for the winner-take-all rumble:

Anita: I mind your nose and your head broken....Sure. They used Maria as an excuse to start World War III.
Bernardo: It is more than that.
Anita: More than what? She was only dancing.
Bernardo: With an American. He was really a Pollack.
Anita: Says the Spic.
Bernardo: You are not so cute.
Rosalia (Suzie Kaye): That Tony is.
Female: And he works.
Chino: As a delivery boy.
Anita: (To Chino) And what are you?
Chino: An assistant.
Bernardo: Si. And Chino makes half of what the Pollack makes.
Anita: Oh, here comes the whole commercial. 'Your mother's a Pole. Your father's a Swede. But you were born here. That's all that you need. You are an American.'

In contrast to other second generation immigrants, their entry into America as Puerto Ricans was met with disillusionment, prejudice and lies: "When I think of how I thought it would be for us here, we came like children, believing, trusting." The rewards of being an American are materialistic: driving a fancy Cadillac, "air-conditioned," "built-in bar," "telephone" "and television," "compartment of Cola."

With the entire Puerto Rican cast on the rooftop, hot-blooded Anita sings and dances, with biting wit and humor, about her love for her new homeland in the rousing, lively and aggressive "America." The land of the free is both a land of opportunity *and* enmity for new immigrants:



America:

(Anita) Puerto Rico, My heart's devotion, let it sink back in the ocean
Always the hurricanes blowing, always the population growing
And the money owing, and the sunlight streaming and the natives steaming
I like the island of Manhattan, smoke on your pipe and put that in!
(Girls) I like to be in America, OK by me in America, Everything free in America
(Bernardo) For a small fee in America
(Anita) Buying on credit is so nice
(Bernardo) One look at us and they charge twice
(Rosalia) I'll have my own washing machine.
(Indio) (Gus Trikonis) What will you have, though, to keep clean?
(Anita) Skyscrapers bloom in America
(Rosalia) Cadillacs zoom in America
(Girl) Industry boom in America
(Boys) Twelve in a room in America.
(Anita) Lots of new housing with more space
(Bernardo) Lots of doors slamming in our face
(Anita) I'll get the terrace apartment
(Bernardo) Better get rid of your accent
(Anita) Life can be bright in America
(Boys) If you can fight in America
(Girls) Life is all right in America
(Boys) If you're all white in America
(Girls) Here you are free and you have pride
(Boys) Long as you stay on your own side
(Girls) Free to be anything you choose
(Boys) Free to wait tables and shine shoes
(Bernardo) Everywhere grime in America, organized crime in America, terrible time in America
(Anita) You forget I'm in America
(Bernardo) I think I'll go back to San Juan
(Anita) I know what boat you can get on
(Bernardo) Everyone there will give big cheers
(Anita) Everyone there will have moved here.

As "an American girl now," the lusty, Puerto Rican spitfire insists that Bernardo choose between his "big important war-council" and her. He selects the war-council, claiming that "back home, women know their place," and that war-councils are held by Americans.

That evening, Tony visits with Maria on the tenement fire escape outside her bedroom - the *Romeo and Juliet* balcony scene - although she knows the danger and cautions him. Despite the hatred and fear of the rival gangs they are connected to, Tony is oblivious to all the potential, obvious, and long-standing difficulties that their inter-racial relationship could cause:

Maria: If Bernardo knew.

Tony: We'll let him know. I'm not one of 'em, Maria.

Maria: But you are not one of us. And I am not one of you.

