



## Julia Bullock, *soprano*



### CD Review: *San Francisco Symphony's WEST SIDE STORY is a Triumph*

David Clarke | *Broadway World* | June 23, 2014

San Francisco Symphony, with Michael Tilson Thomas as conductor, presented an enthralling staged concert version of WEST SIDE STORY in the summer of 2013. With an immense knowledge of the musical and the man who created the score, Michael Tilson Thomas has expertly lead the opulent San Francisco Orchestra and a cast of brilliant talent through the score. Recorded live from June 27 to July 2, 2013 at the Davies Symphony Hall at the San Francisco War Memorial and Performing Arts Center, the dual disc album is definitely one of the loveliest recordings of the score you'll ever hear.

Using the original Broadway orchestrations as his basis, Michael Tilson Thomas states that for this recording audiences will hear those original orchestrations "beefed up" because the San Francisco Symphony was able to remove the doubling that the original score required for the musicians in the pit. Listening to the album, the lushness of the full orchestra adds a distinctive emotional depth to this recording, making the music we all know and cherish all the more grand and utterly breathtaking. The 1984 Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft recording conducted by Leonard Bernstein will probably always be remembered and revered as the definitive recording of WEST SIDE STORY's score, but the San Francisco Symphony's recording is definitely a close second. The largest difference between the two recordings is that Michael Tilson Thomas gives us a more Broadway sound. The operatic nature of the 1984 album has been contemporized, with the cast utilizing the more pop/jazz vocalizations audiences associate with Broadway musicals.

As Maria, Alexandra Silber sings with all the sweetness that one would expect. Her impeccable soprano instrument and vocal skills show a certain maturity of artistry while still conveying the youthfulness of the character. With an operatic sensibility and all the control required for quality arias, her Maria shimmers on the recording.

Cheyenne Jackson gives listeners everything they want from the charismatic and youthful Tony. His wistful and breathy longing on "Something's Coming" and "Maria" makes his yearning for a better life and for the girl all the more tangible. Moreover, he sings with impressive control, allowing the well-known numbers to grow from their quiet moments to their louder segments with fantastic flourish. Most impressively, he sings with a youthfulness that makes the listener believe he is a young boy in his late teens.

The role of Anita, made legendary by Rita Moreno, is sung to perfection by Jessica Vosk. With brassy attitude and indefatigable gusto, Jessica Vosk performs each and every moment written for Anita with electrifying pizzazz. We quickly come to love her during her solos on the snappy "America" and the whimsical "Tonight." However, it is on "A Boy Like That" where she elevates her performance to the realm of unforgettable.

Julia Bullock's evocative rendition of "Somewhere (A Girl)" is also a true standout on the recording. With a sensitive and keen ear for operatic tonality, she makes the absolute most of the solo. You'll be hard-pressed to find a better recording of this number anywhere in the world. Likewise, the energetic ensemble makes the familiar hits like "Jet Song," "America," "Cool," and especially "Gee, Officer Krupke" toe tapping, fun delights as well.

Lastly, the packaging for San Francisco Symphony's WEST SIDE STORY is worthy of mentioning. The 104 page booklet that comes with the two discs is filled with interesting information about the musical itself, this production, quotes from the cast, the complete lyrics, archival photographs, gorgeous full-color photos from the performances, and more. It is a treasure trove of well-researched and well-articulated information about one of America's most cherished musicals. Therefore, it is truly a collector's dream and something that even a casual fan of musicals will enjoy and appreciate.

The San Francisco Symphony released their phenomenal and altogether triumphant recording of WEST SIDE STORY on June 10, 2014. The album can be purchased from the San Francisco Symphony's online store, iTunes, and Amazon.

