NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY
XIAN ZHANG MUSIC DIRECTOR

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

BY LAURIE SHULMAN, ©2024

The American Dream

ONE-MINUTE NOTES

Daniel Bernard Roumain: *i am a white person who _____ Black people* (January 18 only)

Resident Artistic Catalyst Daniel Bernard Roumain (who goes by his monogram, DBR), composed *i am a white person who _____ Black people* for the opening of the New Jersey Symphony's 2020–21 virtual season. Because of pandemic restrictions, the original score was limited to strings and percussion. For this weekend's performances, DBR has expanded the work to include wind and brass instruments. His concept was for the conductor, the musicians and the audience to consider how they feel about and respond to Black people. "They can determine for themselves how to answer, how to fill in the blank," DBR has said. He adds that he wanted the piece to be mournful, a memorial for the plight, trauma and times of Black people in America. His thoughtful musical canvas delivers a full spectrum of emotional experience, opening with reverent solemnity and moving through agitated, turbulent passages that evoke America's impassioned, sometimes violent history. The journey will be individual and personalized for each listener.

William Grant Still: *Darker America*

William Grant Still became the first Black composer in the United States to have a symphony performed by a major orchestra when Howard Hanson led the Rochester Philharmonic in the premiere of the "Afro-American" Symphony in 1930. That work remains Still's best-known composition. *Darker America* is relatively early, composed when he was in his twenties. It was his first unqualified success writing concert music for orchestra. The piece heralded a new phase in Still's career, in which he embraced his Black identity and sought to explore Black heritage in his music. The themes–both melodic and conceptual–that connect *Darker America* triumph through devotional prayer, sorrow and hope, are a microcosm of Black history and experience.

Rob Kapilow: *We Came to America* (World Premiere, Commissioned by the Thurnauer School of Music at the Kaplen JCC on the Palisades) (January 20 & 21 only)

Rob Kapilow's *We Came to America*, which receives its world premiere at these performances, is an ambitious

project inspired by a 2016 children's book of the same name by the artist and picture book creator Faith Ringgold. Her book celebrates America's rich history of immigration and diversity. Kapilow has written, "Understanding the complexities surrounding the issue of immigration today, I wanted to put our current situation in a broad historical perspective, as the issue of how we welcome or exclude others has been with us since Biblical times." The work's five movements set text from the Bible, multiple Immigration Acts beginning in 1882, reminiscences of the immigration experience representing several continents and poetry by Walt Whitman. The cumulative effect is powerful, affirmative and thought-provoking.

Leonard Bernstein: Three Dance Episodes from *On the Town*

American icon Leonard Bernstein established his reputation in the 1940s as both a conductor and a composer. His Three Dance Episodes from *On the Town* grew out of a wartime ballet called Fancy Free, which was a collaboration with the choreographer Jerome Robbins. The plot concerns three sailors on shore leave in search of the perfect girl. Within a year, Bernstein expanded the ballet score into *On the Town*, a fully-fledged musical. The upbeat, fun show was a big success, delighting audiences weary of war and hungry for lighthearted entertainment. The city's vibrant pulse courses through these three episodes: "The Great Lover," "Lonely Town" and "Times Square: 1944."

Leonard Bernstein: Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story*

Choreographer Jerome Robbins was also a catalyst for Bernstein's most celebrated work, *West Side Story*. Robbins approached Bernstein in 1949 about adapting the Romeo and Juliet story to a modern setting. After the 1956 musical's smashing success, Bernstein adapted its independent dance numbers into these Symphonic Dances. The score is charged with vibrant rhythm and a panorama of instrumental color as varied as the teeming streets of New York. Bernstein's music captures the atmosphere of the high school gym, the sweet oblivion of the lovers' first meeting, the raw danger of the rumble, and the surging violence and passion that course through the story.

Daniel Bernard Roumain: *i am a white person who ____ Black people* (January 18 only)

Daniel Bernard Roumain
Born: December 11, 1971, in Margate, Florida
Composed: 2020
World Premiere: November 19, 2020 at NJPAC in a virtual concert; Xian Zhang conducted.

Duration: 5 minutes
Instrumentation: flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, percussion and strings

The New Jersey Symphony's Resident Artistic Catalyst Daniel Bernard Roumain – who goes by his monogram DBR – is busier than ever. He is expanding his role as a composer for cinema; recent film scores include *Ailey* (2021), a documentary about the visionary choreographer who found salvation through dance; *Lynching Postcards* (2021), a documentary short film directed by Christine Turner; and *The Holly* (2022), about five bullets, one gun, and the struggle to save a gentrifying neighborhood in Denver.

