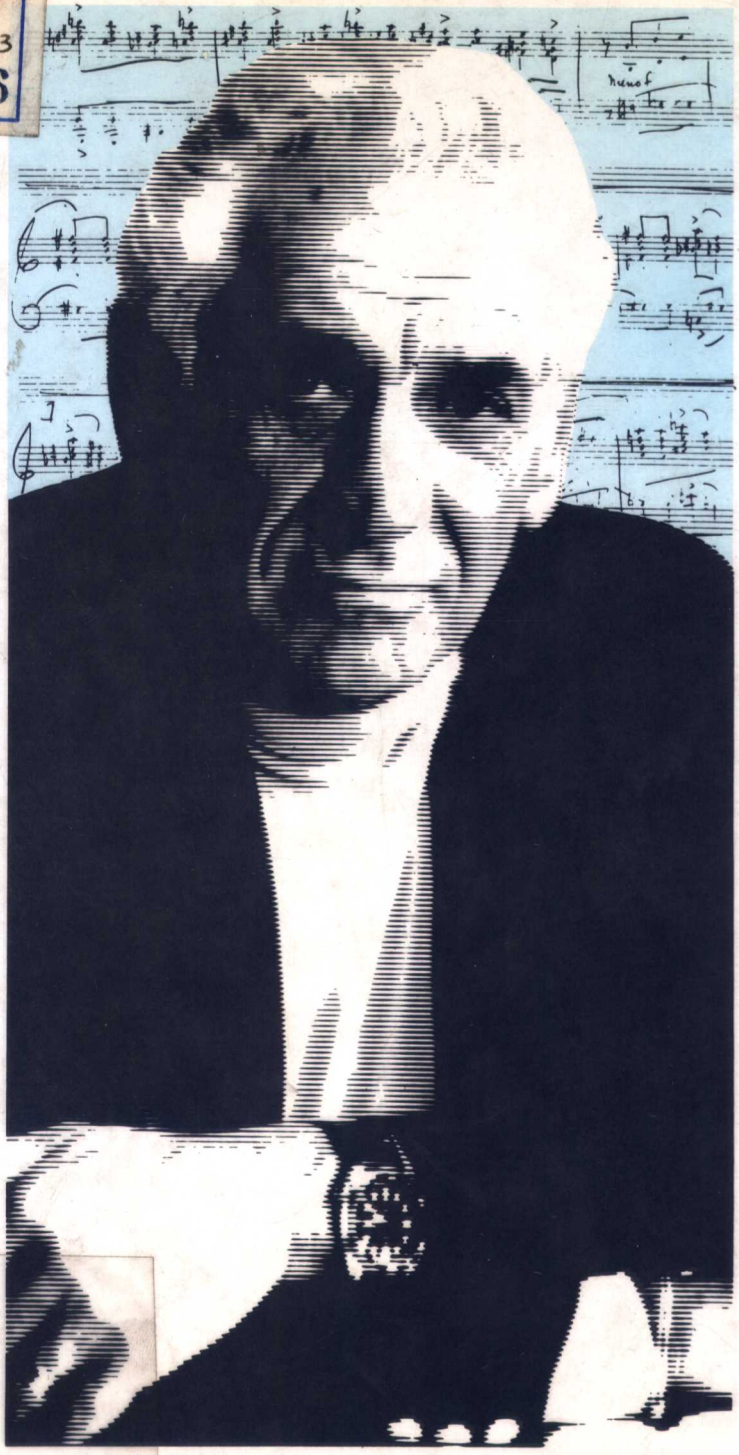
Leonard BERNSTEIN



PETER · GRADENWITZ

Peter Gradenwitz

Leonard Bernstein

The Infinite Variety of a Musician

With personal contributions by
LEONARD BERNSTEIN
