



MAMBO

(from Symphonic Dances from West Side Story)

Leonard Bernstein (1961)



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From *Symphonic Dances from West Side Story*

By Leonard Bernstein (USA)

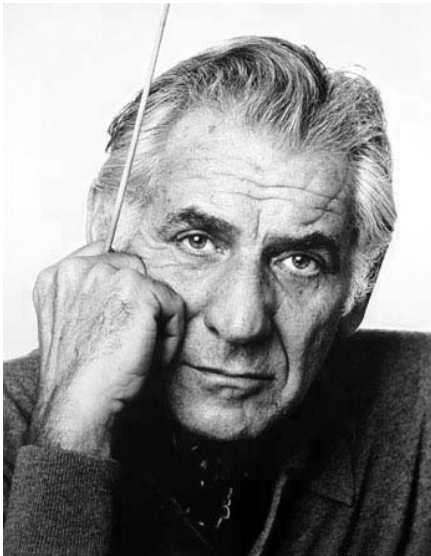
20th Century (1961)

LESSON INTRODUCTION

Important Terms and Concepts

- * **Musical Theatre:** a form of performance that combines songs, spoken words, dance, and acting in order to tell a story
- * **Syncopation:** when an accent occurs on a beat or portion of the beat that is normally unaccented
- * **Tempo:** the speed of music
- * **Mambo:** a Latin dance, generally in 4/4 meter with heavy syncopation and accents on the 2nd and 4th beats.

BEHIND THE MUSIC



Leonard Bernstein (1918 - 1990) was one of the first American-born conductors to lead world-class orchestras and compose music for hundreds of film and television productions. He left a legacy that includes three symphonies, a film score of singular distinction, and an important body of stage works, including one of the cornerstones of American musical theater—*West Side Story* (1957). Bernstein attended Harvard University, where he studied music theory. In 1937 he attended a Boston Symphony concert

The Shreveport Symphony Orchestra will perform Leonard Bernstein's *Symphonic Dances from West Side Story* at the May 6 concert! Encourage your students to come hear this piece performed live!

conducted by Dmitri Mitropoulos, where he greatly admired the conductor for

radiating a rare kind of enthusiasm with every score. Bernstein trained at Tanglewood's Berkshire Music Center, where he soon became the institution's guiding light, serving as teacher and mentor for generations of musicians. He conducted orchestras all over the world, served as the music director of the New York Philharmonic for 12 years, and became a popular figure throughout the US due to his televised appearances in the Young People's Concerts.

Bernstein's deep empathy for the human element in any musical style made him more effective both as a teacher and a composer. In *Symphonic Dances from West Side Story*, Bernstein employed vibrant instrumental combinations, complex rhythms, and a huge percussion section to create energetic dance numbers that tell both a love story and one of gang conflict. In this suite, we first the rivalry between the Jets and the Sharks, then the love story of Tony and Maria; the juxtaposition of the two stories creates a dramatic tension that shapes the entire work.

ACTIVE LISTENING

1. Hand out paper and colored pencils/crayons/markers to students. Have them listen to the first minute of "Mambo:"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RFUmQpjGZXE>

After the first minute, tell students, "This song, "Mambo," was written by Leonard Bernstein. It is part of the musical theatre play *West Side Story*. Musical theatre is a type of performance that uses songs, spoken word, acting, and dance to tell a story. As you listen to the rest of this song, try and imagine what might be happening in the story, and draw a picture of the story that you imagine."

Continue listening to the song as students draw pictures.

2. Ask:
 1. A mambo is a kind of dance. How would you describe the tempo (speed) of the dance? (fast)
 2. How would you describe the mood of the piece?
 3. What instruments did you hear?