Roumain continues to serve on the faculty at Arizona State University and the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, a position he describes as a dream come true. "From my first days on campus, there's a freedom of imagination that allows me to be vulnerable, take risks, and ask the deep, probing questions required of any artist," he has written. "I design classes that I feel are needed to be taught; I collaborate with students and faculty on an array of programs, special projects, and concert experiences; I create and compose new works for artists and ensembles, worldwide, from creative spaces that are vital to my creative practice; and I've created DBR Lab which allows students to plan, design, and present their own work as they start or deepen their careers."

He has also developed *EN MASSE*, an immersive musical experience designed to work in both large public spaces (squares, stadiums, parks) as well as contained spaces (theaters, warehouses). According to his web site, it can last anywhere between 30 minutes to an entire day. *EN MASSE* was commissioned by the Mitchell Center for the University of Houston "Spirit of Houston" Marching Band. It was conceived as a "deconstructed parade" with music direction by Roumain. The band members took over Houston's public park Discovery Green, creating a cross between a flash mob and a pep rally, a processional and pop-up recital.

Amid these geographically far-flung and time-consuming projects, Roumain remains active as a performing violinist – and he is also fulfilling a busy schedule of commissions. *i am a white person who _____ Black people* is a relatively recent example. Roumain's composer's note explains its genesis, title and subtext.

> This work was commissioned by the New Jersey Symphony, Xian Zhang, Music Director, for the opening of the 2020–21 virtual New Jersey Symphony season. It was composed during a series of overlapping crises in our lives: a pandemic; a global fight for social justice; the effects and awareness of climate change; an array or economic collapses; and the tyranny of an electoral process under siege by a president and his party. As a Black, Haitian-American composer, every commission offers a choice. The titles of my work often speak to my feelings and (political) position.
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> With *i am a white person who _____ Black people*, I am extending what has traditionally been my choice given to any white person: how do you see me and other BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) people, and what choice of word or phrase best reflects your opinion of Black people? Your choice, in part, reflects who you are.

> The music reflects a kind of deliberate dance among all these brilliant musicians, safely and physically distanced on stage for the premiere, in a time when making music might mean ending a life. Every note and every breath, then, becomes urgent, passing, and precious. We all need to be cautious about the choices we have made and will make, and in this, yes, Black Lives Matter, and always have and will. Alive and here,
>
> Daniel Bernard Romain (DBR)

In an interview at the time of the premiere, Roumain acknowledged that he struggled with the title. Ultimately, he said, the title comes from where he is as a Black human at this moment. "A title can speak to the moment. I started to ask myself, can a title allow for participation?" The concept was for the conductor, the musicians, and the audience to consider how they feel about and respond to Black people. "They can determine for themselves how to answer, how to fill in the blank." He adds that he wanted the piece to be mournful, a memorial for the plight, trauma, and times of Black people in America. His thoughtful musical canvas delivers a full spectrum of emotional experience, opening with reverent solemnity and moving through agitated, turbulent passages that evoke America's impassioned, sometimes violent history. The journey will be individual and personalized for each listener.

Because of Covid protocols, the original version of *i am a white person who _____ Black people* was limited to strings and percussion. For these performances, Roumain has re-orchestrated the piece to incorporate wind instruments that match those of the Beethoven Violin Concerto. These are the first performances of the newly orchestrated version.

William Grant Still: *Darker America*

William Grant Still
Born: May 11, 1895, in Woodville, Mississippi
Died: December 3, 1978, in Los Angeles, California
Composed: 1924
World Premiere: November 22, 1926 at New York's Aeolian Hall; Eugene Goossens conducted.
Duration: 13 minutes
Instrumentation: two flutes, oboe, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, horn, trumpet, trombone, bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, piano and strings

No history of American music would be complete without a chapter on William Grant Still. His engaging, attractive orchestral compositions are significant examples in the development of a specifically American musical style. Further, he was the first major Black composer to have an impact in the realm of concert music, rather than jazz. To be sure, the heritage of jazz, spirituals and traditional hymns left their own impact on Still's music, but he was able to incorporate these elements skillfully into musical forms associated with the European tradition.

