

Montgomery Philharmonic 2017 - 18 Our 12th Season : Old Friends ... New Friends

Concert 4, Sunday, March 18, 2018: Old Friends ... New Friends

Brahms | Hovhaness | Bernstein

About Leonard Bernstein

Leonard Bernstein was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts. He took piano lessons as a boy and attended the Garrison and Boston Latin Schools. At Harvard University, he studied with Walter Piston, Edward Burlingame-Hill, and A. Tillman Merritt, among others. Before graduating in 1939, he made an unofficial conducting debut with his own incidental music to “The Birds,” and directed and performed in Marc Blitzstein’s “The Cradle Will Rock.” Then, at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, he studied piano with Isabella Vengerova, conducting with Fritz Reiner, and orchestration with Randall Thompson.

In 1940, he studied at the Boston Symphony Orchestra’s newly created summer institute, Tanglewood, with the orchestra’s conductor, Serge Koussevitzky. Bernstein later became Koussevitzky’s conducting assistant. He was appointed to his first permanent conducting post in 1943, as Assistant Conductor of the New York Philharmonic. On November 14, 1943, Bernstein substituted with only a few hours’ notice for the ailing Bruno Walter at a Carnegie Hall concert, which was broadcast nationally on radio, receiving critical acclaim. Soon orchestras worldwide sought him out as a guest conductor.

In 1945, he was appointed Music Director of the New York City Symphony Orchestra, a post he held until 1947. After Serge Koussevitzky died in 1951, Bernstein headed the orchestral and conducting departments at Tanglewood, teaching there for many years. In 1951, he married Chilean actress and pianist Felicia Montealegre. He was also visiting music professor and head of the Creative Arts Festivals at Brandeis University in the early 1950s.

Bernstein became Music Director of the New York Philharmonic in 1958. From then until 1969, he led more concerts with the orchestra than any previous conductor had. He subsequently held the lifetime title of Laureate Conductor, making frequent guest appearances with the orchestra. More than half of Bernstein’s over 400 recordings were with the New York Philharmonic.

Bernstein traveled the world as a conductor. Immediately after World War II, in 1946, he conducted in London and at the International Music Festival in Prague. In 1947, he conducted in Tel Aviv, beginning a relationship with Israel that lasted until his death. In 1953, Bernstein was the first American to conduct opera at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan—Cherubini’s “Medea” with Maria Callas.

Bernstein was a leading advocate of American composers, particularly Aaron Copland. The two remained close friends for life. As a young pianist, Bernstein performed Copland’s “Piano Variations” so often that he considered the composition his trademark. Bernstein programmed and recorded nearly all of Copland’s orchestral works—many of them twice. He devoted several televised “Young People’s Concerts” to Copland, and gave the premiere of Copland’s “Connotations,” commissioned for the opening of Philharmonic Hall (now David Geffen Hall) at Lincoln Center in 1962.

Although Bernstein’s conducting repertoire encompassed the standard literature, he may be best remembered for his performances and recordings of Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms, Schumann, Sibelius, and Mahler. Particularly notable were his performances of the Mahler symphonies with the New York Philharmonic in the 1960s, sparking a renewed interest in the works of Mahler.

In 1985, the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences honored Bernstein with the Lifetime Achievement Grammy Award. He won eleven Emmy Awards in his career. His televised concert and lecture series started with the Omnibus program in 1954, followed by the extraordinary Young People’s Concerts with the New York Philharmonic in 1958, which extended over 14 seasons. Among his many appearances on the PBS series Great Performances was the 11-part acclaimed “Bernstein’s Beethoven.” In 1989, Bernstein and others commemorated the 1939 invasion of Poland in a worldwide telecast from Warsaw.

World peace was a particular concern of Bernstein’s. Speaking at Johns Hopkins University in 1980 and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York in 1983, he described his vision of global harmony. His “Journey for Peace” tour to Athens and Hiroshima with the European Community Orchestra in 1985 commemorated the 40th anniversary of the atom bomb. In December 1989, Bernstein conducted the historic “Berlin Celebration Concerts” on both sides of the Berlin Wall as it was being dismantled. The concerts were unprecedented gestures of cooperation, the musicians representing former East Germany, West Germany, and the four powers that had partitioned Berlin after World War II. Bernstein supported Amnesty International from its inception. To benefit the effort in 1987, he established the Felicia Montealegre Fund in memory of his wife, who died in 1978. In 1990, Bernstein received the Praemium Imperiale, an international prize created in 1988 by the Japan Arts Association and awarded for lifetime achievement in the arts. Bernstein used the \$100,000 prize to establish The Bernstein Education Through the Arts Fund, Inc. before his death on October 14, 1990.

