

West Side Story

Program

Selections from Focus Suite

Eddie Sauter (1914–1981)

I'm Late, I'm Late

Her

Pan

Greg Brown, tenor saxophone

Hymn for Everyone

Jessie Montgomery (1981–)

Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story*

Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990)

However, for those who might be interested in knowing what transpires on stage during the course of the dances, the following summary outlines the principal sections of the music (arranged so that one section flows into the next without a break, and ordered according to alternating high and low levels of emotional intensities):

Prologue (Allegro moderato) — The growing rivalry between two teenage gangs, the Jets and Sharks.

"Somewhere" (Adagio) — In a visionary dance sequence, the two gangs are united in friendship.

Scherzo (Vivace leggiero) — They break through the city walls, and suddenly find themselves in a world of space, air and sun.

Mambo (Presto) — Reality again; competitive dance between the gangs.

Cha-cha (Andantino con grazia) — The star-crossed lovers dance together.

Meeting Scene (Meno mosso) — Music accompanies their first spoken words.

"Cool," Fugue (Allegretto) — The Jets release their hostility.

Rumble (Molto allegro) — Climactic gang battle in which the two leaders are killed.

Finale (Adagio) — Love music developing into a procession, which recalls, in tragic reality, the vision of "Somewhere."

From notes by Jack Gottlieb in the program for the 1961 benefit concert premiering "Symphonic Dances"

May 16, 2024, 7:30 p.m. — Fireside Room, Rossmoor

May 19, 2024, 7:30 p.m. — Leshar Center for the Arts

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PROGRAM NOTES: West Side Story

Born in Brooklyn, New York, **Eddie Sauter** studied trumpet and composition at the Juilliard School. He composed and arranged for Artie Shaw, Woody Herman, and Benny Goodman. By the mid-1940s, he was considered one of the best big band arrangers and, in 1952, cofounded the Sauter-Finegan Orchestra with former Glen Miller arranger Bill Finegan. Formed specifically to produce recordings with newly developed high-fidelity technology, the group released a series of successful singles featuring previously unheard instrumental combinations and arrangements. A 21-piece ensemble began touring in 1953, but expenses and the decreased popularity of big bands in dance hall settings led to substantial debts that forced the orchestra to disband in 1957. In 1961, Sauter (who by that time was arranging Broadway shows and writing TV jingles) was asked by legendary saxophonist Stanley Getz, “out of the blue,” to compose original music for what would become the seven-movement *Focus Suite*. The power of a string orchestra with rhythm section and the cool strains of a tenor sax were fused in a work that has been described as “a meeting point between jazz and classical music.” About his father’s composing, Sauter’s son said, “I would frequently find him poring over something by Bartók, Prokofiev, or Stravinsky ... [he likely] learned the idiosyncrasies of string writing from these sources.” Although the score was fully composed for the strings and percussion (including harp and celesta), Sauter left the saxophone part blank for improvisation. The resulting interplay between improvisation grounded in the golden age of jazz and orchestration grounded in the Classical age was unmatched at the time. The suite is full of highly syncopated rhythms, colorful harmonies, and walking bass lines (continuous sequences of notes of equal duration in the string bass that move the music forward and provide a harmonic foundation). Like all the other movements in the suite, each of the movements being performed today has its own unique fairy-tale-like theme (Sauter said he created the movements to be individual stories or fairy tales, “as if Hans Christian Andersen were a musician.”) The frenetic “**I’m Late, I’m Late**” was inspired by both Bartók’s *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* and the song of the same name in Disney’s 1955 movie *Alice in Wonderland*. The movement begins with a spiky, scurrying theme in the strings, in the middle of which the saxophone appears, apparently hurrying in the opposite direction. Brushes on snare drum add to an air of slightly comic haste and confusion. The exquisite “**Her**,” featuring a part for the celesta, follows. Dedicated to the memory of Getz’s mother, the movement expresses a lush and plaintive mood, with the strings providing the lightest of textures. In one passage, the saxophone and a solo violin curl around one another with quiet subtlety (it has been suggested that moments in the movement reflect the “sparse, ethereal quality of late Debussy”). The next movement, “**Pan**,” written in 6/4 time, flamboyantly evokes images of Greek mythology. The agitated waltzlike string opening introduces the saxophone’s own, even more energetic—almost raucous—statement that quickly takes the lead. A calmer and broader development section follows before the movement returns to its opening mood. *Focus Suite* was recorded in January 1962 and was nominated for a Grammy Award in 1963. More than 60 years later, it stands “as one of the truly rare instances where elements of jazz and classical music converge to create a sound that defies categorization.” (Alex Chilowicz)