Still's father, who was also a musician, died when he was a baby. His mother moved to Arkansas, where he grew up. Music was always part of his life. His grandmother, who lived with them, sang hymns and spirituals at home. After his mother remarried, the boy's stepfather took him to concerts and operettas. As an adolescent, Still started violin lessons and began composing almost immediately. He later asserted that he knew he wanted to be a composer by the time he was 16. After matriculating at Wilberforce University, he conducted and arranged music for the university band. In spite of his mother's wish that he pursue a career in medicine, the pull of music was too strong. He left Wilberforce before graduating to play in theatre orchestras and orchestrate for popular musicians, including such legends as W.C. Handy, Sophie Tucker, Paul Whiteman and Artie Shaw. Eventually Still continued his formal education at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music (interrupted briefly for military service during World War I), and subsequently studied privately with George Whitefield Chadwick and the French emigré Edgard Varèse.

Still's accomplishments would be impressive for any composer, but they are the more remarkable because he was such a trailblazer. He became the first Black composer in the United States to have a symphony performed by a major orchestra when Howard Hanson led the Rochester Philharmonic in the premiere of the "Afro-American" Symphony in 1930. That work remains his best-known composition. Still was also the first Black composer to conduct a major orchestra, and was one of the first to break into the prestigious realm of radio, television, and film scores.

Darker America is relatively early, composed when Still was in his twenties. It was his first unqualified success writing concert music for orchestra, and his first work marking a break from the influence of Edgard Varèse. His composer's note explains the title and describes the piece's significant musical moments.

> *Darker America*, as its title suggests, is representative of the American Negro. His serious side is presented and is intended to suggest the triumph of a people over their sorrows through fervent prayer. At the beginning, the theme of the American Negro is announced by the strings. . . Following a short development…, the English horn announces the sorrow theme, which is followed immediately by the theme of hope, given to muted brass accompanied by string and woodwind. The sorrow theme returns, treated differently, indicative of more intense sorrow, as contrasted to passive sorrow indicated at the initial appearance of the theme. Again hope appears, and the people seem about to rise above their troubles. But sorrow triumphs. Then the prayer is heard (given to oboe); the prayer of numbed rather than anguished souls. Strongly contrasted moods follow, leading up to the triumph and of the people near the end, at which point the three principal themes are combined.

Darker America heralded a new phase in Still's career, in which he embraced his identity and sought to explore Black heritage in his music. The themes – both melodic and conceptual – that connect *Darker America*: triumph through devotional prayer, sorrow and hope, are a microcosm of Black history and experience.

Rob Kapilow: *We Came to America* (World Premiere, Commissioned by the Thurnauer School of Music at the Kaplen JCC on the Palisades) (January 20 & 21 only)

Rob Kapilow
Born: December 22, 1952, in New York City, New York
World Premiere: These performances are the world premiere.
Duration: 30 minutes
Instrumentation: two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, piano, doubling celesta, timpani, percussion (xylophone, glockenspiel, marimba, vibraphone, snare drum, castanets, tambourine, cymbal, bass drum, slapstick, gong, thunder tube, bongos, triangle, chains), mixed chorus and strings

Best known as a conductor of major American and Canadian orchestras, Rob Kapilow is also a prize-winning author, composer and music commentator. His classical music radio program "What Makes It Great?" on NPR's *Performance Today* has a substantial following, and for 17 years included his own series at New York's Lincoln Center. Kapilow's books include *All you have to do is Listen: Music from the Inside Out*, which won the PSP Prose Award for Best Book in the Performing Arts, and *What Makes it Great? Short Masterpieces, Great Composers* and *Listening for America: Inside the Great American Songbook from Gershwin to Sondheim*, which was a finalist for the prestigious Marfield Prize. He is currently working on a book about the music of the Woodstock Generation.

Kapilow's many compositions for solo instruments, chamber ensemble, orchestra, and opera include *Green Eggs and Ham*, after the beloved children's book (Kapilow was the first composer allowed to set a Dr. Seuss text to music); *The Polar Express*, based on Chris Van Allsburg's holiday classic; and *Summer Sun, Winter Moon*, commissioned for the anniversary of Lewis and Clark's journey to the western United States. Written with a Blackfoot poet, *Summer Sun, Winter Moon* was the subject of a PBS documentary.

