

Overture to “Candide”

Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990)

Written: 1956

Movements: one

Style: Contemporary American

Duration: 5 minutes

If the classical music world ever had a “Renaissance Man,” Leonard Bernstein was it. He was a composer, pianist, and conductor. As a composer, he was at home in both worlds of “classical” and popular music. Both American and European audiences admired him as a conductor; orchestral musicians revered him—unheard of! His discourses on music could be hi-falutin’ enough for the esteemed Norton Lectures at Harvard, but almost every baby-boomer learned the basics of music from his inimitable television broadcasts of Young People’s Concerts. There is a long list of current conductors and composers who proudly list Leonard Bernstein as their teacher.

Just a cursory glance at a shortened list of Bernstein’s compositions from the 1940s and 1950s will give you an idea of the breadth of this remarkable man’s interests. He wrote two symphonies, two ballets (*Fancy Free* and *Facsimile*), the Broadway musicals *On the Town*, *Peter Pan*, *Wonderful Town*, and *West Side Story*, the score for the film *On the Waterfront*, the opera *Trouble in Tahiti* and the operetta *Candide*. Curiously, virtually all of those works were great successes, except for *Candide*.

Lillian Hellman wrote a play based on Voltaire’s *Candide* and asked Bernstein to write some incidental music for it. He readily agreed. “Puritanical snobbery, phony moralism, inquisitorial attacks on the individual, brave-new-world optimism, essential superiority—aren’t these all charges leveled against American society by our best thinkers?” he asked. “And they are also charges made by Voltaire against his own society.” Bernstein was so enthusiastic that he convinced Hellman to turn the play into an operetta. The production opened on Broadway in 1956 and ran for only 76 performances. The problem seemed to be that audiences didn’t get the point. As the conductor of the London production of *Candide* put it, “Opera fans did not go to the West End [London’s “Broadway” district] looking for operas, and for people who came expecting a musical it was too serious.” The *New York Times* had nearly the same criticism: “The eighteenth-century philosophical tale is not ideal material for a theatre show.”

The original production may have been a flop, but Bernstein’s overture, when he conducted it at a New York Philharmonic concert in 1957, was an instant hit. Bernstein uses tunes from four songs in *Candide* for the overture: *Eldorado*, *What’s the Use?*, *Glitter and Be Gay*, and *It Must Be So*. The overture starts with a bang and never lets up. Fast, sparkling, and witty: It’s easy to hear why this overture has always been an audience favorite.

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Symphonic Dances

Bruce Stark (1956–)

Written: 2015

Movements: Four

Style: Contemporary American

Duration: Fifteen minutes

Bruce Stark was born in San Diego, California. He started out as a physics major in college but eventually changed his major to composition. He completed a master's degree in composition at the Juilliard School as a student of Roger Sessions and Vincent Persichetti, thereafter residing in Tokyo for more than 20 years, producing a collection of works that reveal a compelling musical voice. In 2013, he returned to the U.S. and joined the music faculty of DigiPen Institute of Technology (in the Seattle area).

His music reflects the varied elements of his musical upbringing: studies in percussion, jazz piano and classical composition. From piano and chamber works to choral and orchestral pieces, Stark's music has been performed on the concert stages of four continents, recorded on numerous CDs, and broadcast on radio programs worldwide.

The Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Timothy Muffitt, premiered the *Symphonic Dances* on October 21, 2016. Maestro Muffitt conducted a second performance at the 2017 Chautauqua Music Festival, and in 2018, Rebecca Tong led the Jakarta Symphony in a performance in Jakarta. Mr. Stark provides the following comments on his *Symphonic Dances*:

Symphonic Dances was composed in the summer of 2015, with the intention of creating a group of short, lively, fun pieces for orchestra. The pieces draw from my musical roots in diverse musical traditions. Dance No. 1 (Hoe-down) is inspired by music I heard a great deal when growing up, as I spent many an evening playing guitar accompaniment to my father's blue-grass mandolin playing. Both of my grandfathers were self-taught fiddle players, and family gatherings were always brought to life with these sounds. Dance No. 2 (Jazz) comes from a musical world that has been a love of mine since high school. For many years, I made a livelihood as jazz pianist, and my experiences as a jazz player often inform and inspire my writing for the concert stage. Dance No. 3 (Daydreamer's Waltz) draws from an older, classical tradition, and is perhaps the most orthodox and tradition-influenced of the set. In this movement (dare I confess?), I wanted to compose music that my teenage daughter—whose ballet dancing over the years brought me to rediscover the splendor, broad lyricism and compelling physical sweep of Tchaikovsky's ballet masterpieces—would enjoy. When I began to compose Dance No. 4 (Sevens) the only thing I was sure of was the meter. Perhaps because drums was my first instrument, odd meters and syncopation have always held a special appeal; Dance No. 4 grew out of an essentially rhythmic genesis. Themes from the first three dances weave together with a new theme to bring the fourth dance to a finale-like conclusion.