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West Side Story Suite

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Music West Side Story (1957) by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. Conception by Jerome Robbins.



Choreography Jerome Robbins

Original Cast Robert La Fosse, Jock Soto, Nikolaj Hübbe, Nancy Ticotin, Elena Diner, Natalie Toro

NYCB Premiere May 18, 1995, New York State Theater

Average Length 32 min.

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990), the gifted and versatile American conductor and composer of symphonic music and Broadway shows, was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts. At the age of seventeen he entered Harvard, went on to study at the Curtis Institute, and then to Tanglewood. Serge Koussevitzky took great interest in his talent and promoted his conducting career, and his great chance came when, on short notice, he substituted brilliantly for Bruno Walter, who had become ill. He performed as a conductor and pianist, and lectured at universities and on television. His compositions ranged from the classical to the musical stage, and included Mass, Kaddish, West Side Story (again in collaboration with Jerome Robbins), Candide, and The Age of Anxiety. He was the first native-born American to become conductor of the New York Philharmonic, and he conducted around the world. Stephen Sondheim began his career as a lyricist on Leonard Bernstein's West Side Story, which premiered on September 26, 1957 at the Winter Garden Theater, and Jule Styne's Gypsy, which opened on

"WHAT ATTRACTS ME VERY MUCH TO THE COMPANY IS THAT THERE ARE REALLY NO SET RULES."

— Peter Martins

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May 21, 1959 at the Broadway Theatre. The impressive list of Broadway shows he went on to compose music and write lyrics for includes Follies, A Little Night Music, Pacific Overtures, Sweeney Todd, Merrily We Roll Along, Sunday in the Park with George, Into the Woods and Assassins. Sondheim's Passion, received several Tony awards in 1994. Early in his life, Stephen Sondheim developed a deep relationship with the Hammerstein family that would prove to have a profound impact on his life and his art. Oscar Hammerstein became his theatrical mentor, instructing his student in the creative process through a series of assignments — writing entire shows using different sources, from plays to original concepts. These lessons were taken seriously by Sondheim, who used them to explore the possibilities in his art form.

**NEW YORK CHOREOGRAPHIC INSTITUTE
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