YEHUDI *and* DIANA MENUHIN, CHRISTA LUDWIG,
DIETRICH FISCHER-DIESKAU, ISAAC STERN,
NIKOLAUS HARNONCOURT, ANTAL DORATI, LUKAS FOSS,
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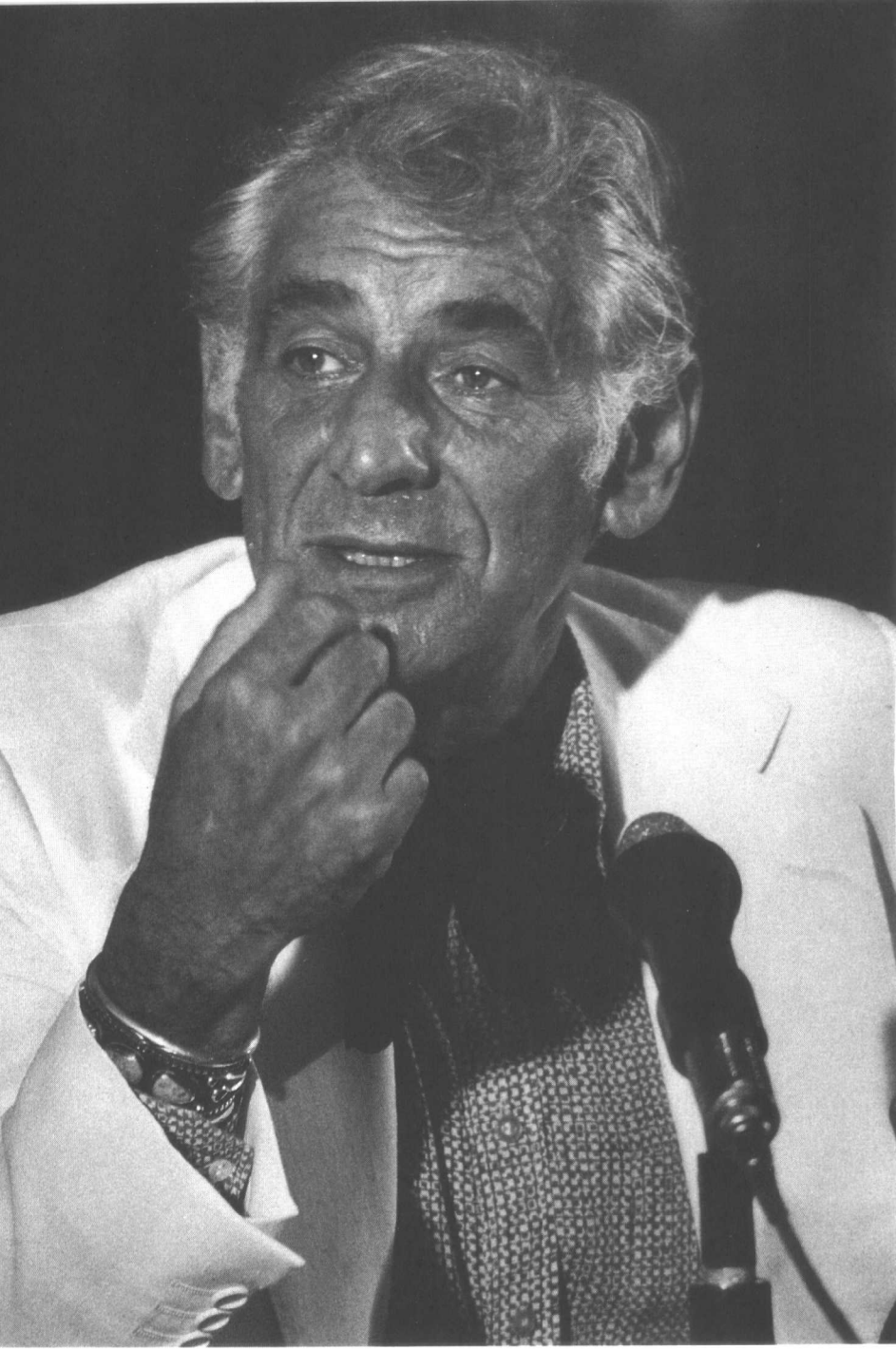

