

#MeToo-style attack on star of *West Side Story* revival fizzles on Broadway

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When the new revival of the Leonard Bernstein-Stephen Sondheim classic *West Side Story* opened on Broadway last Thursday night, it was met by scores of protesters demanding that Amar Ramasar, who plays Bernardo, the leader of the Sharks street gang, be fired on grounds of sexual misconduct.

Ramasar has become the target of a small but vocal group of #MeToo supporters over charges that were filed in a lawsuit against the New York City Ballet and three of its dancers, including Ramasar, in 2018. A former student at the School of American Ballet, Alexandra Waterbury, accused her ex-boyfriend (Chase Finlay) and Ramasar of sharing “explicit” photos of her. The actual charge against Ramasar was that he shared the photo of another dancer at that time. That dancer, not then identified, is Alexa Maxwell, who has in recent weeks strenuously defended Ramasar, with whom she has lived for nearly five years.

The New York City Ballet at first fired Ramasar and the others accused, before an arbitrator reversed that action and ruled that counseling was sufficient punishment. Ramasar, 38, remains a member of the ballet company. He has also previously appeared on Broadway, most recently in a revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s classic *Carousel*.

The decision of the arbitrator met with opposition from Ms. Waterbury and her supporters. For months they have conducted a campaign on social media, and have also circulated an online petition. There have been protests at recent previews as well as the opening night last week, with signs calling Ramasar a “sexual predator.”

These actions show the reactionary logic of the #MeToo movement. There is also growing and healthy opposition, however, to the neo-Victorian sexual witch-hunting and attempted blacklisting of men who, in

many cases, are guilty of little but what in this case Ramasar’s girlfriend simply calls “a misstep in judgment,” for which he has long since apologized and which she has long since forgiven.

Alexa Maxwell’s statement, issued on the day of the show’s premiere and denouncing the protest against her boyfriend, deserves to be quoted at some length. “I am not a victim in this and no longer wish for my truth to be misrepresented,” she wrote. “[The] only photograph that was shared by Amar was of me, his girlfriend of nearly five years. I knew about the photos of me when they were taken, and while sharing it privately with a close friend was a misstep in judgment, Amar immediately told me when he sent them to Chase and his sincerest regrets have led us to today, where we reside together and are building a loving and happy relationship. The incident was a personal matter between me and Amar, and I am okay with what happened.”

“With a demonstration planned for this evening [February 20] in front of the Broadway Theater to protest Amar’s role in the current production of *West Side Story*, I want to share my story so that the public is clear,” Maxwell added. “On social media, Alexandra and other people out there have recklessly tossed around phrases like ‘rapist,’ ‘sexual predator,’ and ‘pedophile’ when referring to Amar. Amar never raped anyone—and Alexandra in her lawsuit does not allege that he did. Amar is not a sexual predator—and Alexandra in her lawsuit does not allege that he is. And Amar is no pedophile—and Alexandra in her lawsuit does not allege anything like that. And while Alexandra in her lawsuit makes allegations about group texts in which men spoke of women in horrible terms, Amar was not a participant in those group texts, and Alexandra does not allege that he was.”

Earlier, Maxwell had also said that Waterbury, in an hour-long phone call at the time of the original complaint, tried to convince her to join the lawsuit by saying that the New York City Ballet “is worth half a billion dollars,” and that she could win “a lot” and could have “an entirely new life.” Waterbury’s attorney has denied this account.

The response thus far by management and the *West Side Story* company as a whole to the campaign to fire and essentially blacklist Ramasar is also significant. “The management of *West Side Story* stands, as it always has stood, with Amar Ramasar,” the management’s press statement said.

“While we support the right of assembly enjoyed by the protestors, the alleged incident took place in a different workplace—the New York City Ballet—which has no affiliation of any kind with *West Side Story*, and the dispute in question has been both fully adjudicated and definitively concluded according to the specific rules of that workplace, as mandated by the union that represents the parties involved in that incident. Mr. Ramasar is a principal dancer in good standing at the New York City Ballet. He is also a member in good standing of both AGMA (representing the company of NYCB) and Actors’ Equity Association (representing the company of *West Side Story*).”

Even more categorically, the statement continued: “There is zero consideration being given to his potentially being terminated from this workplace, as there has been no transgression of any kind, ever, in this workplace. The West Side Story Company does not as a practice terminate employees without cause. There is no cause here. The West Side Story Company’s relationship to Mr. Ramasar is completely private to that company and exists solely between Mr. Ramasar and his fellow company members. He is a valued colleague who was hired to play a principal role in this production, which he is doing brilliantly, and which he will continue to do for the entire unabated length of his agreement.”



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