

LEONARD BERNSTEIN

Composer, Conductor, Author, Pianist

(Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1918 — New York City, 1990)

PRELUDE, FUGUE AND RIFFS FOR SOLO CLARINET AND JAZZ ENSEMBLE

Composed: 1949

Premiered: October 16, 1955, conducted by the composer with Benny Goodman as soloist

Duration: ca. 8 minutes

Scoring: five trumpets, four trombones, five saxophones, percussion, piano and double bass

Overview

Jazz formed an integral part of Leonard Bernstein's musical personality. The snap and sizzle and feel of jazz echoes through many of his instrumental works and theater pieces, from the Broadway shows *On the Town*, *Wonderful Town* and, especially, *West Side Story*, through the opera *Trouble in Tahiti* and the controversial *Mass*, to the *Divertimento* for Orchestra. Jazz was also the subject of two of Bernstein's incomparable television lectures during the 1950s: "What is Jazz?" on October 16, 1955 and "Jazz in Serious Music" on January 25, 1959. The earlier program featured the premiere of Bernstein's most overtly jazz-oriented instrumental piece, the *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs* for Clarinet and Jazz Ensemble, with Benny Goodman as soloist. The work was originally written in 1949 on a commission from the Woody Herman Band as part of a series that already included Stravinsky's 1945 *Ebony Concerto*, but Herman's group disbanded temporarily before the *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs* could be performed. (Herman did not continue with his series of commissions.) The work then lay dormant until 1952, when Bernstein revised it for pit orchestra as a ballet sequence in *Wonderful Town*. The sequence, however, was cut during the show's out-of-town tryouts, though bits of the music remained in the *Conquering the City* dance number and the *Conversation Piece* quartet. *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs* was finally given its much-delayed premiere on the broadcast of October 16, 1955. Ten years later, Bernstein and Goodman recorded the work for Columbia as part of a memorable release (recently re-issued on compact disc) in which the clarinetist was also soloist in jazz-inspired pieces by Stravinsky, Copland and Morton Gould, each conducted by its respective composer.

What To Listen For

The work begins with a *Prelude* for the brass (five trumpets and four trombones augmented by percussion and bass) in conventional three-part form: a fast, driving section in mixed meters; a central passage in "slow drag" tempo; and a return of the driving opening music. The loosely built *Fugue* for the five saxes (without percussion or bass) that follows is a musical progeny of the jazz fugue in Milhaud's *La Création du monde* of 1923, which was the principal focus of Bernstein's 1959 television lecture. (The lectures are available in print in *The Joy of Music* [1955] and *The Infinite Variety of Music* [1959].) The clarinet soloist is introduced in the concluding *Riffs for Everyone*, which recalls themes from the two earlier sections and intertwines them with "riffs" (short, repeated melodic figures that are stock-in-trade for both jazz arrangements and improvisations) to bring the work to a rousing close.

H[EINZ K[ARL] GRUBER

*Composer, Conductor, Chansonnier and Double Bassist
(Vienna, 1943)*

ARIEL, CONCERTO FOR TRUMPET AND ORCHESTRA

Composed: 1998-1999

Premiered: July 29, 1999 in London, conducted by Neeme Järvi; Håkan Hardenberger was the soloist

Duration: ca. 25 minutes

Scoring: two piccolos, three flutes, two oboes, E-flat clarinet, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two saxophones, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, percussion, piano and strings

