

# CELEBRATING LEONARD BERNSTEIN

Pianist Jeffrey Siegel  
honors the composer on  
his birth centennial



died in 1990.

In Scottsdale, Siegel will play four lesser-known Bernstein pieces, three of the *Anniversaries*, short compositions for piano, and an unpublished piece that Siegel debuted. He is the only

pianist who has played it professionally.

"Lenny called the *Anniversaries*, 'snapshots in sound, showing his introspective, private side rather than the extroverted personality many associate with him,' he says.

The pieces are in honor of Copland, Johnny Mehegan, a jazz pianist Bernstein liked to listen to in Manhattan's musical-rich Greenwich Village, and for Helen Coates, his personal secretary.

## MESSAGE OF THE MAESTRO

Siegel met Bernstein as a young man through a mutual friend, American mezzo-soprano, Jenny Tourel, who escorted the young pianist back stage to meet with him. Then, in a series of subscription concerts in November 1988, conducted by Zubin Mehta, he spoke at length with Bernstein, as they often encountered each other during and after rehearsals and performances.

"We chatted in the conductor's room, and he said to me that his publicist, Maggie Carson, attended and enjoyed my 'Keyboard Conversations,'" he recalls. "He told me how pleased he was that I was using the format he so much approved of."

Then Bernstein said something that has resonated with Siegel since and helped reconfirm his life's path to 75 and beyond: "Of all the great things you are doing, including performing as a concert pianist with symphony orchestras, make sure you continue to make time to do these programs. Few musicians can play music well and talk about it just as well."

Case in point: An 11-year-old boy approached Siegel after a recent "Keyboard Conversation" and noted, "Mr. Siegel, you know, Beethoven is not that bad, after all."

Bernstein: He's pretty good, too. ■

David M. Brown » *The Entertainer!*

Leonard Bernstein's 100th birthday is a west side story and an east side story; one of joy uptown, downtown and everywhere great music, music-making and music-makers are loved.

"It's wonderful that all over the musical world, his music is being celebrated this year," says pianist Jeffrey Siegel, who, like Bernstein, speaks with his audiences from the stage.

"He wanted to be remembered as a conductor and music educator, but he told me that he was most concerned that his music would survive him."

*Leonard Bernstein at 100: A Musical Celebration* is the final of Siegel's four annual "Keyboard Conversations," piano concerts with commentary. The show is at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 3, at the Virginia Piper Concert Hall at Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts.

"*West Side Story*, one of the great musicals of the 20th century, was 60 years old last year," he adds. "Many of his other compositions are being played frequently into the 21st century. Gladly, we can say that his music has survived."

Phoenix native Steven Spielberg has just announced a film remake of the 1961 *West Side Story*, with the book by Tony Kushner.

Winner of 16 Grammys, including a Lifetime Achievement in 1985, Bernstein (1918–1990) was music director of the New York Philharmonic, 1958–1969, and laureate director until his death. His compositional range was

wide: symphonic and orchestral music, ballet, film and theater, choral works, opera, chamber music and piano pieces.

Specifically, other well-known compositions include the "Serenade for Violin, Strings, Harp and Percussion," the "The Three Dance Episodes from 'On the Town, Mass,'" in memory of John F. Kennedy, the masterpiece choral work, "Chichester Psalms," and three symphonies.

Siegel studied as a youth with three of the 20th century's premier teachers: Rudolf Ganz, Rosina Lhévinne at The Juilliard School in New York City, and, while a Fulbright Scholar, with Ilona Kabos in London. The great Arthur Rubinstein, considered the greatest modern Chopin interpreter, coached him.

Siegel has appeared with the great orchestras worldwide: the Berlin Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, London Symphony, The Philadelphia Orchestra, Moscow State Symphony Orchestra, NHK Symphony of Japan and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

The conductors he partnered with are legends from yesterday and today: Pierre Boulez, Neeme Järvi, James Levine, Zubin Mehta, Sir Simon Rattle, Claudio Abbado, Lorin Maazel, Eugene Ormandy, Sir George Solti, Klaus Tennstedt, Yevgeny Svetlanov and his friend of 45 years, Leonard Slatkin, with whom he recorded the complete piano works of George Gershwin, an Amazon bestseller. Other recent CD releases include *The Romantic Music of Chopin* and *The Miracle of Mozart*.

This is the 39th year in Scottsdale

for Siegel's Keyboard Conversations, which the young septuagenarian also performs in 20 other cities annually, including New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Minneapolis, Houston, Dallas, Denver, Washington, D.C. and at London's Kings Place.

In these, he plays virtuoso works for the piano by a broad range of composers and briefly discusses the works before playing them. He follows each concert with a question-and-answer session.

The programs, which began nearly 50 years ago at Northwestern University in Siegel's native Chicago, have been widely praised by attendees and critics.

## RHAPSODY IN JOY

In this tribute, Siegel will perform piano arrangements of songs from Bernstein's *West Side Story*, plus two works associated with Bernstein: Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, which Bernstein both played and conducted, and Aaron Copland's *El Salon Mexico*, an orchestral piece that Bernstein arranged for solo piano, his first published work.

"Lenny—he always wanted fellow musicians to call him that and not the more formal 'maestro' or 'Mr. Bernstein' because he said, 'We are all making music together'—played the *Rhapsody* more often than any other piano composition and recorded it twice," Siegel explains. "He talked about Gershwin's ability to, as he put it, 'perspire gorgeous melodies' effortlessly."

Gershwin and Copland were his favorite American composers. "Copland was a father figure for him through his life," he adds. Copland and Bernstein

**"Keyboard Conversations"**  
Scottsdale Center for the  
Performing Arts, 7380 E. Second  
Street, Scottsdale, 480.499.8587,  
scottsdaleperformingarts.org,  
7:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 3,  
\$29-\$49.