Kapilow's latest composition, *We Came to America*, is an ambitious project initiated by the JCC Thurnauer School of Music. Its inspiration was a 2016 children's book of the same name by the artist and picture book creator Faith Ringgold, which celebrates America's rich history of immigration and diversity. Kapilow has written, "Understanding the complexities surrounding the issue of immigration today, I wanted to put our current situation in a broad historical perspective, as the issue of how we welcome or exclude others has been with us since Biblical times."

The piece comprises five movements for mixed chorus and orchestra. The choral text draws on several sources. Kapilow opens with Biblical verses from Deuteronomy addressing how we treat the stranger. The second movement sets language drawn directly from the "Shall be excluded" sections of multiple immigration statutes, beginning with the Immigration Act of 1882. The two ensuing movements were written by the Cambodian-born poet and refugee Sokunthary Svay, who adapted multiple interviews with immigrants from several continents, discussing their experience of coming to America. The work concludes with verses from Walt Whitman's 1856 poem "Salut au monde!" [Salute to the world], which initially appeared as the third poem in his *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman's message celebrates the ideals of inclusion: all are equal, welcome, valued, and cherished.

Kapilow is sensitive to the rhythms of the English language, and uses the chorus effectively to reinforce the diverse messages of his half-hour musical canvas. Themes of inclusion frame the work, while the inner movements trace a path through history – the 19th-century and subsequent immigration statutes – and the vivid imagery of personal experience chronicled in Sokunthary Svay's sensitive libretto. The cumulative effect is powerful, affirmative, and thought-provoking.

Kapilow's composer's note, and Svay's librettist's note, follow in their entirety.

The Project

We Came to America is part of a multi-year project spearheaded by the JCC Thurnauer School of Music which puts a new piece of music at the center of a significant community outreach and community building effort. The project was inspired by Faith Ringgold's 2016 children's book, *We Came to America*, and by the spirit of her words: "We came to America, Every color, race, and religion, From every country in the world."

Intergenerational community engagement has been at the heart of the entire project and is represented in tonight's performance by our intergenerational choir comprised of singers from the Young People's Chorus @ Thurnauer, the Young People's Chorus of New York City, and the adult choir, Ember Choral Arts. Since its inception in 2019, we have conducted remarkable intergenerational interviews in-person and virtually with children, parents and grandparents of families from culturally diverse backgrounds sharing their histories, heritage, and stories of coming to America. Texts for two of the work's five movements— "What Was Left Behind: Home Was Until It Wasn't" and "We Came to America"—have been created by the project's librettist, Sokunthary Svay, from these stories, as well as submitted poetry created during community engagement sessions.

In addition to recording and archiving these interviews, a major curriculum project for elementary, middle and high school children around the history of immigration has been created in collaboration with the music education website MusicFirst which will be implemented in selected New Jersey schools, and a speaker series centered on both the past and present history of immigration will take place in January 2024 at the JCC in Tenafly. It is our hope that other choirs and orchestras around the country will take up the piece and the project and do their own intergenerational interviews as a way both of getting to know their immigrant communities and educating their children on the history of immigration by utilizing our curriculum materials in their schools.

The Piece

Understanding the complexities surrounding the issue of immigration today, I wanted to put our current situation in a broad historical perspective, as the issues of how we welcome or exclude others has been with us since Biblical times. I wanted the piece to be both abstract and specific. After spending several years researching the entire history of immigration in America, it was clear that we have swung back and forth between what I think of as exclusionary and inclusionary versions of America. As a country, we have

traditionally seemed to be the most welcoming to others when our sense of self was strongest, and the most exclusionary in times of national self-doubt. I wanted both aspects to be represented in the piece.

Movement I, “Thou Shalt Open Thine Hand”

The piece begins with the broadest, most universal question at the heart of centuries of immigration controversies. How do we treat the stranger? The text for the entire first movement comes from the Bible, from Deuteronomy 15:11: "Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to the poor, and the needy in thy land." The choir sings these words in both English and Hebrew--a connection to the original Hebrew bible--and the movement concludes with a setting of the original Hebrew trope to these words.

Movement II, “Shall be Excluded”

This movement comes from the opposite end of the spectrum. As part of my research, I read through all of the country's immigration laws beginning with the Immigration Act of 1882, and each successive document had a section detailing specifically who "shall be excluded" with the list getting longer and longer with each new statute. The entire text of this movement is drawn directly from the “shall be excluded” sections of the country's various immigration acts. The movement’s intimate, reflective passage for female soloists was my imaginary attempt to give voice to the hope and then heartbreak that must have been felt by those who made the long, perilous journey to America only to be turned away at Ellis Island and sent back home.

