



Leonard Bernstein

August 25, 1918 - October 14, 1990

New York, New York

Leonard Bernstein, the composer, conductor and teacher who brought American orchestras and Broadway into the same restless conversation, died of a heart attack in New York City on October 14, 1990, five days after announcing his retirement from conducting. He was seventy-two.

He was born Louis Bernstein in Lawrence, Massachusetts, on August 25, 1918, the son of Ukrainian Jewish immigrants Samuel and Jennie Bernstein. He took the name Leonard as a teenager. He studied piano from childhood, graduated from Harvard in 1939, trained at the Curtis Institute under Fritz Reiner, and spent summers at Tanglewood with Serge Koussevitzky.

His public breakthrough came without warning. On November 14, 1943, as assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic, he substituted for an ailing Bruno Walter at Carnegie Hall; the national radio broadcast made him a star overnight. He went on to become the Philharmonic's music director from 1958 to 1969, the first American-born conductor to hold that post permanently, and he remained laureate conductor for life.

As a composer he wrote the scores for *On the Town*, *Fancy Free*, *Candide* and *West Side Story*, which opened on Broadway in 1957 and later won ten Oscars in its film version. His *Mass* for the opening of the Kennedy Center, the *Kaddish Symphony* and the *Serenade after Plato's Symposium* showed the same appetite for mixing concert hall, theater and liturgy. On television his *Young People's Concerts* taught a generation that classical music could be urgent and fun.

He was a lifelong civil-rights and anti-war advocate, led the Vienna Philharmonic and the Israel Philharmonic on

landmark tours, and kept a punishing schedule of recording and guest conducting until emphysema and a lifetime of smoking forced him to stop. A funeral Mass at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine drew thousands; he is buried in Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn beside his wife, Felicia Montealegre.

Services

Died in New York, NY, October 14, 1990, aged 72. Portrait: Photograph by Fred Palumbo, New York World-Telegram & Sun, 1945 (Library of Congress; public domain), hosted by Notice Nearby.

NN-OBIT-2026-H278

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