



## Bernstein & Gershwin – November 1, 2014

### *Ceremonial Fantasy Fanfare*

David Lockington  
b. 1956

David Lockington composed *Ceremonial Fantasy Fanfare* in 2009 for *ArtPrize*, the innovative annual art festival in Grand Rapids, Michigan, "...filled with the experiments of artists and the opinions of everyone."

According to Lockington, the theme that pervades the *Fanfare* comes from the musical notes that be derived from the letters in Grand Rapids: "...I also had a sound image of colored paint being thrown at a canvas and slowly dripping down. That gesture is represented in the first climax after the opening fanfare. After that, the musical material is shaped and molded as a painter or sculptor would fashion their work. I also wanted the main theme to have a dynamic seriousness to it so that the ending would feel like a triumphant resolution."

### **Concerto in F for Piano and Orchestra**

George Gershwin  
1898-1937

The son of poor Jewish immigrants in lower Manhattan, George Gershwin was a natural-born pianist and left school at 16 to become a pianist with a Tin-Pan Alley firm, plugging their new songs. He soon commenced writing songs himself, eventually teaming up with his brother Ira as lyricist to become one of the most successful teams of song and musical comedy writers on Broadway. They created a string of immensely successful musicals from *Lady be Good* in December 1924 to *Let 'em Eat Cake* in October 1933. The opening night of a George Gershwin musical comedy was a social and media event with Gershwin himself usually leading the orchestra.

Gershwin was the first American composer to make jazz acceptable to the American classical music audience. The groundbreaking performance of his *Rhapsody in Blue* at the Paul Whiteman concerts in 1924 made history. His Concerto in F, however, commissioned by Walter Damrosch for the New York Symphony and premiered in December 1925, was the first large-scale jazz composition in a traditionally classical form.

Gershwin, who by that time was already a famous composer of songs and musical comedies, had no experience in orchestration. In the Broadway tradition, this task was usually left to professional orchestrators; Ferde Grofé (of *Grand Canyon Suite* fame) had orchestrated *Rhapsody in Blue*. But for the Concerto in F, Gershwin decided to score it himself. He was a fast learner.

Although billed as a concerto for the concert hall, the Concerto in F adheres only to the most basic elements of the classical models in form: three movements, fast-slow-fast. Gershwin made no attempt to create jazzy versions of sonata, scherzo or ternary (ABA) form in the movements themselves, although the finale is a rondo.

Gershwin employed different jazz styles in each of the three movements. The First employs the quick pulsating rhythm of the Charleston. The unusual opening for timpani and trap set fixes the prevailing rhythm of the movement and announces in no uncertain terms: “This is jazz!” The main theme, introduced by the piano, becomes a motto for the concerto, recurring in the last movement. Instead of developing core thematic material, the tunesmith Gershwin rolls out a series of melodies in contrasting rhythms and moods, expanding each one in the manner of a jazz riff. The climax of the movement is a repeat for full orchestra of the main theme.

The second movement has, as Gershwin himself explained, “...a poetic nocturnal atmosphere which has come to be referred to as the American blues...” The movement begins with a long introductory passage for solo winds, based on a small rhythmic motive that sets the bluesy atmosphere and contains little hints of the two important themes to come. Both themes are delayed in order to produce a sense of expectation and tension that drive the movement, reflecting the melancholy sense of longing that characterizes the blues in general. As in the first movement, the piano introduces the first theme, the accompaniment to which hints at the movement's second big theme that will come into its own a full eight minutes into the movement.

The Finale, the only movement with a classical structure, is a rondo but also a toccata consisting of rapidly repeated notes. From a pop music perspective, the movement is a quickstep. The first episode brings back in variation the motto from the first movement. The next episode the melody is original to this movement, and in the third episode, Gershwin brings back the main theme from the second movement as a quickstep. The climax is a near repeat of the fully orchestrated motto. A rapid coda recalls the rondo theme with a timpani flourish and a jazz trill for the horns.

