

# THE LEONARD BERNSTEIN LETTERS

EDITED BY NIGEL SIMEONE

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LEONARD  
BERNSTEIN  
LETTERS**

**EDITED BY NIGEL SIMEONE**

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For  
Mark Horowitz,  
Lauren Doughty,  
and  
Jasmine Simeone

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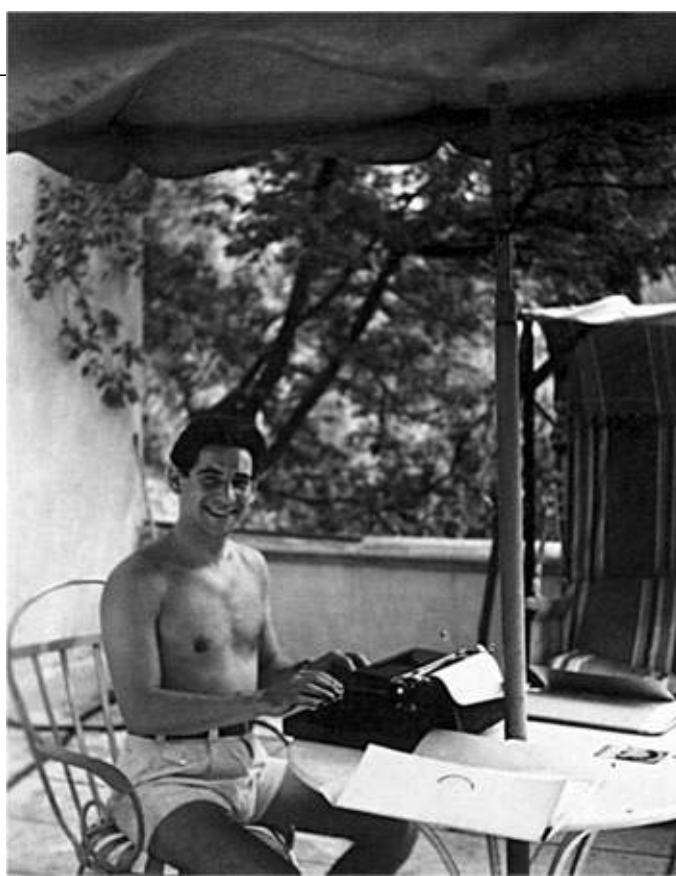
2 Leonard Bernstein conducting Stravinsky's *Soldier's Tale* at Tanglewood in 1940 in a version with Bernstein's own words (see Letter 57). Serge Koussevitzky and his wife Natalie are looking down from the balcony. The inscription reads "For Helen [Coates]: Le commencement de 'L'Histoire d'un élève' – with much love. Lenny, Aug. 1940".



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11 A series of photographs of Bernstein conducting in Carnegie Hall, c. 1946.



