



three cheers for **WEST SIDE STORY**

BY EUGENE YIGA



[SOURCE](#)

BIANCA LE GRANGE

Music has always been a part of Bianca le Grange's life. As a music teacher, her mother would play the organ in church to accompany the choir, while Bianca would be close by, humming and singing along.

"I've been performing since I was six years old," she says. "It's all I ever wanted to do. So from a young age I knew I would be on a stage. I would take every opportunity awarded to me, from singing at weddings and funerals to friend's birthdays and family gatherings."

Even though it's been fifteen years since she was a finalist on the first season of *Idols*, many still recognise her from the television show. And while one of her career highlights was getting to meet Nelson Mandela and singing for his first 46664 concert with Usher, Alicia Keys, and P Diddy, she's also excited to play the role of Anita in *West Side Story*.

"Anita and Maria are dear friends who confide in each other," she says. "Two strong women who know what they want and aren't afraid to speak their minds. Anita is opinionated, savvy, charismatic, and flamboyant. Outgoing and gregarious, she wears colourful frocks. Anita is considered most people's favourite character and rightfully so. She's a badass. I'm a badass too."

Preparing for the role required her to train at the gym every day and go to contemporary dance class twice a week. She's also seen every YouTube video and watched the film more than ten times.

LYNELLE KENNED

Performing scenes from Disney's *The Lion King* to friends and family at home, aged six, is one of Lynelle Kenned's earliest memories. Although she's not sure whether she was any good, she's happy that she at least had the confidence to "fake it 'til you make it".

"I think at the age of sixteen, I was pretty much Maria," she says. "I had the same notions about love and life, and stars in my eyes. I'm much more realistic nowadays, but sometimes still find myself hoping and believing in the best in people and situations."

"When performing, I love the honesty, the immediacy, the feeling of losing yourself and giving something your all without holding back," she says. "I find few things in life as exhilarating, which is why it's so addictive! It leaves you breathless and with butterflies, like falling in love."

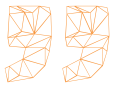
Kenned plays the role of Maria, for which she won a prestigious Fleur du Cap Theatre Award last year. Having just arrived as an immigrant in America, her life seems full of promise when she falls in love at first sight with Tony. She is naïve and radiant in her innocent beauty, but their happiness isn't meant to last. (Spoiler alert!)

To prepare for the role, Kenned took dancing classes for the first time in her life, which is something she's had on her bucket list for ages. She also worked with a dialect coach to perfect Maria's Puerto Rican accent. Mostly, she visualised what kind of atmosphere she want to create in the different scenes, even before memorising the script.



CONTINUES TO
PAGE 24

“IT’S AN INCREDIBLE STORY, TOLD THROUGH THE MOST BEAUTIFUL MUSIC AND DYNAMIC DANCING,” SHE SAYS. “I DON’T THINK I COULD CHOOSE MY FAVOURITE ASPECT, BUT MY FAVOURITE SCENE IS WHEN TONY AND MARIA MEET FOR THE FIRST TIME. EVERYBODY ELSE DISAPPEARS FOR THE YOUNG LOVERS AT THEIR ‘LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT’ MOMENT. IT SEEMS I’M A ROMANTIC AFTER ALL!”



[SOURCE](#)

JONATHAN ROXMOUTH

It all began one day at nursery school when Jonathan Roxmouth forgot to wear a costume for a circus-themed day. They’d be awarding prizes for the best dressed and he didn’t want to feel left out.

“I found a top hat in the drama room, stole the principal’s megaphone, and was the ringmaster for the day,” he recalls. “When my mom came to collect me, the principal took her aside and informed her that she had a Broadway Baby on her hands. Then she added that she was sorry!”

Despite his love for performing, Roxmouth chose to study law instead of pursuing a career in the arts. But when we saw the Janice Honeyman pantomime “Snow White and the Seven Dofs”, he wished he could be having as much fun as the actors on stage. And so he figured it was time to do something about it.

“My family and friends were and still are a little concerned,” he says. “I suppose it’s their job to look out for me. But every opening night that comes along seems to allay their fears.”

