

To the cantorial community:

“I know that when I listened to music in Temple, I felt something stir within me, as though I were becoming subconsciously aware of music as my *raison d’etre*.”

These were the words of the prolific composer, conductor, activist, educator, and humanitarian **Leonard Bernstein**. To celebrate his centennial birthday, the National Museum of American Jewish History on historic Independence Mall in Philadelphia is organizing a groundbreaking new exhibition *Leonard Bernstein: The Power of Music*, opening March 2018, which has received generous support from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

In this exhibition, we are taking a unique approach to Bernstein’s life and work, exploring it through a Jewish lens, and following the same central thesis Lenny stated as his own: **a search for the solution to the twentieth century crisis of faith.**

As the cantorial community prepares for Shabbat Shirah this January, **we hope that this American Jewish icon can serve as inspiration for you and your congregations** during what would have been Bernstein’s 100th year. Arts organizations around the world are organizing activities for the Leonard Bernstein Centennial, which provides a unique opportunity for Jewish communities to connect to one another and to the broader celebrations.

Please find enclosed a “Cantor’s Kit” – a selection of resources for your use, including an essay about Bernstein’s Jewish identity from our exhibition’s curator, a guide to Bernstein’s Jewish music from Hazzan David Tilman, a lesson plan developed by the Museum’s education team, and more.

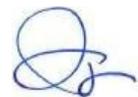
We also encourage you to draw inspiration from Bernstein as you consider your plans for **Jewish American Heritage Month (JAHM) this May**. Over the past few years, we have begun designating an annual JAHM theme and creating and distributing a companion publication to raise awareness of JAHM—and ultimately of the contributions American Jews have made to American society.

This year’s JAHM theme is *American Jews and Music*, which will complement the many activities connected to Leonard Bernstein. We hope you will find ways that are meaningful in your congregations and communities to celebrate and explore Jewish American heritage this spring, and that the relaunched JAHM website (jahm.us) can serve as a resource.

Thank you for all you do every day to inspire and connect the American Jewish community through the power of prayer and song.

If you have any questions, please contact Stefanie Sutton at ssutton@nmajh.org. Wishing you a happy and healthy 2018.

Sincerely,



Ivy L. Barsky
CEO and Gwen Goodman Director

P.S. If you are in travel distance of Philadelphia, please plan to visit us and the exhibition (March-September 2018), or check out our website as we solidify its travel schedule. www.nmajh.org/bernstein

Bernstein & Judaism

By Ivy Weingram, Associate Curator, National Museum of American Jewish History and curator of *Leonard Bernstein: The Power of Music*

Jewish audiences may be familiar with many of Leonard Bernstein's works, notably *West Side Story*, but not necessarily how Bernstein grappled with his own religious, political, and sexual identity, or how he responded to the political and social crises of his day. Moreover, Bernstein's Jewish identity, so deeply ingrained in him by his parents and so intricately woven through his life and work, informed his distinctive compositional style and his social activism.

Leonard Bernstein was born on August 25, 1918 to Jewish immigrants Jennie and Samuel Bernstein, then living in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Samuel founded the Samuel Bernstein Hair Company and built a successful business as the New England franchisee of the Frederic's Permanent Wave machine. Leonard began piano lessons at age 10 and studied at Boston Latin School, Harvard University, the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood, and the Curtis Institute of Music. He graduated from Curtis in 1941, and within months led the Boston Pops in his first appearance with a professional orchestra. On November 14, 1943, Bernstein famously made his Carnegie Hall conducting debut when Maestro Bruno Walter fell ill. He was 25 years old.



Leonard Bernstein with his parents, Jennie and Samuel Bernstein, c. 1921. Leonard Bernstein Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress.

In January 1944 Bernstein premiered *Jeremiah*, the first of his three symphonies that included *Age of Anxiety* and *Kaddish*. He followed *Jeremiah* by composing numerous concert works (*Chichester Psalms*, *MASS*), theater works (*On the Town*, *Wonderful Town*, *Candide*, *A Quiet Place*, songs and chorus for *Peter Pan*, *West Side Story*), film scores (*On the Waterfront* score, among others), and ballet scores (*Fancy Free*, *Dybbuk*).

Bernstein became Music Director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in 1958—the first American born-and-trained conductor to hold this position. His Young People's Concerts made him the face of classical music for a generation of Americans. He traveled the world as a successful conductor and taught at Tanglewood, Harvard, and Brandeis University. He helped found music festivals and academies—nurturing young talent, popularizing classical music, and bringing young composers, conductors, and new music to a wide audience.

