

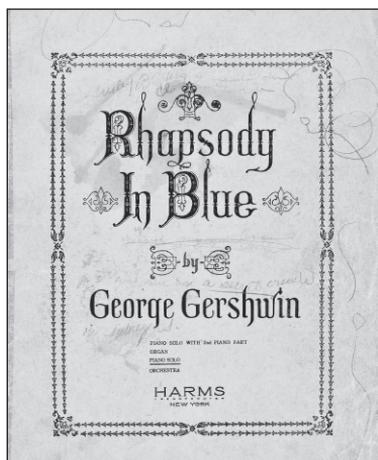
The History in This Program

From an early age, Leonard Bernstein idolized George Gershwin. He bought the solo piano arrangement of *Rhapsody in Blue* when he was 13, and scribbled teasing messages on the cover about his little sister: “Shirley B. has a crush on Clark Gable” and “P.S. Also she has a secret crush on Sydney S.” But his approach to the music itself was totally serious: with the help of his friend Sid Ramin, he wrote a four-hand arrangement using this score as a point of departure.

Bernstein was working as a counselor at a summer camp when the composer died, on July 11, 1937. The news sent the young musician “to pieces.” In memoriam, he played an impromptu all-Gershwin program for visiting parents in the cafeteria and even arranged a version of *Rhapsody in Blue* that could be performed by an ad hoc camp ensemble of piano, clarinet, recorder, accordion, two ukuleles, percussion, and three male singers / whistlers. (Whether the arrangement was ever performed there remains a mystery.) In his final year at Harvard, Bernstein returned to the jazz-inflected *Rhapsody* as a central example for his bachelor’s thesis, which argued that African American musical traditions formed the “universal basis” of American music. Writing in *The Atlantic* in 1955, Bernstein applied a more incisive analysis:

The *Rhapsody* is not a composition at all. It’s a string of separate paragraphs stuck together. The themes are terrific, inspired, God-given. I don’t think there has been such an inspired melodist on this earth since Tchaikovsky. But if you want to speak of a composer, that’s another matter. Your *Rhapsody in Blue* is not a real composition in the sense that whatever happens in it must seem inevitable. You can cut parts of it without affecting the whole.

(In fact, Bernstein made his own cuts, which, along with his childhood copy for solo piano, are viewable in the Philharmonic’s Digital Archives.)



The cover page of Bernstein’s childhood copy of *Rhapsody in Blue*

In 1976, for the Philharmonic’s Bicentennial tour, Bernstein starred as both conductor and soloist in the beloved *Rhapsody*. It appeared alongside another Gershwin favorite — *An American in Paris* — as well as Bernstein’s own Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story*, Schuman’s *American Festival Overture*, Ives’s *The Unanswered Question*, Harris’s Symphony No. 3, and Copland’s *Lincoln Portrait*. Speaking to reporters, Bernstein said, “The real meaning of this program is that there is an American music now — an authentic one, apart from deliberate attempts to do American music.” Bernstein felt that authenticity in Gershwin’s music from the beginning.

— The Archives

To learn more, visit the **New York Philharmonic Leon Levy Digital Archives** at archives.nyphil.org.

Notes on the Program

By James M. Keller, Program Annotator, The Leni and Peter May Chair

Prelude, Fugue, and Riffs

The Age of Anxiety, Symphony No. 2, for Piano and Orchestra (after W.H. Auden)

Leonard Bernstein

Born and raised in Massachusetts, Leonard Bernstein was schooled at Harvard and, following advanced work at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, returned to his home state, where he was taken under the wing of Serge Koussevitzky, music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. In 1943 he moved to New York. While working as Assistant Conductor to Artur Rodziński, then Music Director of the New York Philharmonic, Bernstein stepped in at short notice on November 14, 1943, to substitute for guest conductor Bruno Walter at a Philharmonic concert. As they say, the rest is history. In 1958 he began an 11-year tenure as the Orchestra's Music Director.