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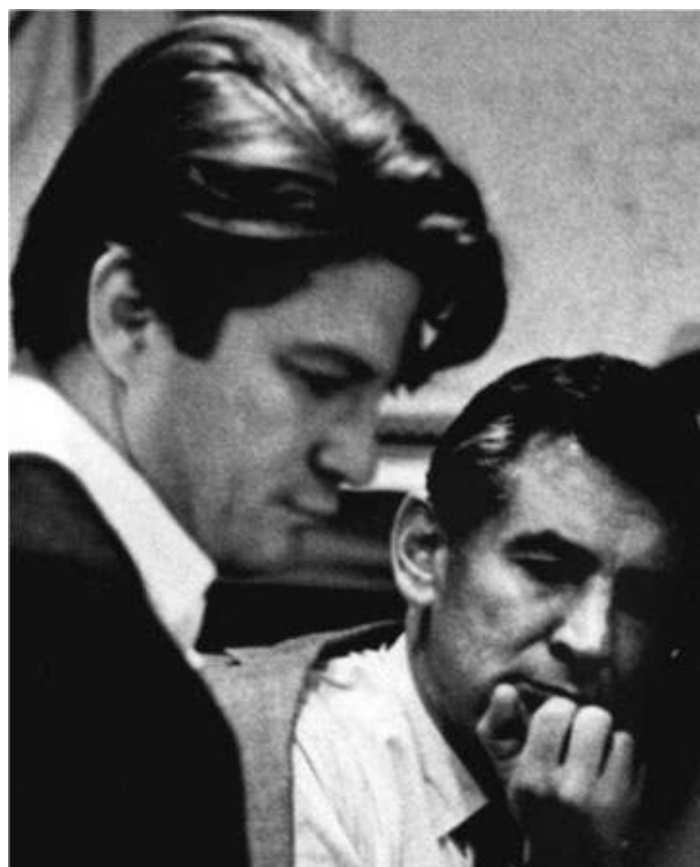
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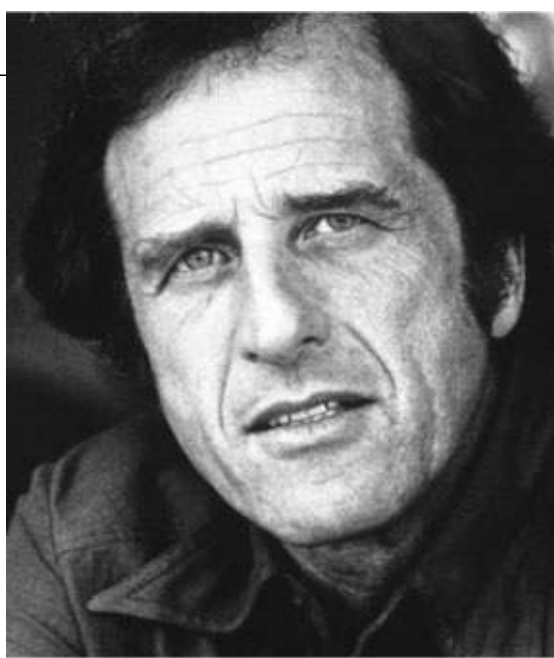
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21 Leonard and Burton Bernstein skiing in 1958.



22 Felicia Bernstein as Joan in Honegger's *Joan of Arc at the Stake*, 1958.



23 Lukas Foss

LP-1624

**SIDE 1**

THE LADY'S IN LOVE WITH YOU 1:50 Decca Music, Inc. 4524P  
 LOVE IS A SIMPLE THING 2:07 Decca, Inc. 4524P  
 LOVE IS HERE TO STAY 2:32 Decca Music, Inc. 4524P  
**I CAN'T GIVE YOU ANYTHING BUT LOVE** 2:58 Decca Music, Inc. 4524P  
 LOVE LETTERS 3:15 Decca Music, Inc. 4524P  
 LOVE IS THE SWEETEST THING 3:41 Decca, Inc. 4524P

**SIDE 2**

COMES LOVE 2:15 Decca & Co., Inc. 4524P  
 I WISH I WERE IN LOVE AGAIN 2:35 Decca & Co., Inc. 4524P  
 WHEN I FALL IN LOVE 2:45 Decca Music, Inc. 4524P  
 THE GLORY OF LOVE 3:05 Decca Music, Inc. 4524P  
 LOVE IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER 3:25 Decca Music, Inc. 4524P  
 LOVE 3:45 Decca Music, Inc. 4524P

**LOVE IS A SWINGIN' WORD**  
 SID RAMIN and His Orchestra



This album is only for those millions who enjoy spirited songs brilliantly arranged and expertly played. Whether you listen nostalgically or spontaneously, this collection proves conclusively that love is a swingin' word, though the music ranges from driving swing to sweet melody.

The man responsible for this outstanding reputation is Sid Ramin, a young man of enormous talent. In the past he has been responsible for the arrangements of such highly successful albums as the *Anna Rodgers' Distinctive Music* (LPM-1498) and *Sammy Davis' Trio* (LPM-1551), *Alvin Karpis' Ten Lovers or Ten* (LPM-1581), and the original cast album of *Sat, Dunlop* (LDC-1047). His other credits include some seven years of arranging for Milton Berle's television show, and he and Dr. Kostal collaborated on the orchestration for the Broadway hits, "Four Side Story" and "Wonderful Town."

