

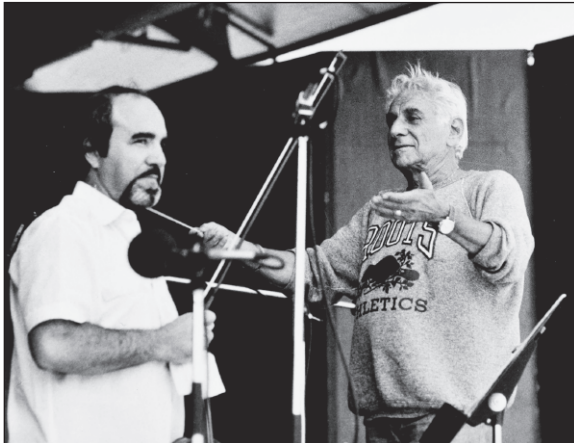
The History in This Program

In 1986 Laureate Conductor Leonard Bernstein took the New York Philharmonic on a coast-to-coast American tour — his last with the Orchestra. The program featured his own compositions, including *Serenade* (after Plato’s *Symposium*), with then Concertmaster Glenn Dicterow as soloist.

The tour kicked off with a concert in Central Park on August 4. Many wondered why Bernstein would have programmed his *Serenade* for an open-air concert: the piece has many quiet, exposed parts that might be easily talked over in a concert hall, much less Central Park. Any fears turned out to be unsubstantiated. Philharmonic Archivist / Historian Barbara Haws, who was in attendance, recalls that the crowd of almost 200,000 was miraculously hushed. “If you could ever hear a pin drop in Central Park, it would have been that evening.”

The *Serenade* was also on a commemorative concert at Carnegie Hall on November 14, 1988, celebrating the 45th anniversary of Bernstein’s legendary debut with the Philharmonic, when he subbed for Bruno Walter on short notice. Former Philharmonic musicians who had played in that memorable concert attended as distinguished guests; one, violinist Jacques Margolies, was still an active member of the Orchestra. After the concert, Haws asked Bernstein if he might be willing to donate his baton to the Philharmonic Archives. However, the baton had snapped during the concert — a casualty of Bernstein’s vigorous podium presence. “They’re always broken,” he admitted, and handed it over.

Tonight’s program pairs the *Serenade* with Bernstein’s *Symphony No. 1, Jeremiah*, for the first time since October 18, 1990. On that day the Philharmonic replaced its scheduled program with a quickly arranged memorial concert for Bernstein, who had died four days before. The Orchestra was still grieving; flute / piccolo player Mindy Kaufman put up a photo of Bernstein backstage, but other musicians requested she take it down because it brought them to tears. Dicterow, who was slated to play the Beethoven Violin Concerto, told the Philharmonic’s administration that he would prepare the *Serenade* instead. After all, in a rehearsal of the work



for that last tour in 1986, Bernstein — notorious for his lack of verbal filter later in life — had turned to him and declared, “This is the best [expletive] piece I ever wrote.”

— The Archives

To learn more, visit the **New York Philharmonic Leon Levy Digital Archives** at archives.nyphil.org.

Glenn Dicterow and Bernstein
rehearsing the *Serenade* in Central
Park, 1986

Serenade (after Plato's Symposium) for Violin, String Orchestra, Harp, and Percussion

Symphony No. 1, Jeremiah

Leonard Bernstein

Throughout his career, Leonard Bernstein struggled to balance the competing demands of his multifarious gifts as composer, conductor, pianist, media personality, and all-round celebrity. Time for composition was potentially the most endangered in the mix that packed his datebook, and he had to take special care to ensure that it didn't get entirely crowded out by his day-to-day obligations as a performer. This balance became especially challenging in the full flower of his career, and never more so than during his 11 years as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic (1958–69).

Bernstein and his wife, Felicia Monteleone, spent the summer of 1954 in a home they rented on Martha's Vineyard, a site sufficiently isolated to allow the composer to concentrate on two major works. He wrote to friends:

My life is all Lillian Hellman and *Candide*, and the violin concerto for Isaac Stern to première at the Venice Festival in September.

Candide would end up dragging on and on; it was brought to its first completion in 1956, but Bernstein kept rewriting it for the rest of his career. The "violin concerto," however, was accomplished in less than a year once he set about working on it seriously in the fall of 1953, and people close to Bernstein reported that the **Serenade (after Plato's Symposium)** was one of the works of which he remained the fondest. Its roots go back to the summer of 1951, when the Koussevitzky Music Foundation commissioned Bernstein to write a piece in memory of the recently

departed conductor Serge Koussevitzky, who had served as his mentor.

