

This Day in History... August 25, 1918

Happy Birthday, Leonard Bernstein

Leonard (Louis) Bernstein was born on August 25, 1918, in Lawrence, Massachusetts. His grandmother had insisted his name be Louis, but his parents always called him Leonard and he legally changed his name to Leonard when he was 15.

Bernstein had a love of music from a young age. His aunt left her old piano at the house that enabled him to learn to play at home. He had several teachers over the years and could play entire operas and Beethoven symphonies as a child.

After graduating from Boston Latin School, Bernstein majored in music at Harvard University. From there he went on to study at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. After graduating, Bernstein moved to New York City and worked in music publishing. He also spent his summers studying at the Boston Symphony Orchestra's summer institute, Tanglewood.



Bernstein made his television debut in 1949 at a concert marking the first anniversary of the UN General Assembly's ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

By 1943, Bernstein was assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. On November 13 of that year, the guest conductor came down with the flu and Bernstein, without rehearsing and very little notice made his major conducting debut. That program had been broadcast nationally on CBS Radio and Bernstein became famous overnight. Soon he was invited to serve as guest conductor for a number of US orchestras. During this time he also started to gain recognition as a composer.

Suffering from asthma, Bernstein was unable to serve during World War II. After the war, he served as Music Director of the New York City Symphony and gained international fame. He conducted in Prague, London, Milan, and several times in Tel Aviv. In 1949, he made his television conducting premiere with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

In 1954, Bernstein began presenting a series of television lectures for the CBS arts program, *Omnibus*. These appearances led him to earn even more fame in the US for his series of 53 Young People's Concerts, also for CBS. These concerts were some of the most influential music appreciation programs on television and were highly praised by critics.

Bernstein was made the director of the New York Philharmonic in 1957, a position he held until 1969. He would continue to conduct and record with the orchestra after that tenure ended.



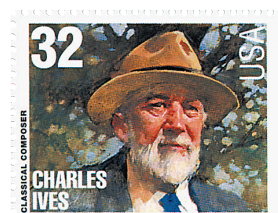
Bernstein wrote and conducted the fanfare played at JFK's inaugural gala. He also conducted a memorial concert to the president the day after he died.

Over the course of his career, Bernstein wrote multiple symphonies, operas, and musicals, as well as scores for movies and ballets. One of his best-known pieces is the score for the 1957 musical *West Side Story*, on which he collaborated with songwriter Stephen Sondheim. The 1961 film adaptation of the musical was so well received that it won ten Academy Awards! He also produced music for *Peter Pan*, *Candide*, *Wonderful Town*, *On the Town*, *On the Waterfront*, and *Mass*.

Bernstein received the Kennedy Center Honors award in 1980 and continued to conduct, teach, compose, and produce TV documentaries throughout the decade. He officially retired from conducting on October 9, 1990, and died of a heart attack five days later. During his lifetime he had earned sixteen Grammys, seven Primetime Emmys, and two Tony Awards.



The First Day ceremony for this stamp was held at the New York Philharmonic.



Bernstein conducted the world premier of Ives's Symphony No. 2 and is credited with helping to expose a larger audience to his, and other composers', music.

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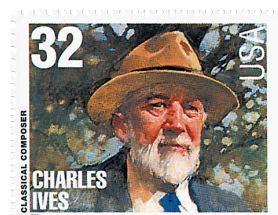
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