West Side Story- Back Story

The film WEST SIDE STORY is based on the Broadway musical of 1957 and was two years in production from '59 through to '61.The plot is basically Romeo & Juliet re-set against a backdrop of West Manhattan street gangs' territorial battles. WEST SIDE STORY marks a mythopoetic peak of the JD movies (juvenile delinquents) which started in the early 50s (from THE WILD ONE to THE BLACKBOARD JUNGLE to REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE - the latter containing similar epic-tragic proportions with the characterizations of the 'family' of Dean, Wood and Mineo). The JD movie continued on through various cycles: High School movies, Juke Box movies, Hot Rod movies & Rock'n'Roll movies.

Apart from being the first movie to treat youth themes and symbols in operatic style and form, WEST SIDE STORY is also historically footnoted as being the first major musical to fully utilize outdoor locations for whole numbers, such as in the long prologue sequence with the Jets and the Sharks baiting each other. It was also the first musical to tackle contemporary social themes in modern settings, considering how musicals from the 30s up through the 50s were predominantly either Fantasy, Period or Theatre in their settings and visualizations.

As a musical (or more precisely, a cinematic adaptation or reconstruction of a stage musical) WEST SIDE STORY tells its story through the form of lyric drama and mise-en-scene.

1. Lyric drama involves a narration which is effected through the stylization of various elements such as body movement, speech/dialogue, gestural interpretation, etc. Theatrics are thus highlighted rather than subsumed into modes of realism.

2. Mise-en-scene refers to the organization of meaning and conveyance of effects through set design, art direction, visual production, etc.

Shape, colour, form, space, depth, texture are all manipulated to form a network of narrative commentaries on the fiction's contents - psychological motivation and reflections of character; poetic description of characters' environments; intonation and suggestion of the causality of the plot's developments; etc. In summary, lyric drama involves theatrics while mise-en-scene involves plastics.

Prologue

This long sequence defines in total the marriage of theatrics and plastics that mark WE5T SIDE STORY as a fusion of opera and lyric drama. Note the multiple rhythms (visual, musical, temporal, etc.) produced by the dynamic movement within the frame; the movement of the frame itself; the movement from scene to scene/shot to shot/etc. Note the importance of clicking - the physical production by the body to produce a sound that symbolizes the body's psychological rhythm. (The tempo of clicking throughout the film reflects the rate of adrenalin flow of the character doing the clicking.)

A . the beat as the control of rhythm and tempo into a standardized form, whose repetition reinforces the display of control; and

B . a directive to "get lost" because of territorial transgression, of crossing over onto the wrong 'beat' or turf.

Holiday Homework

GROUP STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATION

Direction:

Dances are usually choreographed so that the performer faces the audience. Changing the direction, or focus, of part or all of the dance, can provide interest.

Pathways:

As dancers move around the space they create pathways and patterns. These patterns usually reflect the dynamics of the movement. E.g. circular/flowing shape, soft flowing movement.

1. Use this rectangle to draw a pathways map from the clicking to the leapfrog

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| --- |
|  |

2. Describe the starting shape of the Jets Group.

3. What is the reason the group are set up this way?

4. The Jets seem to move in unison. What does this mean? Describe a phrase of dance which shows this.

5. Eye focus is used to direct attention from one gang to the other. Bernardo also uses it to show his intensity and drive to take the Jets down. Describe a phrase of the dance when this occurs.

6. Levels are used to help share the expressive intention. The Jets leap and elevate in order to intimidate and show dominance towards the sharks. Describe a phrase that shows each of these structures.

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| --- | --- |
| Group Structures | Example from WSS of this grouping |
| Unison  Together |  |
| Canon- CD  Creates interest  Dancers perform the same sequence one after another. |  |
| Contrast  Diferent |  |
| Symmetrical  Exactly the same in mirror image |  |
| Assymetrical  Opposite |  |

WSS- BACKGROUND

What is the name of the Choreographer of this piece?

Who was the director of this show?

What was the inspiration for the storyline?

What is a JD and what was happening during this time period in history?

Where was it set?

When was it set?

Describe the main protagonists in the story.

JEROME ROBBINS

5 interesting facts:

Describe the style of performance he was involved in.