

**Symphony No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra, *The Age of Anxiety***

**Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990)**

Written: 1948; revised in 1965

Movements: Three

Style: Contemporary American

Duration: 35 minutes

Leonard Bernstein began his Symphony No. 2 in the summer of 1947 almost immediately after he read W. H. Auden's poem "The Age of Anxiety, a Baroque Eclogue." He was so obsessed with the idea of a symphony based upon that poem that he worked on it constantly, finishing it in March of 1948.

*The Age of Anxiety* Symphony No. 2 is divided into six sections, each with the same titles as the sections of the poem. Those six sections are then collected into two main movements. The first section, "Prologue," is a very soft duet for two clarinets. The Prologue of the poem introduces four characters, Quant, Malin, Rosetta and Emble, who find each other in a dimly lit bar. A flute plays a descending scale as a bridge into the next section: "The Seven Ages." This is a set of seven 'variations,' each on a different theme. The first age in the poem is infancy, here represented by the piano alone. In the second age, youth, the orchestra joins the piano. The third is the age of sexual awakening. Here the strings and horn have a beautiful, singing melody. Rosetta describes the fourth age as "The clown's cosmos." The piano plays a fast *scherzo* (an Italian word meaning "joke") in a five beat rhythm. The orchestra accompanies it with short percussive blips. The next variation is agitated and frantic, corresponding to Malin's refusal to accept the fifth age: middle age. The sixth age is man's aging. The piano plays a disjointed cadenza-like solo. The woodwinds and a final long downward scale played by the piano represent the exhaustion of the seventh and final age.

In the next section—"The Seven Stages"—the four characters take a dream journey "leading

back to a point of comfort and security.” The music is again a set of seven variations. The first is a ponderous *passacaglia* (where the music changes over a regular repeated six-note figure in the bass). This leads to a waltz based upon that six-note theme. The third variation starts with the piano introducing a theme in a seven-beat rhythm. Variation four is an involved sort of round or *fugato* with a theme characterized by wide jumps. The fifth variation is a sort of perpetual motion. The piano fades away as the brass play the original *passacaglia* theme in heavy ponderous chords in the sixth variation. The piano enters again for the final stage that brings the first movement to a crashing close.

The second movement begins with “The Dirge,” depicting the four characters as they taxi to Rosetta’s apartment and “mourn the loss of the ‘colossal Dad,’ the great leader who can always give the right orders, find the right solution, shoulder the mass responsibility, and satisfy the universal need for a father-symbol.” The piano introduces this funeral march with 12 rising notes called a *row*. The oboes then play the march. A middle section, which Bernstein says consists of “almost ‘Brahmsian’ romanticism,” features the piano. The orchestra then plays the *row* again, this time very forcefully, and the dirge fades away. “The Masque” is a party at Rosetta’s apartment. It is a brilliant jazz solo for the piano accompanied only by the percussion, harp and celeste. There remains now only the last section, “The Epilogue,” in which the trumpet plays a beautiful simple melody, “something pure,” symbolizing faith. The orchestra picks up on this theme, playing it as a chorale. The piano plays a cadenza that becomes increasingly more distant and thoughtful. Finally, the orchestra joins for a triumphant apotheosis.

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## ***Slava!***

**Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990)**

Written: 1977

Movements: One

Style: Contemporary American

Duration: Four minutes

In this year celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Leonard Bernstein's birth, there are going to be many concerts celebrating a man who was almost ubiquitous in American musical life in the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He resided at the top of many worlds. He wrote serious "classical" works such as *Age of Anxiety* and blockbuster Broadway shows such as *West Side Story*. He introduced the common person to great music with his televised *Young Person's Concerts* and spoke to the intelligentsia at Harvard with his *Norton Lectures*. As a conductor, he was revered around the globe. Think of it: Even the Europeans admired this American conductor. At the height of the Cold War, he took his New York Philharmonic to Russia. However, like everybody else, he had his failures.

In the American Bicentennial year of 1976, Bernstein collaborated with Alan Jay Lerner on the Broadway show *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue*. It was an "Upstairs/Downstairs" view of the presidential mansion, contrasting the lives of the presidential families with the lives of the servants. It was an enormous bust, closing after just seven performances. Lerner and Bernstein withdrew the work. There wasn't even a cast recording.

All was not lost, however. A year later, Mstislav Rostropovich—the famous Russian cellist and conductor known to his friends as "Slava"—took over the helm as Music Director of the National Symphony in Washington D.C. He asked his friend Leonard Bernstein—the two first met when Bernstein went to Russia in 1959—to collaborate with him on his inaugural concerts in Washington. Bernstein provided his new *Songfest* for singers and orchestra, *Three Meditations* for cello and

orchestra, and a short little “political” overture titled *Slava!*

For the quickly composed piece, Bernstein resurrected some tunes from *1600 Pennsylvania*. The first theme is a “vaudevillian razzmatazz tune filled with side-slipping modulations and sliding trombones,” and the second theme has an asymmetrical 7/8 rhythm (scored for electric guitar, but usually substituted by a saxophone). The central portion of the overture incorporated recorded snippets of political speeches played over a simple repeated rhythm (nowadays often omitted). The two themes come back in reverse order and then the orchestra ends the overture by shouting in unison, “Slava!”

