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Music Review: Symphony showcases Bernstein's rich legacy

By **GENE HARRIS**

As a composer, Leonard Bernstein's work bridges like no other the worlds of classical music, jazz and the stage. On Saturday evening in the Carpenter Theatre, the Richmond Symphony presented "Bernstein on Broadway," a program drawn from four of his Broadway musicals.

The program was conceived and produced by Jamie Bernstein (the composer's daughter) and Michael Barrett. Jamie Bernstein served as narrator, and guest vocalists were Michelle Areyzaga, soprano; Elizabeth Shammash, mezzo soprano; Jeffrey Picón, tenor; and Hugh Russell, baritone. Richmond baritone Jonathan Smith joined the group for the finale.

Conductor Erin Freeman got things off to a rousing start with an exuberant but well-controlled reading of the colorful overture from "Candide," Bernstein's popular comic operetta.

Jamie Bernstein and the vocalists then entered, and she narrated a short introduction to the work of her father and a brief set-up of "Candide." The singers and orchestra followed with several songs from the operetta. Areyzaga's rendition of "Glitter and Be Gay" was easily the highlight of the set. Her sense of comic irony brought laughter as she pulled baubles from her bosom, and her spectacular coloratura singing shone brightly in this devilishly difficult number.

Next were two songs from one of Bernstein's lesser-known musicals, "Wonderful Town." We heard "Pass the Football," sung in a big and brawny fashion by Russell as the football player Wreck, and "Swing!" sung by Shammash in her belting voice. The other singers and Jamie Bernstein joined her in this number, singin' and swingin' to show her how to "get hip."

Excerpts from "On the Town" followed. Russell sang "Lonely Town" in an appropriately warm fashion. He then joined with Shammash in the fun and risqué "Taxi Number." The best-known song from this show, "New York, New York," wasn't included, but as Jamie Bernstein pointed out, references to its main musical motif could be heard throughout the dance episodes that followed, which the orchestra brought off superbly to end the first half.

The second half featured selections from "West Side Story," no doubt Bernstein's most popular work. Picon displayed his vocal prowess in "Maria," but some of the best moments of this section came when the orchestra performed "The Symphonic Dances." The color, rhythmic vitality and sensitivity required by this piece were evident all the way through.

The finale, "Tonight," featured all five singers, with Smith holding his own ably with the guests. It was an exhilarating finish to the evening.

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