They embrace, sing to each other, and join in unison to express their love to each other with the love duet "Tonight," one of the film's most favorite, timeless songs:

Tonight:

(Maria) Only you, you're the only thing I'll see forever in my eyes, in my words and in everything I do,
nothing else but you, ever
(Tony) And there's nothing for me but Maria, every sight that I see is Maria
(Maria) Tony, Tony
(Tony) Always you, every thought I'll ever know, everywhere I go you'll be
(Tony and Maria) All the world is only you and me

(Maria) Tonight, tonight, it all began tonight, I saw you and the world went away
Tonight, tonight, there's only you tonight, what you are, what you do, what you say
(Tony) Today, all day I had the feeling a miracle would happen, I know now I was right
(Tony and Maria) For here you are and what was just a world is a star tonight
Tonight, tonight, the world is full of light with suns and moons all over the place
Tonight, tonight, the world is wild and bright, going mad shooting sparks into space
Today, the world was just an address, a place for me to live in, no better than all right
But here you are and what was just a world is a star tonight
Good night, good night, sleep well and when you dream, dream of me tonight.

They decide to see each other the next day after Maria's work in Madame Lucia's Bridal Shop across the street from her home.

While waiting for the "war-council" in front of Doc's store, Officer Krupke's squad car drives up, and Krupke wants them to move on instead of blocking the sidewalks.

Action: If you don't leave us stay out on the streets all night, we're liable to turn into a bunch of juvenile delinquents.

Krupke: Listen, I know yus guys was cookin' up somethin' at the dance tonight. So don't think yus are gonna put nothin' over on me...Now go on, get a move on, all of yus. And don't let me catch none of yus around here when I get back.

The next bowdlerized song, "Gee, Officer Krupke," mocks the police and blames multiple sources for the causes of juvenile delinquency among youth: poor parenting and role modeling, abuse, drug addiction, alcoholism, and the propagation of unwanted children. The poor victim is shunted from one social institution to another: the police department, a judge in the court system, a therapist and headshrinker, and a social worker. The "punk" is labeled as "no good," "psychologically disturbed," "depraved," and "sociologically sick."

Gee, Officer Krupke:

(Tiger, imitating Krupke) Hey you!

(Riff) Who me, Officer Krupke?

(Tiger imitating Krupke) Yeah you. Gimme one good reason for not draggin' ya down to the station house, ya punk!

(Riff) Dear kindly Sergeant Krupke, you gotta understand

It's just our bringin' upke, that gets us out of hand

Our mothers all are junkies, our fathers all are drunks

Golly Moses, naturally we're punks

(Jets) Gee, Officer Krupke, we're very upset

We never had the love that every child oughta get

We ain't no delinquents, we're misunderstood

Deep down inside us there is good

(Riff) There is good!