Bernstein was the first conductor to truly harness the power of the rapidly developing medium of television. A generation of music lovers received some of their earliest knowledge from his televised Philharmonic Young People's Concerts, which began in his first season as Music Director, but he had already established an on-air presence. In November 1954 Bernstein had appeared on *Omnibus*, a program that ran from 1952 through 1961 (starting on CBS, and rotating through all three major networks). Sponsored by the Ford Foundation and hosted by Alistair Cooke, it exemplified the medium's highest aspirations, purveying insightful programming on the arts, sciences, and humanities. Bernstein presented seven *Omnibus* installments on a variety of musical topics. The first became a classic, as he used sketches from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony to explore the

IN SHORT

Born: August 25, 1918, in Lawrence, Massachusetts

Died: October 14, 1990, in New York City

Works composed and premiered: *Prelude, Fugue, and Riffs* composed 1949; revised in 1952 and 1963; premiered October 16, 1955, on the *Omnibus* television show, with the composer conducting, Al Gallodoro, soloist. Symphony No. 2 composed from summer 1947 to March 20, 1948, on commission from the Koussevitzky Foundation; dedicated "for Serge Koussevitzky, in tribute"; *The Dirge* was premiered November 28, 1948, in Tel Aviv, Israel, by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, Georg Singer, conductor, the composer as pianist; the complete work was premiered April 8, 1949, in Boston, by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Serge Koussevitzky, conductor, the composer as pianist; revised version premiered July 15, 1965, by the New York Philharmonic, the composer conducting, Philippe Entremont, pianist

New York Philharmonic premieres and most recent performances: *Prelude, Fugue, and Riffs* premiered October 12, 1988, Andrew Davis, conductor, Stanley Drucker, soloist; most recently performed July 3, 2005, Bramwell Tovey, conductor, Stanley Drucker, soloist. Symphony No. 2, in its New York Premiere, February 23, 1950, with the composer conducting, Lukas Foss, soloist; most recently played September 27, 2008, Lorin Maazel, conductor, Joyce Yang, pianist

Estimated durations: *Prelude, Fugue, and Riffs*, ca. 8 minutes; Symphony No. 2, ca. 35 minutes

composer's decision-making process, walking over an enlarged version of the score's first page that had been painted on the studio floor. Bernstein included that script in his 1959 essay collection *The Joy of Music*, along with those of his other *Omnibus* topics, which included American musical theater, the innovations of Stravinsky, and the brilliance of Bach.

His October 1955 *Omnibus* program explored "The World of Jazz." He discussed syncopation, improvisation, and jazz-inflected instrumental colors. He demonstrated how a famous couplet from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* could be rendered in the style of the blues. And, at the end of the show, he premiered his **Prelude, Fugue and Riffs**, a spirited example of a classical-music eminence building a bridge between disparate styles. He had written it for Woody Herman's jazz band in 1949, but the ensemble disbanded before the piece was completed, the commission payment never materialized, and Bernstein let the composition languish in his "someday" file. In late 1952 he revised the piece (with a reduced instrumentation) to set a ballet scene in *Wonderful Town*, the musical he was writing with Betty Comden and Adolph

Green. The sequence was cut during tryouts (although Bernstein did incorporate bits of it into two numbers in that show) and the score went back into his files.

Omnibus finally offered a reason to complete the work. He ended up dedicating it to Benny Goodman, who many sources have stated was the soloist in the premiere. In fact, the clarinetist was Al Gallodoro, whose rich career included playing lead clarinet and alto saxophone with the Paul Whiteman Orchestra and bass clarinet in the NBC Symphony. The broadcast can now be viewed on YouTube; an interesting detail it reveals is that, in the premiere, a bass saxophone was used for the score's baritone saxophone line — a substitution Bernstein obviously approved, since he was conducting.

The three continuous portions of the piece stand as essentially independent episodes, each focusing on a different sound world within a standard swing band. The *Prelude* is for the trumpets, trombones, and percussion — at first intoning a snappy gesture, then a sultry tune. The *Fugue* is a bouncy expanse of counterpoint (not quite two minutes long) featuring five saxophones, with punctuation from the percussion and some underpinning

The Jazz Connection

On January 25, 1959, CBS broadcast *Lincoln Presents: Jazz in Serious Music*, hosted by Leonard Bernstein, in which he offered this summation:



Many American composers since Gershwin have turned jazz to far subtler and more complex uses than he did. For many of them jazz entered their blood stream, became part of the air they breathed, so that it came out in their music in new, transformed ways, not sounding like jazz at all, but unmistakably American. Such composers as Copland, Harris, Schuman, and even Sessions and Piston, have written music that is American without trying, the result of an unconscious metamorphosis of jazz elements or jazz feelings. This has been one of the strongest conditioning forces of the American musical language.

