

## Leonard Bernstein Biography

(Adapted by S.L. from Wikipedia)

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." He was born Louis Bernstein in Lawrence, Massachusetts, the son of Ukrainian Jewish parents Jennie (née Resnick) and Samuel Joseph Bernstein, a hairdressing supplies wholesaler originating from Rovno (now Ukraine.) As a child, he was very close to his younger sister Shirley, and would often play entire operas or Beethoven symphonies with her at the piano.

After graduation from Boston Latin School in 1935, Bernstein attended Harvard University, where he studied music with Walter Piston. During his time following that at Harvard College he mounted a student production of *The Cradle Will Rock*, directing its action from the piano. The composer Marc Blitzstein subsequently became a friend and influence (both musically and politically) on Bernstein. Bernstein also met the conductor Dimitri Mitropoulos. Although he never taught Bernstein, Mitropoulos's charisma and power as a musician was a major influence on Bernstein's eventual decision to take up conducting. Mitropoulos was not stylistically that similar to Bernstein, but he probably influenced some of Bernstein's later habits such as his conducting from the keyboard, his initial practice of conducting without a baton and perhaps his interest in Mahler. After completing his studies at Harvard in 1939 (B.A. cum laude), he enrolled at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and studied conducting with Fritz Reiner.

### Compositions, 1930s:

*Psalm 148(for Voice and Piano)1935*

*Piano Trio, 1937*

In 1940, Bernstein began his study at the Boston Symphony Orchestra's summer institute, Tanglewood, in the conducting class of the orchestra's conductor, Serge Koussevitzky. Koussevitzky did not teach Bernstein much basic conducting technique (which he had already developed under Reiner) but instead became a father figure to him and was perhaps the major influence on Bernstein's emotional way of interpreting music. Bernstein later became Koussevitzky's conducting assistant and would later dedicate his Symphony No. 2, *The Age of Anxiety*, to him. On November 14, 1943, having recently been appointed assistant conductor to Artur Rodzinski of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, he made his major conducting debut at sudden notice—and without any rehearsal—after guest conductor Bruno Walter came down with the flu. Bernstein became instantly famous because the concert was nationally broadcast, and afterwards started to appear as a guest conductor with many U.S. orchestras.

From 1945 to 1947 Bernstein was the Music Director of the New York City Symphony Orchestra, which had been founded the previous year by the conductor Leopold

Stokowski.. The orchestra was aimed at a different audience with more modern programs and cheaper tickets than the New York Philharmonic.

After World War II, Bernstein's career on the international stage began to flourish. In 1946 he made his first trip to Europe conducting various orchestras and recorded Ravel's Piano Concerto in G as soloist and conductor with the Philharmonia Orchestra. In 1946, he conducted opera for the first time, with the American première at Tanglewood of Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes*. That same year, Arturo Toscanini invited Bernstein to guest conduct two concerts with the NBC Symphony Orchestra. In 1947, Bernstein conducted in Tel Aviv for the first time, beginning a lifelong association with Israel. In 1949, he conducted the world première of the *Turangalîla-Symphonie* by Olivier Messiaen, with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. When Koussevitzky died two years later, Bernstein became head of the orchestral and conducting departments at Tanglewood, holding this position for many years.

*Compositions - 1940s:*

*Sonata for Clarinet and Piano, 1942*

*Symphony # 1 Jeremiah, 1942*

*I Hate Music: Five Kid Songs for Soprano and Piano. 1943*

*Fancy Free(Ballet) 1944*

*On the Town(Musical) 1944*

*Hashkivenu (Cantor,Chorus and Organ) 1945*

*La Bonne Cuisine: Four Recipes for Voice and Piano*

*Symphony # 2 The Age of Anxiety, 1949*

*Prelude, Fugue and Riffs(Clarinet & Jazz Ensemble) 1949*

In 1951, Bernstein conducted the New York Philharmonic in the world première of the *Symphony No. 2* of Charles Ives, which was written around half a century earlier but had never been performed. Bernstein was a visiting music professor from 1951 to 1956 at Brandeis University, and he founded the Creative Arts Festival there in 1952. He conducted various productions at the first festival, including the premiere of his opera *Trouble in Tahiti* and Blitzstein's English version of Kurt Weill's *Threepenny Opera*. In 1953 he was the first American conductor to appear at La Scala in Milan, conducting Maria Callas in Cherubini's *Medea*. In 1954 Bernstein made the first of his television lectures for the CBS arts program *Omnibus*, with the aid of musicians from the former NBC Symphony Orchestra. Bernstein subsequently performed concerts with the orchestra and recorded his *Serenade for Violin* with Isaac Stern. Further *Omnibus* lectures followed from 1955 to 1958 covering jazz, conducting, American musical comedy, modern music, J.S. Bach, and grand opera.

Bernstein was named the music director of the New York Philharmonic in 1957, replacing Dimitri Mitropoulos. He began his tenure in that position in 1958, having held the post jointly with Mitropoulos from 1957 to 1958. In 1958, Bernstein and Mitropoulos took the New York Philharmonic on tour to South America. In his first season in sole charge, Bernstein included a season-long survey of American classical music. (Bernstein held the music directorship until 1969 although he continued to

conduct and make recordings with the orchestra for the rest of his life and was appointed "laureate conductor".)