(Jets) There is good, there is good, there is untapped good

Like inside, the worst of us is good

(Tiger) That's a touching good story

(Riff) Let me tell it to the world

(Tiger imitating Krupke) Just tell it to the Judge

(Riff) Dear kindly Judge, your Honor, my parents treat me rough

With all their marijuana they won't give me a puff

They didn't wanna have me but somehow I was had

Leapin' lizards, that's why I'm so bad

(Snowboy imitating Judge) Right! Officer Krupke, you're really a square

This boy don't need a judge, he needs an analyst's care

It's just his neurosis, that oughta be curbed

He's psychologically disturbed

(Riff) I'm disturbed

(Jets) We're disturbed, we're disturbed, we're the most disturbed

Like we're psychologically disturbed
(Snowboy imitating Judge) Hear ye, hear ye, in the opinion of this court, this child is depraved on account he ain't had a normal home.
(Riff) Hey, I'm depraved on account I'm deprived.
(Snowboy imitating Judge) So take him to a Headshrinker. You!
(Action) Who me?
(Riff) My daddy beats my mommy, my mommy clobbers me
['My mother is a bastard, my pa's an S.O.B.' in the stage play]
My grandpa is a commie, my grandma pushes tea
My sister wears a mustache, my brother wears a dress
Goodness gracious, that's why I'm a mess
(Action imitating Headshrinker) Yes, Officer Krupke, he shouldn't be here
This boy don't need a couch, he needs a useful career
Society's played him a terrible trick, and sociologically he's sick
(Riff) I am sick!
(Jets) We are sick, we are sick, we are sick, sick, sick
Like we're sociologically sick
(Action imitating Headshrinker) In my opinion, this child does not need to have his head shrunk at all. Juvenile delinquency is purely a social disease.
(Riff) Hey, I got a social disease!
(Action imitating Headshrinker) So take him to a Social Worker
(Riff) Dear kindly Social Worker, they tell me get a job
Like be a soda jerker which means I'd be a slob
It's not I'm antisocial, I'm only anti-work
Glory Osky, that's why I'm a jerk
(A-Rab) Eek, Officer Krupke, you've done it again
This boy don't need a job, he needs a year in the pen
It ain't just a question of misunderstood, deep down inside him he's no good
(Riff) I'm no good
(Jets) We're no good, we're no good, we're no earthly good
Like the best of us is no damn good
The trouble is he's lazy, the trouble is he drinks
The trouble is he's crazy, the trouble is he stinks
The trouble is he's growing, the trouble is he's grown
Krupke, we've got troubles of our own
Officer Krupke, we're down on our knees
(Riff) 'Cause no one wants a fella with a social disease
(Jets) Dear Officer Krupke, what are we to do?
Gee, Officer Krupke, Krup you! [a euphemism for a more familiar 'f' word]

Doc (Ned Glass), who returns to his shop, calls the Jets "hoodlums," and thinks that their plans to "rumble" with the PRs over territory is senseless: "Fightin' over a little piece of street is so important?"

The Sharks and the Jets conduct a "war-council" session in the store, peppered with insults and derogatory epithets:

Riff: We challenge you to a rumble. All out, once and for all. Accept?
Bernardo: On what terms?
Riff: Whatever terms you're callin'? You crossed the line once too often.
Bernardo: You started it.
Riff: Who jumped Baby John this afternoon?
Bernardo: Who jumped me the first day I moved here?
Action: Who asked you to move here?

The Sharks accept the rumble, planned for the next day "after dark" under the highway. Tony enters the store as they are discussing the call for weapons, with increased tempo and volume: "Rocks, belts, pipes, cans, bricks, bats, clubs, chains..." He interrupts the cadence between the two sides:

Tony: Bottles, knives, guns. What a coop full of chickens?

Action: Who are you calling chicken?

Bernardo: Every dog knows his own.

Tony: I'm calling you all chicken. Big tough buddy-boys gotta throw bricks, huh? Afraid you're getting close? Afraid to slug it out? Afraid to use plain skin?

Now "in love," Tony suggests a rumble that is also a "fair fight if you've got the guts to risk that? Best man from each gang will slug it out." He persuades them to accept a fist fight between the strongest representatives from each side for a decisive, final battle. Bernardo threatens Tony personally, thinking that he will be selected as the representative: "When I get through with you, you will be like a fish after skinning."

The prejudiced Lt. Schrank intrudes and is amazed to find the members of the gangs peacefully socializing together in Doc's place. He accepts credit for the relaxation of tensions - although it is a sham - and then viciously throws the Puerto Ricans out:

I get a promotion and you Puerto Ricans get what you've been itchin' for. Use of the playground, use of the gym, the streets, the candy store. So what if they do turn this whole town into a stinkin' pigsty. (Bernardo bursts up from his chair, and is restrained by Riff) Don't stop him. He wants to get home. Write a few letters to San Juan, tell them about how he's got it made over here. What I mean is, CLEAR OUT! I said CLEAR OUT. (Seething with restrained anger, Bernardo stares at Schrank from a few feet away) Oh yeah, sure, I know. It's a free country and I ain't got the right. But I got a badge. Whaddya you got? Things are tough all over. BEAT IT!

The Sharks exit, whistling "My Country Tis of Thee" as they depart.

