

**Madison Symphony Orchestra Program Notes**  
**November 9-10-11, 2018**  
**Subscription Concert No.3**  
**Michael Allsen**

Leonard Bernstein was arguably the single most important American in the world of Classical music in the 20th century. He could have had a career as a composer (either on Broadway or in Classical composition), conductor, concert pianist, or writer. What is remarkable about Bernstein is that he chose to do *all* of these things, and to do all of them phenomenally well! Born in Massachusetts, he did not begin his musical training until his family acquired a piano when he was ten. He was already active as a composer and performer when he attended Harvard, and he continued his musical training at Philadelphia's Curtis Institut By the time he was in his late twenties, Bernstein was an international star: a popular guest conductor and a composer respected both for his Broadway work and for "serious" concert pieces. Bernstein was conductor of the New York Philharmonic from 1958-1969, and later was closely associated with the Vienna Philharmonic. Throughout his life he struggled to maintain a balance between the various facets of his career, but was astonishingly prolific in all of them.

Maestro DeMain has assembled this program titled "Remembering Lenny" as a tribute to his mentor—the program includes three works by Bernstein and the joyous seventh symphony of Beethoven, one of the signature pieces of Bernstein the conductor. We begin with the wonderfully snarky overture to Bernstein's operetta *Candide*, and excerpts from his first great Broadway hit, *On the Town*. We also present the first Madison Symphony Orchestra performance of Bernstein's edgy second symphony, based upon W.H. Auden's poem *The Age of Anxiety*. Christopher Taylor performs the symphony's challenging piano part.

**Leonard Bernstein (1918-1991)**  
**Overture to Candide**

*Bernstein's operetta Candide was completed in 1956. Its overture has been performed more times by the Madison Symphony than any other than any other orchestral work: over twenty performances since 1961, most recently in 2014. Duration 5:00.*

In 1759, the French playwright and satirist Voltaire published his *Candide*, a stinging indictment of the then-fashionable "philosophical optimism" of Leibnitz. Inspired in part by a horrible earthquake that had destroyed much of the Portuguese

city of Lisbon in 1755, the play describes the philosophical awakening of Candide, a young student of the savant Dr. Pangloss. After interminable (and hilarious) tribulations, Candide sheds his optimism and concludes that “to grow one’s own garden” should be the primary aim of life. *Candide*’s satirical rejection of boundless optimism and philosophical approaches to world problems—beloved ideals of the Age of Enlightenment—caused an understandable stir at the French court and elsewhere in Europe, and it was promptly placed in the Vatican Index of banned books. (Despite this prohibition, *Candide* was popular enough to warrant at least thirteen editions prior to Voltaire’s death in 1778!)

The early history of Leonard Bernstein’s *Candide* dates from 1950, when playwright Lillian Hellman suggested the Voltaire play as a possible subject for collaboration. Bernstein’s setting of Hellman’s libretto, completed six years later, had a double purpose. The broad parody of the quartet finale to Act I, and arias such as “Oh Happy We” mocks the conventions of opera and operetta. In a broader sense, however, *Candide* was a satire of the parochialism of America in the 1950s—more specifically the political paranoia that had threatened Hellman and many of Bernstein’s acquaintances with blacklisting and worse. *Candide* was not completed until 1956, four years after Hellman had been called to testify at the McCarthy hearings, and two years after the humiliation of Senator McCarthy himself. Shortly after its premiere Bernstein described *Candide* as a “...political comment in the aftermath of Joe McCarthy,” and political figures are indeed the most bitterly lampooned characters in the operetta.

The overture to *Candide* is a brilliant and showy piece that sets up the sarcastic tone of the drama. It sets several musical themes and motives from the operetta, including music from the battle scene and from the arias “Oh Happy We” and “Glitter and be Gay.” The operetta *Candide* is only rarely performed today, but its overture is one of Bernstein’s most popular pieces of concert music.