Bernstein's Jewish Identity

Many people think of Leonard Bernstein as a New Yorker, given his longtime associations with the New York Philharmonic and Broadway theater. But he was, in fact, Boston-raised in a Jewish community largely composed of recent immigrants like his parents. Leonard learned the Hebrew Bible and Talmud from his father, Samuel. The family belonged to Congregation Mishkan Tefila, a Conservative synagogue that featured progressive approaches to worship and liturgy, including a mixed-gender choir and organ music. "I used to weep just listening to the choir, cantor, and organ thundering out," Bernstein recalled in 1990. Profoundly influenced by the sacred Jewish music of the

synagogue, in 1946 Bernstein wrote that he “may have heard greater masterpieces performed since then, and under more impressive circumstances; but I have never been more deeply moved.”¹

Generational tensions within the Bernstein household reflected the classic immigrant narrative—parents seeking freedom and opportunity, building new lives, and raising children who embraced American customs. Samuel Bernstein nourished his son’s love of the piano, but his idea of a “professional” musician was a poor, traveling klezmer. He once advised Helen Coates, Leonard’s instructor and later long-time secretary, that “from a practical standpoint I prefer that [Leonard] not regard his music as a future means of maintenance.”² Despite his reservations, Samuel took pride in Leonard’s achievements and came to believe that his son could make a living in music. He privately appealed to Serge Koussevitzky, the Boston Symphony Orchestra’s conductor, for assistance in placing his son in a conducting position in the United States.

As Bernstein would later say, being young, American, and Jewish meant “three strikes” against becoming a great conductor in 1940s America. In 1935 he gained entry to Harvard University despite quotas enacted to prevent the school from becoming “too Jewish.” In this climate, he not only secured admission, but did so bearing a letter of recommendation from Mishkan Tefila’s rabbi, Herman Rubenovitz. As Bernstein considered a career as an orchestral conductor, Koussevitzky—born Jewish and converted to Russian Orthodoxy to advance his own career—advised his student that to pass in the world of classical music he should change his name to Leonard S. Burns. Leonard spurned his beloved mentor’s advice: “I’ll do it as ‘Bernstein’ or not at all.”

Asthma kept Bernstein from serving in World War II, affording him the opportunity to establish himself as a conductor and composer, all while witnessing the Holocaust from afar. In the spring of 1948 he embarked on a European conducting tour that included Germany, where he led an orchestra of Displaced Persons in Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*. Meeting survivors affected the young conductor immensely—“[I] cried my heart out,” he wrote to Helen Coates—and yet it took him nearly a lifetime of wrestling with the tragedies of the Holocaust to overtly address these experiences in his work. At the end of his life, Bernstein left an unfinished Holocaust opera.

Jewish themes and Hebrew source texts had considerable influence on, and were present in, Bernstein’s efforts as a composer to explore his identity.³ He regularly drew from Jewish life, scripture, and tradition when creating symphonic works, theater pieces, and film scores—from the opening notes of *West Side Story*, to the liturgical motifs and text in the *Jeremiah* and *Kaddish* symphonies, to *MASS: A Theatre Piece for Singers, Players, and Dancers*, which incorporates Hebrew prayer. “The ‘gang call’—the way the Jets signal to each other—in *West Side Story* was really like the call of the shofar that I used to hear blown in temple on Rosh Hashanah,” he reminisced.⁴ Hazzan David Tilman’s piece in this kit further explores these connections to Jewish prayer motifs.

¹ Leonard Bernstein to Cantor Samuel Rosenbaum, 20 March 1946, Congregation Mishkan Tefila archives, Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary. By then Bernstein had already graduated from the Curtis Institute, studied with Aaron Copland and with Serge Koussevitzky at Tanglewood, and conducted the New York Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall, among other conducting engagements.

² Samuel Bernstein to Helen Coates, 20 July 1934, Correspondence, Box 13 Folder 1, Leonard Bernstein Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³ Jack Gottlieb, *Funny, It Doesn’t Sound Jewish: How Yiddish Songs and Synagogue Melodies Influenced Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, and Hollywood* (New York: SUNY Press, 2004). Ann Glazer-Niren, “‘Lenny Was Family...’ at Mishkan Tefila: The Importance of Leonard Bernstein’s Synagogue.” *The American Jewish Archives Journal* 67:1 (2015).

⁴ Interview published posthumously in *Rolling Stone*, November 29, 1990, p. 3.