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Contents

Illustrations

About this Book

A composer of successful Broadway shows who writes symphonies, a world-famous conductor who composes operas, a ballet composer who teaches at universities and gives lectures on TV — such a musician does not fit easily into the concepts of traditional musicography. But what about a personality whose talents encompass every possible sphere of creative music and interpretation — conducting his own musical on Broadway, conducting the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra at the Salzburg Festival and operas at the Teatro alla Scala, Milan, and the Viennese Staatsoper, travelling around the world with the New York and the Israel Philharmonic Orchestras, writing operas himself and acquainting a public of many millions over TV with classical and contemporary music: this might seem to border on the impossible. Leonard Bernstein, to whose work and personality the present study is devoted, is a phenomenon of spiritual and musical versatility, at the same time always searching, always trying to discover the hidden meaning that lies beneath the surface of matter and appearance, behind words and music. In one of his books he speaks of 'The Infinite Variety of Music'; infinite variety characterises his own personality and in music there is for him no difference between 'serious' and 'light': 'For me every music is serious', reads one of his statements in one of his many self-critical essays.

A considerable number of articles and books have already been written about Leonard Bernstein, most of them of a predominantly anecdotal character; a recent book set out to intrude into his privacy, indelicately exposing some anomalies of which no extraordinary personality may be entirely free, and which have no bearing on the undisputed significance of his contributions to performing style, musical composition, and music education. Some aspects of his musical work have formed the subject of dissertations written at American universities. On his compositions, both Leonard Bernstein himself and his assistant of many years' standing, Jack Gottlieb, have published valuable commentaries for concert programme notes and record sleeves. Of invaluable service is the detailed catalogue of Bernstein's works, with an introductory chronicle of the different stages in his life and

career, together with lists of recordings, writings, films and video tapes, the honours he has received and analyses of his compositions, as compiled by Jack Gottlieb (Amberson Enterprises, Boosey & Hawkes, New York).

The starting point of the present study is a close acquaintance of forty years with Leonard Bernstein's work and career, as well as a personal friendship. Though the present author has, from the very first meeting, been fascinated by the musician and his musicianship as well as by his personality — as are people all over the world — he has tried to offer in this book as objective as possible a picture of the man Bernstein and a critical evaluation of his works, musical and literary, and thought. The music industry and the media of the modern world have done much wrong to Leonard Bernstein by featuring him as a glamorous 'world star', surrounding him with a propaganda image behind which a broad public of music lovers will not always immediately detect artistic depth. The 'infinite variety' of his personality and his work opens up in all its scope and depth if his interpretations are listened to seriously and his writings read carefully.

The manifold aspects of Leonard Bernstein's life, activities and creative work necessitate that in this study biographical details and chronological data are sometimes repeated in different contexts. In the biographical chapter the musical works are mentioned in the chronological order of their composition, while description and analysis are to be found in the chapters dealing with the different musical spheres in which he has been creative.

The author wishes to thank all those who have contributed memories, experiences and evaluations of their own to this book in personal conversations, letters and recorded talks, and most especially to Leonard Bernstein himself who throughout many years has helped to build a picture of his versatile personality and his thinking in innumerable hours of very personal informative talks and exchange of ideas.

We also thank the various music publishers, institutions, orchestras, libraries and archives throughout the world which have provided documentary and informative material and photos and have also kindly permitted the use and reprinting of excerpts protected by copyright law.

