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THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY ANNOUNCES
THE SPECIAL EXHIBITION, LEONARD BERNSTEIN: THE POWER OF MUSIC,
ON VIEW MARCH 16 – SEPTEMBER 2, 2018

Bernstein’s piano, conducting suit, and family heirlooms are among the approximately
100 artifacts that will illustrate his life, Jewish identity, and social activism

PHILADELPHIA—The National Museum of
American Jewish History (NMAJH) announces
Leonard Bernstein: The Power of Music, the
first large-scale museum exhibition to illustrate
the famed conductor and composer’s life, Jewish
identity, and social activism. The exhibition will
feature approximately 100 historic artifacts—
from Bernstein’s piano and conducting suit to
family heirlooms—along with original films and
immersive sound installations. Taking place
during the worldwide centennial celebration of
Bernstein’s birthday, Leonard Bernstein: The
Power of Music will be on view March 16 – September 2, 2018.

Audiences may be familiar with many of Bernstein’s works, notably West Side Story (1957), but
not necessarily how his approach to music was informed by the political and social crises of his
day. Bernstein used the arts to express the restlessness, anxiety, fear, and hope of an
American Jew living through World War II and the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and turbulent
social change that shook his faith: in God, in humanity, and in government. The exhibition will focus on this theme in Bernstein’s work—what he referred to as his “search for a solution to the 20th-century crisis of faith.” It will explore how he confronted this “crisis” by breaking racial barriers in his casting decisions for On the Town (1944), addressing America’s changing ideas about race and ethnicity in West Side Story, and giving a voice to the human rights crisis during the Vietnam era in his provocative theater piece, MASS (1971), as examples.

Ivy Weingram, NMAJH Associate Curator and curator of Leonard Bernstein: The Power of Music, says, “Leonard Bernstein is remembered as a passionate, larger-than-life personality—a charismatic conductor, devoted educator, and skilled musician. This exhibition will delve into his memorable works while also exploring a lesser known side of Bernstein—the second-generation American Jew who inspired social progress, both on and off the stage. As our nation continues to confront issues of race, religion, and what it means to be an ‘American’, Bernstein’s music takes on new, personal meanings for every audience that experiences it.”

Alexander Bernstein, Leonard Bernstein’s son and member of the exhibition’s Advisory Committee, shares, “I think it is so extraordinary that the National Museum of American Jewish History is putting on this exhibition about my father and his life as a Jewish American icon. While the Museum looks back at great figures in American Jewish history, it also is so actively looking forward. My sisters and I are very conscious of bringing our father’s legacy to a new generation, and the Museum is doing a fantastic job of that.”

The exhibition will bring together approximately 100 original artifacts, some never-before-exhibited in public. Artifact highlights include Bernstein’s piano, an annotated copy of Romeo and Juliet used for the development of West Side Story (originally imagined as East Side Story), the program for his Carnegie Hall debut, his conducting suit, his easel used for studying scores and composing, and much more. Bernstein’s Jewish heritage, so deeply ingrained in him by his parents and so intricately

woven through his life and work, will be conveyed through a number of artifacts, including the mezuzah that hung in his studio, the Hebrew prayer book he carried with him when he traveled, his ketubah (Jewish marriage contact), his family’s Passover seder plate, and the Talmud (book of Jewish law) given to Bernstein by his father.

The exhibition will also feature a variety of films, sound installations, and interactive media. Visitors will hear from Bernstein himself through archival recordings and documentary footage, alongside interviews with those who knew him best. Film clips of Bernstein conducting, his visit to Israel in 1967, and excerpts of West Side Story will highlight key moments in Bernstein’s life and career. A state-of-the-art multimedia interactive will invite visitors to explore how Bernstein wove elements of synagogue music into his compositions for film, Broadway, and orchestra. To communicate the significance of Bernstein’s visit to a Displaced Persons camp in Germany during Spring 1948—where he led an orchestra of Holocaust survivors—the Museum will display video testimonies from those who participated in this little-known moment in Bernstein’s life. Lastly, an original film will convey the enduring impact of Bernstein’s MASS, re-contextualizing the monumental composition by combining it with contemporary examples of the power of music.

Leonard Bernstein (1918 – 1990) was born in Massachusetts to Jewish immigrant parents. He learned the Hebrew Bible and Talmud from his father, and the family belonged to a Conservative synagogue that featured approaches to worship and liturgy that were progressive for their day. He began private piano lessons at age 10 and studied at the prestigious Boston Latin School, Harvard University, the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood, and the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. Within months of graduating with a conducting diploma, he led the Boston Pops, and famously made his Carnegie Hall conducting debut at the age of 25. In January 1944, Bernstein premiered Jeremiah, his first of three symphonies. Dozens of additional original works, many of which drew on his Jewish heritage, followed. Along with his two additional symphonies, Bernstein composed numerous works for concerts, theater, film, and ballet. In 1958, Bernstein took the helm as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra—the first American born-and-trained conductor to hold this position. In addition to his
Young People’s Concerts with the New York Philharmonic, Bernstein taught at Tanglewood, Harvard, and Brandeis University.

*Leonard Bernstein: The Power of Music* received generous support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, which awards grants to programs demonstrating the highest scholarship and excellence. The exhibition will be complemented by public and educational programs, to be announced at a later date. For more information, visit [NMAJH.org/Bernstein](http://NMAJH.org/Bernstein).


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**About the National Museum of American Jewish History**

The National Museum of American Jewish History, located on historic Independence Mall in Philadelphia, brings to life the more than 360-year history of Jews in America. Tracing the stories of how Jewish immigrants became Jewish Americans, the Museum invites visitors of all backgrounds to share their own stories and reflect on how their histories and identities shape and are shaped by the American experience. An open door for all, NMAJH honors the past and contributes to a better future by sharing the power of imagination and ideas, culture and community, leadership and service, in ways that turn inspiration into action.

The National Museum of American Jewish History is located at 101 South Independence Mall East at the corner of Fifth and Market Streets in Philadelphia. Museum hours are Wednesday to Friday, 10:00 am - 5:00 pm, and Saturday and Sunday 10:00 am - 5:30 pm. The Museum will also be open Tuesday, 10:00 am - 5:00 pm during Leonard Bernstein: The Power of Music. Museum admission is $15.00 for adults, $13.00 for senior citizens and youth, free for children 12 and under, Museum Members, and active military with ID; reduced prices available if purchased online. Connect with the Museum on [Facebook](http://Facebook), [Instagram](http://Instagram), [Twitter](http://Twitter), and [Pinterest](http://Pinterest). For more information, visit [NMAJH.org](http://NMAJH.org) or call 215.923.3811.