

## Leonard Bernstein Exhibit Inspires at NMAJH

MARCH 23, 2018 BY [BONNIE SQUIRES](#) — [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

Maybe you thought you knew a lot about Leonard Bernstein — or maybe just the Broadway show or film “West Side Story.”

But you will learn a lot more about the legendary Jewish-American composer’s history and accomplishments after a visit to “Leonard Bernstein: The Power of Music,” the latest exhibit at the National Museum of American Jewish History (NMAJH).

Ivy Weingram, is the curator — or more appropriately, conductor — of the impressive exhibit, which is in tribute to Bernstein’s hundredth anniversary. Worldwide, countless events have taken place, and will continue to occur throughout 2018, to celebrate the deceased music icon. Philadelphia has already had its fair share of events honoring Bernstein, including “Lenny’s Revolution,” a concert conducted by Bernstein’s protégée, David Charles Abell, and the Philly POPS orchestra.



**At the press preview for the “Leonard Bernstein: The Power of Music” exhibit at NMAJH. From left to right: Ivy Weingram, Alexander Bernstein, Nina Bernstein, and CEO and Gwen Goodman Director of NMAJH Ivy Barsky. Photo credit: Bonnie Squires**

Philadelphia plays a starring role in Bernstein’s history, as he was once a student at the Curtis Institute of Music, located right on Rittenhouse Square. With the cooperation of all three of Bernstein’s adult children — Alexander, Jamie, and Nina — Weingram created an exhibit with 100-artifacts, video tributes, and interactive exhibits to illustrate Bernstein’s incredible accomplishments.

One of the most fascinating items in the exhibit, which is open through September 2, is a bunch of wooden blocks on a stand in front of a video screen. While at first unassuming, when the six-sided blocks are placed in a specific space on the stand, they play music from Bernstein’s Chichester Psalms and activate accompanying video on the screen.

When asked whether Alexander Bernstein and Nina Bernstein had inherited their father's musical talent, they laughed. They said that they both took piano lessons, but described them to Philadelphia Jewish Voice as "abysmal." Their father's personal piano is in the exhibit, an instrument that was given to "Lenny" by his piano teacher.

Nina went on to say her father was an insomniac and would stay up most of the night, reading his music and writing poems. She said he would slip them under the door so the children would find them in the morning. She called this "sweet."

The exhibition focuses on what Bernstein had called "the 20th century crisis of faith." Aligned with this mission, "Leonard Bernstein: The Power of Music" showcases a number of serious subjects, like the voluminous report by the FBI on the composer's life and political activities that harkens back on McCarthyism.



**Leonard Bernstein.**



**"West Side Story," the 1961 film.**

But just before things get too serious, a short film shows how many different places "West Side Story" and the song "Tonight" have been parodied and copied through the decades. Visitors are also able to see an annotated copy of "Romeo and Juliet," his inspiration for "West Side Story."

Bernstein's Judaic beliefs and practices are a strong focal point of the exhibit. "Leonard Bernstein: The Power of Music" also highlights life events that would otherwise be

forgotten over time, such as Bernstein conducting an orchestra of Holocaust survivors in 1948 at a Displaced Persons Camp in Germany.

The National Endowment for the Humanities has made it possible for everyone to have free admission to the museum and the exhibit every Friday, April through August, from 1-5 pm.

For more information on "Leonard Bernstein: The Power of Music" and other Leonard Bernstein centennial programming, visit [NMAJH's website](#).