4. **What kind of story did you imagine happening in the music?** (Allow students to share their story ideas).
3. Summarize the plot of *West Side Story*: "*West Side Story* is based on Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*, but is set in the Upper West Side of Manhattan. The main characters, Tony and Maria, belong to rival gangs. Tony belongs to the Jets, a white middle-class gang, and Maria belongs to the Puerto Rican gang the Sharks. During the song "Mambo," the two gangs perform a dance-off. Let's watch!
4. Play the Youtube video from the musical:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kokbJvSEMUY>
5. Ask: "What did you notice this time as you watched? How did the elements of music help to set up the story?"

SYNCOPIATION

6. Ask, "How would you describe the rhythms that you heard?"
7. Say, "A mambo dance is performed in 4/4 meter. Let's practice clapping a 4/4 beat." Lead students in clapping a 4/4 beat, possibly along with an excerpt from the original Youtube video so that they can hear
8. Ask, "Did all of the rhythms/accents in the song line up with our beat?"

"The rhythm of a mambo is syncopated. Syncopation happens when an accent occurs on a beat or portion of a beat that is normally unaccented. Let's learn some of the syncopated rhythms that Bernstein uses in his piece."
9. Refer to the rhythmic patterns on page 6 (from "MusicWorks Creative Exercises"). Teach students each of the rhythms by using call-and-response and repeating several times. (If these rhythms are too complex for your students, feel free to substitute other syncopated rhythms). Once students are confident with the rhythms, divide the class in half. Have one half of the class continue to clap the 4/4 pulse, while the other half claps one of the rhythmic patterns. Experiment with different rhythmic

combinations and layers, as appropriate. Encourage students to try and clap the 4/4 beat with one hand and a rhythmic pattern with another.

GO DEEPER

OPTION 1. ROMEO AND JULIET

West Side Story is a modern version of the Shakespearean play *Romeo and Juliet*. Have students listen to Sergei Prokofiev's "Montagues and Capulets" from the *Romeo and Juliet* suite:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1_JUTAO0SA

Prokofiev's music is stylistically very different from Bernstein's. However, it uses the same story as inspiration, and like "Mambo," this movement represents the clash between the two feuding sides. What elements of music does Prokofiev use to represent the feud? How is "Montagues and Capulets" similar to "Mambo?" How are they different?

The Shreveport Symphony Orchestra will perform an excerpt from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* suite at the Discovery Concerts on Jan. 26 – 27, 2017. Register your students for this free concert here!!

OPTION 2. MAMBO!

Teach students to dance a basic mambo, and practice the dance steps along with the music! Some instructions can be found here: <http://latin-dance.wonderhowto.com/how-to/do-four-basic-mambo-steps-350366/>

OPTION 3. MUSICAL CONNECTIONS: SYMPHONIC DANCES

Listen to other movements from the Bernstein's *Symphonic Dances* suite. Have students make guesses about what part of the story each represents. How are they similar and different from the "Mambo" movement?

- Cha-Cha: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AcF3xGXi_sw
- Cool Fugue: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kK4p92ZIPjE>
- Rumble: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7RvmANdoEQQ>

RESOURCES

YOUTUBE RECORDING:

- Symphonic Performance (Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra, conducted by Gustavo Dudamel): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RFUmQpjGZXE>
- Excerpt from *West Side Story*:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kokbJvSEMUY>

RHYTHMIC PATTERNS (from "MusicWorks Creative Exercise," below):

1

2

3

4

Pulse

LESSON ACTIVITIES WERE ADAPTED FROM:

- Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony: *What Can Music Do?*
https://kwsymphony.ca/education/guide_what_can_music_do.PDF
- MusicWorks Creative Exercise:
http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/BernsteinActivityvp_tcm4-375881.doc
- New York Philharmonic: *The Art of Listening*:
http://nyphil.org/~media/pdfs/education/1213/artoflistening_2008.pdf?la=en
- Norton Listening Guide:
https://wnorton.com/college/music/ilg/ENJ_12/BernsteinWestSideMambo/pdf/transcript.pdf
- Rochester Philharmonic: Bernstein Guide:
<http://www.rpo.org/UserFiles/Link/Bernstein.pdf>