

Leonard Bernstein's America

We are pleased to inaugurate *Bernstein Bound* with a look at *Leonard Bernstein's America*. While other composers before him had incorporated American themes into their music, few in any generation have captured the vibrant diversity of American culture with Leonard Bernstein's skill and panache. For millions of listeners worldwide, he has come to personify American music. From his many works that touch on aspects of American life, we've chosen five of particular interest. In addition to some background on each piece, you'll find information on anniversaries, suggested program pairings, recommended recordings, and publications. And on page 4, we've suggested some ways to turn an ordinary weekend of programs into a *Bernstein's America* festival!

Fancy Free (1944)

27'

60th Anniversary: 2004

2(II=picc).2.2.2—4.3.3.1—timp.perc(2-3)—pft—strings

FP: 18 April 1944 Metropolitan Opera House, NY Jerome Robbins, choreographer;
Ballet Theatre Orchestra conducted by Leonard Bernstein

This vibrant, jazz-tinged score was Bernstein's first collaboration with choreographer Jerome Robbins. Its patriotic high spirits affirm the energy and vitality of a great city – Bernstein's beloved New York – during the anxious years of World War II. Bernstein describes the scenario: "Three sailors explode on the stage. They are on a 24-hour shore leave in the city and on the prowl for girls. The tale of how they first meet one, then a second girl, and how they fight over them, lose them, and in the end take off after a third, is the story of the ballet." Robbins sought to create a quintessentially American ballet; Bernstein obliged him with a score that was kinetic and tuneful, refracting popular dance music styles through a prism of angular melodies and syncopated rhythms. The resulting ballet was a huge success, drawing sold-out crowds to the Metropolitan Opera House.

II *Fancy Free* has been paired with:

Bernstein *Symphonic Suite from "On the Waterfront"* (Philadelphia Orchestra/David Zinman)

Ravel *Piano Concerto* (New York Philharmonic/Hugh Wolff)

🎧 Recommended recordings:

New York Philharmonic/Bernstein – Sony Classical 39448, 47530, 60559, 63085, 92728, or 90582

📖 M-051-21135-7 Study score

Songfest (1977)

41'

30th Anniversary: 2007

A Cycle of American Poems for Six Singers (S, M, A, T, Bar, B) and Orchestra

3(III=picc).2.corA.2.EIcl.bcl.2.dbn-4.3.3.1—timp.perc(5)—harp—pft(=cel/elec pft)—elec.bass—strings

FP: October 1977 Kennedy Center, Washington, DC

Clamma Dale (S), Rosalind Elias, (M), Nancy Williams, (M), Neil Rosenshein, (T); John Reardon, (B), Donald Gramm, (Bbar); National Symphony Orchestra conducted by Leonard Bernstein

Reduced Orchestration by Charlie Harmon, Sid Ramin, and George Steel (1996)
 2(II=picc).2(II=corA).2(1=E♭cl,II=bcl).2-2.2.2.0-timp.perc(2)

FP: 9 Oct 1996 Kaufmann Concert Hall, 92nd St Y, NYC Janus Ensemble conducted by Michael Barrett

Writes critic Edward Seckerson, “*Songfest* is a songsmith’s masterpiece: *Songfest* sings America.” Long before ‘multiculturalism’ became a buzzword, Bernstein celebrated the joyous diversity of America in this masterly cycle for six singers and orchestra. From Walt Whitman, Julia de Burgos, Langston Hughes, June Jordan, Gertrude Stein, e.e. cummings, and others Bernstein drew an inspired array of texts, touching in typical fashion on love, social issues, the joys and trials of daily life, and the creative impulse itself. Likewise, Bernstein was ahead of the curve when it came to breaking down stylistic barriers. Mahlerian late-Romanticism, fiery Latin rhythms, moaning blues, modal folksong, and sharp-angled jazz meet up in *Songfest*; ambitious in scope, yet cohesive in structure, it is surely one of the composer’s finest achievements.

II *Songfest* has been paired with:

William Schuman *Academic Festival Overture* and Barber *Cello Concerto* (Philharmonia Orchestra/Slatkin, with *Songfest* as second half)

Schumann *Symphony No. 2* (New York Philharmonic/Bernstein, with *Songfest* as second half)

 Recommended recording:

National Symphony Orchestra/Bernstein – DG 4698292

Symphonic Suite from ‘On the Waterfront’ (1955)

22'

2.picc.2.2.E♭cl.bcl.asax.3.cbn—4.3.3.1—timp(2).perc(3-4)—pft—strings

FP: 11 August 1955 Tanglewood Music Festival, Lenox, Massachusetts Boston Symphony Orchestra conducted by Leonard Bernstein

Despite its title, the *Symphonic Suite from ‘On the Waterfront’* is a beautifully integrated single-movement work, rather than a collection of short pieces. From the pulsing *presto barbaro* section near the opening, to the tragic strains of the dirge-like finale, this score seethes with dramatic tension. The music Bernstein wrote for Elia Kazan’s classic film – a searing drama set amid the docks and slums of postwar Hoboken, New Jersey – served only as a starting point for the *Symphonic Suite*. In a *Berkshire Eagle* article introducing the score, Bernstein noted that “the main materials of the suite undergo numerous metamorphoses, following as much as possible the chronological flow of the film itself.” Bernstein biographer Humphrey Burton notes that this technique stems from the tone poems of Liszt; moreover, “*On the Waterfront* can be seen as a twentieth-century equivalent of Tchaikovsky’s fantasy overture *Romeo and Juliet*, with the film’s principal characters, Terry and Edie, and the star-crossed lovers.”