Claiming that he's for them, Schrank wants the Jets to divulge where the rumble will be held: "I want this beat cleaned up and you can do it for me. I'll even lend a hand if things get rough. Now, where are ya gonna rumble?" He chastises them when no one answers with foul-mouthed insults: "Why don't you get smart, you stupid hooligans? I oughta take you down to the station and throw you in the can right now. You and the tin-horn immigrant scum you come from." As they leave, he threatens to be there at the rumble: "Don't worry. I'll find out where it's gonna be. So be sure to finish each other off because if you don't, I will."

In the bridal shop the following day, Maria models fancy hats, coyly agreeing that she is "crazy" in love, "looks somehow different," and "is up to something." She tells her gossipy Puerto Rican girlfriends "what is going on" by singing "I Feel Pretty":

I Feel Pretty:

(Maria) I feel pretty, oh so pretty, I feel pretty and witty and gay,
And I pity, any girl who isn't me today
I feel charming, oh so charming, it's alarming how charming I feel
And so pretty, that I hardly can believe I'm real
See the pretty girl in that mirror there? Who can that attractive girl be?
Such a pretty face, such a pretty dress, such a pretty smile, such a pretty me!
I feel stunning and entrancing, feel like running and dancing for joy
For I'm loved by a pretty wonderful boy

(Girls) Have you met my good friend Maria, the craziest girl on the block?

You'll know her the minute you see her, she's the one who is in an advanced state of shock

She thinks she's in love, she thinks she's in Spain

She isn't in love, she's merely insane

It must be the heat or some rare disease

Or too much to eat or maybe it's fleas

Keep away from her, send for Chino

This is not the Maria we know

Modest and pure, polite and refined

Well-bred and mature and out of her mind

Miss America, Miss America, speech!

Miss America, bravo, speech!

(Maria) I feel pretty, oh so pretty, that the city should give me its key
A committee should be organized to honor me
I feel dizzy, I feel sunny, I feel fizzy and funny and fine
And so pretty Miss America can just resign
(Maria and Girls) See that pretty girl in that mirror there, (What mirror, where?)
Who can that attractive girl be? (Which, what, where, whom?)
Such a pretty face, such a pretty dress, such a pretty smile, such a pretty me!
I feel stunning and entrancing, feel like running and dancing for joy
For I'm loved by a pretty wonderful boy

Since it is six-o'clock and quitting time, Maria tells Anita that she will be locking up the shop: "I have work." After taking a luxurious bubble bath with Black Orchid, Anita is expecting a date with Bernardo following the evening's rumble between the Sharks and the Jets. Peace-loving Maria doesn't understand the politics of gang warfare:

Maria: What rumble?

Anita: Oh, well, uh, 'Nardo's Sharks and those boys at the dance.

Maria: They fight each other tonight?

Anita: They don't play patsy.

Maria: Why must they always fight?

Anita: Well, you saw how they dance, like they got to get rid of something quick. That's how they fight.

Maria: To get rid of what?

Anita: Too much feeling, and they do get rid of it. Boy, after a fight, that brother of yours is so healthy.

Tony arrives to see Maria - Anita gives both of them a knowing look and a sarcastic rendering of Maria's self-less helpfulness: "I will lock up." She gives them a worried look and warns them about defying loyalties and breaking the rules of their respective societies: "You're out of your heads." Maria urges Tony to go to the rumble as a peacemaker, to stop the fist fight between Bernardo and Ice:

Maria: You must go and stop it.

Tony: I have stopped it. It's only gonna be a fist fight now between two of 'em...

Maria: Any fight is no good for us.

Tony: Maria, everything is good for us. We got magic.

Maria: Listen and hear me. You must go and stop it.

Tony: It means that much to you?

Maria: Yes.

Tony: All right, I will then.

Maria: I believe you. You do have magic.

Tony: Of course, I've got you.

