



# Leonard Bernstein and His Young People's Concerts

By Alicia Kopfstein-Penk

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## Leonard Bernstein and His Young People's Concerts By Alicia Kopfstein-Penk

Leonard Bernstein touched millions of lives as composer, conductor, teacher, and activist. He frequently visited homes around the world through the medium of television, particularly through his fifty-three award-winning *Young People's Concerts* (1958-1972), which at their height were seen by nearly ten million in over forty countries. Originally designed for young viewers but equally attractive to eager adults, Bernstein's brilliance as a teacher shined brightly in his televised presentations. And yet, despite the light touch of the "maestro," the innocence of his audience, and the joyousness of each show's topic, the turbulence of the times would peek through.

In this first in-depth look at the series, Alicia Kopfstein-Penk's *Leonard Bernstein and His Young People's Concerts* illustrates how the cultural, social, political, and musical upheavals of the long sixties impacted Bernstein's life and his *Young People's Concerts*. Responding to trends in corporate sponsorship, censorship, and arts programming from the Golden Age of Television into the 1970s, the *Young People's Concerts* would show the impact of and reflect the social and cultural politics of the Cold War, Vietnam, the Civil Rights and Women's Movements, and the Counterculture. Bernstein cheerfully bridged classical and popular tastes, juxtaposing the Beatles with Mozart even as he offered personal, televised pleas for peace and unity. At the same time, the concerts reflect Bernstein's troubled relationship as a professional musician with the dominance of atonality and his quest to nurture American music.

Anyone who enjoys the oeuvre of Leonard Bernstein, has watched his *Young People's Concerts*, or is passionate about the history of the long sixties will find in *Leonard Bernstein and His Young People's Concerts* a story of all three captured in this monumental study.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

[*Leonard Bernstein and His Young People's Concerts*] is a bristlingly well-informed monograph that draws on Bernstein's archives to tell the story of how his Young People's Concerts telecasts came to be, and why they have had no true successors. (*The Wall Street Journal*)

Kopfstein-Penk proves to be a thorough interrogator of both process and product and the personalities involved. She is particularly revealing about the history and development of the concerts and in her examination of the challenges to key participants in meeting the plethora of conflicting cultural, social and political tropes that emerged in the long 1960s. No less dogged is her analysis of the content and reception of the individual programmes, the detail noted with an almost forensic exactitude. The result is a remarkable document of a remarkable series of documents and an invaluable addition to our deeper understanding of the multi-faceted Bernstein. (*Classical Music*)

If one word can describe Kopfstein-Penk's work, it is 'complete.' The book is as much a history as it is a biographical volume on the pedagogical work of Leonard Bernstein. She provides hundreds of footnotes and eight appendices and leaves no stone unturned to tell the story of the Young People's Concerts. (*Quarter Notes*)

[The author] presents [Bernstein] to us as honestly and in as much detail as is humanly possible. (*Fanfare Magazine*)

As this well-researched volume reveals, Bernstein's specific pedagogical contributions through the medium of television show how Bernstein engaged classical music as a tool for widespread pleasure, social change, and global unity. At once a biography of Bernstein and of the *Young People's Concerts*, Kopfstein-Penk's book uses analysis of the concerts and the musical performances within them to shine new light on Bernstein's life and career. The resulting dialogue...is fascinating and thought-provoking. (*ARSC Journal*)

Alicia Kopfstein-Penk has written a thrilling and vivid account of the element in Leonard Bernstein's work that touched more Americans than anything else he did: the musical education—and inspiration, too—of an entire generation. The Young People's Concerts were at the heart of Leonard Bernstein's philosophy and this wonderfully researched book gives us the how and why of a splendid chapter in television history and Lenny's life. A marvelous piece of work. It is one of the best books about Bernstein I have ever read. (Humphrey Burton, producer, director, and Bernstein biographer)

Alicia Kopfstein-Penk is a master of archival research. In her recent study of Leonard Bernstein's Young People's Concerts and their cultural significance she has painstakingly gone through a large body of material in rich detail. Her study is exhaustive and extensive, and will form the foundation for future scholarship on Bernstein and this important cultural legacy. (Elizabeth Wells, Mt. Alison University, author of *West Side Story: Cultural Perspectives on an American Musical*)

For the general public, the Young People's Concerts with the New York Philharmonic were one of the highest-profile parts of Leonard Bernstein's remarkable career. The broadcasts have been considered by scholars for their educational content and value and as part of Bernstein's work with the orchestra, but, until now, little work had been done in terms of putting them in the broader contexts of Bernstein's life or the

larger musical world. Alicia Kopfstien-Penk has done this beautifully in this study, combining dogged archival work in the Bernstein Collection at the Library of Congress with an encyclopedic knowledge of the Bernstein bibliography and knowledgeable handling of related topics in American music, modern music, cultural contexts, and the medium of television. This fine work is the kind of study that needed to be written on Bernstein and the Young People's Concerts. (The University of Kansas, Paul Laird, Director of Musicology Division, The University of Kansas, author of *Leonard Bernstein: A Guide to Research*.)

#### About the Author

**Alicia Kopfstien-Penk** is an enthusiastic postmodernist who teaches at American University. As a performer, she has sung Bernstein at the Metropolitan Opera, Beatles at clubs, and played classical guitar at the Kennedy Center. She is also a contributor to *Soundboard*, and a podcast producer for the Washington National Opera.

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