

LEONARD BERNSTEIN

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Born August 25, 1918 in Lawrence, MA | Died October 14, 1990 in New York City, NY

LIFE & CAREER

Leonard Bernstein started learning to play the piano as a young boy when his family inherited a piano from a relative. He kept playing piano when he went to Harvard, where he also started learning to conduct and compose. He would go on to conduct many major orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic for 40 years.

Bernstein was passionate about sharing his love of music with others. He was able to teach thousands of American families about music through his televised “Young People’s Concerts.” During these concerts he conducted the orchestra and talked to the audience about the music.



MUSIC

Bernstein composed many works, including “serious” orchestral music, light-hearted musicals, and works that fall somewhere in between. He was influenced by many different styles, including jazz, Latin, Hebrew, and classical music. His music is known for being energetic, rhythmic, and colorful.

SYMPHONIC DANCES FROM WEST SIDE STORY

BY LEONARD BERNSTEIN

ABOUT THE MUSIC

WEST SIDE STORY

Bernstein’s most famous musical, *West Side Story*, premiered on Broadway in 1957. The story is based on Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, the tragic story of two lovers from feuding families. Instead of Renaissance Italy, *West Side Story* is set in the 1950s in New York City. Instead of feuding families, there are two feuding gangs: the “juvenile delinquent” Jets and the Puerto Rican Sharks. The musical follows Tony (a Jet) and Maria (the sister of a Shark) in their star-crossed love story. Tony and Maria believe that their love can overcome hate and prejudice. As in the original *Romeo and Juliet*, it doesn’t have a happy ending.

A few years after the Broadway premiere of *West Side Story*, a film was made of the musical, and it is one of the most popular movie musicals ever made. In 2009 a new version was produced on Broadway, which included both Spanish and English words and lyrics. Lin-Manuel Miranda, the creator of the musical *Hamilton*, wrote the Spanish lyrics.

SYMPHONIC DANCES

Three years after the premiere of *West Side Story*, Bernstein wrote *Symphonic Dances from West Side Story*. He took several dances from the musical and arranged them in suite, or collection of pieces. There are nine different dances in the suite, performed without a pause between them.



ANN ARBOR
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA
Music in the Key of A².



Program Notes for kids

West Side Story
Saturday, March 21st
8 p.m.
Michigan Theater

DIANA SYRSE

Colección de Realidades

MÁRQUEZ

Danzón No. 2

SIERRA

Concerto for Saxophones and Orchestra

BERNSTEIN

Symphonic Dances from West Side Story

DIANA SYRSE

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Born June 3, 1984 in Mexico City, Mexico

Diana Syrse is a composer and singer. She sings contemporary music, opera, tango, and jazz styles. She composes all kinds of music: chamber music, choral music, operas, orchestral works, electronic music, music for dance, and even musical theater. She has received degrees from universities in Mexico City, California, and Munich. She is currently pursuing a PhD in composition at the University of Birmingham. Spanish is her first language, but she is also fluent in English and German.



COLECCIÓN DE REALIDADES

BY DIANA SYRSE

ABOUT THE MUSIC

WHEN WAS IT COMPOSED?

Colección De Realidades (Collected Realities) was written in 2012. It was commissioned by Colectivo de Mujeres en el Arte (The Society of Women in Arts). The piece is a homage to Syrse's parents Fernando and Susana. It is in one movement and lasts about six minutes.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

In her notes on the piece, Syrse describes a collection of photographs saved in a special, hidden place at home. Photographs preserve memories and tell stories, but people who didn't live the memories in the photographs can only try to imagine what reality was like. She says "this piece of music describes these numerous photographs depicting many realities that each image represents differently."

The piece begins with a "mysterious shimmer" of sound, which gives way to the rhythms of Mexico.

ARTURO MÁRQUEZ

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Born December 20, 1950 in Álamos, Sonora, Mexico

Arturo Márquez was the first born child in his family, and was named after his father. The young Márquez listened to the traditional music, waltzes, polkas, and mariachi music that his father played on the violin. Márquez attended middle school in California, where he learned the violin and other instruments, and learned to compose. He then studied music composition in Mexico City, Paris, and California.



DANZÓN NO. 2

BY ARTURO MÁRQUEZ

ABOUT THE MUSIC

WHAT KIND OF PIECE IS THIS?

A *danzón* is a type of dance that originates from Cuba. It became popular in Veracruz, Mexico, where Márquez first heard it. Márquez wrote a series of Danzones inspired Cuban and Mexican dances

WHEN WAS IT COMPOSED?

Danzón No. 2 was commissioned by the National Autonomous University of Mexico and was first performed in 1994. It is considered one of the most famous pieces of Mexican classical music.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Danzón No. 2 starts with a solo clarinet and *claves*, a percussion instrument consisting of two short sticks of wood. Listen closely to the rhythm that the claves play. It is a very important rhythm in this piece and in a lot of Latin music.

ROBERTO SIERRA

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Born October 9, 1953 in Vega Baja, Puerto Rico

Roberto Sierra studied composition in Puerto Rico and in Hamburg. He writes orchestra, chamber, and vocal music. Groups all over Europe and the US have asked him to write music for them. He is currently professor of composition at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY.



CONCERTO FOR SAXOPHONES AND ORCHESTRA

BY ROBERTO SIERRA

ABOUT THE MUSIC

WHAT KIND OF PIECE IS THIS?

A *concerto* is a piece of music for a soloist, in this case a saxophonist, accompanied by an orchestra. In this piece, the soloist plays two different types of saxophone: a tenor saxophone and a soprano saxophone.

WHEN WAS THE PIECE COMPOSED?

This piece was commissioned by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and written for James Carter, a jazz saxophonist from Detroit (who will be performing it at tonight's concert!) It was written to combine jazz and classical elements and showcase Carter's talent. It premiered in 2002.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

This concerto has three cadenzas. A *cadenza* is when the soloist plays by themselves, without the orchestra. Cadenzas are often very flashy and are sometimes improvised (meaning that they are made up on the spot!) Listen for the cadenzas in the first three movements of this piece.