



West Side Story as Cinema: The Making and Impact of an American Masterpiece (CultureAmerica)

Ernesto R. Acevedo-Munoz

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For millions of moviegoers unable to see the original stage version of *West Side Story*, director Robert Wise's adaptation was a cinematic gift that brought a Broadway hit to a mass audience.

Ernesto Acevedo-Muñoz argues that Wise's film was not only hugely popular, but that it was also an artistic triumph that marked an important departure in the history of American movie making.

With a score by Leonard Bernstein and choreography by Jerome Robbins, this update of the Romeo and Juliet story remains one of the most revered and highly popular American movie musicals, with only *Singin' in the Rain* ranking higher in the AFI's list of the best of the genre. Acevedo-Muñoz draws on previously unreleased production documents—from interoffice memos to annotations on the director's script—to go beyond publicity accounts and provide an inside look at this critically acclaimed film classic, offering details of its filming that have never before been published.

From location scouting to scripting to casting to filming, Acevedo-Muñoz focuses on little-known details of the actual production. He provides close analyses of dramatic sequences and musical numbers, emphasizing the film's technical innovations and its visual and aural coding as a means for defining character and theme. He carefully explains the differences between Broadway and film versions, exposing censorship and creative issues that the filmmakers were forced to confront. And taking readers behind the cameras, he highlights the creative differences and financial difficulties that led to the departure of Robbins—who had conceived and directed the stage version—long before filming was complete.

Acevedo-Muñoz makes a strong case for the film's daring vision in combining music, dance, dialogue, and visual elements—especially color—in highly creative ways, while also addressing the social, racial, and class tensions of American society. Drawing on his own Puerto Rican heritage, he provides a Hispanic perspective on the cultural aspects of the story and explores the ways in which the film's portrayal of Puerto Rican identity is neither as transparent nor as negative as some critics have charged.

Bursting with facts, insights, and inside stories, this book boasts a wealth of material that has never been explored before in print. Both history and homage, it is a must for scholar and buff alike.

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