

Anchorage Symphony Orchestra

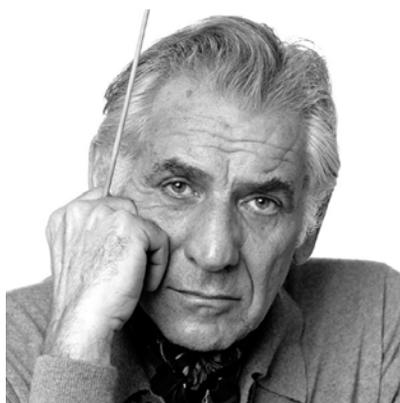
## *Season Finale*

Saturday, April 6, 2019 – 8pm

Atwood Concert Hall, ACPA



### Program Notes by ASO Education Consultant Susan Wingrove-Reed



#### **Leonard Bernstein**

Born: 1918

Died: 1990

#### *Symphonic Suite – On the Waterfront*

ASO Premiere Performance

Leonard Bernstein was an incredibly prolific composer as well as a remarkable conductor, music educator, activist for social justice, and a celebrity media personality. He wrote classical music that was modern, complex, and full of emotion, but he also left a legacy of music that incorporated popular American influences. His repertoire includes beloved symphonic works plus ballets, operas, and Broadway gems including *On The Town* and *West Side Story*. His only film score was for Elia Kazan's riveting *On The Waterfront* (1954) that featured a brilliant cast including Marlon Brando, Karl Madden, Rod Steiger and Eva Marie Saint. The movie won eight of its 12 nominated Academy Awards and is now ranked by AFI as the eighth-greatest in American film history.

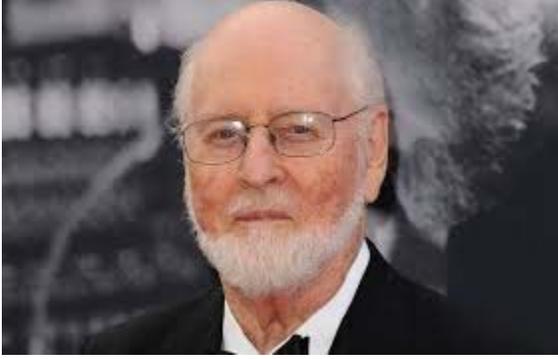
It's amazing to note that Kazan finished filming before he even started to think about incorporating music! When Bernstein was first approached about the project, he said no; he was furious with Kazan who had been an informant to Senator Joseph McCarthy's House on Un-American Activities Committee hearings in 1952. Many performers and writers lost their jobs and careers as a result of this now-indefensible committee. Bernstein publicly stood up against McCarthy and the shameful hearings. Annotator James Keller noted that Kazan "took out an advertisement in the New York Times rationalizing that he had cooperated with the dark forces in the spirit of patriotism, and *On The Waterfront*, which trains its unforgiving eye on the ethical dilemma that can pit loyalty to family and friends against the greater good, was a further step in his process of personal redemption." Bernstein finally agreed to see the uncut film and decided to get involved - "I heard music as I watched – That was enough." Eric Bromberger succinctly summarized, "This epic film tells the exceptionally violent story of the struggle for control of longshoremen on the New York docks. Shot in gritty black and white, it begins

with a murder (a man is thrown off a balcony) and concludes when the hero Terry Malloy (played by young Marlon Brando) is beaten to a pulp on the docks. He gets up and walks to work, destroying the power of the racketeers in the process.” The most famous line in the movie is Brando’s impassioned “I coulda been a contender.”

Bernstein recalled, “I had become so involved in each detail that I had to keep reminding myself that it really is the least important part, that a spoken line covered by music is a lost line – a loss to the picture – while a bar of music completely obliterated by speech is only a bar of music lost.... And so the composer sits by, protesting as he can, but ultimately accepting, be it with a heavy heart, the inevitable loss of a good part of the score. Everyone tries to comfort him – ‘You can always use it in a suite’. Cold comfort. It is good for the picture, he repeats numbly to himself.” His final efforts provided 45 minutes of music for the movie. Austrian film critic Hans Keller enthused that this “is about the best film score that has come out of America.”

