

Leonard Bernstein

Leonard Bernstein (August 25, 1918 – October 14, 1990) was an American composer, conductor, author, music lecturer, and pianist. He was among the first conductors born and educated in the United States of America to receive worldwide acclaim. According to music critic Donal Henahan, he was "one of the most prodigiously talented and successful musicians in American history."^[2] His fame derived from his long tenure as the music director of the New York Philharmonic, from his conducting of concerts with most of the world's leading orchestras, and from his music for *West Side Story*, *Peter Pan*,^[3] *Candide*, *Wonderful Town*, *On the Town*, *On The Waterfront*, and his own *Mass*.

Bernstein was the first conductor to give numerous television lectures on classical music, starting in 1954 and continuing until his death. He was a skilled pianist,^[4] often conducting piano concertos from the keyboard. As a composer he wrote in many styles encompassing symphonic and orchestral music, ballet, film and theatre music, choral works, opera, chamber music and pieces for the piano. Many of his works are regularly performed around the world, although none has matched the tremendous popular and commercial success of *West Side Story*.

Bernstein was one of the major figures in orchestral conducting in the second half of the 20th century. He was held in high regard amongst many musicians, including the members of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, evidenced by his honorary membership; the London Symphony Orchestra, of which he was President; and the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, with which he appeared regularly as guest conductor. He was probably the main conductor from the 1960s onwards who acquired a sort of superstar. Part of Bernstein's fame was based on his role as a composer. As the first American-born music director of the New York Philharmonic, his rise to prominence was a factor in overcoming the perception of the time that the top conductors were necessarily trained in Europe.

Bernstein's conducting was characterized by extremes of emotion with the rhythmic pulse of the music conveyed visually through his balletic podium manner. Musicians often reported that his manner in rehearsal was the same as in concert. As he got older his performances tended to be overlaid to a greater extent with a personal expressiveness which often divided critical opinion.

Bernstein performed a wide repertoire from the baroque era to the 20th century, although perhaps from the 1970s onwards he tended to focus more on music from the romantic era. He was considered especially accomplished with the works of Gustav Mahler and with American composers in general, including George Gershwin, Aaron Copland, Charles Ives, Roy Harris, William Schuman, and of course himself. Some of his recordings of works by these composers would likely appear on many music critics' lists of recommended recordings. A list of his other well-thought-of recordings would probably include individual works from Haydn, Beethoven, Berlioz, Schumann, Liszt, Nielsen, Sibelius, Stravinsky, Hindemith, and Shostakovich, among others.^[52] His recordings of *Rhapsody in Blue* (full-orchestra version) and *An American in Paris* for Columbia Records, released in 1959, are considered definitive by many, although Bernstein cut the *Rhapsody* slightly, and his more 'symphonic' approach with slower tempi is quite far from Gershwin's own conception of the piece, evident from his two recordings.

In addition to being an active conductor, Bernstein was a very influential teacher of conducting. During his many years of teaching at Tanglewood and elsewhere, he directly taught or mentored many conductors who are performing now. He also undoubtedly influenced the career choices of many American musicians who grew up watching his television programs in the 1950s and 60s.

“Music can name the unnameable and communicate the unknowable.”

Name: _____

Article Questions

Directions: Answer the following questions from the article you just read. Answer in **complete sentences**.

1. What five jobs did Leonard Bernstein hold? _____

2. Why is it so surprising that Leonard Bernstein rose to such fame? _____

3. For what did Leonard Bernstein use television programs? _____

4. Name three genres of music that Leonard Bernstein composed. _____

5. What is considered Leonard Bernstein's most popular musical? _____

6. For which three orchestras did Leonard Bernstein conduct? _____

7. How was Leonard Bernstein's conducting style characterized? _____

8. Name five composers whose work Leonard Bernstein conducted. _____

9. At which institute was Leonard Bernstein an educator? _____

10. What did Leonard Bernstein mean by his quote, "Music can name the unnameable and communicate the unknowable"? How can you relate the quote to your own life? _____

