

Three Dance Episodes from “On the Town” (1945)

Leonard Bernstein

Born August 25, 1918, in Lawrence, Massachusetts

Died October 14, 1990, in New York City

The Saint Louis Philharmonic joins orchestras around the world in celebration of the 100th anniversary of his birth of the famed American composer, conductor and pianist. Leonard Bernstein was a world-renowned musician throughout his entire adult life. He served as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic and conducted the world's major orchestras, recording hundreds of performances. His books and the televised Young People's Concerts with the New York Philharmonic established him as a leading educator. In fact, he was a mentor to three of the most recent Saint Louis Philharmonic conductors, Jorge Mester, David Stahl, and Robert Hart Baker.

Bernstein's classical compositions include *The Age of Anxiety*, *Serenade*, *Mass*, *Chichester Psalms*, *Songfest*, *Concerto for Orchestra*, and *A Quiet Place*. He also composed for the Broadway musical stage, creating masterpieces such as *On the Town*, *Wonderful Town*, *Candide*, and the immensely popular *West Side Story*. In addition to the *West Side Story* collaboration, Bernstein worked with choreographer Jerome Robbins on three major ballets, *Fancy Free*, *Facsimile*, and *Dybbuk*. Bernstein was the recipient of many honors, including the Antoinette Perry Tony Award for Distinguished Achievement in the Theater, 11 Emmy awards, the Lifetime Achievement Grammy Award, and the Kennedy Center Honors.

Writes Bernstein, “It seems only natural that dance should play a leading role in the show *On the Town*, since the idea of writing it arose from the success of the ballet *Fancy Free*...The story of *On the Town* is concerned with three sailors on 24-hour leave in New York, and their adventures with the monstrous city which its inhabitants take so for granted.” The first episode is “Dance of the Great Lover,” in which the romantic sailor Gabey falls asleep on the subway and dreams of sweeping Miss Turnstiles off her feet; the effervescent music underlines Gabey’s naiveté as well as his determination. In the second episode, “Pas de Deux,” Gabey watches a scene, “both tender and sinister, in which a sensitive high-school girl in Central Park is lured and then cast off by a worldly sailor.” This is set to “Lonely Town” – one of Bernstein’s greatest tunes, worthy of his friend and mentor Aaron Copland in its air of reflective melancholy. The finale, “Times Square Ballet” is described by Bernstein as “a more panoramic sequence in which all the sailors congregate in Times Square for their night of fun.” Part of the action takes place in the Roseland Dance Palace, with music to match. The famous “New York, New York, it’s a helluva town” theme makes a cameo appearance. The colorful work is scored for a “jazzy” theatre orchestra: flute, piccolo, oboe, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, E-flat clarinet, alto sax, 2 French horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, large percussion section, piano and strings.

--notes from Bernstein’s publisher Boosey & Hawkes