He became a well-known figure in the United States through his series of fifty-three televised Young People's Concerts for CBS, which grew out of his Omnibus programs. His first Young People's Concert was televised a few weeks after his tenure began as principal conductor of the New York Philharmonic and he became as famous for his educational work in those concerts as for his conducting. In 1959, he took the New York Philharmonic on a tour of Europe and the Soviet Union, portions of which were filmed by CBS Television.

Compositions: 1950s:

*Peter Pan*(Musical)1950

*Trouble in Tahiti*(Opera) 1951

*Wonderful Town*(Musical) 1953

*On the Waterfront*(Film score) 1954

*Serenade after Plato's "Symposium"*(Violin and Orchestra) 1954

*Candide* (Operetta) 1956

*West Side Story*(Musical) 1957

In 1960 Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic held a Mahler Festival to mark the centenary of the composer's birth. Bernstein, Walter and Mitropoulos conducted performances. Over the next seven years he made the first complete cycle of recordings of all nine of Mahler's completed symphonies. The success of these recordings, along with Bernstein's concert performances and television talks, was an important part of the revival of interest in Mahler in the 1960s. In 1962 Bernstein conducted the gala opening concert featuring vocal works by Mahler, Beethoven and Vaughan Williams, and the premiere of Aaron Copland's Connotations. Bernstein had conducted at President John F. Kennedy's pre-inaugural gala, and he was an occasional guest in the Kennedy White House. He also conducted at the funeral mass in 1968 for the late President Kennedy's brother Robert Kennedy.

In 1964 Bernstein conducted Verdi's Falstaff at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. And in 1966 he made his debut at the Vienna State Opera conducting the same opera. During his time in Vienna he also recorded the opera for Columbia Records and conducted his first subscription concert with the Vienna Philharmonic. He returned to the State Opera in 1968 for a production of Der Rosenkavalier and in 1970 for Beethoven's Fidelio. . To try to have more time for composition was probably a major factor in his decision to step down as Music Director of the Philharmonic in 1969, and to never accept such a position anywhere again.

Compositions, 1960s:

*Symphony #3 Kaddish*, 1963

*Chichester Psalms*(for Boy Soprano, Chorus and Orchestra)1965

Bernstein continued to appear with the Philharmonic in most years until his death, and he toured with them to Europe in 1976 and to Asia in 1979. He also strengthened his relationship with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, conducting all nine completed Mahler symphonies with them (plus the adagio from the 10th) in the period from 1967 to 1976. In the late 1970s Bernstein conducted a complete Beethoven symphony cycle with the Vienna Philharmonic, and cycles of Brahms and Schumann were to follow. with the 1980s. Other orchestras he conducted on numerous occasions in the 1970s include the Israel Philharmonic, the Orchestre National de France, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

*Compositions, 1970s:*

*MASS: A Theatre Piece for Singers, Players and Dancers, 1971*

*The Dybbuk(Ballet) 1974*

*1600 Pennsylvania Avenue(Musical)1976*

*Songfest(for Six Singers and Orchestra) 1977*

*Slava! A Political Overture, 1977*

In 1982 in the U.S., PBS aired an 11-part series of Bernstein's late 1970s films for Unitel of the Vienna Philharmonic playing all nine Beethoven symphonies and various other Beethoven works. In addition to conducting in New York, Vienna and Israel, Bernstein was a regular guest conductor of other orchestras in the 1980s. These included the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam, with whom he recorded Mahler's First, Fourth, and Ninth Symphonies amongst other works; the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra in Munich, with whom he recorded Wagner's Tristan und Isolde; Haydn's Creation; Mozart's Requiem and Great Mass in C minor; and the orchestra of Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome, with whom he recorded some Debussy and Puccini's La bohème.

In 1982, he founded the Los Angeles Philharmonic Institute as a summer training academy along the lines of Tanglewood. Bernstein served as artistic director and taught conducting there until 1984. Around the same time, he performed and recorded some of his own works with the Los Angeles Philharmonic for Deutsche Grammophon. In 1985, he conducted a recording of West Side Story, the first time he had conducted the entire work.

In his later years, Bernstein's life and work was celebrated around the world. The Israel Philharmonic celebrated his involvement with them at Festivals in Israel and Austria in 1977. In 1986 the London Symphony Orchestra mounted a Bernstein Festival in London with one concert that Bernstein himself conducted, attended by the Queen. In December 1989, Bernstein conducted live performances and a studio recording of his operetta Candide with the London Symphony Orchestra. On December 25, 1989, Bernstein conducted Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in East Berlin's Schauspielhaus as part of a celebration of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

*Compositions, 1980s:*

*Divertimento for Orchestra, 1980*

*Halil (Nocturne for Flutes, Percussion, Harp and Strings) 1981*

*A Quiet Place (Opera) 1983*

*Arias and Barcarolles (Mezzo-Soprano, Baritone and Piano) 1988*

*Missa Brevis, 1988*

*Dance Suite (Brass Quintet) 1989*

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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. 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.

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 followed him, such as Claudio Abbado, Loren Maazel, Marin Alsop, Herbert Blomstedt, Edo de Waart, , Paavo Järvi, Seiji Ozawa, , Helmuth Rilling, Michael Tilson Thomas, and Jaap van Zweden. He also undoubtedly influenced the career choices of many American musicians who grew up watching his television programs in the 1950s and 60s.

Bernstein gave his final performance at Tanglewood on August 19, 1990, with the Boston Symphony playing Benjamin Britten's "Four Sea Interludes" from Peter Grimes, and Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. He announced his retirement from conducting on October 9, 1990 and died of a heart attack five days later.