

Glitter and Be Gay: Sexuality in the Life and Music of Leonard Bernstein

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About Me

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IU Southeast Student Conference Presentations

2020 - *Les Chansons de La Môme Piaf: The Songs
of Edith Piaf*

2019 – An Exploration of Seventeenth-Century
Composer Barbara Strozzi



Who Was Leonard Berns



- Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990) was one of the most iconic composer-conductors of the twentieth-century
- ♥ □ He was the music director of the New York Philharmonic from 1958-1969
- Most famous works:
 - West Side Story
 - Candide
 - On The Town





Overview of Presentation

1. Previous Relationships

Bernstein's relationships with women and men

2. Struggle with Homosexuality

What kept Bernstein from "coming out"

3. Sexuality in His Music

How Bernstein used sexuality in his music and what it meant

4. Conclusion

How sexuality impacted Bernstein's life and music



LOVE



01



Previous Relationships

Previous Relationships... a few of them



- ❑ Aaron Copland*
- ❑ Dmitri Mitropoulos*
- ❑ Ned Rorem
- ❑ Azaria Rapoport
- ❑ Lana Turner
- ❑ Farley Granger
- ❑ Felicia Cohn
- ❑ Tom Cothran
- ❑ Justus Frantz
- ❑ Kazuko Amano
- ❑ Kunihiko Hashimoto

Note: This is not an exhaustive list of Bernstein's relationships, just a brief glimpse into some of the romantic and sexual relationships he has had with people.

* Alleged



02



Struggle with Homosexuality



Was Leonard Bernstein heterosexual?
Homosexual? Bisexual?

Heterosexual and Homosexual?

- ❑ Bernstein might have been heterosexual emotionally and homosexual physically
- ❑ Marriage to Felicia
 - ❑ Three children
 - ❑ She knew that he liked men, but stayed in the relationship
 - ❑ Quote from Felicia's letter





“Look, you know I get it. It’s complicated. But let’s do this because we love each other. Let’s make a family and let’s just go forward.”

—Felicia Bernstein, *in a letter to Leonard recently opened by Jamie Bernstein*

Bisexual?

Yes, Bernstein married a woman, but he had numerous relationships with men – emotionally and physically



Notable Instances

- Ned Rorem
 - Found by secretary
- Trip to Italy with Felicia
 - Orgy
- Tom Cothran
 - Emotional and physical

Luckily, we do not have to assume
Bernstein's sexual orientation.



The Winner Is... Homosexual!

While a couple Bernstein biographers labeled Bernstein as bisexual, there's no evidence that he ever self-identified as such

- ❑ Biographers Humphrey Burton and Myrtle Secrest might have used the term bisexual to “protect” Bernstein’s legacy
- ❑ Quote from Arthur Laurents





“Bernstein was simply a gay man who got married. He wasn’t conflicted about his sexual orientation at all. He was just gay.”

—Arthur Laurents, *collaborated
with Bernstein on West Side Story*

Homophobia



Three Strikes and You're Out!

One of Bernstein's lifelong dreams was to become a music director

- ❑ During the mid- 1900s, being gay would have risked Bernstein's chances at becoming a music director
- ❑ Bernstein could not hide the fact that he was American or Jewish

Three Strikes Against Him

- ❑ American
- ❑ Jewish
- ❑ Homosexual

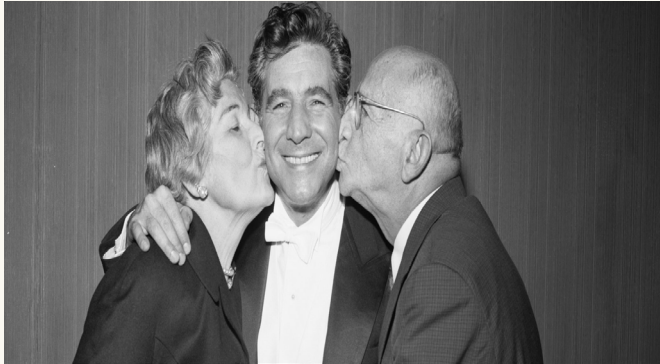


Homophobic Father?