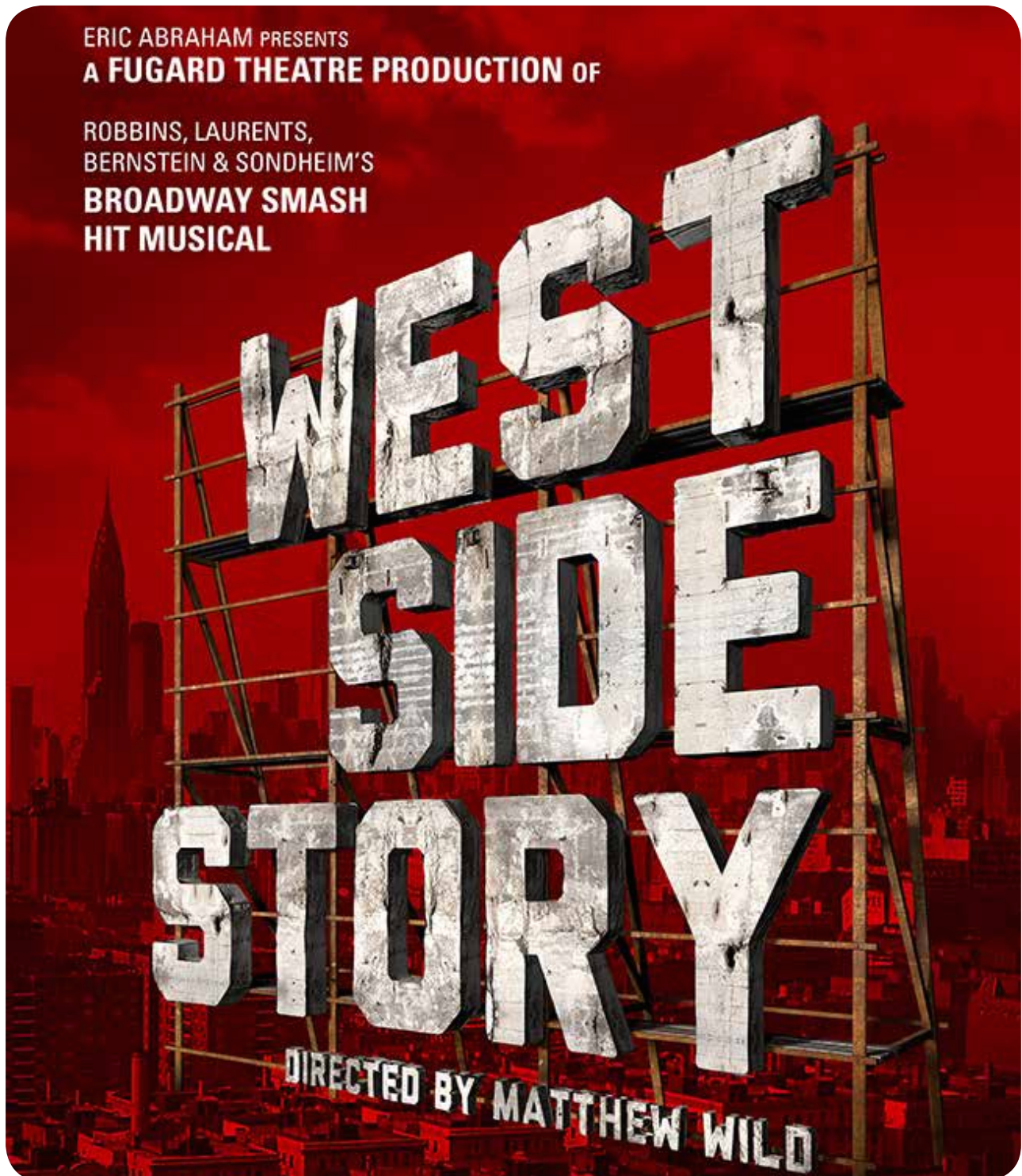
Looking ahead, two of Roxmouth’s dream roles are Jean Valjean in *Lés Miserables* and Billy Bigelow in *Carousel*. In the meantime, he’s excited to revise his role in *West Side Story*.

“Tony is a big role for any singer so I am approaching it with a certain amount of caution,” he says. “In the past, he has been quite drippy and I hope to give him a bit more bite this time round.”

☐☐ THREE CHEERS FOR WEST SIDE STORY

Roxmouth explains that Tony is a gang leader in New York who just happens to fall in love with the possibility of a new life away from the reality he finds himself stuck in. It's something he can relate to.

"I think everyone dreams of a better future at some point in their lives," he says. "I most certainly do. I just think it's easier to do so when you have Bernstein's score played by a full orchestra to back you up."



WEST SIDE STORY IS AT THE MANDELA (JOBURG THEATRE) FROM 24 JANUARY TO 5 MARCH. BOOK AT [COMPUTICKET](#).