Composer and violinist **Jesse Montgomery** grew up in Manhattan’s Lower East Side, where her father (a jazz musician) and mother (a playwright and actor) often took her to events where activists and artists gathered. At age 4, she began violin at the Third Street Music School Settlement and began to compose at age 11. She started a long-standing association with the Sphinx Organization, a nonprofit that supports young African American and Latino string players, in her late teens. She received the Sphinx Medal of Excellence, the organization’s highest honor, and was the first resident composer for its string ensemble Sphinx Virtuosi, which has performed Montgomery’s works at Carnegie Hall six times. She received a bachelor’s degree in violin performance from the Juilliard School and a master’s degree in film and multimedia composition from New York University and is currently a graduate fellow in composition at Princeton University. Described by the BBC as “one of the most distinctive and communicative voices in the US, as a player and a creator,” she performs regularly with her own ensembles as well as with the Silkroad Ensemble (founded by Yo Yo Ma) and Sphinx Virtuosi. She is the recipient of numerous composing awards, including a 2014 Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Classical Composition for *Rounds*, recorded by pianist Awadagin Pratt and the string orchestra A Far Cry. She was named 2023 Composer of the Year by the classical music

Program Notes: West Side Story (continued)

magazine *Musical America* and in 2020 was selected for Project 19, the New York Philharmonic's multiseason initiative to commission and premiere 19 works by 19 women composers to commemorate the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote. In July 2021, she began a three-year appointment as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's composer-in-residence and received three commissions from the orchestra, two of which have already been premiered: "**Hymn for Everyone**" (2022) and "Transfigure to Grace" (2023). As a leading interpreter of twenty-first-century American sound and experience, Montgomery mixes classical conventions with elements of "everyday" music such as jazz, rock, gospel, rhythm and blues, and hip-hop. Her often socially conscious solo, chamber, choral, dance, and orchestral works, described by the *Washington Post* as "turbulent, wildly colorful and exploding with life," are regularly performed by leading ensembles worldwide. She first intended to structure her CSO commission as a suite of miniatures based on differing musical ideas. However, she soon found herself wanting to write a simple, melancholic work in tribute to her mother, who died in May 2021. She remembered a melody that "just [came] to me—a rare occurrence" after a mountain hike earlier in the pandemic. She had picked up her violin and "just started playing this melody, this hymn," which she named "Hymn for Everyone," because it "felt like a hymn" and was "referential to 'Lift Every Voice and Sing'" (a hymn often called the Black national anthem). While considering whether to use the melody as a basis for the commission, she discovered a poem her mother had written called "Poem for Everyone," finalizing a decision to expand the melody into a work for orchestra. The commission thus turned into, in her words, a "big chorale based on a simple melody that gets repeated and reframed" as it traverses through the orchestra's sections (families), which she imagined as "a collection of different choirs," exploring various washes of color and timbres with each of the melody's repetitions. More than most of her other compositions, "Hymn for Everyone" reflects Montgomery's background in film scoring, as it builds from a slow opening in the violas to an anchoring "big brass chorale in the middle." Montgomery notes that the work is both a response to the lingering effects of the pandemic and a reflection on hymns in general, which through history have "offered a sense of both community [an opportunity to sing collectively] and individual solace."