Bernstein's Connection to Israel

From his youngest days as a conductor, Bernstein committed himself to nurturing Israel, particularly at key moments in the life of the State. In April 1947 he gave the first of nine concerts with the Palestine Philharmonic Orchestra (later the Israel Philharmonic). In May of the following year, the State of Israel declared its independence: Bernstein arrived that Fall to conduct concerts throughout the country. In 1967, celebrating a reunited Jerusalem just one month after the Six Day War, Bernstein led the Israel Philharmonic in Mahler's Second Symphony (known as the "Resurrection Symphony"). He wrote to his parents:

How I thought of you, Daddy, and how exalted you would have felt, seeing so many different kinds of Jews - Yemenites, Chasidim, Soldiers, black, blonde, young, old - all praying together in a sound as of the whole universe - as though every Jewish voice for 5000 years had joined in this prayer. ...And when small groups of Tzadikim began to dance and sing Horas in front of The Wall, I saw you there dancing with them. You would have been in ecstasy, but I experienced it for you.⁵

Bernstein went on to conduct the Palestine/Israel Philharmonic Orchestra in 25 different seasons—touring, recording, and filming concerts in the United States and Europe. Building a cultural exchange between the U.S. and Israel, he brought the New York Philharmonic for concerts in Israel, and premiered new works with the Israel Philharmonic well into the 1980s.

Additional resources on Bernstein's Jewish identity, and its expression in his music:

- Burton, Humphrey. *Leonard Bernstein*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1995.
- Feigelson, Josh. "Leonard Bernstein, My Rabbi: How the Jewish conductor inspired a classical music-loving rabbi." *Tablet*, 23 Aug. 2013.
- Glazer-Niren, Ann. "'Lenny Was Family... at Mishkan Tefila': The Importance of Leonard Bernstein's Synagogue." *The American Jewish Archives Journal* 67:1 (2015): 27-55.
- . "Jewish Elements in Leonard Bernstein's *Hashkiveinu*." *Journal of Synagogue Music* 40.2 (Sep. 2015): 66-77.
- Gottlieb, Jack. *Funny, It Doesn't Sound Jewish: How Yiddish Songs and Synagogue Melodies Influenced Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, and Hollywood*. New York: SUNY Press, 2004.
- Hyman, Paula E. "From City to Suburb: Temple Mishkan Tefila of Boston." *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*. Ed. Jack Wertheimer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 185-205.
- Kaskowitz, Sheryl. "All in the Family: Brandeis University and Leonard Bernstein's 'Jewish Boston.'" *Journal of the Society for American Music* 3.1 (2009): 85-100.
- Sarna, Jonathan D. "Leonard Bernstein and the Boston Jewish Community of His Youth: The Influence of Solomon Braslavsky, Herman Rubenovitz, and Congregation Mishkan Tefila." *Journal of the Society of American Music* 3.1 (2009): 35-46.
- Sarna, Jonathan D. and Ellen Smith, eds. *The Jews of Boston: Essays on the Occasion of the Centenary (1895-1995) of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston*. Boston: Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, 1995.
- Schiller, David Michael. "Leonard Bernstein's *Kaddish*. Bloch, Schoenberg, and Bernstein: *Assimilating Jewish Music*." New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. 127-166.
- . "'My Own Kaddish': Leonard Bernstein's Symphony No. 3." *Key Texts in American Jewish Culture*. Ed. Jack Kugelmass. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003.

⁵ Leonard Bernstein to Jennie and Samuel Bernstein, 11 July 1967, Correspondence, Box 83 Folder 18, Leonard Bernstein Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Celebrating Leonard Bernstein's Compositions with Your Congregation

by Hazzan David F. Tilman / david.tilman@comcast.net

As the centennial of Leonard Bernstein (August 28, 1918–October 14, 1990) is celebrated throughout the world, the Jewish community, and especially the Jewish musical community, should take pride in the huge contributions of Leonard Bernstein as conductor, music educator, pianist, and especially as composer.

Raised by his family as a serious, practicing, and committed Jew, Bernstein internalized Jewish beliefs, practices, customs, history, and especially Jewish musical materials during his youth in Sharon and Roxbury, Massachusetts. In 1920, his parents, Sam and Jennie Bernstein, joined Roxbury's **Congregation Mishkan Tefila**, a large Conservative synagogue. In this congregation, Bernstein was so greatly influenced by the synagogue's music director, **Solomon G. Braslavsky** (1887–1975), that he inscribed a copy of the "Lamentation" from his Jeremiah Symphony to him: "For Prof. Braslavsky, To whom I owe much, 1945." He reflected back on these formative teenage years, describing the congregation's excellent Cantor, choir, and the organ, and the profound impact synagogue music had on him.

Cantors should take special pride in Bernstein's use of Jewish musical materials, and find opportunities to teach their congregants about the composer's Jewish identity revealed in so many of his compositions.