### **Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story***

Leonard Bernstein  
1918-1990

*West Side Story* was Leonard Bernstein’s attempt to demonstrate that it was possible to write a Broadway musical with the characteristics of high art. He succeeded beyond all expectations. With lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and with Jerome Robbins as director and choreographer, the show opened on Broadway on September 26, 1957 and ran for over 1,000 performances. The movie was just as spectacular a success, as was the recording.

But its birth was not easy. The show was originally conceived eight years earlier as a conflict between Jews and Catholics during the Easter-Passover celebrations and at one point was to be called *East Side Story*. The protagonists were finally switched to ethnic gangs on the Upper West Side, but no backers could be found. *West Side Story* became notorious for having been turned down by nearly every producer because no one thought that such a tragic story was suitable material for Broadway. Finally, Harold Prince and Robert Griffith, two successful Broadway producers, emerged as the show’s financial “angels.”

Casting was another problem. The perfectionist Robbins wanted a cast of 38 who could both dance *and* sing – a nearly impossible demand in those days, but now the rule rather than the exception. A choreographer first and foremost, Robbins finally settled on dancers who could sing – as opposed to singers who could dance. When Bernstein, unencumbered by staging constraints, re-recorded *West Side Story* in 1988, he used opera singers for the main roles:

Kiri Te Kanawa, José Carreras, Tatiana Troyanos and Marilyn Horne. It became another bestseller.

While describing the tragic life of ordinary people in a New York Puerto Rican ghetto, *West Side Story* tackles an archetypal theme: love clashing with prejudice and clan hatred, an inner city *Romeo and Juliet*.

The Symphonic Dances, which Bernstein extracted from the musical, are not played in the order of the original show. Comprising of nine segments played without pause, the suite was first performed by the New York Philharmonic in 1961:

1. *Prologue*: Portrays the rising violence between the two street gangs, the Sharks and the Jets in harsh, jazzy dissonances and rhythms.
2. *Somewhere*: Tony and Maria's idyllic dream sequence in which the gangs are joined in friendship and the lovers united, originally from Act 2 after Tony has stabbed Maria's brother.
3. *Scherzo*: The dream continues as the two gangs leave the city for the idyllic countryside.
4. *Mambo*: The rival gangs compete at a school dance, originally from Act 1 when the two lovers first meet.
5. *Cha-Cha*. Tony and Maria, from opposing gangs, meet for the first time and dance together.
6. *Meeting Scene*: The lovers hesitantly exchanging their first words.
1. 7. *"Cool" Fugue*: The hostility of the Jets gradually builds in anticipation of street warfare.
7. *Rumble*. The violent, dissonant climax results in the final tragedy in which both rival gang leaders are killed.
8. *Finale*: Tony dies in Maria's arms, a victim of gang violence. In an ironic twist, the dream melody of "Somewhere" hauntingly reappears during the funeral procession.

### **Overture to *Candide***

Leonard Bernstein  
1918-1990

During Senator Joseph McCarthy's Communist witch hunts of the early 1950s, which particularly targeted artists, writers and musicians, Leonard Bernstein and playwright Lillian Hellman decided to use Voltaire's satirical novel *Candide* as a vehicle to make a political statement. According to Hellman, the novel attacks "all rigid thinking...all isms." Bernstein thought that the charges made by Voltaire against his own society's puritanical snobbery, false morality and inquisitorial attacks on individuals were identical to those that beset American society.

After Hellman and Bernstein spent two years of intermittent cooperative work, the play opened in the fall of 1956. It failed – that is, all but the overture. In its orphaned state, the Overture became a staple of the orchestral repertoire and one of Bernstein's most frequently performed works. It reflects the breakneck pacing of Voltaire's satire with its worldwide adventures and buffoonery, interspersed in places by mock-tender moments.

In 1974, equipped with a new libretto that concentrated on madcap humor rather than a political and social message, *Candide* was successfully revived. The musical saw 741 packed performances in the Broadway Theater, but Bernstein was still not satisfied. Two operatic versions followed in 1982 and 1989, and a CD of the final version, one of Bernstein's last recordings, became a bestseller.

Program notes by:  
Joseph & Elizabeth Kahn  
Wordpros@mindspring.com  
www.wordprosmusic.com