That Bernstein was a highly literate man is beyond question. Fellow composer, conductor, and pianist Lukas Foss once said in an interview about Bernstein:

IN SHORT

Born: August 25, 1918, in Lawrence, Massachusetts

Died: October 14, 1990, in New York City

Works composed and premiered: *Serenade*, composed from late 1953 through August 7, 1954, on commission from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation; dedicated "To the beloved memory of Serge and Natalie Koussevitzky"; premiered September 12, 1954, at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice, Italy, by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, with the composer conducting, Isaac Stern, soloist. *Symphony No. 1*, composed spring through December 31, 1942; dedicated "For my Father"; premiered January 28, 1944, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, with the composer conducting, Jennie Tourel, soloist

New York Philharmonic premieres and most recent performances: *Serenade*, premiered July 15, 1965, with the composer conducting, Zino Francescatti, soloist; most recently performed May 16, 2013, in Vienna, Austria, Alan Gilbert, conductor, Joshua Bell, soloist. *Symphony No. 1*, premiered March 29, 1944 (which marked the New York Premiere) with the composer conducting, Jennie Tourel, soloist; most recently played, November 1, 2008, David Robertson, conductor, Michelle DeYoung, soloist

Estimated durations: *Serenade*, ca. 31 minutes; *Symphony No. 1*, ca. 27 minutes

The Work at a Glance

Bernstein penned this program note for his **Serenade** the day after he signed off on the score:

There is no literal program for this Serenade, despite the fact that it resulted from a re-reading of Plato's charming dialogue, "The Symposium." The music, like the dialogue, is a series of related statements in praise of love, and generally follows the Platonic form through the succession of speakers at the banquet. The "relatedness" of the movements does not depend on common thematic material, but rather on a system whereby each movement evolves out of elements in the preceding one.

For the benefit of those interested in literary allusion, I might suggest the following points as guideposts:

Phaedrus: Pausanias (Lento — Allegro). Phaedrus opens the symposium with a lyrical oration in praise of Eros, the god of love. (Fugato, begun by the solo violin.) Pausanias continues by describing the duality of lover and beloved. This is expressed in a classical sonata-allegro, based on the material of the opening fugato.

Aristophanes (Allegretto). Aristophanes does not play the role of clown in this dialogue, but instead that of the bedtime storyteller, invoking the fairy-tale mythology of love.

Eryximachus (Presto). The physician speaks of bodily harmony as a scientific model for the workings of love-patterns. This is an extremely short fugato scherzo, born of a blend of mystery and humor.

Agathon (Adagio). Perhaps the most moving speech of the dialogue, Agathon's panegyric embraces all aspects of love's powers, charms, and functions. This movement is a simple three-part song.

Socrates: Alcibiades (Molto tenuto — Allegro molto vivace). Socrates describes his visit to the seer Diotima, quoting her speech on the demonology of love. This is a slow introduction of greater weight than any of the preceding movements; and serves as a highly developed reprise of the middle section of the Agathon movement, thus suggesting a hidden sonata-form. The famous interruption of Alcibiades and his band of drunken revelers ushers in the Allegro, which is an extended Rondo ranging in spirit from agitation through jig-like dance music to joyful celebration. If there is a hint of jazz in the celebration, I hope it will not be taken as anachronistic Greek party-music, but rather the natural expression of a contemporary American composer imbued with the spirit of that timeless dinner party.



Bernstein and violinist Isaac Stern, who premiered the Serenade, during a recording session in 1956

Probably the reason he had so much success with his collaborations in the music theater was that he was fired by the intrusion of the other arts, that they inspired his imagination. I would say that Lenny was the most well-read composer I have ever met.

A number of Bernstein's works relate to literary sources of grand standing, including his early incidental music for *The Birds* and *The Peace* (two plays by Aristophanes), *Candide* (from Voltaire's novella), *West Side Story* (from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*), and *The Age of Anxiety* Symphony (after poems by Auden). He is known to have been reading Plato in 1951, at about the time the Koussevitzky Foundation extended its commission, but there's no indication that he decided to attach Plato to the piece until later. The biographer Humphrey Burton believes that the connection may have been forged "not long before the completion of the work, since a glance at Plato reveals obvious discrepancies between Bernstein's adaptation and the original." Burton notes:

Bernstein names the individual movements of the concerto after the various speakers at the banquet but has changed the order of the speeches and modified their character. Thus in Bernstein's version, Aristophanes, the comic playwright, becomes "a bedtime storyteller, invoking the fairy-tale mythology of love." Moreover, Bernstein shifts the emotional center of gravity from Socrates to Agathon. The fourth movement of the concerto, dedicated to Agathon, contains some of the most beautiful music of any twentieth-century score. But in Plato it is Socrates who has the longest and most important speech.

