

# Program Notes

BY J. MICHAEL ALLSEN

**Leonard Bernstein**, like many of his predecessors, was attracted to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as subject-matter for a stage work - the tragic story of lovers from two warring clans has universal appeal and relevance. In his **West Side Story**, the story is updated, and the "star-crossed lovers" are a Puerto Rican girl named Maria and a Polish-American boy named Tony. In place of warring Montagues and Capulets, we have two rival gangs fighting for territory. The Sharks are Puerto Rican immigrants, and the Jets are an "American" gang, primarily Tony's Polish-American buddies. Introducing Puerto Rican culture in the characters of Maria, Anita, and the Sharks allowed Bernstein to introduce Caribbean instruments into the score, and he also makes subtle use of Caribbean rhythms in many numbers. A successful collaboration between Bernstein, lyricist Stephen Sondheim, and choreographer Jerome Robbins, *West Side Story* was also an amazingly effective synthesis of classical and Broadway elements.

The set of selections from *West Side Story* heard on this program brings together all of the best tunes of Bernstein's score in a single medley, starting with *I Feel Pretty*, Maria's breezy song of fresh love. This is answered by Tony's more passionate *Maria* - with a wonderfully subtle effect that combines a lyrical song by the horn and flute above a muted clave rhythm representing Maria herself. The jazzy and insistent rhythms of *Something's Coming* serve

as a bridge to *West Side Story*'s great Act I love duet *Tonight*. The hymnlike *One Hand, One Heart* is sung as Tony and Maria secretly marry, just before their whole world comes crashing down. The Cool Jazz style of *Cool* accompanies one of Jerome Robbins's finest dance sequences: as the Jets do their best to contain and channel their rage after their leader Riff is killed by Maria's brother, Bernardo. The medley ends with *America*, a wonderfully satirical duet between two Puerto Rican girls in a dress shop, set over the lively *huapango* rhythm.

In November 2001, Warner Brothers issued the first of a successful series of movie adaptations of the Harry Potter books, **Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone**, with a score by **John Williams**. The ethereal *Hedwig's Theme* is used throughout to represent Harry's pet owl, but also a sense of mystery and wonder.

**Johann Sebastian Bach's** Cantata No.147, *Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben* (*Heart and Mind and Deed and Life*) was written for Leipzig's Thomaskirche, and was performed for the first time on July 2, 1723. Bach concluded the cantata with a chorus that used one of his favorite devices, quoting a chorale in the choir, the lines separated by an obbligato. This chorus, *Jesu bleibet meine Freude* (**Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring**) has become one of Bach's "greatest hits." It is heard here in an arrangement by Arthur Luck.

Though 19th-century Vienna was dominated by the waltz, the energetic polka was a popular second choice. The brief **Pizzicato Polka** was composed in 1869 by **Johann Strauss, Jr.** and his younger brother **Josef**, as a novelty piece for a tour through Russia. This tour turned out to be a disaster. Josef, who had always suffered from ill health, was beaten up by a group of Russian soldiers, possibly a factor in his death a few months later, as he was conducting in Warsaw. The *Pizzicato Polka*, originally scored for plucked strings and celesta, begins with a pair of delicate themes. The middle section presents a second pair of melodies - the first a light melody answered by a bell, and the second with a bit of military flair - before a reprise of the opening music.

American composer **Paul Creston** wrote his **Concertino for Marimba and Orchestra** - the first concerto written for the instrument - for a commission by Frédérique Petrides, conductor of New York City's all-women Orchestrette Classique. The ensemble's percussionist, Ruth Stuber, was soloist in the premiere at Carnegie Hall on April 29, 1940. ETSO principal percussionist Roland Muzquiz performs the first two movements here. The first (*Vigorous*) develops two themes, which Creston described as "a strongly rhythmic one and a lyric one." The second movement, marked *Calm*, is based upon a tranquil main theme from the marimba.

The most famous work by Mexican composer **José Pablo Moncayo** is his **Huapango** (1941). The title

refers to a folk dance associated with the *son huasteca* - the lively folk music of Veracruz. The *huapango* is traditionally danced on a low wooden platform, so that the dancers' footwork can provide a percussive counterpoint to the song. Moncayo used three traditional songs in his *Huapango*. The bold opening section is based on *El siquisiri* and *El balajú*. A slightly slower, more stately contrasting section adapts *El gavilán*, but the tempo soon ratchets up for a wild reprise of the opening music.