They playfully pantomime their engagement and wedding with mannequins that represent the in-laws and other members of their families. With a bridal veil on her head, and a black top hat on his head, they walk down an imaginary aisle in the store and enact their wedding. As a couple, they kneel and exchange marital vows. The setting resembles a church and an altar - the store's window above them with a cross bathed in gold light accentuates the holy nature of their bonding: "'til death do us part." Their soothing duet, "One Hand, One Heart," establishes their oneness as they exchange private vows:

One Hand, One Heart:

(Tony) Make of our hands one hand, Make of our hearts one heart

Make of our vows one last vow, Only death will part us now

(Maria) Make of our lives one life, Day after day one life

(Tony and Maria) Now it begins, now we start

One hand, one heart, even death won't part us now

The scene abruptly changes to a blood-red sky, and the approach of the combatants, Sharks and Jets, toward their eventual confrontation at the rumble, sung by all gang members. Verses and cross-cut

scenes in the same dance and song sequence "Quintet" show paralleling, interwoven events from the perspectives of different characters (the gangs, Anita, Tony, and Maria) as they each face the night. Anita expects to get her kicks in a "private little mix" with her "hot and tired poor dear" Bernardo. Tony sings: "I'll see my love tonight and for us stars will stop where they are." Maria is impatient with the slow passage of time:

Today the minutes seem like hours, the hours go so slowly and still the sky is light. Oh moon, grow bright and make this endless day endless night.

The Puerto Ricans scale a tall chain-link fence under the highway. The Jets appear on the top of a facing concrete wall, jump down, and face them. After dispensing with the shaking of hands, Bernardo urges: "Look, every one of you hates every one of us, and we hate you right back. Let's get at it." Tony interrupts the rumble, the hand-fight between Ice and Bernardo, after it has just begun: "Hold it!" He steps between the two gang combatants to mediate and prevent senseless fighting. The leader of the Jets challenges and taunts Tony to fight in a warm-up bout: "Afraid pretty boy? Afraid gutless? Afraid chicken?...You yellow-bellied chicken...Pollack."

During the elaborately-choreographed, action-oriented dance/fight, Riff defends Tony and punches Bernardo - the two pull out gleaming switchblades and escalate the conflict to deadly proportions. Riff is disarmed and stands defenseless in front of a chain-link fence, but is given another blade by a fellow gang member. Meanwhile, Tony is held back by the Sharks. Bernardo accidentally kills Riff with a single plunge of the knife to his mid-section. As he falls, Riff passes his switchblade to Tony. In retaliation to counter Riff's death, Tony vengefully and passionately stabs and kills Bernardo. The sounds of police sirens force the gangs to scatter. Two bodies are left at the scene. Despite his intentions, he has caused further bloodshed. Horrified and anguished, Tony cries out: "Maria!" A spotlight catches Tony in its circular beam, pronouncing him guilty in the tragedy. A church bell tolls the time - a somber death knell.

Maria is waiting for Tony on the rooftop of her tenement building, expecting to hear of his peaceful intervention. In a short, lovely and enchanting dance sequence, she expresses her inner happiness by dancing around by herself on the rooftop. Chino appears with a bloody bruise on his cheek, visible when he steps into the light. Dismayed, Maria realizes there's been a fight, although "nobody meant for it to happen." She is feverishly curious about Tony's well-being. Chino yells at her: "He killed your brother!" She is stunned to learn of her brother's death, and numbed by the tragic turn of events. Maria can't believe that her boyfriend has killed her own brother. She prays in her bedroom before the Virgin Mary: "Make it not be true!...I will do anything. Make me die."

Tony climbs into her bedroom window - she pounds on his chest and collapses. He admits: "I tried to stop it. I did try. I don't know what went wrong. I didn't mean to hurt him. I didn't wanna. Riff- he was like my brother. When Bernardo killed him, Bernardo didn't mean it either...I thought you knew." Now that she knows he killed her brother in retaliation, she decides to forgive him and to steadfastly stand by him - she is incapable of hating him. She urges: "Stay with me. Don't leave me...Hold me...Tighter." Tony remains blinded and rebelliously-indifferent to their plight, believing and hoping that there is still "Somewhere" they can run away to and find peace together for their forbidden love:

Tony: It'll be all right, I know it. We're really together now.

