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**Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre Celebrates Jerome Robbins & Leonard Bernstein Centennials with Three Company Premieres**

*'UPMC Presents West Side Story Suite + In the Night + Fancy Free'*



**PITTSBURGH, PA (March 20, 2018)** — This spring Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre (PBT) joins in international centennial celebrations for choreographer Jerome Robbins and composer Leonard Bernstein with an all-Robbins program featuring three company premieres. “UPMC Presents West Side Story Suite + In the Night + Fancy Free” with the PBT Orchestra takes the stage May 4-6, at the Benedum Center.

Both Robbins (1918-1998) and Bernstein (1918-1990) would have celebrated their 100th birthdays in 2018, which has inspired a worldwide celebration of their work. The duo famously collaborated on a number of ballets and Broadway hits beginning in the 1940s.

Among the Robbins and Bernstein collaborations represented in PBT's centennial tribute are their first and most famous collaborations – “Fancy Free,” which inspired the Broadway hit “On the Town,” and “West Side Story Suite,” which Robbins excerpted from the full-length “West Side Story.”

“I had the privilege of working with Jerry when I was principal dancer and then ballet master for American Ballet Theatre. I'll never forget his genius for the details that make a masterpiece,” said PBT Artistic Director Terrence S. Orr. ‘West Side Story Suite’ will push our dancers outside their comfort zones with its drama, its choreography and especially its singing scenes. I love its contrast with ‘In the Night,’ which shows us Robbins’ classical side. And of course, ‘Fancy Free’ holds a special place in my heart. I had the privilege of learning one of the sailor parts from original cast member John Kriza and dancing the role for many years with ABT. We plan to do Jerry proud with this program.”

The theatrical “West Side Story Suite” premiered in 1995 and samples iconic songs and Tony-winning choreography from the duo's Broadway musical (1957) – and Academy Award-winning film (1961) – with choreography by Robbins, music by Bernstein, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and scenery by Oliver Smith. PBT company members will dance “Prologue,” “Something's Coming,” “Dance at the Gym,” “Cool,” “America,” “Rumble” and “Somewhere Ballet” and also sing some of the songs with support from five vocalists from Carnegie Mellon University's School of Music. A modern take on “Romeo and Juliet,” “West Side Story” sets the love story on the streets of 1950s New York in the crosshairs of two feuding gangs: The Jets and the Sharks.

PBT also debuts in Robbins' claim to fame: his first ballet and Bernstein collaboration, “Fancy Free” (1944), which inspired the duo's Broadway hit “On the Town (1944).” Set on a hot summer night in New York City, “Fancy Free” follows the escapades of three sailors on shore leave. The irresistible “Fancy Free” captures the sights and sounds of World War II-era America and met with resounding success and 22 curtain calls at its 1944 premiere.

Rounding out the program is a more rarely seen Robbins masterwork: his classical “In the Night” (1970), which sets romantic pas de deux for three couples to four piano nocturnes (op. 27, no. 1; op. 55, nos. 1 & 2; and op. 9, no. 2) by Frédéric Chopin. The pas de deux represents love's various shades and stages from tenderness to infatuation.

Jerome Robbins was a dancer, choreographer and director – both in ballet and on Broadway. Leonard Bernstein was a prolific conductor and composer. They were born two months apart and both had their first big breaks by age 25. Bernstein gained fame when he stepped in on a few hours notice for the ailing Bruno Walter to conduct the New York Philharmonic in a nationally broadcast concert at Carnegie Hall. Robbins rose to prominence after choreographing his first ballet –and his first collaboration with Bernstein – “Fancy Free,” which premiered at American Ballet Theatre while he was still dancing as an original company member.

The wildly successful “Fancy Free” soon gave rise to the duo’s Broadway hit “On the Town.” They went on to collaborate on “West Side Story” and other projects, including two more major ballets: “Facsimile” (1946) for American Ballet Theater and “Dybbuk” (1975) for New York City Ballet.

### **Performance Times**

- Friday, May 4, at 8 p.m.
- Saturday, May 5, at 2 p.m.
- Saturday, May 5, at 8 p.m.
- Sunday, May 6, at 3 p.m.