Ramin's talents are profound, for art in both melody and motion. This is his first featured album for RCA Victor. It is one of which he can be proud and which you will be delighted to own.

**Leonard Bernstein says:**  
 "I have known Sid Ramin since we were both thirteen; I was impressed with his great musicality then, and have continued to be more and more impressed ever since. His work with me (and Irv Kostal) on *West Side Story* was invaluable – sensitive, strong, and facile. Long may he wave!"

Recorded in Webster Hall, New York, September 18, 27, 28, and 29, 1958. Recording Engineer: Ray Hall. Arranged and conducted by Sid Ramin. Produced by Fred Karloff and Norman Pan, Jr.

© 1959 Decca Records of America, Inc.  
 LPM-1624

24 Sid Ramin, on the back cover of his LP *Love is a Swinging Word* (RCA Victor, released in 1959)

To the right of Ramin's photo is an endorsement by Bernstein: "I have known Sid Ramin since we were both thirteen. I was impressed with his great musicality then, and have continued to be more and more impressed ever since. His work with me (and Irv Kostal) on *West Side Story* was invaluable – sensitive, strong, and facile. Long may he wave!"



25 Leonard and Felicia Bernstein with Boris Pasternak, Moscow, 1959.



26 Leonard Bernstein and Aaron Copland with the score of *El Salón México*, c. 1960.





28 Leonard Bernstein: canon written for Humphrey Burton and Erik Smith, 25 March 1977. The text reads: “Humphrey Burton is forty-six, so is Erik Smith. Erik Smith is forty-six, so is Humphrey Burton.” Burton recalls the occasion on which it was written: “We dined with LB at the Garrick Club which is where he produced his composition and we all lustily joined in an impromptu performance so far as I am aware never repeated”.



29 Jacqueline Kennedy with Leonard and Felicia Bernstein and their children Alexander and Jamie at the Theatre De Lys, New York, on 28 June 1965. The occasion was the opening night of *Leonard Bernstein's Theatre Songs*, a revue featuring songs from shows for which Bernstein composed the music.

# Introduction and Acknowledgments

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## The Beginning of the Project

In early 2010, just after finishing a book about *West Side Story*, I was in the Performing Arts Reading Room at the Library of Congress, talking to Mark Horowitz about possible future projects. Mark's position as a Senior Music Specialist in the Music Division includes responsibility for the Leonard Bernstein Collection – so he knows this enormous archive better than anyone. In the course of one of our frequent chats, Mark made an apparently straightforward suggestion: “Why don't you do a book about the correspondence?” Those words lodged in my mind and the idea quickly began to take root.

One reason *not* to do the letters was their sheer bulk: many tens of thousands of them, grouped into different series: Personal Correspondence, Writings (which include few but wonderful letters), Family Mail, and Business Papers – taking up hundreds of linear feet. But the temptation of working with Leonard Bernstein's correspondence was far too exciting a challenge to let these statistics – however daunting – get in the way. Betty Comden wrote to Bernstein back in 1950 about how he saved “every scrap of correspondence [...] from Koussevitzky's pages on life, music, and your career – to Auntie Clara's handwritten denunciations of meat” (Letter 301). How right she was. I already knew some of the letters from earlier research, and a trawl through the general correspondence was enough to demonstrate what an engrossing project this could be.

But how best to approach the task? The Bernstein Collection, used in conjunction with others in the Library of Congress, offered an enticing option: to present correspondence both to and from Bernstein. This was also made possible thanks to the efforts of Charlie Harmon at the Leonard Bernstein Office. After Bernstein's death in 1990, Harmon contacted significant people in Bernstein's life requesting photocopies of the letters they had received from him, and these copies were integrated into the folders in the Bernstein Collection. The Library of Congress already had Aaron Copland's and Sergiy Koussevitzky's papers, and it acquired David Diamond's in the course of my research. I drew up a preliminary selection of letters in early 2010 and set to work on the process of transcription and annotation. By the end of that year, the selection needed major revision – for the best of reasons. At the end of 2010, the Bernstein estate decided that a substantial group of letters sealed after his death should be made available, and added to the Bernstein Collection in the Library of Congress. Many of these “new” letters turned out to be enthralling: personal, funny, and revealing. As work progressed, still more letters came to light (thanks to the generosity of the recipients, or their heirs), and I was in a position to make a final selection – acutely aware, of course, that more Bernstein letters will emerge in the future.

