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Great Performances: The Bernstein Centennial Celebration at Tanglewood Premieres Friday, December 28 on PBS to Honor the 100th Birthday of Music Legend Leonard Bernstein

Boston Symphony Orchestra gala concert hosted by Audra McDonald features Andris Nelsons, John Williams, Keith Lockhart, Michael Tilson Thomas, Isabel Leonard, Yo-Yo Ma, Susan Graham, Jessica Vosk, Tony Yazbeck and more

In honor of Leonard Bernstein’s 100th birthday, Tanglewood—the famed summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra—dedicated its entire 2018 season to the iconic composer, conductor, performer, educator and humanitarian. The festivities culminated on Bernstein’s centennial birthday on August 25, 2018, in a special celebrity-studded gala concert, with every memorable moment captured for a worldwide audience by THIRTEEN’s Great Performances series. Great Performances: The Bernstein Centennial Celebration at Tanglewood features some of the world’s leading performers and musicians from the classical stage, opera and musical theater in a tribute to the music legend. The program premieres nationwide Friday, December 28 at 9 p.m. on PBS (check local listings) and will be available to stream the following day via pbs.org/gperf and PBS apps.
Hosted by film, television and theater star Audra McDonald, Great Performances: The Bernstein Centennial Celebration at Tanglewood features appearances by prominent conductors Andris Nelsons, Christoph Eschenbach, Keith Lockhart, John Williams and Michael Tilson Thomas leading an incredible orchestra made up of musicians from some of the organizations most important to Bernstein. Joining the Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO) are performers from the New York Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra, Pacific Music Festival, and Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival. World-renowned classical music artists Midori, Thomas Hampson, Isabel Leonard, Yo-Yo Ma, Kian Soltani, Nadine Sierra and Susan Graham perform during the centennial celebration, along with leading Broadway talent Jessica Vosk and Tony Yazbeck, and the Tanglewood Festival Chorus.

Directed for the stage by James Darrah, Great Performances: The Bernstein Centennial Celebration at Tanglewood illuminates the breadth of Bernstein’s incredible life and career, which inspired generations of music lovers around the globe – from his talent as a composer to his generosity in mentoring other composers and musicians, his inimitable role as a driving musical force at Tanglewood for over 50 years and more.

Song List

Overture to “Candide,” Leonard Bernstein
Andris Nelsons conducting

First movement “Phaedrus; Pausanias (Lento–Allegro)” from “Serenade (after Plato’s Symposium),” Leonard Bernstein
Christoph Eschenbach conducting
Midori, violin

Meditation No. 3 from “Mass,” Leonard Bernstein
Christoph Eschenbach conducting
Kian Soltani, cello

“Kaddish 2” from Symphony No. 3, “Kaddish,” Leonard Bernstein
Keith Lockhart conducting
Nadine Sierra, soprano
Women of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus

Selections from “West Side Story”: “Prologue,” “Jet Song,” “Maria,” “A boy like that – I have a love,” “Tonight (Quintet),” Leonard Bernstein
Michael Tilson Thomas conducting; Joshua Bergasse, choreographer
Performed by Isabel Leonard, Jessica Vosk, Tony Yazbeck and other Broadway artists

“Der Schildwache Nachtlied” from “Des Knaben Wunderhorn,” Gustav Mahler
Andris Nelsons conducting
Thomas Hampson, baritone
Finale of “Appalachian Spring,” Aaron Copland
Michael Tilson Thomas conducting

“Highwood’s Ghost,” An Encounter, John Williams
John Williams conducting
Yo-Yo Ma, cello; Jessica Zhou, harp

Finale from Symphony No. 2, “Resurrection,” Gustav Mahler
Andris Nelsons conducting
Nadine Sierra, soprano; Susan Graham, mezzo-soprano
Tanglewood Festival Chorus

“Somewhere” from “West Side Story” (Grand Finale), Leonard Bernstein
Andris Nelsons conducting
Performed by entire lineup of guest artists

Throughout its more than 40-year history on public television, Great Performances has provided viewers across the country with an unparalleled showcase of the best in all genres of the performing arts, serving as America’s most prestigious and enduring broadcaster of cultural programming. In addition to The Bernstein Centennial Celebration at Tanglewood, music icon Leonard Bernstein and his works have been featured in numerous other Great Performances specials over the years, including Leonard Bernstein: The Gift of Music (1993), Leonard Bernstein’s Candide (2005), Carnegie Hall Opening Night 2008: A Celebration of Leonard Bernstein (2008), a Boston Pops performance of “Times Square: 1944” in Tanglewood 75th Anniversary Celebration (2012) and many more.