Bernstein's father might not have liked the fact that his son was a homosexual

Further Explained In...

❑ *A Quiet Place*



- ❑ Bernstein included many father figures in his music
- ❑ Were the father figures supposed to be like his own father?





03



Sexuality in His Music



Candide (1956)

❑ “Glitter and Be Gay”

- Cunegonde was sold as a sex slave
- The aria talks about lost honor, shame and the need for purification
 - Similar situation for the LGBTQ+ experiencing homophobia during the time *Candide* was written

❑ Maximillian had several homosexual encounters

❑ Paquette had sex with almost every man she met



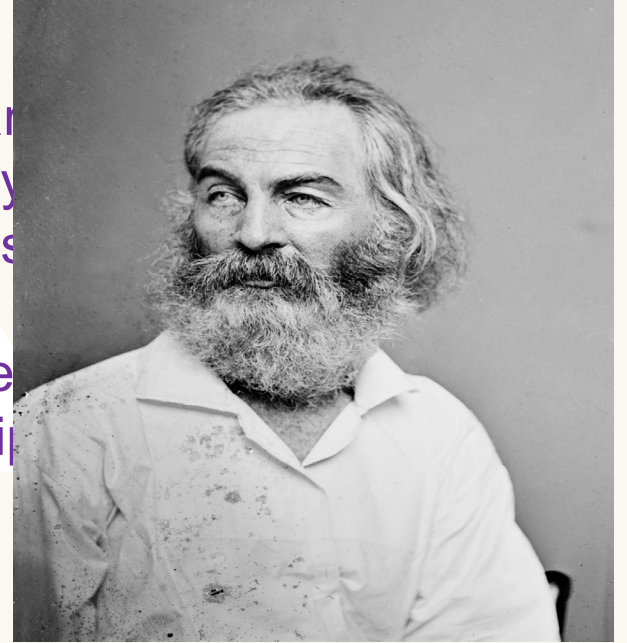
Songfest (1977)

☐ “To What You Said”

- An unpublished poem by Walt Whitman
- “I am he who kisses his comrade lightly
the lips at parting, and I am one who is
kissed in return”

☐ Bernstein’s homage to homosexual love

- Tom Cothran, who was in a relationship
with Bernstein at the time, helped him
select the poetry for *Songfest*



A Quiet Place (1983)

- ❑ Junior is a bisexual man with incest fantasies about his sister
- ❑ Junior's homosexual relationship with Francois
- ❑ Junior and Dede's estrangement from the father Sam
 - Sam is the father figure *of Quiet Place*
 - Sam might have been homophobic
 - Turmoil of the gay rights movement threatened the authority of white, middleclass men like Sam





Conclusion



Conclusion

Leonard Bernstein was a homosexual man who achieved great success as a composer-conductor

- ❑ His wife Felicia knew that he was a homosexual, but they still decided to make a family together
- ❑ The fear of “striking out” was eminent, but Bernstein remained successful
- ❑ Bernstein used sexuality in his music to truly express himself





“To be a success as a Broadway composer,
you must be Jewish or gay. I’m both.”

—Leonard Bernstein

Image Credits

Slide 2: <https://www.biography.com/musician/leonard-bernstein>

Slide 5: <https://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2018/08/25/638625561/life-with-leonard-bernstein> and <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/aug/17/leonard-bernstein-japanese-love-letters-hashimoto>

Slide 8: <https://interlude.hk/leonard-bernstein-felicia-montealegre-divided-life/>

Slide 11: <https://www.beachamjournal.com/journal/2020/10/ned-rorem-the-composer-and-diarist-is-97-years-old-today.html>

Slide 16: <https://bernstein.classical.org/features/learning-from-lenny/>

Slide 18: <https://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2015/06/05/412211924/in-candide-bernstein-fuses-philosophy-and-comedy>

Slide 19: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Walt-Whitman>

Slide 20: <https://www.besteveralbums.com/thechart.php?a=132864>

Slide 22: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/jul/12/leonard-bernstein-composer-conductor-inspiration-genius-proms>



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Thanks!



Do you have any questions?

Feel free to email me!
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