Overview

Mary Shelley's cautionary novel about Dr. Victor Frankenstein and the monster he created in his laboratory is perhaps even more relevant in these days of DNA sequencing and genetic engineering than it was when it was published in 1818, and it is the title of the work that won for HK Gruber (his preferred professional name) international recognition in 1978. Gruber, composer, conductor, chansonnier and double bassist, was born in Vienna in 1943 and sang in the famed Vienna Boys Choir as a child and later studied composition, performance and dance at the Vienna Hochschule für Musik. While he was playing double bass with the contemporary music ensemble "die reihe" and the Vienna Tonkünstler Orchestra in the 1960s, Gruber was also composing actively, and his Concerto for Orchestra won a prize at the *Österreichische Jugendkulturwoche* ("Austrian Youth Culture Week") in 1966, the same year he began appearing as an actor and singer. During the following decade, he played bass in the Austrian Radio Symphony Orchestra and founded the "MOB art & ton ART Ensemble" with composers Kurt Schwertsik and Otto Zykan to perform new and unconventional works that often tempered modern and traditional styles with elements of popular music. Gruber also gained a reputation as a cabaret-style performer during those years, and he created a sensation as the "chansonnier" in the premiere of his *Frankenstein!!* in Liverpool in November 1978; he has since appeared around the world in the role. He has continued to conduct (he was Composer-Conductor of the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra in Manchester from 2009 to 2015), perform as chansonnier, serve as a resident composer (at the BBC Proms, Wiener Konzerthaus, and the festivals of Gstaad, Lucerne, Grafenegg and Bregenz) and compose, earning special recognition for his orchestral and concerted works (for cellist Yo-Yo Ma, violinist Ernst Kovacic, percussionist Evelyn Glennie, trumpeter Håkan Hardenberger, percussionist Colin Currie and other prominent soloists) and his operas *Gomorra*, *Gloria von Jaxtberg*, *Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald* and *Der Herr Nordwind*, about which a critic for the London *Sunday Times* wrote that "nostalgic frisson and the ironic surprise are technical means used by Gruber with absolute authority to create forthright masterpieces."

What To Listen For

Gruber wrote, "Aerial was composed in 1998-1999 on a commission from the British

Broadcasting Corporation for the BBC Promenade Concerts; it was performed at Royal Albert Hall on July 29, 1999 by Håkan Hardenberger and the BBC Symphony under Neeme Järvi. The concerto stretches the soloist's skills not only in terms of virtuosity, stamina and the use of multiple mutes, but also through the requirements to play cow horn as well as trumpet and piccolo trumpet, the ability to sing and play simultaneously, and the employment of playing with slides removed. [Each trumpet valve leads to a small curved tube that can slide to allow subtle adjustments in pitch.]

“The concerto offers two aerial views, firstly an imaginary landscape beneath the Northern Lights bearing an inscription from Emily Dickinson's poem *Wild Nights: Done with the compass — Done with the chart!* In part, this refers to the pure invention that can be conjured up through the skills of a great trumpeter, heard here as a magician casting an incantatory spell. The movement opens with the trumpeter simultaneously playing and singing the work into being, conjuring up the mythological image of the creation of music as Pan blows into the reed into which the nymph Syrinx has been transformed. As the orchestra enters, the soloist explores the notes available with slide-less playing, providing a sonic bridge to the entry of the cow horn, which functions as an *ur* [from the German for ‘source’ or ‘primitive’] brass instrument from a lost age.

“The second and larger of the two aerial views, entitled *Gone Dancing*, provides an energetic contrast, with glimpses of two exuberant examples of ‘light’ music at its best, but heard as if from another planet — our world is empty of human life, but a lone sign bears the words ‘Gone Dancing.’ The movement opens in the West in the 1940s with Fred and Ginger creating a toe-tapping dance dialogue, and this moves into outdoor folk music of a distinctly Eastern hue with the soloist progressively assuming the role of leader of the village band.”

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Composer

(Votkinsk, Russia, 1840 — St. Petersburg, 1853)

ROMEO AND JULIET, FANTASY-OVERTURE

Composed: 1869, revised 1870 and 1880

Premiered: March 16, 1870 in Moscow, conducted by Nikolai Rubinstein

Duration: ca. 20 minutes

Scoring: pairs of woodwinds plus piccolo and English horn, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings

Overview

Romeo and Juliet was written when Tchaikovsky was 29. It was his first masterpiece. For a decade, he had been involved with the intense financial, personal and artistic struggles that mark the maturing years of most creative figures. Advice and guidance often flowed his way during that time, and one who dispensed it freely to anyone who would listen was Mili Balakirev, one of the group of amateur composers known in English as “The Five” (and in Russian as “The Mighty Handful”) who sought to create a nationalistic music specifically Russian in style. In May 1869,

Balakirev suggested to Tchaikovsky that Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* would be an appropriate subject for a musical composition, and he even offered the young composer a detailed program and an outline for the musical form of the work. Tchaikovsky took the advice to heart and he consulted closely with Balakirev during the composition of the work. Though his help came close to meddling, Balakirev's influence seems to have had a strong positive effect on the finished composition.

