

From Ravinia to Vienna and beyond, the world will note Leonard Bernstein's centennial with 'thousands of concerts'



Legendary composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein, shown here at a New York recording studio in 1974, would have turned 100 next year. His centenary is being celebrated around the world. (Getty)

By Stephen M. Silverman
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Leonard Bernstein, the prodigal maestro behind the pulsating rhythms of “West Side Story,” “On the Town,” “Candide” and other theatrical and concert-hall monuments of the 20th century, would have turned 100 on Aug. 25, 2018 — a shareable landmark that is not about to go unnoticed for the next two years.

After an official Sept. 21, 2017, kickoff at the [John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts](#) in the nation’s capital, the music world will enjoy “a global celebration with thousands of concerts on six continents,” actor [Alec Baldwin](#) said earlier this year at New York’s [Lincoln Center](#), where he emceed a formal announcement of the broad international effort being labeled “[Leonard Bernstein at 100.](#)”

“Though I never met him,” Baldwin said of the charismatic music man, who died at 72 in 1990, “we definitely would have been pals.”

“I first heard his name when I was a kid,” added [Whoopi Goldberg](#), referring to Bernstein’s signature live “Young People’s Concerts,” which were broadcast on CBS from 1958 until 1972. Goldberg watched back then because, she said, “my mother insisted my musical influences should include something other than Bugs Bunny.”



Actor Alec Baldwin announced plans for "Leonard Bernstein at 100" festivities at a press event at the Lincoln Center in New York in May. (Gary Gershoff/WireImage)

From Alabama to Wisconsin, “festive performances and events” are being scheduled through 2019, according to a statement from the Leonard Bernstein Office, whose honorary centennial committee includes such names as Julie Andrews, Daniel Barenboim, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Carol Burnett, Quincy Jones, Patti LuPone, Yo Yo Ma, Rita Moreno, Yoko Ono, Seiji Ozawa, Stephen Sondheim, Kiri Te Kanawa and John Williams.

Particular domestic focus will center on “cities held dear to his heart — New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, San Francisco.”

Bernstein will also receive significant attention in the Chicago area. “We’re doing more than anyone else, out of my own respect for Lenny,” Welz Kauffman, president and CEO of [Ravinia](#), said of the two-season tribute to take place in every one of the Highland Park 2018 summer-season venues, including a new “experience center.”

Bernstein first appeared at Ravinia on the Fourth of July in 1944, only eight months after his historic Nov. 14, 1943, debut at New York’s Carnegie Hall, where he conducted the New York Philharmonic as a last-minute substitute for, according to Leonard’s daughter Jamie

Bernstein, the man forever known inside her father's household as "the ailing Bruno Walter."

Broadcast live over radio, that concert propelled the young man originally from Lawrence, Mass., into an overnight sensation and, for the time, something even more remarkable: an American-born conductor. In 1958, at age 40, he was the first native-born music director of any U.S. orchestra. For the New York Philharmonic, he was also its youngest music director.

Not surprisingly, that orchestra is highlighting its link with a festival that runs this Oct. 25 to Nov. 14, beginning with Bernstein's symphonic cycle, conducted by Alan Gilbert and Leonard Slatkin. Other of his works, and those he championed, along with a "Young People's Concert," will make up separate programs. This year will be capped off with the Philharmonic's New Year's Eve concert, ["Bernstein on Broadway."](#)

Other autumn in New York highlights include, on Oct. 4, [Carnegie Hall's gala 127th season opener](#): conductor Yannick Nezet-Seguin and the Philadelphia Orchestra performing Bernstein's Symphonic Suite from the film "On the Waterfront" and Symphonic Dances from "West Side Story." In late October, violinist Joshua Bell solos with the NY Phil and conductor Alan Gilbert for Bernstein's Symphony No. 1, "Jeremiah," and the maestro's 1954 composition "Serenade."



Leonard Bernstein rehearses in 1959 at New York's Carnegie Hall, one of many venues that will host concerts in the late maestro's honor as part of "Leonard Bernstein at 100." (Getty)

A coast away, [San Francisco Symphony](#) music director Michael Tilson Thomas conducts [Sept. 22-24 performances](#) of Bernstein's jazz ensemble showpiece "Prelude, Fugue and Riffs," the liturgical work "Chichester Psalms" and the humorous show cycle "Arias and Barcarolles." [Nov. 2-5](#) it is Symphony No. 2: "The Age of Anxiety."

The [Atlanta Symphony Orchestra](#), meanwhile, is peppering its entire season with Bernstein, including the music to his ballet "[Fancy Free](#)" in January.

Jan. 16 to Feb. 4, the [Tucson Desert Song Festival](#) will offer its own related performances, including Bernstein's "Trouble in Tahiti."

In the City of Brotherly Love, the [Philadelphia Orchestra](#) begins its ongoing Bernstein program at the [Kimmel Center](#) on Oct. 5. From March 16 to Sept. 2 of next year, the [National Museum of American Jewish History](#), on Independence Mall, holds its exhibition "[Leonard Bernstein: The Power of Music,](#)" detailing how the famed composer's heritage infused his distinctive sound.

"Leonard Bernstein at 100' will explore my father's legacy from every angle," Jamie Bernstein said. "And that's a lot of angles."

Recognizing his stature as an American musical ambassador to the world, London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Prague, Rome, Budapest, Hungary, and Warsaw, Poland, as well as Japan, China, India, Brazil, Australia, South Africa and Israel, are also about to become hotbeds of "LB 100" fever. For instance:

- In Vienna, starting in November, there will be concerts by the [Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra](#), the [Tonkünstler Orchestra](#), the [Volksoper Wien](#) and the [Neue Oper Wien](#), with full festivals in the [Wiener Konzerthaus](#) and the [Musikverein](#).
- In London, the [BBC Symphony Orchestra](#) is offering a [day of Leonard Bernstein music Jan. 27](#), while in November and December of this year, conductors Marin Alsop and Sir Simon Rattle will lead the the London Symphony Orchestra in Bernstein's three symphonies and "Wonderful Town," his 1953 Broadway musical.

For a complete listing of events, go to leonardbernstein.com/news/calendar.

Besides the concerts, the [Grammy Museum at L.A. Live](#) is organizing a traveling exhibition of Bernstein artifacts — including his Aunt Clara's piano that he started playing at age 10 — that will debut Sept. 21 at the JFK Center in Washington, before moving on to the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts on Dec. 12, followed by the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles on April 26.

Bernstein was "a free spirit" who shined larger than life, said Gustavo Dudamel, the Venezuela-born music director of the [L.A. Philharmonic](#), which, on its home turf [Feb. 1-4](#), will present Bernstein's rarely performed 1971 "Mass," — complete with full symphony orchestra, street singers, choruses, dancers, and rock and marching bands.

"Big personalities never die," Dudamel said. "You feel he is still around. That is the symbol of the genius that was him."

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