- **Born:** August 25, 1918, Lawrence, Massachusetts
- **Died:** October 14, 1990, New York, New York
- **Nationality:** American
- **Compositions:** 3 ballets, 3 operas, 7 Broadway Musicals, 7 works of incidental music for plays, 3 film scores, 20 original works for orchestra including 3 symphonies, 11 major choral works, 13 chamber works, 17 works for voice, 14 works for solo piano
- **Father:** Samuel Joseph Bernstein, a hairdressing supplies wholesaler
- **Mother:** Jennie (née Resnick)
- **Wife:** Felicia Montealegre, Chilean actress and pianist (m. 1951, d. 1978)
- **Children:** Jamie, Alexander, and Nina
- **Grandchildren:** Francisca, Evan, Anya, and Anna

Overture to Candide – Opus 73 (1877) – Leonard Bernstein (1833–1897)

Leonard Bernstein’s *Overture to Candide* is his most popular piece of music today. Like *Fidelio* was for Beethoven, *Candide* was quite a problem for Bernstein. From the 1956 version until the end of his life, Bernstein tinkered with the comic opera. The exciting and fun *Overture* has had a remarkable life of its own and is often played as a concert opener or closer.

The original work, which is debated as both a comic opera and a Broadway Musical, was based on the work of the same name by Voltaire that was adapted by playwright Lillian Hellman. Hellman first proposed the project to Bernstein in 1953. Voltaire’s 1759 novella satirized the fashionable philosophies of his day. It tells the story of the misadventures of Candide, a naive, simple, and pure-hearted young man, and his sweetheart, Cunégonde. Candide unfortunately was subject to the Catholic Church whose Inquisition routinely tortured and killed “heretics” in a ghastly event known as an “Auto da Fé” (“act of faith”). Hellman observed a sinister parallel between the Inquisition’s church-sponsored purges and the “Washington Witch Trials,” fueled by anti-Communist hysteria and waged by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Charged with rage, she began her adaptation of Voltaire’s work with lyricist John LaTouche and Bernstein, who wrote numerous musical sketches. Before long, LaTouche was replaced by poet Richard Wilbur. Hellman, Bernstein, and Wilbur worked periodically over the next two years but labored in earnest through 1956, a year when Bernstein was simultaneously composing *West Side Story*.

Although the theme of political aggression originally attracted Lillian Hellman to the project, her sharpest writing on the topic was ironically taken out while the show was still out of town. The director, Tyrone Guthrie, became too nervous about her “Auto da Fé” scene, specifically, as it directly satirized the House Un-American Activities Committee. It would appear that the urgent political impetus for writing the musical was the one aspect of the work that didn’t stand up to the test of time. The original Broadway production, with sets by Oliver Smith and costumes by Irene Sharaff, opened at the Martin Beck Theater in New York on December 1, 1956 to mixed reviews and closed on February 2, 1957.

In 1971, the Los Angeles Civic Light Opera Association mounted a production in which Sheldon Patinkin attempted a complete revision of Hellman’s book with a substantial shuffling of musical numbers. This version was performed in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and later at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. It is probably at this time that Mr. Bernstein wrote the song “Words, Words, Words,” which includes a bitter reprise of “The Best of All Possible Worlds.” Though this production was not successful, it seems to have stirred up interest in *Candide*. In 1973, Harold Prince and Hugh Wheeler devised a new small-scale version, which drew the ire of Lillian Hellman, who at this time withdrew her original adaptation of Voltaire.

Today, the most performed version of *Candide* is the Royal Scottish Opera’s version, which was mounted by John Mauceri. Mauceri examined the opera and put many more of Bernstein’s original musical numbers back into the revision and then Bernstein, himself, took a look at the score one final time. Bernstein shuffled Mauceri’s work, added the “Auto-da-Fé” section back in to the second act, and altered a few endings to several numbers. This revised version was what Bernstein wanted, but it was not published. Instead the Mauceri version for the Royal Scottish Opera was published and this version is most performed.

Instrumentation – piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, E-flat clarinet, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horn, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, 2 percussion (glockenspiel, xylophone, triangle, cymbals, snare drum, tenor drum, bass drum, harm, violin 1, violin 2, viola, cello, double bass

Artifacts –

[Score and parts in the New York Philharmonic Archives](#)

[Leonard Bernstein Archival Website](#)



1. Bernstein Century - Bernstein: Candide Overture, Symphonic Dances from West Side Story, On the Waterfront Symphonic Suite, Fancy Free
2. Candide (Original Broadway Cast Recording)
3. Overture: Candide Zubin Mehta & Los Angeles Philharmonic

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1. Leonard Bernstein Paperback – January 2, 2018

by Humphrey Burton CBE (Author)

2. The Leonard Bernstein Letters Hardcover – October 29, 2013

by Leonard Bernstein (Author), Nigel Simeone (Editor)

3. Leonard Bernstein: American Original Hardcover – August 19, 2008

by Burton Bernstein (Author), Barbara Haws (Author)

YouTube.com Links –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=422-yb8TXj8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zn5bhJ5YX6U>