

Bernstein Centennial Celebration Continues With Concerts Worldwide, Philadelphia Museum Exhibition

Jane Levere

The actual 100th anniversary of the birth of musician extraordinaire Leonard Bernstein on August 25 will be celebrated worldwide—capped by [a special concert at Tanglewood](#) that will be taped and later broadcast—while the centennial commemoration of his life and work continues in museums and at other concerts and events.

At the concert at Tanglewood, the summer home in the Berkshires of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, where Bernstein studied and conducted for 50 years, the BSO will be joined by members of the New York Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra, Pacific Music Festival and Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival, all ensembles important to Bernstein and his career. The orchestra will be conducted by five prominent conductors from the BSO family and Bernstein extended-family tree: BSO music director Andris Nelsons, Boston Pops conductor Keith Lockhart, Boston Pops conductor laureate John Williams, San Francisco Symphony music director Michael Tilson Thomas and National Symphony Orchestra conductor laureate Christoph Eschenbach. Host/vocalist Audra McDonald will be joined by guest artists Midori, Yo-Yo Ma, Kian Soltani, Nadine Sierra, Susan Graham, Isabel Leonard, Thomas Hampson, Jessica Vosk and Tony Yazbeck. The concert will be filmed by PBS' *Great Performances* and have its broadcast premiere December 28.

Other Bernstein concerts and events on [August 25](#) will take place in Indonesia, Slovakia, Austria, Germany, Scotland, England, Australia and Finland, and, in the U.S., in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Fort Worth, Minneapolis, Huntsville, Alabama, Boston and Santa Fe.

A special performance of Bernstein's iconic musical *West Side Story* [will take place tonight](#) at Lincoln Center Out of Doors in New York City, a reimagination of the score by the Grammy-nominated Bobby Sanabria Multiverse Big Band. The performance will take place only a few blocks from where the opening scene of the movie of the musical was filmed. Sanabria's music reimagines Bernstein's instrumental score using Afro-Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, Brazilian, Venezuelan and Mexican rhythms, as well as funk, rock and jazz.

This performance will be accompanied by the projection of 1,000 photos taken in the South Bronx by a collective of six Nuyorican photographers, Seis del Sur, while the poets La Bruja and Rich Villar will kick off the program with a spoken word set.

Sanabria—who was born in the Bronx to Puerto Rico-born parents and who recently

released [a CD](#) of *West Side Story Reimagined*, some of whose proceeds will aid Puerto Rican musicians who became hurricane victims last year—said this week that he spent three years creating the reimagined musical, not realizing initially that its completion would coincide with the centennial of Bernstein’s birth as well as the 60th anniversary of the musical’s Broadway debut. He describes his composition as a “tribute to the Puerto Rican community that has transformed the city into a cauldron of rhythm, activism and bilingual education. They’ve never gotten credit for that. It’s a gift to all the people who came before me, my mother and father.”

Sanabria and his band will perform *West Side Story Reimagined* [at the Kennedy Center](#) in Washington next January.

An exhibition at the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia, [“Leonard Bernstein: The Power of Music.”](#) is the first large-scale museum exhibition that explores his life, Jewish identity and social activism.

Among the items on display that have never been shown in public before are a kiddush cup presented by Bernstein’s wife, Felicia Montealegre-Cohn, to him on the occasion of their marriage; his flask and mezuzah from the door of his Fairfield, Connecticut studio; the Bernstein family Passover seder plate and prayer book; and a Steinway piano given to him by Helen Coates, his piano instructor, in 1932.

The exhibition shows how Bernstein used the arts to express the restlessness, anxiety, fear and hope he felt as an American Jew living through World War II, the Holocaust, and the Vietnam War and its accompanying social turbulence, all events that shook his faith in God, humanity and government. Focusing on what Bernstein referred to as his “search for a solution to the 20th-century crisis of faith,” it explores how he confronted this crisis by breaking racial barriers in his casting decisions in 1944 for *On the Town*, addressing America’s changing ideas about race and ethnicity in *West Side Story*, and giving a voice to the Vietnam-era human rights crisis in his 1971 theater piece, *MASS*.

Visitors can hear Bernstein himself in archival recordings and documentary footage, as well as interviews with those who knew him best. A multimedia interactive display invites visitors to delve into the many layers of Bernstein’s compositions, while there are video testimonies from people who participated in his visit to a displaced persons camp in Germany in spring 1948, where he led an orchestra of Holocaust survivors. An original film conveys the enduring impact of *MASS*, while another features interviews with Bernstein mentees and fans, including Alec Baldwin, Mandy Patinkin, Tony Kushner and Wynton Marsalis.

After the exhibition—which was conceived and curated by NMAJH—closes on September 2, it will travel to Brandeis University (October 5-November 20) and to the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage, outside of Cleveland, in September 2019.

Jamie Bernstein, the oldest of the three Bernstein children, said she was struck by the exhibition’s display of a reproduction of an 800-page file the FBI maintained on her father, and said she was surprised he was never subpoenaed to testify in the 1950s before the House Un-American Activities Committee. She suggested FBI director J. Edgar Hoover was “secretly in love with” her father, and that he “toyed

with him like a mouse but wouldn't destroy him.”

She was featured in a [panel discussion](#) held during the opening week of the Philadelphia exhibition, and appears in a “Late Night with Leonard Bernstein” program, with upcoming shows at Copland House in [Mount Kisco, N.Y.](#), part of a two-weekend-long “Bernstein Bash,” and in [Phoenix](#). She also has written a new book, *[Famous Father Girl: A Memoir of Growing Up Bernstein](#)*. She said she hoped this would provide “a sense of him as a very warm, tactile human being who was funny, informal and irreverent, maybe something people don't expect.”

Alexander Bernstein, the musician's middle child, suggested the Philadelphia exhibition “brought so many parts of (his father's) life and work together in a really honest way.” He also said that when museum officials visited Bernstein's apartment, they discovered things he and his two sisters had never noticed before, such as the inscription, “From your child bride,” on the kiddush cup his mother gave his father.

He continues the educational efforts of his father—creator of the legendary [“Young People's Concerts,”](#) broadcast for 14 years on commercial TV—through [Artful Learning](#), a learning model that empowers educators to use the arts and the artistic process to awaken and sustain the love of learning for all students.