Movement III, “What we left behind: Home Was, Until it Wasn’t”

The texts for movements III and IV were written by our librettist, the brilliant poet and Cambodian refugee, Sokunthary Svay, and were drawn (see below) from the inter-generational interviews at the heart of the project. As part of these interviews, I asked grandparents, parents, and children of immigrant families what they left behind when they came to America. Their moving answers were both specific and abstract, and the libretto for this movement was inspired by their answers. Most of the phrases are direct quotes from the interviews. The subtitle came from a workshop session, in which I asked students to come up with a phrase that described what was left behind, and a 13-year-old came up with the phrase "Home Was Until It Wasn't" which became a refrain in the movement.

Unlike movement I, here the reality of immigration becomes extremely specific, and the imagery is detailed and personal. "I leave behind my motherland's cotton," "cups of samovar tea, slices of cucumber, rice cakes and noodles" etc. But also, "I leave my ancestral names and languages, scraping meat off of the bones, bleak Russian winters, wrinkled hands on dough. Immigrants and immigration may seem to be an abstract idea in our political discourse, but at heart it is deeply human and personal. Leaving home is often about small things left behind that together make up a world. “Home was, until it wasn’t.”

Movement IV, “We Came to America”

This movement is the most narrative of all the movements. The entire project began with a session at the JCC where we simply asked immigrant families to talk about their experience of coming to America. The inspiring stories we heard at that session led us to explore more extended inter-generational interviews with families centered around this same theme. What was your experience of coming to America like? Were you

welcomed? Discriminated against? Did you try to keep your former culture alive? Do you feel American? What would that mean to you? Sokunthary has woven the various stories we heard in our interviews into a collage referencing a wide range of immigrant experiences--from the experience of slaves brought to this country against their will and Native Americans who were already here, to a woman stepping off an airplane in a sarong and flip flops.

Movement V, "Salut an Monde!"

This joyful, ecstatic text comes from Walt Whitman's poem "Salut au Monde!" In a far different language than the Biblical language of Movement I, it expresses a similar spirit and offers welcome to "You whoever you are. . . All you continentals of Asia, Africa, Europe, Australia, indifferent of place!" with a radical inclusiveness that I found uplifting and inspirational. Whitman's final line, "Each of us here as divinely as any is here" represents a challenge that has been at the heart of the American experiment since the founders first signed a document declaring that all men shall be created equal while slavery existed throughout the country. The piece ends with the ambiguous, open-ended "We-Came-to-America" music that began Movement I, now sung with words for the first and only time. Like America's ongoing engagement with immigration, the music ends with questions, not answers.

Librettist Note from Sokunthary Svay

For "Home Was, Until it Wasn't," I spent a few days during COVID lockdown watching interviews, reading creative writing, listening to songs, all contributions by members of the JCC. The first few drafts were about the theme of "What We Left Behind," and I took most of the words from community members. It seemed a pity not to use what had been so beautifully articulated through the filter of memory. In some respects, this method made the creative work feel like a found poem, where the words already existed elsewhere, but I retrieved them to create a new structure. It was important to me to get as many stories into this piece as possible. I was struck by particular details about home and comfort, but also turns of phrases that were unusual, likely by someone whose first language was not English; I'm intrigued by language informed by multiple cultures and languages.

For "We Came to America," I mined my own family experience as refugees, recalling my mother's first impressions upon arrival into the U.S. How people wound up in the States, through love and economic opportunity, whatever grabbed my attention, I made notes about. All the stories were poignant, and we were lucky to have such a collection of authentic pieces of personal history from which to reference and be influenced by. Lastly, as a poet and a singer, I considered how the words would feel on the tongue and what vowel shapes felt good when sung. (Sometimes one must sacrifice such things, however, for the good of language.)

Leonard Bernstein: Three Dance Episodes from *On the Town*

Leonard Bernstein
Born: August 18, 1918, in Lawrence, Massachusetts
Died: October 14, 1990, in New York City, New York

Composed: 1945
World Premiere: *On the Town* opened in Boston on December 13, 1944; Bernstein led the first performance of the Three Dance Episodes in San Francisco on February 3, 1946.
Duration: 11 minutes
Instrumentation: flute (doubling piccolo), oboe (doubling English Horn), three clarinets (two doubling E-flat clarinet and bass clarinet), alto saxophone, two horns, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion (suspended cymbal, snare drum, bass drum, triangle, traps, wood block and xylophone) piano and strings

For those of us who grew up on the familiar tunes of *West Side Story*, it is difficult to imagine a world in which Leonard Bernstein is not a household name. In the early 1940s, however, he was not yet world-famous. Bernstein enjoyed a reputation as a talented young pianist and composer whose interests were leaning more and more toward conducting. Still, his career showed tremendous promise: at age 25, he was assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic, and the exciting young choreographer Jerome Robbins had asked him to collaborate on a wartime ballet entitled *Fancy Free*.