Bernstein and clarinetist Benny Goodman, the dedicatee of Prelude, Fugue, and Riffs, at a Carnegie Hall rehearsal, ca. 1946–48

from the bass. The solo clarinet is held in reserve for the *Riffs* segment, where it indeed lets loose melodic flourishes, assisted at first by piano and then the band's other instruments. The texture builds through this section before the *Fugue* subject makes some final appearances and the piece reaches its swing band, raise-the-roof conclusion.

Throughout his career Leonard Bernstein struggled to balance the competing demands of his multifarious gifts as composer, conductor, pianist, media personality, and all-around celebrity. Time for composition was potentially the most endangered in the mix that packed his datebook — most especially during his years as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic (1958–69) — and he had to take special care to see that it didn't get en-

tirely crowded out by his day-to-day obligations as a performer. Bernstein often found that blocks of time for composing were most easily carved out in the summer. His **Second Symphony** began as a summertime inspiration, as the composer related in an essay he appended to the published score:

W.H. Auden's fascinating and hair-raising poem "The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue" began immediately to affect me lyrically when I first read it in the summer of 1947. From that moment the composition of a symphony based on "The Age of Anxiety" acquired an almost compulsive quality; and I worked on it steadily in Taos, in Philadelphia, in Richmond, Mass., in Tel-Aviv, in planes, in hotel lobbies, and finally (the week preceding the premiere) in Boston.

Sources and Inspirations

Bernstein's **Symphony No. 2** was inspired by W.H. Auden's "The Age of Anxiety," a long-form poem that received the 1948 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Auden set the work in a New York City bar, where four strangers — Quant, Malin, Rosetta, and Emble — explore themes of identity and man's place in the modern world. It struck a chord in the post-World War II era and the title soon became shorthand for a state of generalized anxiety related to everything from the Cold War to economic strife, alienation in the industrialized world to interpersonal relations.

Meanwhile, the source material faded. In a 2014 opinion piece for *The New York Times*, author Daniel Smith wrote:

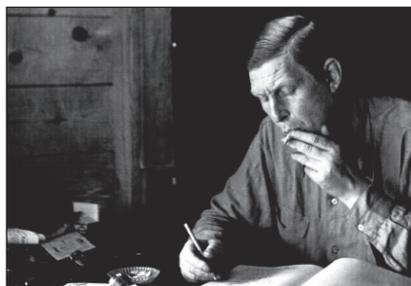
It's hard to believe that anyone but scholars of modern literature or paid critics have read W.H. Auden's dramatic poem "The Age of Anxiety" all the way through ... It is a difficult work — allusive, allegorical, at times surreal ... The characters meet, drink, talk and walk around; then they drink, talk and walk around some more. They do this for 138 pages; then they go home.

Auden's title, though: that people know.

Auden would not likely have appreciated the sentiment. Apparently he cared little for Bernstein's *Second Symphony*. "It really has nothing to do with me. Any connections with my book are rather distant," he observed, despite the rather distinct parallels drawn by Bernstein in his own program note (see "The Work at a Glance," page 30).

— The Editors

W.H. Auden in 1948



The Work at a Glance

Bernstein provided this disquisition on his **The Age of Anxiety, Symphony No. 2:**

Part One:

(a) *The Prologue* finds four lonely characters, a girl and three men, in a Third Avenue bar, all of them insecure and trying, though drunk, to detach themselves from their conflicts, or, at best, to resolve them. They are drawn together by this common urge and begin a kind of symposium on the state of man. Musically, the *Prologue* is a very short section consisting of a lonely improvisation by two clarinets, echo-tone, and followed by a long descending scale which acts as a bridge into the realm of the unconscious, where most of the poem takes place.

(b) *The Seven Ages*. The life of man is reviewed from the four personal points of view. This is a series of variations which differ from conventional variations in that they do not vary any one common theme. Each variation seizes upon some feature of the preceding one and develops it, introducing, in the course of the development, some counter-feature upon which the next variation seizes. ...