Tchaikovsky was emotionally primed for his musical portrayal of the star-crossed lovers by his own romantic misadventure of the preceding year. He had been infatuated with the French opera singer Désirée Artôt, who was enjoying a considerable vogue in St. Petersburg in 1868, and he felt strongly enough to consider marrying her. He carried his suit to this lady whom he described to his brother Modeste as possessing "exquisite gesture, grace of movement, and artistic poise," but she apparently regarded his proposal of marriage somewhat less seriously than he did — within a month she married another opera singer, Padilla y Ramos, in Warsaw. Tchaikovsky never revealed exactly how deep a wound this affair inflicted, but he did make a point of recounting their later meetings in his personal letters, always praising her beauty and artistry. His torch for Artôt may never have been fully extinguished. At any rate, while the Artôt episode was probably not directly responsible for the creation of *Romeo and Juliet*, it was an important emotional component of Tchaikovsky's personality at the time. The composer, a firm believer that Fate seeks to dampen man's every happiness, could easily have drawn a parallel between his personal loss and the tragedy of Shakespeare's drama.

What To Listen For

Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* is among the most successful reconciliations in the orchestral repertory of a specific literary program with the requirements of logical, musical structure. The work is in a carefully constructed sonata form, with introduction and coda. The slow opening section, in chorale style, depicts Friar Lawrence. The exposition (*Allegro giusto*) begins with a vigorous, syncopated theme depicting the conflict between the Montagues and the Capulets. The contrapuntal interworkings and the rising intensity of the theme in this section suggest the fury and confusion of a fight. The conflict subsides and the well-known love theme (used here as a contrasting second theme) is sung by the English horn to represent Romeo's passion; a tender, sighing phrase for muted violins suggests Juliet's response. A stormy development section utilizing the driving main theme and the theme from the introduction denotes the continuing feud between the families and Friar Lawrence's urgent pleas for peace. The crest of the fight ushers in the recapitulation, in which the thematic material from the exposition is considerably compressed. Juliet's sighs again provoke the ardor of Romeo, whose motive is here given a grand, emotional setting that marks the work's emotional high point. The tempo slows, the mood darkens, and the coda emerges with a sense of impending doom. The themes of the conflict and of Friar Lawrence's entreaties sound again, but a funereal drum beats out the cadence of the lovers' fatal pact. Romeo's theme appears for a final time in a poignant transformation before the closing woodwind chords evoke visions of the flight to celestial regions

Former New York Philharmonic program annotator Edward Downes summarized the drama and power of Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*. "The composers who have been inspired, or who thought they were inspired by Shakespeare, make an endless list," Downes wrote. "And in that

history, Tchaikovsky is one of the very few who speaks with the elemental passion and strife that grip us as do the words of Shakespeare.”

LEONARD BERNSTEIN

SYMPHONIC DANCES FROM *WEST SIDE STORY*

Composed: 1957

Premiered: February 13, 1961 in New York, conducted by Lukas Foss

Duration: ca. 24 minutes

Scoring: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two B-flat clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, piano, celesta and strings

Overview

Leonard Bernstein, a native of Boston, had a productive fascination with New York City for much of his career. Beside being linked with that city’s major orchestra for many years as conductor and music director, Bernstein was inspired by the great metropolis in several of his original stage compositions — the ballet *Fancy Free* (1944), the musicals *On the Town* (1944) and *Wonderful Town* (1952), the score for Elia Kazan’s film *On the Waterfront* (1954) and the epochal *West Side Story*. The idea for *West Side Story* was suggested to Bernstein as early as 1949 by the choreographer Jerome Robbins, who envisioned a modern adaptation of Shakespeare’s classic *Romeo and Juliet* set in New York City. Bernstein was fascinated with the idea, but he could not find time to work on the project until the middle 1950s, beginning composition as soon as he had finished the brilliant score for the operetta/musical *Candide*. Stephen Sondheim, in his Broadway debut, supplied the lyrics, Arthur Laurents wrote the book and Robbins staged the show, which was finally completed in 1957. After try-outs in Washington and Philadelphia, *West Side Story* was unveiled on Broadway on September 26th and ran for almost two years. After a ten-month road tour, it returned to New York and closed on April 27, 1960 after a total of 732 Broadway performances. It was made into a film in 1961 that swept ten Oscars, including Best Picture, and has since entered into the pantheon of the American theater as one of the greatest musicals ever created.