The ballet's plot concerns three sailors on shore leave in pursuit of the perfect girl -- in this case, most likely, the first available attractive female. Bernstein's sophisticated, jazzy dance score was a big success at its 1944 premiere. Oliver Smith, the set designer, recognized its potential for the more commercial venue of Broadway. Bernstein worked with Smith, George Abbott, Betty Comden and Adolph Green to develop the ballet into a fully-fledged musical called *On the Town* that opened in December 1944 and ran for nearly 500 performances. Purely escape theatre, the upbeat, fun show was a natural fit for a nation weary of war and hungry for lighthearted diversion.

On the Town's music is more sophisticated than most other contemporary musicals. As John Briggs has written:

> Bernstein's lively, unself-consciously jazzy score was attuned to the rhythm and tempo of the times....The man who could employ jazz idioms for abstract musical purposes could also use the devices of symphonic rhetoric to make a theatrical point.

Nowhere is this gift more evident than in the Three Dance Episodes from *On the Town*, where Bernstein's instrumental gift has free rein. The city's vibrant pulse courses through this music, bringing to life its diversity and humanity through three vignettes: "The Great Lover," "Lonely Town: Pas de Deux" and "Times Square, 1944." The last of the three was the finale of the musical's first act.

Leonard Bernstein: Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story*

Leonard Bernstein
Born: August 18, 1918, in Lawrence, Massachusetts
Died: October 14, 1990, in New York City, New York
Composed: 1957; Bernstein extracted the dances in 1960 with Sid Ramin and Irwin Kostal.

World Premiere: February 13, 1961 in New York City; the composer conducted the New York Philharmonic.
Duration: 22 minutes
Instrumentation: three flutes (third doubling piccolo), two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, alto saxophone, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (vibraphone, timbales, congas, bass drum, tom tom, trap set, cymbals, tambourine, woodblock, triangle, tam tam, xylophone, glockenspiel, chime, tenor drum, four pitched drums, two snare drums, finger cymbals, two pair maracas, three cowbells, police whistle, three bongos, two suspended cymbals, *guïro*), harp, piano, doubling celesta and strings

Nearly seventy years after its premiere, *West Side Story* has become an American classic. Most of us can easily recall not only tunes but also lyrics to many of its songs. "Tonight," "Maria," "Somewhere," "America" – all are testimony to the enduring appeal of Arthur Laurents's book, Stephen Sondheim's lyrics, and perhaps most of all, Leonard Bernstein's music.

Dancer and choreographer Jerome Robbins provided the germ for the idea that developed into *West Side Story*. As early as 1949, he approached Bernstein about adapting the Romeo and Juliet story to a modern setting. Before its eventual crystallization almost eight years later, the project underwent many changes--in geographic locale, the nature of the feud, the particulars of the plot. Dance was a constant through all these metamorphoses. Ballet and its contemporary sisters, modern dance and jazz dance, provided much of the emulsifier for the unlikely ingredients of Broadway musical theatre, mime, Shakespearean-derived drama and traditional opera, all of which comprise significant elements in *West Side Story*.

The musical opens with a Prologue that is half-danced, half-mimed, thus setting the stage for a performance where music and dance tell as much of the tale as do words. Each movement of the Symphonic Dances functions as an independent danced number in Bernstein's original score. Unlike some instrumental suites that quote sung melodies from an opera or show in an orchestral version, Bernstein's concept was wordless to begin with, focusing on the primal energy of Robbins's choreographed episodes.

Not surprisingly, this results in a score charged with vibrant rhythm and a panorama of instrumental color as varied as the teeming streets of New York City where the story takes place. Bernstein's vivid music captures the atmosphere of the sleazy high school gym, the sweet oblivion of the lovers' first meeting, the raw danger of the rumble and the surging violence of passion and hatred that course through the story, collectively lending the music immediacy and drama without the costumes and scenery.