Dr. Jack Gottlieb, Bernstein scholar and collaborator, has written **that there are at least 20 examples of Jewish musical materials** found in Bernstein's oeuvre. Here are a few examples:

- a. **Hashkiveinu** - This composition was commissioned in 1945 by Cantor David J. Putterman and the Park Avenue Synagogue in New York City, for a Shabbat evening service. This difficult work is scored for tenor Cantor, choir, and organ. It was written as part of the Park Avenue Synagogue annual commissioning series of Jewish liturgical compositions by contemporary composers.
- b. **Yigdal** - The Shabbat evening closing hymn was set by the composer at the invitation of Harry Coopersmith, music director the NYC Board of Jewish Education in 1950, and published in "The Songs We Sing," a large collection of Jewish music for the entire year, especially suited as a music text book for children. The music is set as a round or canon. This work is the most accessible of all the Bernstein Jewish works.
- c. **Simchu Na** - In 1954 the composer was invited to write an arrangement of an Israeli dance melody composed by Matityahu Shelem for a Los Angeles based dance group. Originally scored for mixed chorus and orchestra, it was transcribed for chorus and piano by Reuven Kosakoff.
- d. **Jeremiah Symphony** - The composer's first extended work was written in 1942. He utilizes traditional Haftarah cantillation in the second movement, and sets Hebrew texts from Eicha/Lamentations sung to the unique musical cantillation motifs for this mournful book traditionally sung on the Ninth Day of Av, a fast day in the Jewish calendar.

- e. **Kaddish Symphony** - This very long work for narrator, large chorus of children and adults, and symphony orchestra, utilizes the complete text of the Kaddish prayer. The composition, written in 1963, is dedicated to the memory of President John Kennedy. This work explores Bernstein's personal theological quest.
- f. **Chichester Psalms** - Commissioned in 1965 by the Chichester Abbey in England, the composer wrote settings for several Biblical Psalm texts, including Psalms 100, 23, and 131. It concludes with Hine Mah Tov U'Mah Naim, Psalm 133, v. 1. The composer insists that the composition, scored for chorus, orchestra, or organ, be performed only in Hebrew. This 18-minute work is the most performed of all the serious works.
- g. **Candide** - The humorous dance "I Am Easily Assimilated," in the original score is entitled "Old Lady's Jewish Tango," and the tempo marking is humorously indicated as "Hassidicamente."
- h. **West Side Story** - The overture begins with a traditional "T'kiyah" shofar blast, hinting at the work's original title and subject material as "East Side Story." He utilizes Shofar calls in other compositions.
- i. **MASS** - Bernstein's longest and largest work, written for the opening of the Kennedy Center in 1971, has many Jewish elements, including Psalm 121 in English translation, liturgical quotes in Hebrew, including Kadosh Kadosh Kadosh and Baruch Haba.

There are many other examples of Bernstein's Jewish roots and identity in his music. **We American Cantors and Jewish musicians should find opportunities to teach our congregants about his life and works.** For example, the Bernstein **Yigdal** can be taught to a chorus of children, teenagers, and adults and sung in Shabbat evening services. The **Hashkiveinu** setting is more difficult to learn and perform. It can be accessed and studied through YouTube recordings. The Jewish ingredients throughout the Bernstein repertoire can be learned by score study and by listening to recordings of many different settings.

Contact me directly for additional guidance on studying and teaching the Jewish elements in the music of Leonard Bernstein.

Leonard Bernstein: The Power of Music

March 16 – September 2, 2018 at the National Museum of American Jewish History



The **National Museum of American Jewish History** (NMAJH) on historic Independence Mall in Philadelphia will present ***Leonard Bernstein: The Power of Music***, the first large-scale museum exhibition to illustrate the famed conductor and composer's life, Jewish identity, and social activism. The exhibition will feature **approximately 100 historic artifacts**—from Bernstein's piano and conducting suit to family heirlooms—along with original films and immersive sound installations. Taking place during the worldwide centennial celebration of Bernstein's birthday, *Leonard Bernstein: The Power of Music* will be on view **March 16 – September 2, 2018**.

Audiences may be familiar with many of Bernstein's works, but not necessarily how his approach to music was informed by the political and social crises of his day. Bernstein used the arts to express the restlessness, anxiety, fear, and hope of an American Jew living through World War II and the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and turbulent social change that shook his faith: in God, in humanity, and in government. The exhibition will focus on this theme in Bernstein's work—what he referred to as his **“search for a solution to the 20th-century crisis of faith.”** It will explore how he confronted this “crisis” by breaking racial barriers in his casting decisions for *On the Town* (1944), addressing America's changing ideas about race and ethnicity in *West Side Story*, and giving a voice to the human rights crisis during the Vietnam era in his provocative theater piece, *MASS* (1971), as examples.