These are cogent observations, and they do lend credence to the idea that episodes from Plato's *Symposium* may have been

largely superimposed over a piece that had already found its own shape.

The decision to call this half-hour long work a serenade, rather than a concerto, also seems to have come quite late in the process of composition, as is evident from Bernstein's regularly referring to it as a concerto during the months preceding its completion. Burton imagines that Bernstein may have selected the name as an allusion to the fact that some early serenades were used for wooing — literally, serenades sung beneath a balcony. He writes:

What Bernstein surely meant us to understand was that his Serenade embodied all his loving feelings toward all his fellow human beings. Complete movements from Bernstein's *Anniversaries*, short piano pieces dedicated to loving friends, are woven into the musical fabric of three of the Serenade's five movements. But the work can also be perceived as a portrait of Bernstein himself: grand and noble in the first movement, childlike in the second, boisterous and playful in the third, serenely calm and tender in the fourth, a doom-laden prophet and then a jazzy iconoclast in the finale.

The germ of Bernstein's **Symphony No. 1** began as a sketch for a "Lamentation" for soprano and orchestra that he wrote out in the summer of 1939. On June 22 of that year Bernstein graduated from Harvard, where in April he had made his first appearance as a conductor, leading his own incidental music for a college production of Aristophanes' *The Birds*. A year earlier he had made his first bow as a composer-pianist. By the time he completed this symphony, on the last day of 1942, his bifurcated path had become clearer. He had spent the summer of 1940 at Tanglewood. There he studied conducting with his soon-to-be-mentor Serge Koussevitzky and made his

first stab as a symphonic conductor, leading two movements from Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*. He then enrolled at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, which awarded him a diploma in May 1941, following the impressive work he had accomplished in the studios of Fritz Reiner (conducting), Isabella Vengerova (piano), Randall Thompson (orchestration), and Renée Longy (score reading). In April 1942 he joined in the premiere of his Clarinet Sonata with clarinetist David Glazer and that summer was named Koussevitzky's assistant at Tanglewood. On paper Bernstein's résumé was impressive, but his accomplishments were not exactly spectacular by the time he finished his First Symphony.

That would change by the time the work was premiered 13 months later. In 1943 Artur Rodziński was appointed the New York Philharmonic's Music Director, and on August 25 of that year he invited the promising young Bernstein — who was celebrating his 25th birthday that very day — to serve as his Assistant Conductor. Such a position can often involve a good deal of behind-the-scenes work and unglamorous waiting in the wings, but by autumn Bernstein was fully prepared to make good on an opportunity that came his way. On November 14 he filled in at the 11th hour for the ailing Bruno Walter to conduct the Philharmonic in a Carnegie Hall concert that was broadcast nationwide. This

In the Composer's Words

Bernstein provided this comment on his **Symphony No. 1, *Jeremiah***, in a note prepared for the work's premiere in 1944:

The Symphony does not make use to any great extent of actual Hebrew thematic material. The first theme of the scherzo is paraphrased from a traditional Hebrew chant, and the opening phrase of the vocal part in the "Lamentation" is based on a liturgical cadence still sung today in commemoration of the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon. Other remembrances of Hebrew liturgical music are a matter of emotional quality, rather than of the notes themselves.

As for programmatic meanings, the intention is again not one of literalness, but of emotional quality. Thus the first movement ("Prophecy") aims only to parallel in feeling the intensity of the prophet's pleas with his people; and the scherzo ("Profanation") to give a general sense of the destruction and chaos brought on by the pagan corruption within the priesthood and the people. The third movement ("Lamentation"), being a setting of poetic text, is naturally a more literary conception. It is the cry of Jeremiah, as he mourns his beloved Jerusalem, ruined, pillaged, and dishonored after his desperate efforts to save it. The text is from the book of Lamentations.

Bernstein with his parents Jennie and Samuel, around the time Symphony No. 1, which is dedicated to his father, was premiered



A Crisis of Faith

In August 1977, when Leonard Bernstein was in Berlin making his third recording of the **Jeremiah Symphony**, he shared these thoughts with an interviewer:

Although everything I write seems to have literary or dramatic underpinning, it is, after all, music that I am writing. Whatever happens in the music happens because of what the music does, not because of the words or the extramusical ideas. In a sense, I suppose, I am always writing the same piece, as all composers do. But each time it is a new attempt in other terms to write this piece, to have the piece achieve new dimensions, or even acquire a new vocabulary.