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July 1987

1

Music in America — American Music

We have been writing music in this country for only fifty years, and half of that fifty years the music has been borrowed clean out of the pockets of Brahms and Company . . . .
Leonard Bernstein, November 1954

When, in 1943, 25-year-old Leonard Bernstein made his sensational concert debut, stepping in at the last moment for the indisposed Bruno Walter at Carnegie Hall as conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, he was announced as a 'full-fledged conductor who was born, educated, and trained in this country' — the first of whom this could be said. Hardly anything was known then to the American public of the role of their own native musicians in the development of musical life in the country and few musicians were aware of American musical history. Most prominent musicians conducting and performing in the United States had been born in Germany, France, Italy, Hungary or Russia, or at least had obtained their formative musical education in a European country. In Europe, on the other hand, few names of musicians active in the Western hemisphere were known. American composers were hardly played on either side of the Atlantic. 'American music' to Europeans meant negro spirituals, jazz and George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, which Paul Whiteman and his orchestra had brought over in 1924. George Antheil's opera *Transatlantic* had its world premiere in Frankfurt in 1930 but disappeared from the operatic stage very quickly. Only thirty-six years later two German opera houses attempted, independently, to revive the interesting work. Names of American composers appeared in the 1920s and 1930s here and there, mostly as authors of film scores.

Two years after his first startling success conducting the renowned

New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein made his first appearance in 'Old Europe', and here he surprised conservative audiences — and critics — not only by his unusual drive and musical insight, but also as a promoter of new American music. His first European concerts took place in Prague and London in the spring of 1946; he was twenty-seven years old at the time. His programmes contained music by William Schuman, Samuel Barber, Roy Harris, Aaron Copland, George Gershwin and his own First Symphony, *Jeremiah.*

The symphonic works Leonard Bernstein had chosen for his programmes were all composed between the years 1936 and 1942 — with the exception of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* — and the majority of listeners then heard for the first time music from the 'New World'. The oldest composer represented was Roy Harris (born 1898), whose Third Symphony, one of the most important works of new American music and one of the great symphonies in the twentieth-century orchestral repertoire, had been completed in 1938. Aaron Copland and William Schuman were both born in 1900; Copland's *El Salón Mexico* (1936) and Schuman's *American Festival Overture* (1939) had distinctly American musical traits; *Essay No. 2* (1942) was composed by the 32-year-old American musical lyricist, Samuel Barber. None of the composers presented by Leonard Bernstein to his European audiences were numbered among those musicians described in his essay, 'Whatever happened to that Great American Symphony?' (November 1954, reprinted in *The Joy of Music*, New York, 1954), of whom he says that their music 'has been borrowed clean out of the pockets of Brahms and Company'. In dating the beginnings of an 'American music' around the early years of the twentieth century, he looks back to a generation of composers characterised by names such as John Knowles Paine (1839–1906), George W. Chadwick (1854–1931), Edgard Stillman Kelley (1857–1944), Arthur Foote (1853–1937), Horatio Parker (1863–1919), Mrs H.H. Beach (1867–1944), and Henry F. Gilbert (1868–1928) — the so-called Boston or New England Group. A contemporary of these composers was Edward MacDowell (1861–1908), known as 'America's Grieg', the first American composer to gain recognition in Europe. The 'Bostoners' were followed by a post-Romanticist generation of composers, such as Frederick Shepherd Converse (1871–1940), Henry Hadley (1871–1938), Daniel Gregory Mason (1873–1953) and David Stanley Smith (1877–1920); or Impressionists such as Charles Martin Loeffler (1861–1935) and Charles Tomlinson Griffes (1874–1954). It was only with the works of Charles Ives (1874–1954) (whose importance was discovered and appreciated long after the bulk of his work had been written) and of the composers born towards the end of the

nineteenth century, that music written in America gained characteristic traits of its own.

Leonard Bernstein's promotion of American composers, his choice of significant works for his programmes and his study of the development of American music went a long way towards compelling music historians to ask once again: is there such a thing as music that may be termed national and uniquely characteristic of a certain nation or people? Do national characteristics find expression in the musical creations of a nation's composers? Analysts and historians have distinguished between a spiritual–national and folkloristic–national approach in the case of composers eager to be regarded as musical representatives of their countries. Attempts have also been made to detect national strains in the music of composers of more cosmopolitan, universal leanings and to doubt the inclusion of folk elements in the music of composers who expressed their national-mindedness in words. The entire question seems anachronistic at a time when technology and the media make music of every kind and description familiar all over the world with the help of satellite transmissions, radio and television — music of all countries and peoples, of all historical periods and styles, showing different techniques, means of expression, forms and structures is available. In previous epochs of history, musical nationalism has played a major role in various countries especially during a time of national renascence in those countries which had not yet found a place in world cultural history. Romanticism and musical–national Romanticism often develop side by side and have survived even such turbulent times as the second half of the twentieth century. Cultural nationalism is a natural phenomenon in a country like the United States of America, a melting-pot of civilisations and cultural inheritances, where a continual immigration of newcomers wishing to become American citizens and not just to hold a US passport, are seeking a unifying identity.