Ivy Weingram, NMAJH Associate Curator and curator of *Leonard Bernstein: The Power of Music*, says, “Leonard Bernstein is remembered as a passionate, larger-than-life personality—a charismatic conductor, devoted educator, and skilled musician. This exhibition will delve into his memorable works while also exploring a lesser known side of Bernstein—the second-generation American Jew who inspired social progress, both on and off the stage. As our nation continues to confront issues of race, religion, and what it means to be an ‘American’, Bernstein's music

takes on new, personal meanings for every audience that experiences it.”

Alexander Bernstein, Leonard Bernstein’s son and member of the exhibition’s Advisory Committee, shares, “I think it is so extraordinary that the National Museum of American Jewish History is putting on this exhibition about my father and his life as a Jewish American icon. While the Museum looks back at great figures in American Jewish history, it also is so actively looking forward. My sisters and I are very conscious of bringing our father’s legacy to a new generation, and the Museum is doing a fantastic job of that.”

The exhibition will bring together approximately 100 original artifacts, some never-before-exhibited in public. Artifact highlights include **Bernstein’s piano, an annotated copy of *Romeo and Juliet*** used for the development of *West Side Story* (originally imagined as *East Side Story*), the **program for his Carnegie Hall debut**, his **conducting suit**, his **easel used for studying scores and composing**, and much more. Bernstein’s Jewish heritage, so deeply ingrained in him by his parents and so intricately woven through his life and work, will be conveyed through a number of artifacts, including the **mezuzah** that hung in his studio, the **Hebrew prayer book** he carried with him when he traveled, his **ketubah** (Jewish marriage contract), his family’s **Passover seder plate**, and the **Talmud** (book of Jewish law) given to Bernstein by his father.

The exhibition will also feature a variety of films, sound installations, and interactive media. Visitors will hear from Bernstein himself through **archival recordings and documentary footage**, alongside interviews with those who knew him best. **Film clips** of Bernstein conducting, his visit to Israel in 1967, and excerpts of *West Side Story* will highlight key moments in Bernstein’s life and career. A state-of-the-art **multimedia interactive** will invite visitors to explore how Bernstein wove elements of synagogue music into his compositions for film, Broadway, and orchestra. To communicate the significance of Bernstein’s visit to a Displaced Persons camp in Germany during Spring 1948—where he led an orchestra of Holocaust survivors—the Museum will display **video testimonies** from those who participated in this little-known moment in Bernstein’s life. Lastly, an **original film** will convey the enduring impact of Bernstein’s *MASS*, re-contextualizing the monumental composition by combining it with contemporary examples of the power of music.

Leonard Bernstein: The Power of Music received generous support from the **National Endowment for the Humanities**, which awards grants to programs demonstrating the highest scholarship and excellence. The exhibition will be complemented by public and educational programs, to be announced at a later date. For more information, visit NMAJH.org/Bernstein.

You can learn more about #Bernsteinat100 celebrations at leonardbernstein.com/at100, or explore centennial events in Philadelphia at bit.ly/phillyloveslenny and using #PhillyLovesLenny.

To book a group visit, contact groups@nmajh.org or 215.923.3811 x 141.



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Jewish American Heritage Month in May Will Celebrate *American Jews and Music*

Jewish American Heritage Month (JAHM), a national commemoration of the contributions that American Jews have made to the fabric of our nation's history, culture, and society, announces the theme for the May 2018 celebration: **American Jews and Music**. A newly revamped website, www.jahm.us, offers interactive content and educational resources to facilitate the nationwide engagement around this year's edition. First established by presidential proclamation in 2006 and renewed every year since, JAHM encourages people of all backgrounds to learn about and draw inspiration from the more than 360-year history of Jewish life in this country.



"The stories of American Jews are woven into the rich history of this diverse nation," says **Ivy Barsky**, CEO and Gwen Goodman Director of the **National Museum of American Jewish History**, the lead sponsor of JAHM. "By celebrating JAHM, we honor the values of inclusion, acceptance, and religious liberty cherished by this country. This year's focus on *American Jews and Music* invites deeper exploration of one of the many facets of American life impacted by this community."

JAHM's 2018 theme provides an opportunity to recognize the many American Jews who have helped create the nation's soundtrack, from patriotic anthems and classical compositions to Broadway scores and rock and roll. There are numerous examples of composers, conductors, lyricists, musicians, and singers who have been shaped by American life, society, and culture, and in turn enriched America's musical repertoire. Songwriter **Irving Berlin** (1888-1989) was an Eastern European immigrant who produced timeless hits, including *God Bless America* while fighting for the United States in World War I. *West Side Story* composer **Leonard Bernstein** (1918-1990)—whose centennial birthday is currently being observed worldwide—used the power of music to respond to the political and social crises of his day. Singer **Fanny Brice** (1891-1951), the child of Jewish immigrants, delighted audiences with her vaudeville acts, inspiring a stage and film portrayal by another widely successful singer—global stage and screen sensation **Barbra Streisand** (b. 1942). The musical output of these creative individuals, among countless others, continues to entertain and inspire today.

