

BEN BAGLEY'S LEONARD BERNSTEIN REVISITED

Ben Bagley's *Leonard Bernstein Revisited* is another delightful entry in the *Revisited* series. By now, nothing in this compilation is especially unknown, but back when the LP came out it was like an oasis in the desert, as all the *Revisiteds* were. It would be astonishing if those reading these liner notes needed biographical information on Leonard Bernstein, certainly one of the most well know of all American composers and one who was not shy about putting himself everywhere he could put himself. He had an amazing life and career as composer, conductor, TV personality – it was hard to escape him. He had long-running contracts with Columbia Records and then Deutsche Grammophon. Many of his recordings are legendary, and of course his theatre works are, too. He only wrote one film score, but it's a great one – *On The Waterfront*.

It all happened rather quickly for Bernstein: After Harvard he attended the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, studying conducting with Fritz Reiner and orchestration with the great Randall Thompson. In 1940, barely into his twenties, he studied at the Boston Symphony Orchestra's summer institute, Tanglewood, studying conducting with Serge Koussevitsky. In 1943, now in his mid-twenties, Bernstein was appointed associate conductor to Arthur Rodzinski of the New York Philharmonic, and made his debut soon after when guest conductor Bruno Walter came down with the flu. Because the concert was broadcast on CBS Radio, Bernstein became a name instantly, with the *New York Times* saying, "It's a good American success story."

A year later, it was not only Bernstein the conductor, but Bernstein the composer emerged. He premiered his *Jeremiah Symphony*, his ballet *Fancy Free* (choreographed by Jerome Robbins), and then *Fancy Free* was reworked into the Broadway musical *On The Town*, written with his close friends Betty Comden and Adolph Green. All three of those events happened the same year – 1944. In the ensuing years Bernstein conducted all over the world to great acclaim, and also made his TV debut as a conductor

in 1949, wrote another ballet, *Facsimile*, and his second symphony, *The Age of Anxiety*.

In the 1950s, his success continued unabated – much conducting everywhere, premiering his opera *Trouble in Tahiti*, incidental music for the Jean Arthur/Boris Karloff production of *Peter Pan*, he wrote another Broadway musical, *Wonderful Town* (again with Comden and Green), appeared on a series of *Omnibus* TV programs talking about music, wrote *Candide*, after which came *West Side Story* and then another TV series, *Young People's Concerts*. In the early 1960s he recorded the Mahler *Symphony No. 4* and over the next few years recorded what was the first complete cycle of the Mahler symphonies, which played a huge part in bringing attention back to Mahler.

Subsequent to all that, he wrote his third symphony, *Kaddish*, another ballet entitled *Dybbuk*, *MASS*, *A Quiet Place*, another musical, this one a flop – *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue* and many, many other pieces. He won multiple Grammys (and was awarded a lifetime achievement Grammy), a Tony, along with other awards from all over the world. He announced his retirement from conducting in 1990 and died just five days later. He was only seventy-two.

For *Leonard Bernstein Revisited*, Bagley assembled his usual eclectic group of singers, including Nell Carter, Estelle Parsons, John Reardon (who worked with Bernstein on the 1961 recording of *On The Town*, and the recording of *Songfest/Chichester Psalms*), Chita Rivera, Arthur Siegel, and Jo Sullivan. The arrangements were mostly by Bagley's frequent collaborator, Dennis Deal.

The album includes cut songs from *Wonderful Town*, including its original opening number that was cut out of town, and other rarities from *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue* and *Candide*, as well as assorted other pieces.

The album came out on CD in 1989, and, as with most of the Bagley CDs, the mastering was perfunctory. As

we've done with the other albums in this series, we have considerably spruced up the sound. For almost all the other CDs in the series, Bagley went into the studio and recorded bonus material to fill out the CD length. But not in the case of *Leonard Bernstein Revisited*, which clocks in at just over forty-one minutes. So, we've taken the liberty of including three bonus tracks from the purported London cast album of *West Side Story*, the one starring Bruce Trent and purportedly George Chakiris – but there is some confusion as to what this album actually was – most likely a studio cast album and whether George Chakiris is actually on the album is anyone's guess. It appeared on a London label as well as stateside on the Forum label. I had the album as a kid and I liked it because it had an overture, which the show does not, and I liked the sound of it. So, from that we've chosen the "Overture," the "Ballet Sequence ("Somewhere")," and "The Rumble," just to present that marvelous Bernstein music in that fun stereo sound.

— Bruce Kimmel