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Bww Review: BERNSTEIN AT 100: Symphonic And Choreographic Lushness By The Sea At Burton Chase Park

by [Valerie-Jean Miller](#) Aug. 3, 2018

With Frank Fetta conducting the Marina del Rey Symphony and Nancy Dobbs Owen's Portrayal thru Dance of Leonard Bernstein's and Jerome Robbins' famed works, in celebration of his 100th Birthday, this marvelous concert took place at Marina del Rey's Burton Chase Park, where the ocean meets the land. There is something quite fabulous about sitting in the open air, a sea breeze blowing, a newly overcast sky, as the sun sinks past the horizon and people with picnics, dogs and children in tow, gather to hear one of the several free summer concerts, done bi-weekly, during the

summer months.



This is a long-time tradition for the Culver City Symphony Orchestra, who also gives concerts the rest of the year in Culver City. I have been coming to these events on and off for many years and was a subscriber as a student. When I found out they were playing in Leonard Bernstein's honor and that there would be dancing to accompany the magnificent music he created for stage and film, it was something I didn't want to miss!

The evening was so welcome from the heat of the Valley, and what better musical selections could there be! Leonard Bernstein's music is so rich, passionate and filled with wondrous orchestrations and dynamic energy. On top of that, featuring choreography inspired by his collaborator, the original choreographer, the incomparable Jerome Robbins. Nancy Dobbs Owen did a beautiful job of combining her own vision with some signature Robbins' moves that are forever embedded in our minds whenever a certain lyric is heard. You can just picture the Jets or the Sharks ' leaping, with their knees up in the air, fingers snapping...





The Concert began with the Symphonic Suite from "On The Waterfront" which was composed by Mr. Bernstein early on in his career, and one of the last film scores he ever did. The overcast darkening sky was in perfect harmony to the beginning of this piece. It is a wide, sweeping score with such descriptive instrumentation, the scenes from the movie play vividly in your head. Lively, with intricate, dramatic passages, and then serene, melodic strings permeating the mood. The fullness of the sound and the solo passages using so many different instruments takes you with it and makes you feel a range of emotions. All the tempos, volumes, key and mood changes in this masterpiece afford the listener to feel the intensity of the actions in the actual scene. All of Bernstein's work is so complete, in that each one paints a picture with glorious sound and in this case, movement to match.



The next composition presented was "Three Dance Episodes from "On The Town,"" a medley of dance scenes from the musical, smoothly woven together. The dancers act and dance out a story about sailors on twenty-four hour leave in N. Y., and the girls they encounter, first in "Dance of the Great Lover," where a bright, exuberant sailor hits the town and along with his friends, wants to paint the town red.



He imagines wooing and winning over a certain girl and the sailors start the piece off with a great trio section full of leaps, exciting partner work with the girls, with the music graduating to "Lonely Town," containing a beautiful pas de deux. There is some terrific dancing by all cast members, who are all accomplished technicians and each present their own character with gusto.



The third section, "The Times Square Ballet" had quite a bit of athleticism in the choreography which the music warrants, with a bit of "New York, New York, it's a helluva town" exuberance and an air of carefree joy. After a brief intermission of relaxing and taking in the scenery, the Orchestra played the Overture to "Candide," an operatic musical interlude that is very uplifting and again uses every type of instrument to echo different passages and modulate into different feels of happiness and optimism. The colorful techniques of pizzicato, vibrato, plucking, muting, trills, and mixing legato and allegro-staccato sounds together are some of what makes this music so exhilarating.



The grand finale was a perfect last piece. The Orchestra played the bejesus out of "Symphonic Dances from 'West Side Story,'" the iconic genius combination of Leonard Bernstein's music and Jerome Robbins' Choreography. The dancers were on their toes, in the air, on the ground, double-pirouetting and acting out in movement, the story of two New York gangs in the 1960s, what life was like and the tragedy that befalls them. There were many recognizable steps that Jerome Robbins created that were mingled in with variations of, as well as original ones that fit perfectly with the exciting score. They took us through the "Prologue," the Adagio of "Somewhere" with beautiful partner work, clean and lovingly executed, the gym dance, or "Mambo" which was pure fun to watch, as they mixed balletic dancing with playful antics, interesting lifts and break out in a feverish mambo challenge and group section that made the musical notes seem to dance off the page and come to life. Followed by the Meeting Scene, and the famous "Cool" jazz sequence, the Rumble, and then the soaringly exquisite "Finale," each section was cleverly a mixture of an homage to Mr. Robbins and some inventive, substantial choreography.



I loved the dance sections where acrobatics and tumbling, the knee spins, double and triple pirouettes, and a few flick-kick jumps that I've never quite seen before were used to accent the urgency, intertwined with strong balletic movements that swept you away. All perfectly aligned and placed and performed excellently.

The energetic, versatile and enthusiastic dancers were: Kate Coleman, Darby Epperson, Megan Merry, Eryn Orsburn, Zach Bezdziecki, Jacob Byrd, Antoine Lee and Timothy Lewis.

Thank you, Frank Fetta, who is both Artistic Director and Conductor for this fine orchestra, for bringing this idea to fruition. And to Nancy Dobbs Owen for her choreography, hard work and dedication to this project. Presented by the Department of Beaches and Harbors, and L. A. County Supervisor Janice Hahn, it affords and encourages Community involvement in appreciation of the Fine Arts.

Check their website for further info on upcoming concerts:

www.culvercitysymphony.org

A beautiful setting and an evening of symphonic choreographed bliss.

Photos courtesy of The Department of Beaches and Harbors; Heidi Marie and Lilia Aronoff-Aspaturian, and Matthew Hetz