Conductor, composer, and pianist **Leonard Bernstein**, who was born and raised in Massachusetts, majored in music at Harvard University and obtained an advanced degree in conducting from the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia in 1941. In the summer of 1940, he was mentored by the Boston Symphony Orchestra's conductor, Serge Koussevitsky, at the orchestra's summertime Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood in Lenox, Massachusetts, and became Koussevitzky's conducting assistant there two years later; he became director of the center's orchestral and conducting programs after Koussevitsky's death, in 1951, and maintained a strong professional relationship with Tanglewood until his own death, in 1990. In 1943 Bernstein joined the New York Philharmonic as assistant conductor and began his 11-year tenure as its music director in 1958, becoming the first American-born conductor to lead a major American symphony. Expanding the orchestra's televised *Young People's Concerts*, he wrote, conducted, and narrated a total of 53 episodes over the next 14 years. His daughter Jamie wrote that, as a political activist and humanitarian, her father held onto a "fervent hope for a better world" and strongly believed that "artists had the power to tip the earthly balance ... if enough hearts would open themselves to the beauty of great music, there would be no room left in any of those hearts for evil, greed, or hate." When John F. Kennedy was assassinated, he declared, "This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before." Bernstein led the Philharmonic's televised tribute performance of Mahler's Symphony No. 2 ("Resurrection") two days after the assassination. Over multiple decades, he conducted United Nations-related concerts and, near the end of his life, conducted Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in Berlin to celebrate the fall of the Berlin Wall. As a composer, Bernstein wrote in many genres, including orchestral music, ballet, film and theater music, choral works, chamber music, and piano pieces. His musical *West Side Story*, premiered in 1957, remains a landmark in the history of American theater. To create the astounding number of moods and actions portrayed by the music, Bernstein fused elements from older European and new American musical traditions. The result was immediately recognized as an original art form that is neither opera nor musical theater. Drawing from the "old," Bernstein employed complicated vocal ensembles, fugues, and leitmotifs (such as the one related to gang violence). From the "new," he employed idiomatic jazz and Latin figurations and syncopations, dance rhythms, and fluid changes from spoken word to music. As the story of young love set

Program Notes: West Side Story (continued)

against a backdrop of gang warfare unfolds, the sounds of a classic symphony and the sounds of modern urban life (such as car horns and police whistles) intermingle seamlessly. Bernstein's capacity for enhancing a new work's impact with quotes from music of the past is exemplified in the main melody of "Somewhere," where the words "There's a place for us" are set to a poignant phrase from the opening of the "Adagio" in Beethoven's "Emperor" piano concerto. In early 1960, Bernstein took nine sections from the musical's score to create a suite designed specifically for the concert stage. "**Symphonic Dances from West Side Story**" reorders, combines, and metamorphoses relatively few thematic ideas to tell a story—filled with both hope and despair—that doesn't require knowledge of the events portrayed onstage. The story's tensions—in both the musical and the suite—are stunningly evoked through use of the tritone, an unstable and dissonant interval of three whole tones (nicknamed "diabolus in musica"—devil in music—due to its jarring nature). Prominent throughout the scores, it is perhaps most easily recognized at the beginning of the song "Maria" (heard in the suite's "Cha-cha"), where the ear wants the interval's top note to resolve (move to a more stable, more final-sounding note). When first heard in "Maria," it does resolve to the half-tone above. However, the song's final, sustained note—the top note in a tritone, heard with "a" of the word "Maria"—stays unresolved, leaving the listener with an unstable, "things are not fine" feeling. A perfect vehicle for depicting the unstable relationship between Tony and Maria as well as the rootlessness (and resulting ruthlessness) of the Jets and Sharks, tritones—often many—are found in all the important motives and harmonies and particularly serve as a driving force in "Mambo," "Cool," and "Rumble." Like the musical, the suite ends on edge, with an evocative chord containing this distinctive, unsettling musical device.