The work I have been writing all my life is about the struggle that is born of the crisis of our century, a crisis of faith. Even way back, when I wrote *Jeremiah*, I was wrestling with that problem. The faith or peace that is found at the end of *Jeremiah* is really more a kind of comfort, not a solution. Comfort is one way of achieving peace, but it does not achieve the sense of a new beginning, as does the end of *The Age of Anxiety* or *Mass*.

career-making moment was followed by an extraordinary media flurry, greeting music's newest megastar-in-the-making.

But for this, the premiere of Bernstein's Symphony No. 1, which the composer was scheduled to conduct that January in Pittsburgh, might have passed without much fanfare. Now all eyes were upon it. In press interviews, Bernstein underscored the timeliness of its message, particularly the third movement; Jeremiah's lamentation on the destruction of Jerusalem was particularly vivid given the plight of Jews in Europe.

Bernstein exclaimed to the *New York Journal-American*:

How can I be blind to the problems of my own people? I'd give everything I have in order to strike a death blow at Fascism.

The premiere by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra was a complete success — "Front pages, banner headlines, a shouting audience," Bernstein informed Koussevitzky — and performances followed quickly at other notable orchestras: the Boston Symphony Orchestra that February, marking Bernstein's first appearance as a conductor at Symphony Hall, then in March and April with the New York Philharmonic. In May the New York Music Critics Circle overwhelmingly selected it as the most impressive premiere of the season, with the result that a performance was arranged and broadcast nationally by the NBC Symphony. The piece became Bernstein's calling card, and in its first three years he conducted further performances in Chicago, New York, St. Louis, Detroit, Rochester, Prague, and Jerusalem.

Instrumentation: Serenade calls for harp, timpani, snare drum, tenor drum, bass drum, triangle, suspended cymbal, xylophone, orchestra bells, chimes, Chinese blocks, tambourine, and strings, in addition to the solo violin. Symphony No. 1 employs two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets, E-flat clarinet and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, cymbals, suspended cymbals, triangle, maracas, bass drum, wood block, piano, and strings, plus mezzo-soprano soloist.

Text and Translation

Lamentation, from Bernstein's Symphony No. 1, *Jeremiah*

Text from "The Lamentations of Jeremiah"

Chapter 1.1-3

*Echa yashva vadad ha-ir
Rabati am
Hay'ta k'almana;
Rabati vagojim
Sarati bam'dinot
Hay'ta lamas.*

*Bacho tivkeh balaila,
V'dim'ata al lecheyu;
En la m'nachem
Mikol ohaveha;
Kol reeha bag'du va.
Hayu la l'oy'vim.*

*Galta Y'huda meoni,
Umerov avoda;
Hi yashva vagojim,
Lo matsa mano-ach;
Kol rod'feha hisiguha
Ben hamitsarim*

Chapter 1.8

*Chet chata Y'rushalyim
(Echa yashva vadad ha-ir
... k'almana.)*

Chapter 4.14-15

*Na-u ivrim bachutsot
N'go-alu badam,
B'lo yuchlu
Yig'u bilvushehem.*

*Suru tame kar'u lamo,
Suru, suru al tiga-u ...*

Chapter 5.20-21

*Lama lanetsach tishkachenu ...
Lanetsach taazvenu ...*

Hashivenu Adonai elecha ...

How doth the city sit solitary,
That was full of people!
How is she become as a widow!
She that was great among the nations,
And princess among the provinces,
How is she become tributary!

She weepeth sore in the night,
And her tears are on her cheeks;
She hath none to comfort her
Among all her lovers;
All her friends have dealt treacherously with her,
They are become her enemies.

Judah is gone into exile because of affliction,
And because of great servitude;
She dwelleth among the nations,
She findeth no rest.
All her pursuers overtook her
Within the narrow passes.

Jerusalem hath grievously sinned...
[How doth the city sit solitary
... a widow.]

They wander as blind men in the streets,
They are polluted with blood,
So that men cannot
Touch their garments.

Depart, ye unclean! they cried unto them,
Depart, depart! Touch us not ...

Wherefore dost Thou forget us forever ...
And forsake us so long a time? ...

Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord ...

Translation courtesy of Boosey & Hawkes