

American MASTERS

20
years

thirteen
WNET NEW YORK

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press information

THIRTEEN/WNET NEW YORK'S *AMERICAN MASTERS* AIRS FIRST ENCORE OF CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED FILM, *LEONARD BERNSTEIN: REACHING FOR THE NOTE*, THIS SEPTEMBER ON PBS

A Production of
Thirteen/WNET
New York for PBS



Winner Of Emmy, Gold Hugo And CINE Golden Eagle Awards

Full-Scale Film Biography Of One Of The 20th Century's Most Beloved Icons Features Interviews With Stephen Sondheim, Michael Tilson Thomas, Jerome Robbins, Isaac Stern, John Mauceri, Carol Lawrence, Betty Comden, And Adolph Green, Among Others

*In the beginning was the note, and the note was with God;
and whosoever can reach for that note, reach high, and bring it back to us on earth...
and to the extent of his reach, partakes of the divine.*
– Leonard Bernstein

At the New York Philharmonic, the flags were flown at half-mast. Broadway dimmed its lights. Carnegie Hall announced a week of honorary concerts. And when the funeral procession passed a construction site, the workers removed their hard hats and called out, "Goodbye, Lenny!" The year was 1990 and the world had just lost an artistic giant. Leonard Bernstein was dead at the age of 72.

Thirteen/WNET's award-winning biography series *AMERICAN MASTERS* offers the first encore presentation of the critically acclaimed 1998 biography, *Leonard Bernstein: Reaching for the Note*. This two-hour original production, which has been shown around the world, airs Wednesday, September 6 at 9 p.m. (ET) on PBS (check local listings). When the film premiered, critics raved. "It celebrates the irrepressible energy, exuberance and inventiveness that took fire with such collaborators as Jerome Robbins and Stephen Sondheim," *The New York Times*; "Finally, a worthy TV look at a musical master," *Chicago Tribune*; "With her imposing arsenal of film clips...Lacy compiles a dazzling portrait of Bernstein," *The Hollywood Reporter*.

Reaching for the Note is directed and written by Susan Lacy and produced by Lacy and

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Margaret Smilow. The program is a co-production of Thirteen/WNET, Unitel (KirchGroup), NHK and Channel Four. The film is part of the 20th anniversary season of *AMERICAN MASTERS*.

“Growing up, Leonard Bernstein was a hero in my home. I cried every day making this film. I am delighted to once again share this very special program with our viewers,” says Susan Lacy, creator and executive producer of *AMERICAN MASTERS*, a five-time winner of the Emmy Award for Outstanding Primetime Non-Fiction Series and a recent recipient of its seventh Peabody Award. Lacy adds: “Despite the existence of a vast visual record of Bernstein in his many roles – teacher, conductor, composer, writer, humanitarian – a film portrait of Bernstein, which includes his personal correspondence and interviews with his family, did not exist until we made this film.”

As a subject, Bernstein is a monumental and complex one. *AMERICAN MASTERS Leonard Bernstein: Reaching for the Note* captures the texture and tone of his story and conveys the broader context of his times by incorporating both personal and historical materials – home movies, scrapbooks and letters, photographs, rehearsal footage, television interviews, and newsreels – much of which had never before been seen by the public. This stirring autobiographical approach provides an intimate, first-hand look at a human being who embraced the world with great zeal, but who was often plagued by self-doubt and despair.

Leonard Bernstein became a conducting sensation overnight in 1943 at the age of 25 when he stepped in for the New York Philharmonic’s ailing guest conductor Bruno Walter. “Little did we realize that the next day, Lenny would be one of the most famous people in America,” his brother, Burton Bernstein, remembers.

Two years later he was named director of the New York City Symphony. He returned to the philharmonic in 1957 and became the first American to serve as musical director of a major orchestra anywhere in the world. When he left in 1969, he had conducted 939 concerts with the orchestra, more than any other conductor in its history.

Bernstein traveled the world, winning international acclaim as both conductor and composer. He was the first American to conduct at Milan’s historic opera house, La Scala. His

versatile musical genius brought him to Broadway, where he composed the music for the landmark productions *On the Town* and *West Side Story*. He introduced several generations of Americans to classical music with such television programs as *Omnibus* and *Leonard Bernstein's Young People's Concerts with the New York Philharmonic*.