West Side Story was one of the first musicals to explore a serious subject with wide social implications. More than just the story of the tragic lives of ordinary people in a small, grubby section of New York, it was concerned with urban violence, juvenile delinquency, clan hatred and young love. The show was criticized as harshly realistic by some who advocated an entirely escapist function for the musical, depicting things that were not appropriately shown on the Broadway stage. Most, however, recognized that it expanded the scope of the musical through references both to classical literature (*Romeo and Juliet*) and to the pressing problems of modern society. Brooks Atkinson, the distinguished critic of *The New York Times*, noted in his book *Broadway* that *West Side Story* was “a harsh ballad of the city, taut, nervous and flaring, the melodies choked apprehensively, the rhythms wild, swift and deadly.” Much of the show’s electric atmosphere was generated by its brilliant dance sequences, for which Jerome Robbins won the 1957-1958 Tony Award for choreography. “The dance movements not only epitomize

the tensions, the brutality, bravado, and venomous hatred of the gang warriors but also had sufficient variety in themselves to hold audiences spellbound,” wrote Abe Lafe in *Broadway’s Greatest Musicals*. In 1961, Bernstein chose a sequence of dance music from *West Side Story* to assemble as a concert work, and Sid Ramin and Irwin Kostal executed the orchestration of these “Symphonic Dances” under the direction of the composer. Bernstein said that he called these excerpts “symphonic” not because they were arranged for full orchestra but because many of them grew, like a classical symphony, from a few basic themes transformed into a variety of moods to fit the play’s action and emotions. *West Side Story*, like a very few other musicals — *Show Boat*, *Oklahoma*, *Pal Joey*, *A Chorus Line*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Rent*, *Hamilton* — provides more than just an evening’s pleasant diversion. It is a work that gave a new vision and direction to the American musical theater.

In the story, Riff, leader of the Jets, an “American” street gang, determines to challenge Bernardo, head of the rival Sharks, a group of young Puerto Ricans, to a rumble. Riff asks Tony, his best friend and a co-founder of the Jets, to help. Tony has been growing away from the gang, and he senses better things in his future, but agrees. The Jets and the Sharks meet that night at a dance in the gym, where Tony falls in love at first sight with Maria, Bernardo’s sister, recently arrived from Puerto Rico. Later that night, Tony meets Maria on the fire escape of her apartment. The next day, Tony visits Maria at the bridal shop where she works, and they enact a touching wedding ceremony. Tony promises Maria he will try to stop the rumble, but he is unsuccessful and becomes involved in the fighting. He kills Bernardo. Maria learns that Tony has slain her brother. Tony comes to her apartment, but she cannot send him away, and they long for a place free from prejudice. Tony leaves, and hides in Doc’s drugstore. Maria convinces Anita, Bernardo’s girl, of her love for Tony, and Anita agrees to tell Tony that the Sharks intend to hunt him down. She is so fiercely taunted by the Jets at the drugstore, however, that she spitefully tells Tony that Maria has been killed. Tony numbly wanders the streets, and meets Maria. At the moment they embrace, he is shot dead. The Jets and the Sharks appear from the shadows, drawn together by the tragedy. They carry off the body of Tony, followed by Maria.

What To Listen For

The following summary, outlining the stage action that occurs during the Symphonic Dances, appears in the orchestral score:

“*Prologue* (Allegro moderato) — The growing rivalry between two teen-age gangs, the Jets and the Sharks.

“*Somewhere* (Adagio) — In a visionary dance sequence, the two gangs are united in friendship.

“*Scherzo* (Vivace leggiero) — In the same dream, they break through the city walls, and suddenly find themselves in a world of space, air and sun.

“*Mambo* (Presto) — Reality again; competitive dance between the gangs.

“*Cha-cha* (Andantino con grazia) — the star-crossed lovers, Tony and Maria, see each other for the first time and dance together [*Maria*].

“*Meeting scene* (Meno mosso) — Music accompanies their first spoken words.

“*Cool, Fugue* (Allegretto) — An elaborate dance sequence in which the Jets practice controlling their hostility.

“*Rumble* (Molto allegro) — Climactic gang battle during which the two gang leaders are killed.

“*Finale* (Adagio) — As Tony dies in Maria’s arms, love music developing into a procession, which recalls, in tragic reality, the vision of *Somewhere*.”

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