(c) *The Seven Stages*. The variation form continues for another set of seven, in which the characters go on an inner and highly symbolic journey according to a geographical plan leading back to a point of comfort and security. ... When [the four characters] awaken from this dream-odyssey, they are closely united through a common experience (and through alcohol), and begin to function as one organism. This set of variations begins to show activity and drive and leads to a hectic, though indecisive close.

Part Two:

(a) *The Dirge* is sung by the four as they sit in a cab en route to the girl's apartment for a night-cap. They 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. This section employs, in a harmonic way, a twelve-tone row out of which the main theme evolves. ...

(b) *The Masque* finds the group in the girl's apartment, weary, guilty, determined to have a party ... The party ends in anticlimax and the dispersal of the actors; in the music the piano protagonist is traumatized by the intervention of the orchestra for four bars of hectic jazz. When the orchestra stops, as abruptly as it began, a piano in the orchestra is continuing the *Masque*, repetitiously and with waning energy, as the *Epilogue* begins. ...



Bernstein presenting a score of *Symphony No. 2, The Age of Anxiety* to its dedicatee, Serge Koussevitzky, in May 1949

(c) *The Epilogue*. What is left, it turns out, is faith. The trumpet intrudes its statement of "something pure" upon the dying piano: the strings answer in a melancholy reminiscent of the *Prologue* ... All at once the strings accept the situation, in a sudden radiant pianissimo, and begin to build, with the rest of the orchestra, to a positive statement of the newly recognized faith.

The orchestration was started during a month-long tour with the Pittsburgh Symphony, and was completed on March 20, 1948, in New York City.

Auden's poem was hot off the press when Bernstein encountered it, and it's easy to understand why he found it so captivating. The poem deals with questions that would occupy Bernstein throughout his life — alienation, friendship, family, faith — and it seems likely that he was particularly attuned to its veiled gay overtones, grappling as he was just then at fitting his attraction to the actress Felice Montealegre (not yet his wife) into the bisexual scheme of his life. "I imagine that the conception of a symphony with piano solo emerges from the extremely personal identification of myself with the poem," wrote Bernstein. He continued:

In this sense, the pianist provides an almost autobiographical protagonist, set against an orchestral mirror in which he sees himself, analytically, in the modern ambience. The work is therefore no "concerto" in the virtuosic sense, although I regard Auden's poem as one of the most shattering examples of pure virtuosity in the history of English poetry.

The essential line of the poem (and of the music) is the record of our difficult and problematical search for faith. In the end, two of the characters enunciate the recognition of this faith — even a passive submission to it — at the same time revealing an inability to relate to it personally in their daily lives, except through blind acceptance.

In creating his symphony, Bernstein did not aspire to work in the realm of program music, and he did not so much set out to translate episodes of Auden's poem into music as to use the poem as a point of departure from which he might express his own thoughts — in musical

terms, of course — on some of the same matters that Auden addressed. It was not by chance that he stated in his title that the symphony was "after" Auden. Still, the symphony turned out to parallel the poem more closely than Bernstein had intended. He explained:

No one could be more astonished than I at the extent to which the programmaticism of this work has been carried. I had not planned a "meaningful" work, at least not in the sense of a piece whose meaning relied on details of programmatic implication. I was merely writing a symphony inspired by a poem and following the general form of that poem. Yet, when each section was finished I discovered, upon re-reading, detail after detail of programmatic relation to the poem — details that had "written themselves," wholly unplanned and unconscious. Since I trust the unconscious implicitly, finding it a source of wisdom and the dictator of the condign in artistic matters, I am content to leave these details in the score.

Instrumentation: *Prelude, Fugue, and Riffs* calls for two alto saxophones, two tenor saxophones, baritone saxophone, five trumpets, four trombones, piano, four tom-toms, snare drum, bass drum, xylophone, vibraphone, wood block, timpani, and bass, in addition to the solo clarinet. Symphony No. 2 employs two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, tenor drum, bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbals, tam-tam, triangle, temple block, xylophone, orchestra bells, harp, piano (doubling celeste), and strings, in addition to the solo piano.

An earlier version of the note for Prelude, Fugue, and Riffs appeared in the programs of the San Francisco Symphony and is used with permission. © James M. Keller