Great Performances: The Bernstein Centennial Celebration at Tanglewood is a production of THIRTEEN Productions LLC for WNET, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Inc, C Major Entertainment, NHK and WDR. Directed for television by David Horn. For Great Performances: John Walker and Richard R. Schilling are producers; Bill O’Donnell is series producer; David Horn is executive producer.

Major support for this Great Performances program is provided by The Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation, the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Arts Fund, the Irene Diamond Fund, Rosalind P. Walter, the LuEsther T. Mertz Charitable Trust, The Agnes Varis Trust, The Starr Foundation, the Kate W. Cassidy Foundation, The Philip and Janice Levin Foundation, Ellen and James S. Marcus, The Abra Prentice Foundation, the Lillian Goldman Programming Endowment, Jody and John Arnhold and PBS.

Websites:
pbs.org/gperf, facebook.com/greatperformances, @GperfPBS #GreatPerformancesPBS
About WNET

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About Leonard Bernstein And the BSO and Tanglewood

Leonard Bernstein's fifty year association with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Tanglewood began in the summer of 1940, when he became a member of Serge Koussevitzky's first conducting class at the new Berkshire Music Center, in part thanks to a written recommendation from Aaron Copland. In a letter to Koussevitzky—who became a mentor and great friend of Bernstein's over the next ten years—Bernstein described that summer as "the happiest and most productive of my life." He would go on to become Koussevitzky's assistant at Tanglewood beginning in 1942, and would return virtually every summer of his life thereafter to work with both the Boston Symphony and Tanglewood Music Center orchestras. Bernstein's time as a student at Tanglewood played an integral role preparing him for his first big break in 1943, when, at age 25, he stepped in for Bruno Walter in a nationally broadcast concert with the New York Philharmonic. He made his BSO debut the following winter in February 1944, leading his own Symphony No. 1, Jeremiah, and Copland's El México. Following many decades of major accomplishments and an undeniable impact in the music world, in 1988, Leonard Bernstein turned 70 and Tanglewood threw a four-hour concert/birthday party, Bernstein at 70!, that was aired on PBS's Great Performances, was hosted by Beverly Sills, and featured a star-studded line-up. Bernstein made his final Tanglewood appearances just two years later, on August 29, 1990, leading the BSO in a dramatic performance of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony as well as the “Four Sea Interludes” from Peter Grimes for what would become his final appearance before his death on October 14, 1990.

At Tanglewood and with the BSO, Bernstein lead some of the most important performances in 20th century musical history, including the first American performance of Benjamin Britten's opera Peter Grimes (commissioned by Koussevitzky), and the world premiere performance of Olivier Messiaen’s Turangalîla Symphony (commissioned by the BSO). In 1951, after Koussevitzky's death, Bernstein headed up the orchestral and conducting programs at Tanglewood, where he remained active as a conductor and teacher for the next 40 years; he wore a pair of Koussevitzky's cufflinks at every concert he conducted, and ritually kissed them before entering the stage for each performance. Bernstein composed two works for the Boston Symphony Orchestra: his Symphony No. 3, Kaddish, commissioned for the orchestra's 75th anniversary and given its American premiere by the BSO in 1964; and his Divertimento, a BSO centennial commissioned that was premiered in September 1980. The BSO also gave the world premiere performance of Bernstein’s Symphony No. 2, Age of Anxiety (dedicated to Koussevitzky), with the composer as piano soloist; the first concert performance of his suite from his only film score, On the Waterfront; and the American premieres of his Serenade (after
Plato's Symposium) and Halil. For a more in depth history of Leonard Bernstein's relationship with the BSO and Tanglewood, click here.