BIOGRAPHIES



Matilda Hofman is music director and conductor of the Diablo Symphony Orchestra as well as conductor-in-residence of the Empyrean Ensemble at UC Davis. She is also artistic director of the San Francisco-based Left Coast Chamber Ensemble, with which she has premiered several works, including several operas. California guest engagements include Festival Opera, the Fremont Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Ballet, the Sacramento Ballet, and Sierra Summer Festival. Hofman also serves as a cover conductor for the San Francisco Symphony. Committed to education, she initiated an outreach program with the DSO that includes ensemble performances in schools as well as family concerts. She has performed at the Guggenheim in Bilbao, Spain, as well as at the Salzburg Festival, Paris Autumn Festival, the Berliner Festspiele, Holland Festival, and Luzerne Festival. She has also conducted alongside Ingo Metzmacher in many performances of Luigi Nono's *Prometeo* and prepared Chorwerk Ruhr for its debut performance with the Berlin Philharmonic. She has worked with Ensemble Modern, SWR Symphonieorchester, Ensemble Recherche, Bochumer Symphoniker, and Kammerakademie Potsdam. She has served as a conducting fellow at the Aspen Music Festival and School and has received awards from the League of American Orchestras and the Conductors Guild of America. Hofman was guest conductor for the Oberlin Opera Theater's November 2021 production of George Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, featuring Oberlin Conservatory students in the Vocal Studies Division and the Oberlin Orchestra. She holds degrees from Cambridge University, the Royal Academy of Music, and the Eastman School of Music.



Greg Brown earned his bachelor's degree in 1984 and his master's degree in 1992 from California State University, Hayward. From 1997 to 2021, he was instrumental director and chairman of the music department at Northgate High School in Walnut Creek, where he developed jazz band programs that have inspired countless students. He became chairman of the school's Performing Arts Department in 2004. Since 1989 Brown has served as the Alameda County Representative, and later Jazz Representative, to the California Music Educators Association, Bay Section Board. He has been a clinician and festival adjudicator throughout Northern California. Brown has guest-conducted the Mt. Diablo Unified School District High School Honor Orchestra, the Northern California Honor Band, and the Mt. Diablo Unified School District Middle School Honor Band. As a conductor, he has worked with Bobby Shew, Sean Jones, Carl Allen, Vijay Lyer, Laurence Hobgood, Julian Lage, Mic Gillette, Allen Carter, Jeff Beal, Pete Christieb, Andy Martin, Edgardo Cambon, Francisco Torres, Mary Fettig, Javier Cabanillas, Tamir

BIOGRAPHIES, continued

Hendelman, and many others. The Pleasanton Legislative Action Committee selected him as their Educator of the Year in 1988. He received the Outstanding Band Director Award at the Monterey Jazz Festival High School Big Band Competition in 1988 and at the Pacific Grove Band Review in 1989. In 2009 Brown's contributions to music education were recognized when the CMEA Bay Section awarded him the Gil Frietas Award. Additionally, Brown received the Jazz Educator of the Year Award from the CMEA Bay Section in 2014. That same year, the Mt. Diablo Unified School District chose him as one of five finalists for Teacher of the Year. In 2019 he received the Paul A. Shaghoian Jazz Educator Award: Honoring Excellence in Jazz Education and Performance by the California Music Educators Association and, in 2020, received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Mt. Diablo Unified School District. Since 2014 he has been codirector and educational consultant for the Big Band of Ross-moor. Finally, he has served as the Northern California liaison/clinician for the Stanford Jazz Workshop since 2023. Brown currently serves on the board of directors of the Diablo Symphony Association.

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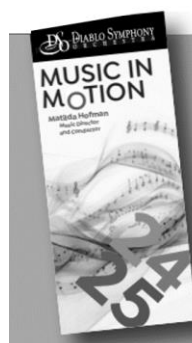
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