American composers themselves have often asked whether a typically American music exists: answers have been very different. Virgil Thomson, the important critic, chronicler and composer, has said: 'The way to write American music is simple. All you have to do is to be an American and then write any kind of music you wish'. A similar opinion has been expressed by Aaron Copland, who in his early compositions used folkloristic material and jazz-style, but later said: 'I no longer feel the need of seeking out conscious Americanism. Because we live here and work here, we can be certain that when our music is mature it will also be American in quality'. Among the most pointed sayings on nationalism in music is a remark by Heitor Villa-Lobos: 'A

truly creative musician is capable of producing, from his own imagination, melodies that are more authentic than folklore itself'. Leonard Bernstein's own opinion seems to follow that of the composer Edward MacDowell, who wrote at the turn of the century:

> Before a people can find a musical writer to echo its genius it must first possess men who truly represent it — that is to say, men who, being part of the people, love the country for itself: men who put into their music what the nation has put into its life. What we must arrive at is the youthful optimistic vitality and the undaunted tenacity of spirit that characterize the American man. That is what I hope to see echoed in American music.

Leonard Bernstein, in his television programmes for young people, during his fourth talk, asked 'What makes music American?'

> Think of all the races and personalities from all over the globe that make up our country. What our composers are nourished on is a folk music that is probably the richest in the world, and all of it is American, whether it's jazz, or square-dance tunes, or cowboy songs, or hilly-billy music, or rock'n'roll, or Cuban mambos, or Mexican huapangos, or Missouri hymn-singing. It's like all the different accents we have in our speaking; there's a little Mexican in some Texas accents, and a little Swedish in the Minnesota accent, and a little Slavic in the Brooklyn accent, and a little Irish in the Boston accent. But it's all American, just like Copland's *Billy the Kid*, which also has a Mexican accent here and a Brooklyn accent there . . . . And hearing all these accents you can feel strongly what it means to be an American — a descendant of all the nations of the earth (*Leonard Bernstein's Young People's Concerts for Reading and Listening*, New York, 1962, pp. 96f.).

When Leonard Bernstein, at the age of forty, became Music Director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in 1958, he started a series of performances of works written during the past hundred years by American composers; he also initiated preview talks on the concert programmes. The earliest symphonic works in his programmes were chosen from what he called 'the kindergarten phase of American music'. He drew the attention of both musicians and the general public to early attempts of composers to create consciously conceived national music, without however playing the very earliest specimens of this kind — music that is indeed of little inherent interest, but has some historic importance because of its influence on later developments in American music.

Such national sentiments were shown by a composer living in Kentucky at the beginning of the nineteenth century, who later moved to