On the revamped website (www.jahm.us), you can find ways to observe JAHM in your own communities. The website delves into the history of American Jewish life through a detailed timeline and map. Teachers, students, and lifelong learners can peruse lesson plans and reading lists. The 2018 theme is highlighted through stories of American Jews in music across genres, and will be further explored in a forthcoming booklet produced by the National Museum of American Jewish History. All are encouraged to submit their JAHM-related events to the calendar, whether it is an exhibition, concert, film screening, lecture, or other program.

For more information and updates in the lead-up to JAHM, visit www.jahm.us.

Leonard Bernstein – A Passionate Advocate for Social Justice

Shabbat Shirah is a musical moment in Jewish biblical history. This is a Shabbat of singing and of celebrating Moses and Miriam leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and into the wilderness.

This lesson for learners ages 12 and up provides the opportunity to examine Leonard Bernstein's commitment to social justice and his belief in the power and importance of music in bringing social change. The lesson focuses on one formative moment in a long life of activism, and invites learners from middle school through adulthood to explore Bernstein's choices in music-making. The lesson also encourages participants to identify and respond creatively to social issues that are important to them.

Read the following text with your students:

We still believe, or many of us do, what the Exodus first taught... about the meaning and possibility of politics: first, that wherever you live, it is probably Egypt; second, that there is a better place, a world more attractive, a promised land; and third, that the way to the land is through the wilderness. **There is no way to get from here to there except by joining together and marching.**

-- Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 1985

A prominent political thinker and scholar, Michael Walzer interprets the Exodus story as **a call to action**. In *Exodus and Revolution*, Walzer attempts to "give a reading of the Exodus that captures its political meaning." "Egypt" here is the world in which we all live, and the "Promised Land" is the better world we can make through our own actions. No one individual can walk into the Promised Land alone: entering requires the efforts of the entire community.

Ask your student:

- *In what ways is the world in which we live "Egypt"?*
- *What might be the advantage of feeling like we're always in "Egypt"?*
- *Is it always necessary to go through a "wilderness" to get to the "Promised Land"?*
- *What is YOUR "Promised Land"? What cause would you fight for?*

Leonard Bernstein not only composed for Broadway, conducted famous orchestras, and starred on TV, but he was a celebrated personality constantly living in the spotlight. How would you promote a cause that you believe in if you had that kind of spotlight on you?

Explain: Bernstein believed in the power of art to influence reality and get us "from here to there." His conception of the relationship of the arts and society is reflected in his statement from 1957: "*West Side Story* is one long protest against racial discrimination... that is why we wrote it."

Historical Background:

The arts have always been a means for addressing political issues. Leonard Bernstein used his prominence, and his talents, to advocate for social justice, both on and off the stage. For example, he

supported nuclear disarmament (asking his admirers to celebrate his 65th birthday by wearing blue armbands to signify their opposition to the nuclear arms buildup), Amnesty International, and conducted concerts in the Soviet Union to improve relations during the Cold War.

Bernstein maintained a lifelong commitment to racial equality. His 1939 Harvard thesis, entitled "The Absorption of Race Elements into American Music," called for an "organic" music that drew on country's many musical traditions and connects its citizens regardless of religion, race, class or ethnicity. During the 1940s he became involved with the National Negro Congress (NNC), an interracial organization founded in 1935 to protest deteriorating working conditions for Africa-Americans and "secure the rights of the Negro people to be free from Jim Crowism, segregation, discrimination, lynching, and mob violence." As a student at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, Leonard Bernstein wrote to his childhood piano teacher, Helen Coates, about the possibility of leading "an all-Negro Symphony Orchestra!...I'll be only too glad to work with them [NNC]. It's a great social triumph, too, if it succeeds; conquering the latest suspicion of whites among the Negroes (and how justified that suspicion is!) is a large step forward."

Explicit and implicit racism and discrimination in arts education made it much more difficult for African-Americans to become professional musicians, especially, but not only, in the world of symphonic music. Bernstein considered this a social problem – most African-American children did not have access to professional training and segregation often prevented them from entering the great orchestra halls and theaters of the time. In 1947 he published an article in the *New York Times* titled "The Negro in Music: Problems He Has to Face in Getting a Start" criticizing the lack of resources available to Africa-American children. Nora Holt, classical music critic for the *Amsterdam News*, an Africa-American newspaper, commented that "it took more than ordinary courage for Leonard Bernstein...he measures a human being according to his qualities without odious reference to race or creed."

Bernstein continued to be an outspoken advocate for civil rights throughout his life, including participating in the historic 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery (Alabama) and inviting African-American musicians to his popular Young People's Concerts.