Bernstein's brother, Burton, and his children, Jamie Bernstein-Thomas, Nina Bernstein and Alexander Bernstein offer their own very personal accounts of life with the great maestro. "He was omnivorous in his intellectuality and his love of everything," Burton Bernstein says. "That, I suppose, is the key to Lenny."

At the core of *AMERICAN MASTERS Leonard Bernstein: Reaching for the Note* is Bernstein's own words and voice. A prodigious and outstanding writer and raconteur, Bernstein documented every period of his remarkable life. Through the extensive use of his written and recorded materials in the film, Bernstein himself does the talking, exploring his life philosophically and discussing his work as an artist.

The film invites viewers into Bernstein's inner circle through candid and anecdotal interview segments with friends, colleagues, peers and critics. They include lyricists Betty Comden and Adolph Green, composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim, playwright Arthur Laurents, conductors John Mauceri and Seiji Ozawa, conductor and composer Michael Tilson Thomas, actress Carol Lawrence, and violinist Isaac Stern. The film also contains the last on-camera interview given by the late choreographer Jerome Robbins.

In *AMERICAN MASTERS Leonard Bernstein: Reaching for the Note*, Yaacov Mishori of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra recalls a concert when Bernstein was conducting with his usual energy and passion. He describes how, at one point, Bernstein leapt into the air and proceeded to fall off the podium. As he lay on the floor, he shouted to the stunned orchestra to continue until, finally, a cellist picked him up and put him back on the podium.

A major thread that weaves the film together and reveals even more about the interior life of Bernstein is his music, including such compositions as *Jeremiah*, *Kaddish*, *Chichester Psalms*, *Mass*, *Candide*, and *A Quiet Place*. Autobiographical in nature, his compositions not only score the film but also serve as a supplementary narrative, reflecting the influences of his Jewish

heritage, his concerns with morality and promoting human understanding, and his unbridled sense of humor, wit and playfulness.

AMERICAN MASTERS Leonard Bernstein: Reaching for the Note is a co-production of Thirteen/WNET New York, Unitel (KirchGroup), NHK and Channel Four. *Reaching for the Note* is directed and written by Susan Lacy and produced by Lacy and Margaret Smilow. Susan Lacy is executive producer of *AMERICAN MASTERS*. Barry Schulman is director of cultural and arts programs for Thirteen/WNET New York.

To take *AMERICAN MASTERS* beyond the television broadcast and further explore the themes, stories, and personalities of masters past and present, the companion Web site (<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters>), created by Thirteen/WNET New York, offers interviews, essays, photographs, outtakes, and other resources.

AMERICAN MASTERS is produced for PBS by Thirteen/WNET New York. This acclaimed series, now celebrating its 20th season, has become a cultural legacy in its own right. The *AMERICAN MASTERS* film library is one of the most highly honored in television history with profiles of more than 140 artistic giants. In addition to seven Peabodys, an Oscar and two Grammys, *AMERICAN MASTERS* has won 16 Emmys, including Outstanding Primetime Non-Fiction Series for 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003, and 2004.

Corporate funding is provided by Visa Signature. *AMERICAN MASTERS* is also made possible by the support of the National Endowment for the Arts and by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Additional funding for *AMERICAN MASTERS* is provided by Rosalind P. Walter, The Blanche & Irving Laurie Foundation, Jack Rudin, The Marilyn M. Simpson Charitable Lead Trusts, The André and Elizabeth Kertész Foundation, and public television viewers. More information about *AMERICAN MASTERS* can be found at: www.thirteen.org.

AMERICAN MASTERS Leonard Bernstein: Reaching for the Note
Press Release

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Thirteen/WNET New York is one of the key program providers for public television, bringing such acclaimed series as *Nature*, *Great Performances*, ***AMERICAN MASTERS***, *Charlie Rose*, *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, *Wide Angle*, *Secrets of the Dead*, and *Cyberchase* - as well as the work of Bill Moyers - to audiences nationwide. As the flagship public broadcaster in the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut metro area, Thirteen reaches millions of viewers each week, airing the best of American public television along with its own local productions such as *The Ethnic Heritage Specials*, *The Thirteen Walking Tours*, *New York Voices*, and *Reel New York*. With educational and community outreach projects that extend the impact of its television productions, Thirteen takes television "out of the box." And as broadcast and digital media converge, Thirteen is blazing trails in the creation of Web sites, enhanced television, CD-ROMs, DVD-ROMs, educational software, and other cutting-edge media products. More information about Thirteen can be found at: www.thirteen.org.

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