

# LEONARD BERNSTEIN

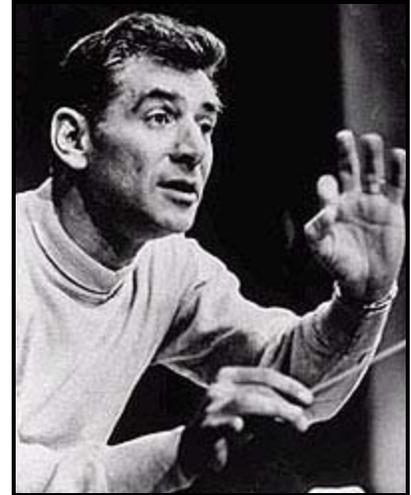
Born in Lawrence, Massachusetts 1918

Died in Brooklyn, New York 1990

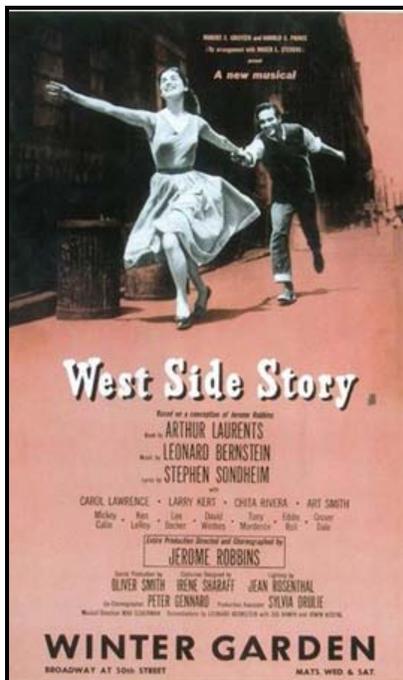
## Overture from *Candide*

Composed in 1956

Leonard Bernstein, the first conductor born in the United States to receive world-wide acclaim, demonstrated extraordinary musical ability very early on. He took piano lessons as a boy and after graduating from Boston Latin School in 1935, he attended Harvard where he studied music with Walter Piston. Subsequently he attended the renowned Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, studying conducting with Fritz Riener and piano with Isabella Vengerova and Heinrich Gebhard.



Bernstein then went on to study at Tanglewood during the summers of 1940 and 1941 with Serge Koussevitzky. Koussevitzky was so impressed with Bernstein that he asked him to be his assistant in 1942. Also in that year, Bernstein was invited to be Assistant Conductor of the New York Philharmonic, where in November of 1943, he substituted for Conductor Bruno Walter when Walter became ill; Bernstein was an immediate overnight success. In 1948 he joined the staff at Tanglewood and succeeded Koussevitzky as head of the conducting department. Bernstein took over the post of Music Director of the New York Philharmonic in 1958, and held it until 1969. Twenty years later, on Christmas day, Bernstein conducted Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 to honor the fall of the Berlin Wall; the performance reached approximately 100 million people as it was broadcast live in more than twenty countries. Bernstein conducted his final performance with the Boston Symphony on October 9, 1990. He died less than a week later on October 14, 1990.



**Original 1957 Broadway  
production artwork**

As a contemporary composer, Bernstein was very alert to the melodic and rhythmic possibilities of popular styles, styles prevalent in his Broadway musicals. The score for *West Side Story*, in particular, is an example of virtuosic symphonic treatment. *West Side Story* is a musical with book by Arthur Laurents, music by Leonard Bernstein, and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. The story uses Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as inspiration, and is the musical theater's only real tragedy. In using the universal themes of prejudice, disenfranchisement and the destruction of love through hate, themes profound and disturbing, the work transcended the musical theatre medium. *West Side Story* is a highly successful work because of the unity of its parts: the music, the book, the eloquent lyrics along with Jerome Robbins's choreography are fully interwoven. Characterization, action and exposition are related through all of these elements in a way that was truly innovative.

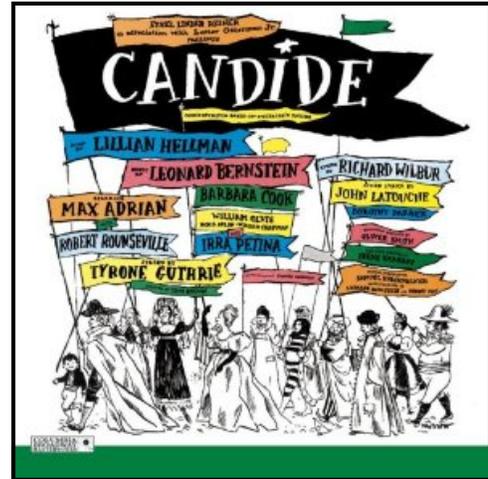
In order to create the sense of tension, restlessness and ruthlessness inherent in the action of the story, Bernstein employed a musical device of called a tritone, an interval that spans three whole tones, also known as an augmented fourth. This interval is one of dissonance, known for a long time as Diabolus in Musica (Devil in music) and was considered a "dangerous" interval. The tritone is apparent in almost every number in the musical. *West Side Story* debuted September 26, 1957 on Broadway at the Wintergarden Theatre. The **score** features numerous songs that have gone on to become musical theatre standards such as "Maria", "Tonight", and "Somewhere".

## Overture to *Candide*

The operetta *Candide* was based on an 18<sup>th</sup>-century satire of the same name by the French writer Voltaire. Leonard Bernstein wrote the music, and the American playwright Lillian Hellman wrote the text.

The show, which is described as “part operetta” and “part screwball comedy with shades of Monty Python”, details the trials and travails of the hapless Candide. Music Theatre International gives this brief run-down of the frenzied plot:

*[Candide] is expelled from home, drafted into the Bulgarian army, brought before the Spanish Inquisition, swindled out of a fortune, shipwrecked on a desert isle, and separated time and again from his true love Cunegonde, who bears with remarkable dignity a variety of carnal besmirchments by almost everybody. Through it all, Candide remembers the lesson of his dear master Dr. Pangloss: that "everything is for the best in this best of all possible worlds."*



**Original 1956 Production Artwork**

It premiered on Broadway on December 1, 1956 at the Martin Beck Theatre. The original production was not a success and only ran for a total of 73 performances. However, buoyed by Bernstein’s stellar score, the show has overcome its early troubles and achieved popularity, being a favorite of opera troupes and music schools for the opportunities it offers to singers. The show has also been revived twice on Broadway, once in 1974 and again in 1997.



**Robert Rounseville as Candide and Barbara Cook as Cunegonde in the original Broadway company**

The overture was first performed alone by the New York Philharmonic on January 26, 1957, with Bernstein conducting.

An **overture** is an instrumental piece written as the introduction to an opera/operetta, musical, or ballet. It often is a sampling of several tunes that will be heard later in the course of the theatrical work. This is certainly the case with the Overture to *Candide*.

Bernstein’s overture is in a lively tempo, with much rhythmic vitality and frequent changes in meter. It opens with a short and loud announcement from the brass instruments and bass drum, followed by a very fast and scurrying melody in the violins and high woodwinds. A driving and forceful melody gives way to a lyrical tune (“Oh, Happy We”). The opening material returns, with loud brass and busy woodwinds. The “Oh, Happy We” song is interrupted by a glimpse of the famous “Glitter and Be Gay” coloratura showpiece. The overture ends with an ever-faster, spectacular presentation of the various melodies woven one upon the other.

The score to the Overture to *Candide* calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, E-flat clarinet, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, triangle, xylophone, cymbals, orchestra bells, tenor drum, harp, and strings. You can watch Bernstein himself conduct the overture at this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=422-yb8TXj8>