

# LEONARD BERNSTEIN



**Leonard Bernstein** was born in Massachusetts in 1918. He studied piano as a child and developed a lifelong love for it, going on to major in Music at Harvard. After completing college, he moved to New York City and took jobs transcribing music and writing arrangements for publishers, and worked his way up to becoming an assistant conductor at the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. One night in 1943, he was rushed in to conduct the New York Philharmonic after their usual conductor fell ill. The night's concert was nationally broadcast, and Bernstein became an overnight sensation in the world of orchestral music. He then began guest conducting with several orchestras, and composed symphonies and ballets. One of his ballets was adapted into a musical called *On the Town*, which was later made into a successful MGM movie musical. He also hosted a television show that taught music to children, which made him a well-known name in American homes in the late 1950s. In 1959, he collaborated with writers Arthur Laurents and Stephen Sondheim and choreographer Jerome Robbins to compose the score to *West Side Story*, now one of the most famous American musicals and his most famous work. He continued conducting and composing for the rest of his life.

Bernstein's music was famous for combining several different styles of music, including elements of jazz, Jewish folk music, and the works of composers from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, to create his own signature sound. Search the internet for a recording or video of *West Side Story*, or check out the film version or cast recording from your local library, and listen to some of the music. Do you hear any of his regular influences, or do you hear something completely different? List the different elements you hear in the song in the space below.

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