Maria: But it's not us. It's everything around us.

Tony: Then I'll take you away where nothing can get to us - not anyone or anything.

Somewhere:

(Tony) There's a place for us, Somewhere a place for us
Peace and quiet and open air wait for us, Somewhere

(Maria) There's a time for us, Some day a time for us
Time together with time to spare, time to look, time to care, Someday

(Tony) Somewhere we'll find a new way of living

(Maria) We'll find a way of forgiving, Somewhere

(Tony and Maria) There's a place for us, a time and place for us

Hold my hand and we're halfway there
Hold my hand and I'll take you there
Somehow, Someday, Somewhere

Although some of the Jets gang regret the killings, an edgy and tense Action vows to get even:
"They're gonna pay, them stinkin' Sharks." Ice urges everyone to "play it cool" until the crisis blows over:

Now you all better dig this and dig it good. No matter who or what is eatin' you, man, you show it and you are dead. You are cuttin' a hole in yourselves for them to stick in a red hot umbrella and open it. Wide. Man, you wanna get past the cops when they start askin' you about tonight? You wanna live in this lousy world? You play it cool.

Together, they sing/dance "Cool," a finger-snapping, tense, beat-oriented tune in a deserted delivery van parking garage with a low ceiling. The Jets plan to find Tony before Chino does - he's hunting for Tony with a gun.

After sleeping together in her bedroom, Maria and Tony make plans to "go so far away they'll never find us," using "getaway money" from Doc. They will escape the surrounding hatred and find a less violent, hateful world to live in. Tony decides to hide out in the cellar of Doc's store, until she can get word to him. Anita discovers that they remain lovers despite the fact that Tony killed Maria's brother:

Maria: Now you know.

Anita: And you still don't know. He is one of them.

Maria: No, Anita.

Anita: Yes.

Still grieving the death of her boyfriend Bernardo, Anita insists that Maria forget loving her enemy and "stick to your own kind." She chides Maria with a song: "A Boy Like That."

A Boy Like That:

A boy like that who'd kill your brother
Forget that boy and find another
One of your own kind, stick to your own kind
A boy like that will give you sorrow
You'll meet another boy tomorrow
One of your own kind, stick to your own kind
A boy who kills cannot love, a boy who kills has no heart
And he's the boy who gets your love
And gets your heart, very smart Maria, very smart
A boy like that wants one thing only
And when he's done he'll leave you lonely
He'll murder your love, he murdered mine
Just wait and see, just wait Maria, just wait and see

Faithful to Tony, Maria declares her love in another song, "I Have a Love":

I Have a Love:

Oh no Anita, no, Anita, no, it isn't true, not for me
It's true for you, not for me
I hear your words and in my head I know they're smart
But my heart, Anita, but my heart knows they're wrong
You should know better, you were in love
Or so you said, you should know better
I have a love and it's all that I have
Right or wrong, what else can I do?

I love him, I'm his, and everything he is I am too
I have a love, and it's all that I need
Right or wrong, and he needs me too
I love him, we're one, there's nothing to be done
Not a thing I can do, but hold him, hold him forever
Be with him now, tomorrow and all of my life
(Maria and Anita) When love comes so strong
There is no right or wrong
Your love is your life

Anita is convinced of Maria's true love for Tony - "right or wrong." Lieutenant Schrank, in the midst of an investigation of the killings of Riff and Bernardo, arrives to ask Maria about the identity of the "wrong boy" she danced with in the gymnasium - an incident that stimulated conflict between the gangs. Cleverly, she uses disguised language to send Anita to Doc's store to take a warning message to Tony: "Tell him I have been detained and can't get there right away." Anita enters Doc's store to deliver the important message - but she is mercilessly insulted and taunted by the vengeful Jets as a "greaseball." Smoke is blown in her face, and she is not permitted to pass because "she's too dark." The Puerto Rican is exasperated by their obtuse ignorance: "Don't you understand? I want to help." Labeled as "Bernardo's tramp, Bernardo's pig, lyin' spic," they suspect she is trying to find Tony's whereabouts to help Chino locate him. They surround her, toss her around, taunt her like a wild bull in a bull-ring, and finally simulate a rapist's assault. Doc's return, with cash for Tony in his hands, ends their vicious teasing.