Next is a set of three pieces by America's premiere "Pops" composer **Leroy Anderson**. His greatest success came in the late 1940s and 1950s, when he worked as the staff arranger for the granddaddy of all Pops orchestras, Arthur Fiedler's Boston Pops. Anderson's **Clarinet Candy** was composed in 1960 - a brilliant showpiece for the clarinet section. In 1950, Anderson composed **The Typewriter** for solo typewriter and orchestra, turning the typewriter into a percussion instrument. Few of us under the age of 60 share the experience of having used a manual typewriter. While there are certainly things that no one will miss about them (correction fluid, changing ribbons, sticking keys, etc.), the experience of writing on a manual typewriter was more aurally satisfying than any word processing program - the clatter of the keys as your words went onto the page, the cheery ding that warned you about the end of line and the satisfying thwack of pushing the carriage return to begin a new line! In 1954 Anderson composed his **Bugler's Holiday** as a showcase for the Boston Pops trumpet section -

Robert Cusamann, Carl Poolee, and Melven Solomon. Playing above a lively march beat, the three trumpets play sometimes in close harmony and sometimes with overlapping fanfares, and all three have a chance to display flashy technique and triple tonguing. Near the end, Anderson makes a witty reference to a standard bugle call.

One of the biggest television hits of the last decade was HBO's *Game of Thrones*, a complex, dark, violent, and sexy series based on the fantasy novels of George R. R. Martin. Iranian-German composer **Ramin Djawadi** composed music for the series. His driving, Celtic-style **Game of Thrones Theme** - heard here in an arrangement by Larry Moore - appeared as the title music for each episode.

**Carl Strommen's Salute to Television** reaches back further in television history to TV themes from the 1960s and 1970. Two of these themes were borrowed from earlier Classical works. One was actually the *Rondeau*, composed in 1729 by French composer Jean-Joseph Mouret. Another was adapted from Charles Gounod's 1872 composition *Funeral March of a Marionette*.

Victor Hugo's 1862 novel **Les Misérables** tells the story of Jean Valjean, a French peasant living in the years leading up to the 1832 revolution, and his search for redemption. The famous musical adaptation, created by lyricist Alain Boubil and composer **Claude-Michel Schönberg**, was first produced as an album in 1980. It opened later that year as a wildly successful live

production in Paris. The English-language production opened first in London in 1985, and on Broadway in 1987. The Broadway production was a phenomenal success, running until 2003, and was successfully revived on Broadway twice after that. "*Les Mis*" is still a phenomenon today, in continuous tours. The heartbreaking ***I Dreamed A Dream*** was written by Schönberg with lyricist **Herbert Kretzmer**. This was a feature for the character Fantine, a young woman forced into prostitution - sung here by Julianne Casey.

Ms. Casey also reprises a song from *West Side Story*: **Tonight**, originally a duet between Tony and Maria, is **Bernstein's** version of the famous "balcony scene" from *Romeo and Juliet*. This passionate song is underlaid by yet another Caribbean rhythm, the syncopated and sensuous *beguine*.

We close with **Semper Fidelis** by America's "March King" **John Philip Sousa**. Sousa was born in Washington DC to immigrant parents. His father was a trombonist in the US Marine Corps Band. When he was 13, Sousa tried to run away to join a circus band, and his father enlisted him in the Marine Corps as an apprentice bandsman - to keep him out of trouble! Sousa would remain part of the US Marine Band for the next 20 years, eventually leading the band from 1880-1892. Under his leadership, the Marine Band gained the proud title "The President's Own" which it still bears today. His famous *Semper Fidelis* was written for the Marine Band in 1888 at the request of President Chester Arthur. Named

for the Marine Corps' motto, "Always Faithful," it was quickly recognized as the official march of the Marines. *Semper Fidelis* is a brisk 6/8 march

set, like most of Sousa's 136 marches, in four repeated strains, and features a drum break as an interlude.

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