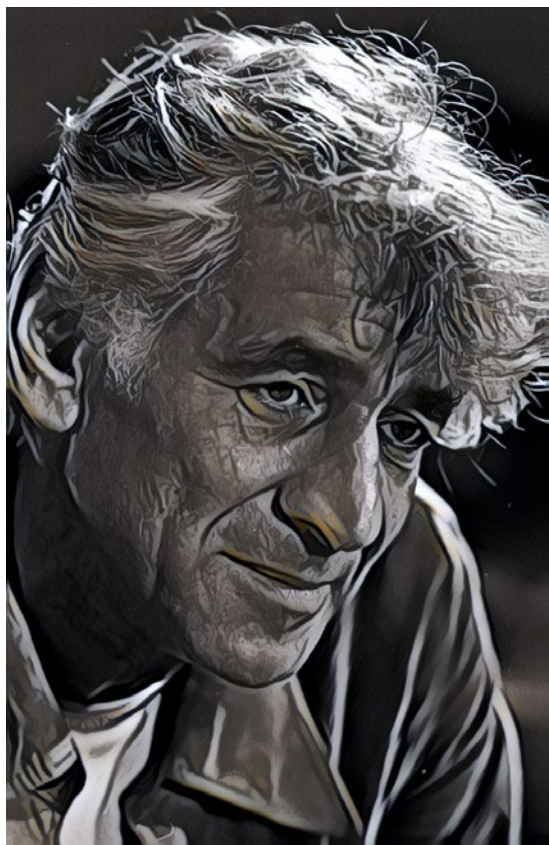


RCM SPARKS
Leonard Bernstein's





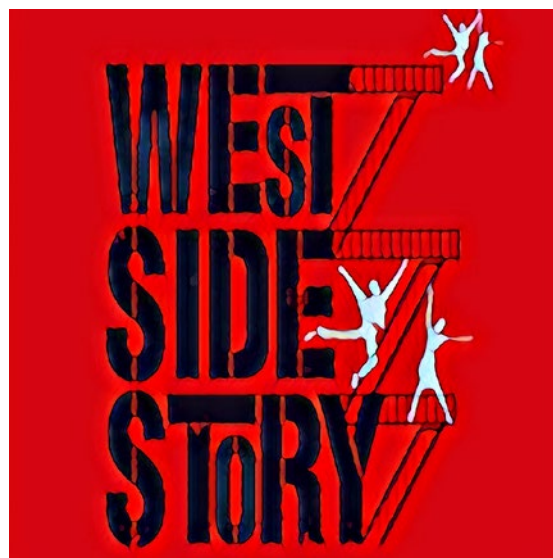
In this resource you will find an introduction to the composer Leonard Bernstein and his iconic orchestral work West Side Story. As well as a specially composed song to aid learning, there are links to short YouTube clips to accompany the re-telling of the plot, an activity to explore themes and suggestions of topics that could be explored further in a PHSE setting.



Learn

Leonard Bernstein (1918 -1990) was an American composer, conductor and pianist.

He mainly lived in New York. He wrote many pieces of music for orchestras and he wrote six musicals that were performed on Broadway (New York's equivalent of the West End in London). The most famous of these musicals was a show called 'West Side Story'.



West Side Story is piece of musical theatre with singers, dancers and an orchestra. The music mixes classical music with Jazz and Latin American rhythms. It was first performed in 1957 on Broadway in New York. The film of West Side Story won 10 Oscars in 1961.



Leonard Bernstein later turned the music from West Side Story into an orchestral piece – without the singing or dancing. These were called the Symphonic Dances from West Side Story.



Learn

Understanding the story

The story of West Side Story is based on William Shakespeare's play Romeo and Juliet. It is set in the 1950s in the rough side of New York. At the centre of the story are two rival gangs: the Jets and the Sharks. They are gangs based on race. The Jets are white and the Sharks are originally from the Caribbean island of Puerto Rico. They hate each other and are constantly fighting, to show who is in control of that area of the city.