In an untimely twist of fate, her message of reconciliation between the two lovers fails to get through. Spitefully, she lies and tells them that Maria's ex-boyfriend Chino has killed Maria in anger:

Anita: Bernardo was right. If one of you was lying in the street bleeding, I'd walk by and spit on you.

Action: Go on and go. Don't tell Chino that Tony's hidin' in the cellar.

Anita: Don't you touch me! I got a message for your American buddy. You tell that murderer that Maria's never going to meet him. You tell him that Chino found out about them and shot her. She's dead.

Doc: When do you kids stop? You make this world lousy.

Action: We didn't make it, Doc.

Doc: Get out of here.

In the cellar with Doc, Tony is wildly optimistic about his future with Maria: "Do you know what we're going to do in the country, Maria and me? We're gonna have lots of kids. And we're gonna name 'em all after ya." But Doc slaps him to "Wake up!" and tells him about the rumored death of Maria: "There is no Maria, Tony." Not wanting to live without Maria, Tony bursts out of his hiding place to challenge Chino: "Come and get me too, Chino." He welcomes his own death.

Devastated, Tony races and roams through the desolate streets, crying out for Chino to kill him: "Come on Chino, get me too...There's nobody here but me...I'm waitin' for ya." Tony learns the truth that Maria is alive too late - dressed in red, she is on the other side of the chain-fenced playground. She rushes joyfully toward him to embrace him, but he has already been spotted by Chino. Just before they reach each other's arms in a tiny spot of light (and in the only area of dry pavement) on the playground, he is shot by Chino as revenge for Bernardo's death (and as retribution for being thwarted in his love for Maria).

The remaining members of both gangs gather after the single gunshot. Maria grieves as she holds the dying Tony in her arms:

Tony: I didn't believe hard enough.

Maria: Loving is enough.

Tony: Not here. They won't let us be.

Maria: Then we'll get away.

Tony: Yeah. We can?

Maria: Yes.

Tony: We will?

Maria: Yes. (singing) Hold my hand and we're halfway there. Hold my hand and I'll take you there. Somehow, someday, some...

She mourns his passing and commands the two gangs that threaten more violence: "Stay back!" Walking in between them as she wields Chino's deadly weapon, she accuses all of them of being responsible for Tony's senseless death - contributing factors are societal intolerance, racial antagonism, misunderstanding, mistrust, and the fermentation of hatred. She lectures at them about how hate breeds more hate:

How many bullets are left, Chino? Enough for you, and you? All of you. You all killed him! And my brother, and Riff. Not with bullets and guns - with hate. Well, I can kill too because now I have hate! How many can I kill, Chino? How many and still have one bullet left for me?

She falls to her knees, weeping. A red light circulates over all of them from the approaching police car's cherry-top. She screams at Lieutenant Schrank as he walks toward her beloved's body: "Don't you touch him!" She tenderly kisses the lips of Tony one last time, and expresses her love for him in Spanish:

Te adoro, Anton.

The struggle of Maria and Tony to love each other in the face of opposition ends on a hopeful note. The two gangs, confused, stunned, ashamed and sobered by the unnecessary triple killings, finally put aside their enmity. As some of the Jets struggle to bear Tony's body away, a few of the Sharks assist them. Together, they solemnly carry him down the street, with Maria following. For once, the opposing groups are united and reconciled - by the heart-breaking tragedy.

The imaginative end credits, displayed as chalk-marked graffiti on inner city brick walls and surfaces, were designed by Saul Bass