We will focus now on one of Bernstein's earliest works for the stage. written during World War II: the Broadway musical *On the Town* (1944), and how Bernstein and the musical's creative team made a powerful statement with this one new show.

Show students the following image and ask them "what do you see?" encourage them to pay close attention to details.

Photograph from the souvenir program for *On The Town*, 1944
 Here are a few questions to encourage observation (for middle school students):

1. Describe the people that you see in the photo.
2. What are the people in this photo doing?
3. What are they wearing?
4. What is in the background?



Continue by asking:

5. *How do you think these people feel?*
6. *Where might this scene taking place?*
7. *What might be special or uncommon about this picture?*

Explain that this photo was taken from the Broadway musical *On The Town*, which tells the story of three sailors, Chip, Ozzie, and Gabey, enjoying one day of shore leave in New York City. The show premiered in 1944, at the height of WWII.

In the photo, the cast holds hands. What looks normal to us today was unusual in 1944. At that time, a mixed-race cast was rare. Notice the African-American serviceman and the women dance hand in hand with white sailors, and the African-American sailor in the back, Flash Riley, appears to be holding hands with a white female dancer. This would have been striking given that the American armed forces were still segregated, public touching or dancing between men and women of different races could be very dangerous in the Jim Crow south, and stage practices reinforced segregation on and off stage. The choreographer, Jerome Robbins, explained that “for the first time they [black dancers] danced with the whites, not separately, in social dancing. We had some trouble with that in some of the cities we went to [on tour].”

In addition to dancing together, the show offered African-Americans different roles than usually seen on stage. African-Americans were often cast in stereotypical roles such as household helpers, laborers, and criminals. *On The Town* had no such stereotypes and featured African-American dancers and actors to playing the same character-types as their white colleagues - including sailors! - all together, part of the same street scene, and living equal lives.

A female lead in the show, Sono Osate remarked that the show “depicts just people, any people, the people of New York as they live and dance and ride in subways, all intermingled.” Theophilus Lewis, a theater critic, wrote in Baltimore’s *Afro-American* that “the colored characters...are not highlighted or emphasized in any way. They are just there, a part of the human scene as they are in life.”

Watch one of the most famous songs, placed near the opening of the musical, ‘New York, New York’.

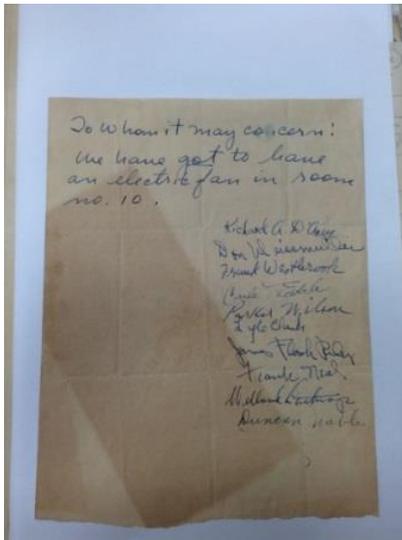
The scene and music show that *On the Town* is at its heart a love affair with New York and a tale about living life to its fullest. We can assure you that you will continue humming “New York, New York” after the lesson is over!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7C1gWZTdgw> (from the 1949 film).

Bernstein continued the show’s commitment to integration when he hired Everett Lee as a violinist in the pit orchestra, and later appointed him conductor. Lee, likely the first African-American to lead a Broadway pit orchestra, later recalled, “Lenny was a wonderful person. Not only was he a great talent, he was a fine person...he said “be what you are, Everett. Just be what you’re supposed to be.”

Ask: *How would you interpret the advice to “be what you are”?*

Show your students the following image and ask them “what do you see?” Encourage them to pay close attention to the names at the bottom of the page, especially to the 7th and 8th names listed.



Handwritten note from the male dancers in *On The Town*

“To whom it may concern:
 We have got to have
 an electric fan in room
 no. 10.”

Explain that this is a handwritten note from the male dancers in *On The Town*, requesting an electric fan in their dressing room. Flash Riley (#7 on the list) and Frank Neal (#8 on the list) signed it together with their white colleagues.

Ask: *This note will be displayed as part of an exhibition that celebrates the life and career of Leonard Bernstein. What might be its significance?*

Explain: We already saw how *On The Town* faced segregation through onstage, and this note shows that it did so offstage as well, through shared dressing rooms. The note shows that 10 men, including the two African-American dancers, Flash Riley and Frank Neal, shared a dressing room. The female dancers also shared integrated dressing rooms. One actress remarked, “We are such a happy community in the show. We go out together and we eat in the same restaurants...”

Have students look at the photo and share details they can observe.

