

West Side Story at Savoy Theatre, Helsinki 1.9.-19.9.2021

Savoy Theater is applying for a grant to cover the travel and accommodation expenses of the American soloists of the musical production of West Side Story.

Savoy theatre and Sublime Music Agency Ltd are producing Leonard Bernstein's masterpiece *West Side Story*, which premieres at Savoy Theatre September 1st, 2021. Director **Tuomas Parkkinen**, choreographer **Ima Iduozee**, conductor **Jonas Rannila** and scenographer **Jani Pulkkinen** have created an anti-racist concept for the musical. Its fundamental basis is the multiculturalism of the cast: the musical will not contrast different ethnicities or nationalities. Instead, diversity plays an important role in the cast, in which anyone can play any role whatsoever.

Instead of highlighting the 1950s US, this new interpretation of the musical emphasizes the main theme of the play - irrational hatred. The message of this production is anti-racist, and thus the project takes part of building an atmosphere of equal and respectful attitudes between diverse populations.

The main cast comes from the United States: Los Angeles based actress **Holly Sedillos** has been casted for the role of *Maria*, and **Christian Mark Gibbs** from New York will play the role of *Tony*. The international cast also includes **Christopher Faison** from New York as *Action* and **Adam Hollick** from Los Angeles as *Riff*.

The first rehearsal period of the musical will be held on May 2021, and the second rehearsal period is on 2.7.-31.8.2021. Premiere is September 1, and there will be total of 12 performances until 19 September 202. West Side Story will be performed in English, and it will be subtitled in Finnish.

The production is expected to gather audiences from across the country. The anti-racist concept and multicultural cast are hoped to evoke societal discussion nationally.

The project has following goals:

- 1) To act as an example and to present different operation models, with which a pre-existing artwork may be approached by an anti-racist and diverse angle.
- 2) To employ artists. Employing freelance artists within the culture sector, which has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, is now more important than ever before.
- 3) To strengthen the relationships of the culture sector in Finland and the United States.
- 4) Build an atmosphere of positive attitudes between different population groups, provoke discussion against racism, and to underline the responsibilities of artists in promoting equality.
- 5) To empower the people working within the project, and to create role models for all the racialized people, not only for the racialized artists.
- 6) To produce an international, top-quality musical in Helsinki.

Outcomes:

- 1) An ethical Code of Conduct, which will present equal and respectful guidelines and policies for artistic productions.
- 2) An international, top-quality musical in Helsinki
- 3) The project is expected to create wide, societal discussion of the absurdity of hate speech and racism.