The selection of correspondence in *The Leonard Bernstein Letters* is necessarily a personal choice, and there were some very difficult decisions to be made in terms of what to leave out, and there is scope for more than enough correspondence – for several further volumes. To give just a couple of examples: I have omitted most of the correspondence with his sister Shirley (including a large number of letters, mostly undated, written while she was a student at Mount Holyoke College) and from his brother Burton. A book of Bernstein family letters could make for fascinating reading. Many of them, however, concern family matters, and I had already decided that my principal focus for this book

should be on correspondence that told us something about Bernstein himself, and particularly his life as a musician. It is for a similar reason that I have omitted most of the letters from Martha Gellhorn – many of them have little to say about music – though I have included a splendid letter about *West Side Story* and a most revealing one about her marriage to Ernest Hemingway.<sup>1</sup>

## **Illuminating a Musical Life**

Anyone interested in Bernstein has the great advantage of Humphrey Burton's superbly researched and beautifully written biography. Twenty years after its first publication, it remains definitive as well as enthralling, and subsequent writers on Bernstein owe Humphrey Burton a great debt of gratitude. The present book would have been unthinkable without his work, but it sets out to do something different. While Burton quotes from a good deal of correspondence, his main purpose is to tell a life story. In *The Leonard Bernstein Letters* I have aimed to allow the letters mostly to speak for themselves, rather than to be woven into a linear biographical narrative. In addition, a number of letters have emerged since Burton's book was published in 1994.

One of the delights of the Bernstein Collection is its astonishing breadth: there's extensive correspondence not only with those working in music, but also with writers, politicians, film stars, artists, journalists – and long-standing friends who offered Bernstein support at times when he needed it. I have tried to reflect something of the range of these friendships. Even so, it is as a giant *musical* personality that Bernstein is remembered, and this has been my primary criterion for choosing the letters to include in what is the first published volume devoted to Bernstein's correspondence. In terms of other composers, Bernstein was in very close contact with Aaron Copland from the end of the 1930s onwards, and he also had an extensive correspondence with David Diamond stretching over five decades – a group of letters sometimes marked by tetchiness on Bernstein's part, and by a tendency to over-sensitivity on Diamond's. Such is the volume of the correspondence that I have had to omit letters from other close musical friends such as Paul Bowles and Irving Fine. These deserve to see the light of day in a future publication. In addition to correspondence with composers and performers, I have also aimed to include letters that chart the genesis of Bernstein's compositions. Two of his first big successes were collaborations with Jerome Robbins: a ballet (*Fancy Free*) and a musical (*On the Town*). In the case of *Fancy Free*, much of it was conceived and composed while Robbins and Bernstein were working away from home. As a result, there was detailed discussion by letter. It is frustrating that Robbins' letters to Bernstein about this ballet seem not to have survived. (Bernstein was constantly moving house at the time – and it was just before the arrival on the scene of his assistant, Helen Coates, who ensured that everything thereafter was carefully saved.) However, Bernstein's letters to Robbins constitute a fascinating chronicle of the work's composition. *On the Town* is a very different case: a collaboration where those concerned were working in the same place at the same time. As a result, there is no substantial correspondence about it with any of the collaborators (Bernstein, Robbins, Betty Comden, and Adolph Green) – indeed, in 1945, just after the show had opened on Broadway Comden mentioned in a letter to Bernstein that it was the first time she had written him since 1941.

*West Side Story* presents a more complex case – partly because it took so long to get started. A fascinating letter from Arthur Laurents, undated, but probably written in April 1949, raises some detailed points responding to what had evidently been a difficult phone conversation with Bernstein. A follow-up letter from Laurents (Letter 283) reveals that Bernstein considered pulling out of the project.



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