II *Symphonic Suite from ‘On the Waterfront’* has been paired with:

Gershwin *Concerto in F for Piano and Orchestra* (Los Angeles Philharmonic/Nagano)

Mendelssohn *Midsummer Night’s Dream* [selections] (New York Philharmonic/Bernstein)

 Recommended recording:

Israel Philharmonic Orchestra/Bernstein – DG 4698292 (7-disc “Bernstein Conducts Bernstein”)

 M-060-10762-7 Full score (Masterworks Series)

Three Dance Episodes from 'On the Town' (1945)

10'

60th Anniversary: 2005

1(=picc).1.3(I=Ebcl,II=asax,III=bcl).0-2.3.3.1-timp.perc(2)-pft-strings

FP: 3 February 1946 Civic Auditorium, San Francisco San Francisco Symphony Orchestra conducted by Leonard Bernstein

Writes Bernstein, "It seems only natural that dance should play a leading role in the show *On the Town*, since the idea of writing it arose from the success of the ballet *Fancy Free*...The story of *On the Town* is concerned with three sailors on 24-hour leave in New York, and their adventures with the monstrous city which its inhabitants take so for granted." The first episode is *Dance of the Great Lover*, in which the romantic sailor Gabey falls asleep on the subway and dreams of sweeping Miss Turnstiles off her feet; the effervescent music underlines Gabey's naiveté as well as his determination. In the second episode, *Pas de Deux*, Gabey watches a scene, "both tender and sinister, in which a sensitive high-school girl in Central Park is lured and then cast off by a worldly sailor." This is set to *Lonely Town* – one of Bernstein's greatest tunes, worthy of his friend and mentor Aaron Copland in its air of reflective melancholy. The finale, *Times Square Ballet* is described by Bernstein as "a more panoramic sequence in which all the sailors congregate in Times Square for their night of fun." Part of the action takes place in the Roseland Dance Palace, with music to match. The famous "New York, New York, it's a helluva town" theme makes a cameo appearance.

II *Three Dance Episodes from 'On the Town'* has been paired with:

Barber *Violin Concerto* (New York Philharmonic/David Robertson at Vail Valley Music Festival)
Gershwin *Rhapsody in Blue* (Charlotte Symphony/Christoph Perick)

 Recommended recordings:

New York Philharmonic/Bernstein – Sony Classical 39448, 42263, 47530, 60538, 60559, or 66493

 M-060-10761-0 Study score (in Bernstein Orchestral Anthology Volume 1)

A White House Cantata (1997)

90'

Scenes from '1600 Pennsylvania Avenue' in Concert

Text: Alan Jay Lerner (E)

FP: 8 July 1997 Barbican Centre, London Nancy Gustafson (S), Jacqueline Miura (S), Thomas Young (T), Dietrich Henschel (BBar); London Voices and London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Kent Nagano

Vocal forces: S, M, T, B, Bar; chorus (SATB)

3(II&III=picc).1.3(II=cbcl,ssax.III=Ebcl).bcl.1.cbn-2.2.2.1-timp.perc(2)-gtr(=elec.gtr.banjo)-harp-pft(=elec.kybd/organ/harpsichord/calliope/harmonium)-1.1.0.2.1

In 1976 Leonard Bernstein and Alan Jay Lerner collaborated on their musical *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue*, which was written for the Bicentennial of the United States. The show closed after just seven performances in New York. In 1990 the Bernstein and Lerner Estates decided to liberate the witty lyrics and charming music from the burdensome book. Scored for six soloists, chorus, and orchestra, *A White House Cantata* retains 90 minutes of music from the two-hour show; it includes barbershop harmonies, calypso, marches, jazz, blues, drinking songs, Dixieland, minstrel-show tunes, torch songs, waltzes, and hymns. An instrumental suite has also been derived from the musical (see overleaf).

Orchestral Suite from '1600 Pennsylvania Avenue' (2003)

20'

FP: 25 April 2003 Carnegie Hall, New York New York Pops conducted by Charles Prince

2.2.2.2—2.2.2.1—timp.perc(3)—harmonium—strings

Developed in 2003, the *Orchestral Suite from '1600 Pennsylvania Avenue'* is an attractive medley of the most familiar numbers from the musical – *The President Jefferson's March*, *Take Care of This House*, *I Love My Wife*, and *To Make Us Proud* – arranged for a modestly-sized orchestra. Though the show was not successful, the music has been admired, and reflects Leonard Bernstein at his most witty and charming.

 Recommended recording (*A White House Cantata*):

Thomas Hampson, June Anderson (S), Barbara Hendricks (S), Kenneth Tarver (T), Victor Acquah (BoyS), Neil Jenkins (T), Keel Watson (B); London Voices and London Symphony orchestra conducted by Kent Nagano

Leonard Bernstein's America: Festival Ideas

- Join forces with local professional or university dance company to present *Fancy Free* as a ballet
- Collaborate with opera/theater company on semi-staged *Trouble in Tahiti* or *On The Town*
- Show *On the Waterfront* and *West Side Story* films
- Hold panel discussions on:
 - Leonard Bernstein's New York
 - Leonard Bernstein: Social Activist and Humanitarian
 - Leonard Bernstein's impact on American Music and Culture
 - Leonard Bernstein and his colleagues (i.e. Copland, Barber, Rorem, etc.)
- Additional works:
 - Fanfare for the Inauguration of John F. Kennedy*
 - Prelude, Fugue, and Riffs* (written for Woody Herman)
 - Symphonic Dances from "West Side Story"*

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