### **Leonard Bernstein** **Three Dance Episodes from *On the Town***

*Bernstein’s Broadway show On the Town was composed in 1944. The suite, Three Dance Episodes, was created by Bernstein in 1945, and he conducted the premiere in San Francisco on February 15, 1946. This is our first performance of the work at a subscription concert, Duration 11:00.*

By 1943, Bernstein had already caught the attention of America. At age 25, he was named Assistant Conductor of the New York Philharmonic, and his legendary “big

break” came on November 14, 1943, when with just a few hours’ notice he substituted for Bruno Walter in a nationally-broadcast New York Philharmonic concert from Carnegie Hall. Shortly before this he had been approached by a dancer named Jerome Robbins. Unlike Bernstein, who was already a star, Robbins was still up-and-coming, but he was every bit as ambitious. He wanted Bernstein to write a score for his *Fancy Free*—a new ballet about three sailors on a shore leave in New York—to be performed by the Ballet Theater of New York. The two hit it off immediately, and Bernstein immediately began work on the ballet’s Jazz-inspired score. It was performed on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera on April 18 and was an immediate success. Producer Oliver Smith encouraged Bernstein and Robbins to expand their work into a full-fledged Broadway musical, and by June, they were at work on the new show. Bernstein brought in his friends Betty Comden and Adolphe Green to write a book and lyrics. The show was finished in time for its preview performances in Boston on December 13. When it opened on Broadway a couple of weeks later it was a hit, running for 463 performances. The 1949 movie version, starring Gene Kelly and Frank Sinatra, won an Oscar for best picture that year.

None of *Fancy Free*’s music was replicated in *On the Town*, which expands on the story of sailors on a 24-hour pass. Like Gershwin before him, Bernstein was interested in blending symphonic music with Jazz and the Broadway stage, but Bernstein channeled a much broader range of influences: Jazz and popular songs are certainly there, but also the clear influence of Copland. This is particularly true of the music Bernstein wrote for Robbins’s innovative dance sequences—much of which was collected into his 1945 orchestral suite *Three Dance Episodes from “On the Town.”* In discussing the central role of dancing in the show, Bernstein boasted “I believe this is the first Broadway show ever to have as many as seven or eight dance episodes in the space of two acts; and, as a result, the essence of the whole production is contained in these dances.”

The *Dance Episodes* are all drawn from Act I of the show. *Dance of the Great Lover* is a rather frenetic jazzy number—originally the song “She’s a Home Lovin’ Girl”—with the sound of a clattering subway train always in background. Bernstein describes the action: “Gaby, the romantic sailor in search of the glamorous Miss Turnstiles, falls asleep in the subway and dreams of his prowess in sweeping Miss Turnstiles off her feet.” *Lonely Town (pas de deux)* is much slower, with bluesy solos for the trumpet and solo woodwinds. Here, “Gaby watches a scene, both tender and sinister, in which a sensitive high-school girl in Central Park is lured and then cast off by a worldly sailor.” Bernstein describes the third movement, *Times Square: 1944*, as “a more panoramic sequence in which all the

sailors in New York congregate in Times Square for their night of fun. There is communal dancing, a scene in a souvenir arcade, and a scene in the Roseland Dance Palace.” The music that dominates this episode is the show’s irrepressible opening song “New York, New York,” whether in a big show dance or a sexy saxophone solo. There is a humorous interlude as several sailors—small town boys in the big city—bargain for souvenirs, and the final sequence of frantic dances.

### **Leonard Bernstein** **Symphony No.2 (“The Age of Anxiety”)**

*Bernstein’s second symphony was composed in 1947-49. Serge Koussevitsky conducted the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the premiere on April 18, 1949 with Bernstein playing the prominent piano part. He revised the score in 1965. This is our first performance of the work. Duration 35:00.*

