



## Summer Arts: Jamie Bernstein to discuss her father's legacy at FAU

Posted by [Mary Kate Leming](#) on June 3, 2014 at 10:00pm

[View Blog](#)



*Jamie Bernstein (right) says when her father, Leonard, was alive, she took him for granted. Now she realizes his impact on generations of music lovers. Photos provided*

By **Greg Stepanich**

As befits the daughter of an eminent man of music, Jamie Bernstein answers the first question by singing.

"Don't it always seem to go / You don't know what you've got till it's gone," she warbles, channeling Joni Mitchell's 1970 classic, Big Yellow Taxi. She's answering a polite query about the legacy of her father, Leonard, composer, pianist, conductor, educator and world eminence, who in his Young People's Concerts with the New York Philharmonic showed millions of young people — and their parents — that classical music could be not just fun, but cool to listen to.

"When my father was alive, I took him for granted, in a way," she said last month from her home in New York. "He was my dad, and we were in the middle of our lives together. It's only been as the years have passed since his death that it's really begun to hit me of the degree of impact that he had on more than one generation of music lovers. It's amazing to contemplate."



Leonard Bernstein died in 1990, nearly 25 years ago, but in several important ways, his legacy has only grown in the absence of his corporeality. Several of his works — West Side Story, the overture to his operetta Candide and the choral work Chichester Psalms — are seen and heard regularly, and in recent years there has been more attention paid to his wonderful one-act opera, Trouble in Tahiti, his three symphonies, and the Serenade for violin and orchestra, a concerto in everything but name that may be his finest classical achievement.

Although it's scheduled for another revival this fall at New York's Lyric Theatre, Bernstein's earliest Broadway score, On the Town, which premiered in the last days of 1944, has not established itself the way West Side Story has. But it is a marvelous piece, with among other things a famous opening number (New York, New York), a ballad revered by jazz players (Some Other Time) and a standout comic number (I Can Cook, Too) that makes a great impression if the performer is brassy and high-spirited enough.

This month, as part of the inaugural Spirit of America Festival at Florida Atlantic University, Aaron Kula and his Klezmer Company Orchestra will mark the 70th anniversary of the musical's premiere with a full concert version of the score, performed by six singers and the 50-piece KCO.

The show is set for 3 p.m. June 22, at the Kaye Performing Arts Auditorium on FAU's Boca Raton campus.

The three-day festival also will feature Kula in conversation with Jamie Bernstein at 7:30 p.m. June 21, at the Wimberly Library, preceded by a meet-and-greet reception.

And on June 23 at 7 p.m., also at the library, theater critic Bill Hirschman, who operates the Florida Theater On Stage website, will provide commentary for a piano-vocal recital called Bernstein on Broadway.

The show is about three sailors on shore leave who have 24 hours to see the big city; it was made into a movie in 1949 with Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra and Jules Munshin as the sailors, and Vera-Ellen, Betty Garrett and Ann Miller as their love interests. But most of Bernstein's score was replaced with far more conventional songs by MGM house hack Roger Edens, which was a sore point with the composer, and still is today with his daughter.

But the movie was a hit, and confusion about what was actually in that score may have hindered its acceptance in the way that the film of West Side Story, considered a cinematic masterpiece, helped secure that work's place in the theatrical pantheon.

"It's a more lightweight story," Jamie Bernstein says of On the Town. "It's three sailors on shore leave, it's very humorous, and it doesn't have the gravitas of the Romeo and Juliet template that West Side Story has. It's just in a different category."

But the music itself is anything but frivolous.

"Musically, boy, that score has so much going on in it," she said. "It was one of the first, and one of the few, through-composed Broadway scores. My father, with his classical training, really brought a symphonic and through-composed approach to writing show music, where he would take motives and work them all the way through ...

"I think at the time people thought that maybe it meant a rounding of the corner for Broadway scores, and from now on, Broadway scores would be much more sophisticated," she said.

"Looking back, my father's scores were more like a blip on the screen, and then everybody went right back to their old habits. I don't think that, except for my father and [Stephen] Sondheim, anybody wrote Broadway scores that way. It was just kind of an anomaly."

On the Town was developed from a ballet score called Fancy Free that Leonard Bernstein had composed for choreographer Jerome Robbins.

"That might be the engine of On the Town, that driving dance music, and the way my father was able to mix together the jazz genres with his own symphonic impulses," she said, adding that the Three Dance Episodes suite her father drew from his score remains one of her favorite pieces.

The team of Betty Comden and Adolph Green wrote the book and lyrics for On the Town, and later worked with Bernstein on another score with New York at its heart, Wonderful Town. Their other collaborations include Bells Are Ringing, with Jule Styne, and the scripts for Singin' in the Rain and The Band Wagon.

"I couldn't begin to appreciate them when they were in my life, and now I miss them so much," said Bernstein, who's 61. Green died in 2002, Comden in 2006. "Betty and Adolph really made my father laugh, and that was no small thing. They just had this bond where they enjoyed each other's company so much. ... There is that element of delight that you can hear in the score of On the Town. You can practically hear them laughing together."

Bernstein has been working for the past four years on a documentary about El Sistema, the social change-through-music program for impoverished Venezuelans that has spawned legions of imitators (70 such programs in the United States alone) and at least one world-class career, that of Los Angeles Philharmonic music director Gustavo Dudamel. The movie should be ready by the end of the year, she said, and in the meantime, she and her sister Nina and brother Alexander are heavily involved in plans for the celebration in 2018 of their father's centennial.

And championing the life and work of Leonard Bernstein never gets burdensome, she insists. "Everybody should be so lucky to carry such a burden," she said. "We are so proud of him, and so proud of his legacy. Who wouldn't want to go out and share it with the world?"

Tickets for the Jamie Bernstein conversation are \$25, and for the Bernstein on Broadway recital are \$15; On the Town tickets are \$20-\$42. Call 800-564-9539 or visit [www.fauevents.com](http://www.fauevents.com).