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### Leonard Bernstein: An American Life

**Aired:** October 8 through  
December 18, 2004

**Hosted:** Susan Sarandon  
Produced by WFMT

**E-mail:** [WUSF 89.7](mailto:WUSF 89.7)

[Order the entire Bernstein series](#)



#### Information on Leonard Bernstein: An American Life



Leonard Bernstein

Leonard Bernstein: An American Life, an 11-hour audio documentary, narrated by Susan Sarandon, was aired on WUSF 89.7 from October 8 through December 18, 2004.

While the last episode of this program has been broadcast, the full 11 CD set for Leonard Bernstein: An American Life is now available online at [www.zbs.org](http://www.zbs.org) or by calling 800-662-3345, Monday through Friday 9 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (EST).

This 11 CD set is the complete audio documentary as heard on public radio across the country and here in the Tampa Bay area. It is narrated by Susan Sarandon and is based on nearly 100 exclusive interviews, rare archival tapes of Bernstein interviews and rehearsals, historic correspondence, and of course, lots of music. The series was in production for over 7 years and is the most in-depth documentary ever created about Bernstein.

The program contains 7 hours that follow Bernstein's chronology, and 4 hours focused on conducting and composing exclusively. The chronology explores, in great detail, his roots, his apprenticeship period, his tenure with the New York Philharmonic, his devotion to Israel, his involvement with American and international politics, his friendships with JFK, with Aaron Copland, Serge Koussevitsky, Fritz Reiner, Lukas Foss, and dozens of others. It covers his work as a teacher, at Tanglewood and other institutions, as an extraordinary television educator through his Omnibus programs and The Young People's Concerts. There are two hours about Bernstein as Conductor with detailed discussion of what a conductor actually does, and why Bernstein was different than other great conductors. And there are two hours on Bernstein the Composer with discussions of his symphonies, his theater music, West Side Story, Candide, Mass, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue and much more.

#### The series included the following episodes:

01. Bernstein: The Early Years
02. Twelve Gates to the City (Meeting the Mentors)
03. New York, New York
04. Tonight
05. A New Frontier/The Philharmonic Years
06. Bernstein: the Conductor, part I
07. Bernstein: the Conductor part II
08. Crossroads

- 09. Bernstein: The Composer, Pt 1
- 10. Bernstein: The Composer, Pt II
- 11. A Candle burned at Both Ends

**Total of 11 hours on CD.**

**Leonard Bernstein: An American Life** was a groundbreaking 11-part documentary series illuminating the life and work of musical titan [Leonard Bernstein](#). The series of 60-minute programs was narrated by Academy Award-winning actress Susan Sarandon.

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990) was the last classical musician of our time to be a household name; no one since has achieved the level of fame with the general public as Bernstein. Bernstein became an American icon not only because of his ability to conduct and compose, but also because of the power of his personality and his passion to communicate, through music, about life, love and the human condition. Youngsters (and adults) in the 1960s and beyond were the beneficiaries of Bernstein's intense music making and insightful commentary on his Young People's Concerts.



Leonard Bernstein

This radio event took six years to produce. It is, says producer Steve Rowland, "a story -- a profound and multi-layered story with many fascinating twists: the number and variety of people, places, ideas and artistic issues that Bernstein worked with, came into contact with, and ultimately affected is stunning. And on top of his extraordinary talents in music, as a composer, a conductor, a performer and educator, there was still more: He occupied a place in American culture as a voice of conscience, a voice for peace, a supporter of democracy in its broadest vision, and a force working to bring the world together through music and art. These 11 hours of radio tell a monumental story."

Virtually every aspect of Bernstein's career and life was explored through the words of Bernstein's own correspondence as well as interviews with more than one hundred people who knew and worked with him. These luminaries included John Adams, Marin Alsop, Betty Comden, John Corigliano, Adolph Green, Bobby McFerrin, Hal Prince, Mary Rodgers, Mstislav Rostropovich, Stephen Sondheim, and many others. Bernstein's family also participates in the production. His brother Burton, son Alexander, and daughters Nina and Jamie all appear through their thought-provoking interviews and readings.

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