Bernstein had already made his mark in the field of Classical composition with the 1944 premiere of his *Symphony No.1 (“Jeremiah”)* when his mentor Serge Koussevitsky commissioned a new work for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. But the direct inspiration for his second symphony was W.H. Auden’s book-length poem *The Age of Anxiety*. Auden won the Pulitzer Prize for the poem in 1948 but it was and remains a difficult work. Its four characters—Quant, Malin, Rosetta, and Emble—meet in a bar in wartime New York, and drink and talk their way through well over 100 pages, in six episodes organized into two parts. The characters speak in an imitation of ancient Anglo-Saxon verse forms, and the whole is set in a Classical form inherited from Virgil, the eclogue. For his part, though, Bernstein was overwhelmed by Auden’s poem. In a later essay about the symphony (liberally quoted here) he wrote that he first encountered it in the summer of 1947 and “from that moment the composition of a symphony based on *The Age of Anxiety* acquired an almost compulsive quality; and I worked on it steadily in Taos, in Philadelphia, in Richmond, Mass., in Tel-Aviv, in planes, in hotel lobbies, and finally (the week preceding the premiere) in Boston.” On what the poem and symphony meant to him, he said: “The essential line of the poem (and of the music) is the record of our difficult and problematical search for faith. In the end, two of the characters enunciate the recognition of this faith – even a passive submission to it – at the same time revealing an inability to relate to it personally in their daily lives, except through blind acceptance.”

Bernstein mirrored the organization of *The Age of Anxiety* in his symphony, which is divided into two parts, each of which is further divided into three sections, played without pauses. It is also programmatic, following the action of Auden’s

characters in musical form. A prominent solo piano part (to be played by him) was part of Bernstein's plan from the start—in essence, this was Bernstein inserting himself into the narrative as “an almost autobiographical protagonist.” *Part One* opens with *The Prologue*, in which the four characters meet in a bar. In this short section, Bernstein creates a quiet melancholy atmosphere with a pensive clarinet duet. The first entry of the piano signals the beginning of *The Seven Ages*, where the boozy interchanges between Auden's characters are shown in a set of seven variations, carried largely by the piano. However this is a unique form: the variations are not on a single theme, but each is essentially a variation on some element of the preceding one. The variations continue in *The Seven Stages*, though now in a more fragmented and increasingly frantic way. According to Bernstein, in this section “the characters go on an inner and highly symbolic journey according to a geographical plan leading back to a point of comfort and security. The four try every means, going singly and in pairs, exchanging partners, and always missing the objective. When they awaken from this dream-odyssey, they are closely united through a common experience (and through alcohol), and begin to function as one organism. This set of variations begins to show activity and drive and leads to a hectic, though indecisive, close.”

In *Part Two*, Rosetta has invited the three men up to her apartment to continue the party. While the two older men eventually leave, Emble is determined to seduce Rosetta, but in the end, only passes out in her bed. The opening section, *The Dirge*, sung as the characters stumble towards Rosetta's place, mourns the loss of “the great leader who can always give the right orders, find the right solution, shoulder the mass responsibility, and satisfy the universal need for a father-symbol.” The plodding main theme leads to a moment of crisis before a quieter, more romantic middle section. *The Masque* is the scene in Rosetta's apartment, beginning with an insistent groove from the percussion and frantic, disjointed piano jazz. This is the symphony's scherzo movement, complete with a contrasting trio section: a delicate duet between celesta and piano. *The Epilogue* is the longest section of the symphony, and continues directly from the last bit of agitated solo piano. Bernstein describes this conclusion as follows: “What is left, it turns out, is faith. The trumpet intrudes its statement of ‘something pure’ upon the dying piano: the strings answer in a melancholy reminiscent of the *Prologue*: again and again the winds reiterate ‘something pure’ against the mounting tension of the strings’ loneliness. All at once the strings accept the situation, in a sudden radiant *pianissimo*, and begin to build, with the rest of the orchestra, to a positive statement of the newly-recognized faith.”

**Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**  
**Symphony No.7 in A Major, Op.92**

*Beethoven's seventh symphony was completed in 1812, and performed for the first time in December 1813. The Madison Symphony Orchestra has played the Symphony No.7 on seven previous occasions, beginning in 1940, and most recently in 2009. Duration 38:00.*

Beethoven's seventh and eighth symphonies, which were composed at roughly the same time during 1811-1812, are among the last products of what is come to be known as his "heroic decade"—the remarkable period of creativity between 1802 and 1812. The sublime optimism and joy of these symphonies are truly their most "heroic" qualities—these were works written when the composer had become almost entirely deaf, when his ill health and loneliness could have dried up his inspiration. The seventh, which Richard Wagner called "the apotheosis of the dance," is particularly exuberant, and there is evidence that it was one of the Beethoven's own favorite works.

The *Symphony No.7* was first performed on December 8, 1813, at a benefit concert for Austrian and Bavarian soldiers wounded at the battle of Hanau. Beethoven also included his "battle symphony" *Wellington's Victory* on this program. The *Symphony No.7* was warmly applauded, but *Wellington's Victory* caused a greater outpouring of praise than any of Beethoven's earlier works. Beethoven's own opinion was at odds with this approval—he was disgusted with the public's rapture over what he considered to be a shoddy piece of work, and more than a little disgusted with himself for writing it. Since that time, however, *Wellington's Victory* has lapsed into well-deserved obscurity, and the *Symphony No.7* has been recognized for what it truly is, one of Beethoven's most joyful and subtle works. Despite its lightness of feeling, however, the seventh is the longest and most complex of the symphonies, save the ninth, and displays a confident compositional virtuosity in matters of form and thematic development.

The long introduction to the first movement (*Poco sostenuto*) is almost a movement unto itself, with two themes exposed and fully developed in the course of its 64 measures. However, at the point we would expect to hear a recapitulation, the texture begins to thin, finally leaving only violins and upper woodwinds to echo one another. The rhythmic fragment that is passed between them blends seamlessly into the beginning of the *Vivace*. Immediately, we hear a distinctive three-note rhythm that will dominate this movement. The opening theme, played by the flute, emerges from this rhythmic figure and is gradually taken up by other

sections of the orchestra. There is a brief hold, and a sweeping string figure leads back into a statement of the theme by full orchestra. A second theme is also built from the same rhythmic material. In the extended development section, Beethoven shows his mastery of contrapuntal writing. A grand crescendo and a forceful passage by full orchestra leads to a recapitulation of the opening theme. Even at this point, Beethoven is able to pry further surprises from his thematic material, before bringing the movement to a close with a lengthy coda.

The second movement (*Allegretto*) begins as a solemn theme and variations. The theme is first heard in the low strings, and the color of the sound becomes brighter as the first three variations proceed: first the second violins are added, then the firsts, and finally, the entire orchestra is added to the mix. After the third variation, Beethoven abandons the theme briefly in favor of a new pastoral melody. The movement then moves on in the manner of a rondo: introducing new material, but always returning to elaborate variations on the original theme.

The scherzo is one of Beethoven's most charming symphonic movements. Here he expands the traditional three-part form of symphonic third movements to a five-part structure with elements of sonata form. The opening section is a good-natured scherzo theme (*Presto*), and the trio contains somewhat slower and sweeter music (*Assai meno presto*). Following the trio, the scherzo theme is stated again and developed. Another statement of the trio and a return to the scherzo round out the form. As a parting joke, Beethoven begins the trio melody yet again, now in a mournful D minor, but after only four measures, brings the movement to an abrupt end in the original key.

One writer has described the Finale (*Allegro con brio*) "...a triumph of Bacchic fury." This movement is filled with good humor and incessant energy. The opening theme is clearly dancelike in nature, recalling some of the pastoral ideal of the sixth symphony. The second theme is softer in nature, with mincing dotted figures in upper woodwinds and strings. As if to counterbalance the massive introduction of the first movement, Beethoven provides the final movement with a grand coda extending for well over 100 measures. This extensive closing section serves almost as a second development, providing further musical space in which to exhaust the possibilities of thematic material.

"I am Bacchus incarnate, to give humanity wine to drown its sorrow... one who divines the secret of my music is delivered from the misery that haunts the world." - Beethoven