Large-format program for *On The Town*

Here are a few questions to encourage observation (for middle school students):

1. Describe the people that you see in the photo.
2. What are the people in this photo doing?
3. What are they wearing?
4. What is written and depicted in the background?

Continue by asking:

5. The text on the backdrop is Ivy Smith’s biography. What can you tell about her?
6. Which specific qualities are described? Why do you think she is depicted this way?
7. Now that you understand the background of the show, what unique casting decision is represented in this photo? Why is it special?



Explain: The plot of *On The Town* follows three sailors - Chip, Ozzie, and Gabey on a one-day shore leave in New York City during World War II. Each of them pursues a woman during the course of the show. Central to the plot is Gabey’s pursuit of Ivy Smith. Ivy has just been selected as “Miss Turnstiles” for the month - a beauty queen of the subway - and Gabey falls in love with her image on a poster inside a subway train. He vows to find her.

On the Town featured the Japanese-American ballet dancer, Sono Osato as “Ivy Smith.” Casting Osato as an all-American beauty queen challenged current ideas about Japanese-Americans. Japan was America’s enemy in the war and Japanese Americans were being interred in camps across the country. **Audiences saw a Japanese-American woman taking a role onstage that was off-limits to her in real life**, representing one of the more remarkable moments on Broadway during World War II.

Their choice is even more remarkable given that Osato’s father, Shoji Osato, had been arrested by the FBI one day after the attack on Pearl Harbor as an “enemy alien,” becoming one of some 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry who were held in internment camps. He was held six months and denied permission to travel to New York to see his daughter perform until April 1945.

Discuss:

*Do you think it was risky for the creative team to cast Sono Osato in *On the Town*? Based on the two images you have seen, how did the show’s creators take a traditional story of three sailors pursuing women and give it deeper meaning?*

Conclude the discussion by saying that Leonard Bernstein and *On The Town*’s creators used the Broadway stage as a platform for promoting equality, integration, and even women’s rights (the women in *On The Town* are dominant, high-powered, competent, and outspoken).

Watch Hildy, the sweetly aggressive taxi driver, in “I Can Cook, Too,” as she brings Chip to her apartment, refusing to take ‘no’ for an answer and bragging about her many talents. This song is a great example of the outsized roles and personalities Bernstein gave his female leads in *On The Town*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5-a1mvGDRl>

Ask your students: *How do you think the press of the day responded to the show?*

Have students read an excerpt from the article, “On The Town Proves the Point; Negroes Cast in Normal Roles” by Joe Bostic, published in *The People’s Voice* on Feb 17, 1945, and answer the questions below:

“For the first time in the history of the big street a mixed cast is completely integrated in a thoroughly normal presentation of people living their lives – and having loads of fun doing it – in New York. It’s the biggest, most important, thing that has ever happened to Negroes in the American theatre.

Six Negroes are in the cast...not as Negro characters but as New Yorkers. Whom you’d never know were Negroes except for the color of their skin. To give you an idea, Lenny Jackson plays the role of a cop...and takes a sailor into custody.

Best of all, the producer didn’t make a lot of fuss about the departure from the customary policy, which we’ve resented for years...he just went ahead and did it. For God’s sake, see it.”

What Does Joe Bostic mean by “customary policy”?

Why does he consider the show “the biggest, most important thing” that has ever happened to African-Americans in the American theater?

What changes do you want to make in society? What barriers are there? How could you “just go ahead and do it”?

Explain: The mainstream white press of the day, with some exceptions, ignored the show’s integrated cast. However, the black press commented repeatedly on this. *Why do you think accounts for this difference?*

This article quoted above appeared about six weeks after the show opened in *The People’s Voice*, a weekly newspaper circulated in Harlem. Its African-American author, Joe Bostic, recognized *On The Town*’s efforts toward integration and encouraged his readers to see the show. Later he became an outspoken advocate for the integration of baseball which took place in 1947.

Discuss the following questions with your students:

The author Carol Oja said that Bostic’s review was “extraordinary.” What do you think she means when she says that “a largely white show with a relatively small number of African-American (6 out of 54) could make a difference?”

*Broadway musicals have dealt with race and ethnicity in a range of ways. Can you think of any other examples? What makes the decision to deal with equality and social justice **through casting** so powerful? Can you think of any recent movies, TV shows, or plays that have made similar contributions to expanding representation in popular media?*

Conclusion

As a young conductor, Leonard Bernstein once told his orchestra during rehearsal: "Give it all you've got and then crescendo*!"

*a gradual increase in volume of a musical passage

Discuss:

What do you think Bernstein meant by these words? What do they mean for you personally?

Remember your “Promised Land”? Would you “give it all you’ve got”? How? How would you perform a crescendo?