cities with Amerindian populations. In April 1822, John R. Parker, in his *Euterpiad*, called him 'the Beethoven of America'. The composer in question was born in Bohemia in 1781 as Anton Philip Heinrich, came to America by way of Malta and changed his first name to Anthony. Only a few years after immigration, he already felt himself to be an American composer. In his book *Dawning of Music in Kentucky, or The Pleasures of Harmony in the Solitudes of Nature* (published in 1820) Heinrich wrote that it 'has been one of the chief motives, in the exercise of his abilities . . . to create but one single Star in the West [and] no one would ever be more proud than himself, to be called an American Musician'. His works bear such titles as *The Wildwood Troubadour, a musical Auto-Biography*, *The Indian Carnival or The Indian's Festival of Dreams*, *Gran sinfonia misteriosa indiana*, *The Treaty of William Penn with the Indians — Concerto grosso — An American national dramatic divertissement* . . . . Heinrich was proud to have received a letter from Heinrich Marschner, dated 10 May 1849, which praised 'the originality, the deeply poetic ideas' developed in his compositions, which other musicians often criticised as eccentric and bombastic. While his music no longer holds much interest, there can be no doubt that his preoccupation with Indian music and the use of Indian folklore in his works exerted an influence on American composers of later generations. Anthony Philip Heinrich died in New York in 1861, aged eighty; some two hundred of his compositions, many of them printed, are preserved in the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

The oldest composer from the 'kindergarten phase' included in Leonard Bernstein's concerts, was William Henry Fry, who has gone down in history as the creator of the first publicly performed opera by an American-born composer. His *Leonora* was staged in June 1845 in Philadelphia: critics of the time said it was an opera of the Bellini school. Bernstein has played Fry's *Santa Claus Symphony* (1853) and thus William Henry Fry (born circa 1815, died 1864) at last achieved a place in a New York Philharmonic concert. When the Philharmonic Society of New York was founded in 1842, many composers hoped that their works would be performed at its concerts, but most were disappointed: Fry was one of the composers who complained bitterly at the time that his symphonies were not given a hearing in the Philharmonic concerts. Discontent among composers grew when one of the first — out of very few — works by American composers to be performed was in fact one written by George F. Bristow, concert master of the Philharmonic. The founder and first conductor of the orchestra was American-born Ureli Corelli Hill (1802–75), who as a violinist had studied for a time under Louis Spohr in Germany. Thus the founder-

director of the Philharmonic was, in fact, a native American.

One of the most characteristic early works of American music with a folk background was the fantasy *Nights in the Tropics* by Louis Moreau Gottschalk, famous in his day as pianist and composer; his piano pieces are still played. Born in 1829 in New Orleans, with an English Jewish father and a Creole mother, at the age of thirteen he went to study in Paris and there became a pupil of Hector Berlioz, who was enthusiastic about his youthful talents as a pianist. Chopin predicted that he would become a 'king of pianists'. In 1853, Gottschalk returned to America to embark on a series of concert tours, and was acclaimed wherever he played. He died in Rio de Janeiro in 1869. His incorporation of Negro tunes and Creole melodies into his compositions exerted on American composers an even deeper influence than had the music of Anthony Philip Heinrich. In his concerts Bernstein sought out works by early American composers with a leaning towards the folk tradition and Gottschalk's music was given its due place.

Compositions by the Boston Group that figured in Leonard Bernstein's survey of American music were George Chadwick's *Melpomene*, first performed in 1891, the *Suite on Negro Themes* by Henry Gilbert, premiered in Boston in 1911 when the composer was forty-three years old, and the *Indian Suite*, op. 48, by Edward MacDowell, first given in 1896. Further programmes included music by American composers who had become independent of 'Brahms and Company', who belonged to the generation born between 1874 and 1900, and composers of the twentieth century proper.

The wide-ranging versatility of Bernstein's taste and the thoroughness with which he studied American musical history are evident from the works which, under his directorship, the New York Philharmonic played in various series of concerts. There were compositions with which he had become familiar long before his appointment to the important position of Music Director, music that he unearthed from the archives, new works and music that influenced his own style of writing. One of the first modern works which Bernstein performed with the New York Philharmonic was the Second Symphony by Randall Thompson. This was in fact the very first orchestral piece that he ever conducted professionally, for his conducting teacher Fritz Reiner had assigned this work to him as his first task as a student at the Curtis Institute of Philadelphia in 1939; Randall Thompson (born 1899), had been a composition student of Ernest Bloch. The symphony, written in 1931 and first performed at Rochester in 1932, was the work of a composer who — in his own words — argued that 'a composer's first responsibility is, and always will be, to write music that will reach and