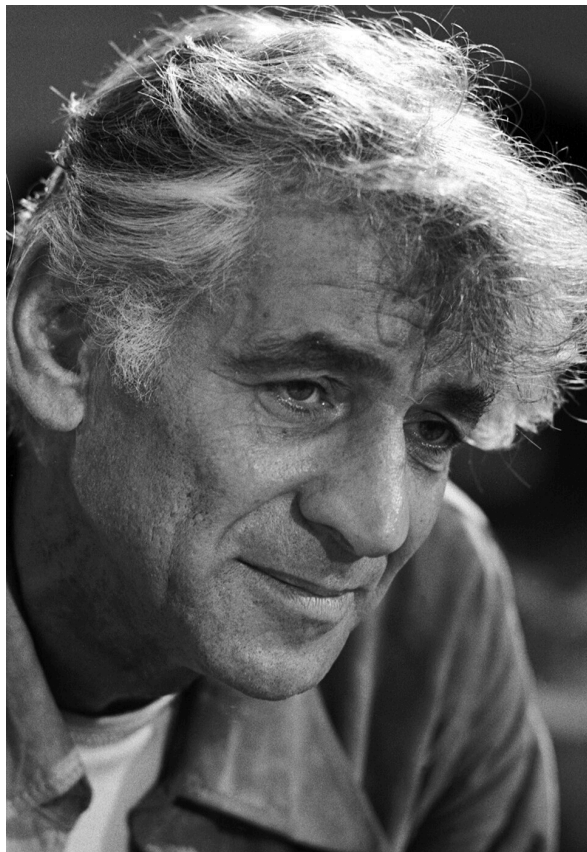


Leonard Bernstein

August 25, 1918 – October 14, 1990



Leonard Bernstein is one of the most well-known composers of the modern age. His story began on August 25, 1918 in Lawrence, Massachusetts, where he was born to Jewish parents who had immigrated to the United States from present-day Ukraine.

Growing up, his earliest encounters with music centered around the synagogue he attended weekly, where he first experienced the beautiful strains of choir and organ music.

Shortly after he turned 10, his aunt left a piano she no longer needed at his family's home. Bernstein begged his parents for lessons, and they relented, allowing him to study with several different teachers.

However, Leonard's father, who was not keen on his son's burgeoning interest in music, eventually put his foot down, refusing to pay for lessons any longer. Undeterred, the young boy simply began to teach music lessons to the neighborhood children in order to fund his own lessons. Seeing Leonard's determination, his father gradually grew to support his music studies, beginning to pay for them once more and taking him to various orchestra performances.

At just 17, Leonard began to study music at the famous Harvard University, graduating with honors in 1939. He continued his studies at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, and then moved to Manhattan, where he immersed himself in the music world. However, his biggest break didn't come until 1943, right after being appointed assistant conductor of the world New York Philharmonic orchestra. The original conductor scheduled to lead a major concert at Carnegie Hall called in sick, and although the notice was last-minute, giving Bernstein no time to rehearse with the orchestra, he persisted. The subsequent performance was broadcasted to the entire nation live, and his admirable composure under pressure was widely celebrated, skyrocketing him to fame.

Bernstein's rise to fame made him the first American conductor to become well-known throughout the world. This was unheard of at the time, given that the vast majority of renowned conductors were European. He went on to conduct and perform internationally, leading famous ensembles like the New York Philharmonic, the Vienna Orchestra, the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, and the London Symphony Orchestra.

In addition to conducting, Bernstein composed in a wide array of genres, from traditional forms like symphonies, operas, ballets, and orchestral music, to more modern works for theater and film. He even went on to write the music for *West Side Story*, one of the most famous Broadway musicals of all time. For his contributions to music, he was given several prestigious awards, including 16 Grammy awards, seven Emmy awards, and the Kennedy Center Award, underscoring how important his work had become.

Bernstein became a part of history through his music, using his platform to advocate for peace and human rights. He conducted Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony* with the New York Philharmonic as a tribute after President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, led a concert in Israel to celebrate the end of the Seven Day War, and traveled to Berlin in 1989 to conduct a performance commemorating the fall of the Berlin Wall. Peace was an incredibly important subject to him, and he often used his music as a means of fostering harmony and unity.

Sadly, not long after the concert in Berlin, he died, succumbing to a heart attack in 1990. However, Leonard Bernstein left behind a world shaped by both his incredible musical talents and passion for peace.

Composer Selections

Week 1 - Peter Pan
(Musical, 1950)

Week 2 - Serenade after Plato's Symposium
(Orchestral, 1954)

Week 3 - Symphonic Suite from On the Waterfront
(Film Score/Orchestral, 1954)

Week 4 - Candide Overture
(Opera, 1956)

Week 5 - Symphonic Dances from West Side Story
(Musical, 1957; Orchestral 1960)

Week 6 - Chichester Psalms
(Choral, 1967)