

## Course syllabus

### **Lenny: Portrait of an American Maestro**

Instructor: Ben Simon

Thursdays Oct 17, 24, 31 and Nov 7: 10am – noon

Lafayette Public Library

Larger than life, Leonard Bernstein was the most brilliant and beloved American musician of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Composer, conductor, pianist, teacher, writer, socialite, tennis player, concert innovator, and prodigiously talented crossword puzzler, Bernstein was an international superstar who lived a full and very public life. His multi-faceted career is the stuff of legend, from *On the Town* and *West Side Story* through three symphonies, *Chichester Psalms*, and *Serenade*.

In this four-week class we will explore Bernstein's remarkable career, very public life and his musical legacy through his writings, recordings, videos and stories. Our focus will be his compositions and his lifetime as the premiere American maestro of his generation.

Very special guest Jamie Bernstein will join our Oct. 24 class to share stories and insights about her father and his music.

Lenny: Portrait of an American Maestro will be delivered in four two-hour presentations at the Lafayette public library and live-streamed for Bernstein fans everywhere.

### Course Outline

#### **Week 1: Early successes: *Fancy Free* to the New York Philharmonic.**

In our first week, we discuss Bernstein's early years, those who taught him, inspired him, and set him on his remarkable path. We will listen to and discuss his first musical theater successes, his first symphony, and the lucky break that launched his brilliant conducting career. Bernstein was the first American appointed as Music Director of a major American symphony orchestra. How did this happen? And why?

#### **Week 2: Composer and Conductor**

Our very special guest Jamie Bernstein will share stories and insights about her father and his music. Bernstein's growing fame as a composer was boosted by the great success of his ground-breaking musical, *West Side Story* but his dream was to write "serious music". Trying to balance composing and conducting, he tirelessly circled the globe as orchestras and audiences around the world clamored for "The Maestro". He formed a strong relationship with the fledgling Israel Philharmonic and a bit later, with the Vienna Philharmonic as well.

### **Week 3 Educator and Advocate**

We explore Bernstein's enormous influence as an educator and advocate, including his ground-breaking *Young People's Concerts*, Omnibus television series, his annual summer visits to Tanglewood, and a stint as a college professor, delivering his Norton Lectures at Harvard in 1973. He championed many young instrumentalists, singers and conductors, and was an influential advocate for many modern American composers, Aaron Copland most of all. The music of Gustav Mahler had a very special place in his heart, and he brought Mahler's incredible music into the classical "mainstream".

### **Week 4 Later Years and Legacy**

In our fourth last class we'll tie up any loose ends of the very public life, prolific career, and unmistakable genius of Leonard Bernstein. His compositions were growing larger and more personal, his appearances on the podium legendary, his circle of friends and admirers enormous. His later works such as the *Third Symphony* ("Kaddish") and his *Mass*, written for the opening of the Kennedy Center in Washington marked the culmination of an extraordinary career as a composer. Bernstein felt that he didn't write his "Great American Opera" but I think he did, and we'll discuss! As one of the most recorded classical artists, we have a trove of recordings and videos to explore - – enough to last several normal lifetimes, which Bernstein somehow managed in his 72 years.