### **Educational Events**

#### **Jerome Robbins Instructional Performances**

Starting in early March, PBT’s education team, and an ensemble of PBT School graduate students, have been visiting area schools to illustrate excerpts from Robbins’ work, highlighting his unique contributions to the art form and contextualizing his choreography as part of a continuum of classical and neoclassical styles. As part of these programs, PBT School students are performing Robbins’ “Somewhere Ballet” from “West Side Story Suite” as well as excerpts from “Swan Lake,” and PBT Principal dancer Yoshiaki Nakano’s neoclassical ballet “The Symphony.” PBT presented at the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf on March 7, CAPA on March 13, and 14, and will visit New Castle Junior/Senior High School on April 20. These programs are made possible by the Jerome Robbins Foundation and the support of an anonymous donor.

### **Theater Programs**

**Afterthoughts | Fri., May 4, immediately after the 8 p.m. performance**

A post-show talk-back with dancers and other artists. Located at the front of the orchestra section in the theater; no reservations necessary.

**Insights | 7-7:30 p.m. Sat., May 5**

A pre-show discussion with PBT artistic staff members, who share historical and cultural context for the production. On the Mezzanine. Reservations requested at [education@pittsburghballet.org](mailto:education@pittsburghballet.org).

**Talks with Terry | 2-2:30 p.m. Sun., May 6**

Audience members can watch a few minutes of the company's onstage warm-up class, then Artistic Director Terrence S. Orr previews the ballet and conducts a Q&A. In the theater, no reservations necessary.

**Sun., May 6, 3 p.m: Audio-described performance**

A live narrative of the ballet for patrons with vision impairment. Additional details are available at [www.pbt.org/accessibility](http://www.pbt.org/accessibility).

**About Jerome Robbins (1918-1998)**

Jerome Robbins is world renowned for his work as a choreographer of ballets and as his work as a director and choreographer in theater, movies and television. His Broadway shows include "On the Town," "Billion Dollar Baby," "High Button Shoes," "West Side Story," "The King and I," "Gypsy," "Peter Pan," "Miss Liberty," "Call Me Madam," and "Fiddler on the Roof." His last Broadway production, "Jerome Robbins' Broadway" (1989), won six Tony Awards, including best musical and best director. Among the more than 60 ballets he created are "Fancy Free," "Afternoon of a Faun," "The Concert," "Dances at a Gathering," "In the Night," "In G Major," "Other Dances," "Glass Pieces and Ives" and "Songs," which are in the repertoires of New York City Ballet and other major dance companies worldwide. His last ballets include A Suite of Dances, created for Mikhail Baryshnikov (1994), 2 & 3 Part Inventions (1994), West Side Story Suite (1995) and Brandenburg (1996). In addition to two Academy Awards for the film "West Side Story," Robbins has received four Tony Awards, five Donaldson Awards, two Emmy Awards, the Screen Directors' Guild Award and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award. Mr. Robbins was a 1981 Kennedy Center Honors recipient and was awarded the French Chevalier dans l'Ordre National de la Legion d'Honneur. [Read his full bio here.](#)

## **About Leonard Bernstein**

Leonard Bernstein was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts. He took piano lessons as a child, attended the Garrison and Boston Latin Schools and graduated from Harvard University. Bernstein received his first permanent conducting post in 1943 as assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic. He served as music director of the New York City Symphony Orchestra from 1945 to 1947 and became music director of the New York Philharmonic in 1958. From then until 1969 he led more concerts with the orchestra than any previous conductor. He later held the lifetime title of laureate conductor, making frequent guest appearances with the orchestra. More than half of Bernstein's 400-plus recordings were made with the New York Philharmonic. In addition to orchestral compositions, Bernstein contributed substantially to Broadway, writing and collaborating on shows, including "On The Town (1944)," "Wonderful Town (1953)," "Candide (1956)" and the landmark musical "West Side Story," which also was made into the Academy Award-winning film. Among his many awards and honorary degrees, Bernstein won 11 Emmy awards, received the Lifetime Achievement Grammy Award in 1985 and was elected in 1981 to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, which honored him with a Gold Medal. [Read his full bio here.](#)