

Bernstein legacy celebrated at FAU



The legacy of composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein will be celebrated in the Spirit of America Festival at Florida Atlantic University from June 21-23. (Submitted photo / June 16, 2014)

By Marvin Glassman, Special to the Journal

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The legacy of composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990) will be celebrated in the Spirit of America Festival at Florida Atlantic University from June 21-23.

Musician Jamie Bernstein, the daughter of the composer, will be discussing her father's compositions on June 21 at 7:30 p.m. with Klezmer Company Orchestra conductor Aaron Kula in a meet and greet reception at the Wimberly library.

Kula will conduct the KCO Orchestra with six vocalists for the Florida premiere of the full concert version of Bernstein's "On The Town" June 22 at 3 p.m. at the FAU Auditorium.

The festival will conclude June 23 at 7 p.m. with "Bernstein On Broadway," featuring two singers performing songs from Bernstein's "Candide," "West Side Story" and "Wonderful Town."

Bernstein is regarded in music circles as one of the greatest composers of the 20th century, becoming the first American born conductor to achieve worldwide acclaim and earned a [Kennedy Center](#) Honor for lifetime achievement in 1980.

Bernstein had a 47 year tenure as conductor of the New York Philharmonic and wrote in musical styles for symphonic orchestras, ballet, film and theater music. His most celebrated composition is for the musical "West Side Story."

Less well-known is that Bernstein strongly identified as both a Jew and an American and created works based on the Torah, such as "Jeremiah Symphony," "Kaddish" (which Bernstein played at the funeral of [President Kennedy](#)) and "Mass."

He also helped the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra flourish as a cultural institution, conducting the IPO in Tel Aviv on many occasions, predating the establishment of the State of Israel.

"Without a doubt, Leonard Bernstein was one of the most important Jews in the history of America. Lenny brought an American endorsement of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra with his flair and it became a world class cultural institution because of his love of the IPO," said Kula.

"Bernstein was mesmerizing for me personally. As a youngster, he gave me the thirst for classical music through his many televised Young People's Concerts. His stature, generosity and pride in being both an American and Jew made him a legend never to be forgotten," he added.

Born in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1918, Leonard developed a love of music from his parents. His father Sam, who founded a bookstore in Lawrence that still exists today, discouraged Leonard from seeking a career in music, and preferred for him to work in the family owned bookstore.

"My grandfather was worried that my dad would never be able to support a family. Sam changed his mind once Dad completed his music studies at [Harvard University](#) and started conducting at the New York Philharmonic in the 1940s," said Jamie Bernstein.

"My grandfather was a deeply religious Jew and left my father with a strong feeling for Judaism that was especially prevalent in his music. My father made sure that my brother had a bar mitzvah and had a rabbinical student teach me and my siblings all about Judaism," she added.

Jamie and her two siblings went often to Israel and treasured all the time she spent with her father.

"Obviously, my father was very much in demand, but he always had time to be a loving father to his children and we enjoyed all we learned, especially about music, from him."

Jamie Bernstein continues the legacy of her father by reaching to young people in educational concerts, as has been the case when she performed in Miami for the New World Symphony.

"My father had Torah Lishman, (in Hebrew meaning "a thirst for knowledge") and communicated his love of learning and music to children. I am inspired by my father and will continue to teach young people as he did."

Musician Jamie Bernstein and conductor Aaron Kula celebrate the legacy of Leonard Bernstein in the Spirit of America Festival June 21-23 at Florida Atlantic University, 777 Glades Road in [Boca Raton](#). For tickets, call 800-564-9539 or go to <http://www.faevents.com>