Before watching the the film's opening scene below, have these questions in mind:

- How does the music make you feel?
- What emotions are in the music (tense, humorous, violent, overwhelming)
- What instruments can you hear? (drums/percussion, saxophones, trumpets, violins, police whistle)
- What does the music sound like? (jumpy, jazzy, clashy, rhythmic)



The Prologue

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxoC5Oyf_ss

The Rumble

The two rival gangs set up a 'rumble' to settle the question of who is in charge. They are going to make the challenge to each other at the neighborhood dance that evening. Tony and Maria meet at the dance. Tony used to be a Jet and is still best friends with the Jets' leader Riff. Maria is the sister of the leader of the Sharks - Bernardo. At the dance, while the gangs get aggressive with each other, Tony sees Maria and they dance together and fall in love.



Dance at the Gym

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbg15byRQUs>



Tony learns the name of the girl he has just fallen in love with: Maria

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

Tony & Maria

The story of West Side Story is of how Tony and Maria try to be together despite coming from enemy gangs. However, it is a very sad story full of fights and revenge and Tony is killed just before they can run away together.



This scene is where they're dreaming of running away together.

"There's a place for us"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQ4ogstDVE>



Explore

Themes

West Side Story touches on some very powerful and relevant subjects and you may wish to explore them further with your class in a PHSE setting:

- Peer pressure/belonging/gangs
- Racism
- Expressing anger
- Relationships/love/dating

The story of West Side Story is inspired by William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and further learning could involve exploring the similarities of the two stories.



Frozen statues

You can play this game if you are in an open space either outdoors or in a hall. If you don't have a large space to do this in, the game could be modified to work in a classroom.

Ask the students to walk around the room in silence and when you clap your hands they are to freeze like a statue. Repeat these 2 or 3 times so they get the idea.

Now start to create tableaux in differing size groups using themes from the piece, for example:

"This time when I clap you are to show me the frozen statue of: someone who is 'cool'"

"This time when I clap you are to show me the frozen statue of: someone who is angry"

"This time when I clap make find a group of 4 and show me a frozen statue of rivals"

"This time when I clap find a partner and show me a frozen statue of 'true love'"

"This time when I clap make find a group of 6 and show me a frozen statue of dancing"

"This time when I clap find a partner and show me a frozen statue of 'heart-broken'"

"This time when I clap find a group of 8 and show me a frozen statue of friends forever"





We're Gonna Dance by Sam Chaplin

We're gonna dance, we're gonna sing
We're gonna fly, we're gonna fling

We're gonna dance, we're gonna sing
We're gonna fly, we're gonna fling

Then we'll cool down, yes we'll cool right down, down, down.
(finger clicks: click, click)

Then we'll cool down, yes we'll cool right down, down, down.
(finger clicks: click, click)

We're gonna dance, we're gonna sing
We're gonna fly, we're gonna fling

We're gonna dance, we're gonna sing
We're gonna fly, we're gonna fling

Then we'll cool down, yes we'll cool right down, down, down.
(finger clicks: click, click)

Then we'll cool down, yes we'll cool right down, down, down.
(finger clicks: click, click)

And we'll dream of place where you and I can be together.
Sing it soft like a prayer, and your heart will lead you there

(finger clicks: click, click)
(finger clicks: click, click)

We're gonna dance, we're gonna sing
We're gonna fly, we're gonna fling

We're gonna dance, we're gonna sing
We're gonna fly, we're gonna fling

Then we'll cool down, yes we'll cool right down, down, down.
(finger clicks: click, click)

Then we'll cool down, yes we'll cool right down, down, down.
(finger clicks: click, click)

We're gonna dance!

Sam Chaplin's specially composed song, 'We're Gonna Dance' is full of jazz rhythms and harmonies like West Side Story. The song delves also into ideas & themes from West Side Story.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j10fGCTdQrk>



***"We're gonna dance, we're gonna sing
We're gonna fly, we're gonna fling"***

This is a reference to the dancing and exuberance on the stage.

"Then we'll cool down..."

There's so much aggression and tension in West Side Story, The Jets get told to cool down and be cool and click their fingers.

"And we'll dream of a place where you and I can be together"

This is Tony and Maria longing to escape together – rising above the hatred.

"Say it soft like a prayer and your heart will lead you there"

Tony says that if you say the name 'Maria' softly it's like praying.

Further learning

This BBC Ten Pieces resource explores Mambo from Symphonic Dances from West Side Story in more detail.



[CBBC - Ten Pieces - 'Mambo' from Symphonic Dances from 'West Side Story' by Leonard Bernstein](#)