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## **Overture to *Candide***

**Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990)**

Written: 1956

Movements: One

Style: Contemporary American

Duration: 5 minutes

Just a cursory glance at a shortened list of Leonard Bernstein's compositions from the 1940s and 1950s will give you an idea of the breadth of this remarkable man's interests. He wrote two symphonies, two ballets (*Fancy Free* and *Facsimile*), the Broadway musicals *On the Town*, *Peter Pan*, *Wonderful Town*, and *West Side Story*, the score for the film *On the Waterfront*, the opera *Trouble in Tahiti*, and the operetta *Candide*. Curiously, virtually all of those works were great successes, except for *Candide*.

Lillian Hellman wrote a play based on Voltaire's *Candide* and asked Bernstein to write some incidental music for it. He readily agreed. "Puritanical snobbery, phony moralism, inquisitorial attacks on the individual, brave-new-world optimism, essential superiority—aren't these all charges leveled against American society by our best thinkers?" he asked. "And they are also charges made by Voltaire against his own society." Bernstein was so enthusiastic that he convinced Hellman to turn the play into an operetta. The production opened on Broadway in 1956 and ran for only 76 performances. The problem seemed to be that audiences didn't get the point. As the conductor of the London production of *Candide* put it, "Opera fans did not go to the West End [London's "Broadway" district] looking for operas, and for people who came expecting a musical it was too serious." The New York Times had nearly the same criticism: "The 18th-century philosophical tale is not ideal material for a theatre show."

The original production may have been a flop, but Bernstein's overture, when he conducted it at a New York Philharmonic concert in 1957, was an instant hit. Bernstein uses tunes from four songs in the overture: "Eldorado," "What's the Use?" "Glitter and Be Gay," and "It Must Be So." The overture starts with a bang and never lets up. Fast, sparkling, and witty; it's easy to hear why this overture has always been an audience favorite.

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**“Morning’ Sun” from *Trouble in Tahiti***  
**“Greeting” and “Little Smary” from *Arias and Barcarolles***  
**“A Little Bit in Love” from *Wonderful Town***  
**“Glitter and Be Gay” from *Candide***  
**Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)**

Written: 1951, 1988, 1953, 1956 respectively

Style: Contemporary American

Duration: 3, 3, 2, 3 and 6 minutes

Leonard Bernstein is a towering figure in American music. As musicologist Jeremy Rudkin puts it, “Bernstein was enormously versatile, and he had the energy of three men. He used to sleep only two or three hours a night. He could have been a great pianist, a great conductor, or a great composer. Instead, he was all three.”

In addition to his serious concert music, Bernstein wrote a lot of music for the stage: two ballets (*Fancy Free* and *Facsimile*); the Broadway musicals *On the Town*, *Peter Pan*, *Wonderful Town*, *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue* and *West Side Story*; the score for the film *On the Waterfront*; the operas *Trouble in Tahiti* and *A Quiet Place*; and the operetta *Candide*.

Bernstein wrote *Trouble in Tahiti* in 1951. Ironically, he was on his honeymoon when he began work on the opera that describes a day in the life of a desperately unhappily married couple. He explained how he tried to make the opera sound distinctly “American.” “All the music derives from American vernacular roots, as do the words. And the words are very carefully set so that they will

sound in the American cadence and with the American kind of syncopated, almost slurred quality.” In addition to its bleak depiction of a marriage, *Trouble in Tahiti* presents a withering attack on post-war American materialism. Part of the prelude to the opera, “Morning Sun,” describes a perfect life, in a perfect little suburb, in a little white house with a red roof . . .

Although the song cycle *Arias and Barcarolles* had its first performance in 1988 at a fund-raising concert in honor of a friend who had died from AIDS, Bernstein had been working on some of its parts since at least the mid-1950s. The title itself comes from 1960 when Bernstein performed *Rhapsody in Blue* for President Eisenhower. “I liked that last piece you played,” the president said. “It had a tune. I like music with a tune, not all of them arias and barcarolles and things.” In *Arias and Barcarolles’* seven songs, a soprano and baritone sing about the seven ages of man. Bernstein wrote “Greeting” for the birth of his son Alexander in 1955. “Little Smary” contrasts the perky bedtime-story-telling style of a mother with the anguish of a child whose pet has died.

In 1953, Bernstein collaborated with Betty Comden and Adolph Green on a Broadway musical starring Rosalind Russell. *Wonderful Town* is about two Midwestern girls who come to New York to “seek fame and fortune.” Eileen, the younger of the two, wants to become an actress. Frank, a manager at a Walgreens, has fallen in love with Eileen and has been giving her free lunches. She asks the question “When you meet someone who bewitches you/Will he be my all/Or did I just fall/A little bit in love?”

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against his own society.” Bernstein was so enthusiastic that he convinced Hellman to turn the play into an operetta. It is a satirical debunking of optimistic Enlightenment philosophy. In “Glitter and Be Gay,” Cunegonde describes the art of survival in bohemian Paris.

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