So that some of this dynamic music could be performed in concerts, Bernstein crafted a splendid 20-minute one-movement Symphonic Suite in 1955. He stated, “My purpose was to salvage some of the music that would otherwise have been left on the floor of the dubbing-room. The main materials of the suite undergo numerous metamorphoses, following as much as possible the chronological flow of the film score itself.”

The Suite features jagged rhythms and jazz-tinged harmonies along with marvelously lyrical episodes. A haunting solo horn presents the lengthy opening theme that is associated with the character of Terry Malloy. The alto saxophone is prominently featured, adding an urban city vibe. There is an especially beautiful duet for flute and harp – a sound oasis of calm in an overall violent score - that evolves into a breathtaking, rich anthem. After an energetic episode the spacious opening music is recalled then transformed into a gutsy march, bringing the suite to a memorably powerful end.



**John Williams**

Born: 1932

**“Hymn to the Fallen” from  
*Saving Private Ryan***

ASO Premiere Performance

John Williams is an American musical treasure, a beloved composer, conductor and pianist. In addition to classical music, he has crafted many of the most popular and critically acclaimed movie scores in the history of the medium, including *Star Wars*, *Superman*, *ET*, three of the *Harry Potter* films, *Indiana Jones*, *Jaws*, *Schindler’s List*, and *Jurassic Park* – just to name a few. He has won 24 Grammy awards, five Academy Awards, and numerous other accolades. The American Film Institute chose his 1977 *Star Wars* as the greatest and most important film score of all time (2005). He has announced that after *Star Wars: Episode IX* (to be released in December, 2019) he will be retiring from composing music for this epic franchise, saying, “It will round out a series of nine, that will be quite enough for me!”

Director Steven Spielberg and Williams collaborated on fifteen movies before “*Saving Private Ryan*” (1998). They began *Sugarland Express* in 1974 after meeting over a martini lunch. Williams recalled, “It was like going out with a teenager who had never ordered wine before and didn’t quite know what to do with the silver....He was so young, a little older than my children but not a whole lot. And seemed to know more about my music than I did.” The partnership has continued fruitfully through over twenty-five films in forty years. Spielberg admiringly reflected, “John is much more of a chameleon as a composer. He reinvents himself with every picture.” Theirs is probably the most successful movie/music team in the history of Hollywood.

Multiple Oscar-winning *Saving Private Ryan* portrays the intensity and horrors of war in an unforgettable, graphic opening sequence of 27 excruciating minutes depicting the Normandy Invasion in 1944. The powerful film features Tom Hanks and Matt Damon. A group of eight soldiers go behind enemy lines during World War II to bring out a paratrooper whose three brothers have all been killed in action; the mother of the four boys received the three death-notic telegrams on the same day. The Army Chief of Staff decides that her surviving son must be spared and returned home. Many lives are sacrificed on that mission.

Williams had some major challenges scoring the film. First, Spielberg asked that most of the footage not include music – only the realistic sounds of death and battle. The theme “Hymn to the Fallen” is hauntingly presented at the end of the movie and became a hit on its own merits. The choir sings without words and the colors of trumpet and snare drum “tug at the heart strings”.

Annotator John Lehman wrote, “‘Hymn to the Fallen’ is one of John Williams’ most astounding pieces. The simple tune carries the weight of all who died in the war.... The music is never too sad or depressing. Even when the tension builds, the tears that are yanked from your eyes come not from the sadness of the piece, but from its profound beauty.” Spielberg shared that this six-minute elegiac, nobly elegant gem was chosen for

the closing credits of the movie “because it will stand the test of time and honor forever the fallen of this war and possibly all wars.”



## Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born: 1756

Died: 1791

### **Requiem; *Dies Irae, Confutatis, Lacrimosa***

Last ASO Performance December 1991

The movie *Amadeus* (1984) directed by Milos Forman showcases a visually sumptuous, scintillating story of Mozart's life and music, glorious footage shot in Prague, and concludes with excerpts from his Requiem that propel the film to its dramatic conclusion. It won eight Academy Awards four Golden Globes, and many others. AFI has named it as the 53<sup>rd</sup> of 100 of the most important films in history. Although some of the biographical elements are arguably fictional, especially the premise that composer Antonio Salieri murdered Mozart out of jealousy for his talent, the sense of Mozart's eccentric character is spot on – and the astonishing music is integral to the plot.

Mozart's *Requiem* (1791) is one of the most famous works in all of classical music. The young composer was dying as he tried to finish the score; several of the movements were carefully completed and orchestrated by friend and former student Franz Xaver Süssmayr after Mozart died; historian John Bowden observed, "It is Mozart's genius that shines through". The Requiem's dark instrumental coloring reflects the emotional character of the traditional mass - the classical orchestra's standard flutes, oboes, clarinets and horns are omitted. Instead, the orchestra consists of strings plus two bassoons, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and organ. The original score also called for two bass horn - a clarinet invented in 1790 and pitched a fifth below the clarinet in C.

Renowned music historian H. C Robbins Landon reflected on Mozart's genius and accomplishments in his noteworthy book *Mozart's Last Year*, writing, "The Mozartian legacy, in brief, is as good an excuse for man-kind's existence as we shall ever encounter and is perhaps, after all, a still small hope for our ultimate survival."

The ASO and our choral partners from the Alaska Chamber Singers, Anchorage Concert Chorus and West High School are presenting three of the twelve movements: **Dies Irae** – A harrowing depiction of the Day of Wrath full of passionate choral proclamations, this movement is sometimes compared to the relentless sense of doom Mozart created in *Don Giovanni's* Commendatore scenes (where the title character arrogantly and unyieldingly goes to hell.) **Confutatis** – Dramatically opens with basses and tenors proclaiming that sinners will spend eternity in the flames of hell while the strings pound a repeated pattern. Sopranos and altos provide breathtakingly beautiful contrast with pure, angelic sounds - "Call me one of the blessed ones". The music sinks lower and lower, ending on a poignant, quiet chord. **Lacrimosa** (Day of Weeping) – Soft upper strings lead into poignant song, and the music rises higher and louder as the choir affirms: "The guilty person shall rise from the ashes to be judged". Historians believe that this could be the final music Mozart heard from his deathbed.



## **Serge Prokofiev**

Born: 1891

Died: 1953

### ***Alexander Nevsky, Op. 78***

Last ASO Performance April 2001

Many of Russia's young artists fled the country during the Bolshevik Revolution (1918) – Serge Prokofiev was one of the very few to ever return. Although he was successful in Europe and America, he never stopped yearning for his homeland – and when the misery of the Great Depression hit and Stalin extended an invitation to return to “a Worker's Paradise in the Soviet Union” – he moved back. As annotator Steven Larsen aptly wrote, “It was a decision he would later regret, but that is for another story”.

Visionary Russian film director Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948), renowned for his dramatic narrative genius, invited Prokofiev – already acknowledged as one of the twentieth century's finest composers - to collaborate with him on his new project. The plot would focus on military hero Prince Alexander of Novrogod (1220-1263), a leader universally admired as a founder of Russia. The Prince – who earned the name Nevsky after defeating the Swedish army on the Neva River, put together a valiant army, confronted the enemy on the frozen waters of Lake Chud, and masterfully defeated the invaders. It is a historical irony that this movie was produced in 1938, a time when fears were building about a potential German invasion into Russia; the Teutonic Knights were ancestors of the modern Germans and Eisenstein's brilliant inclusion of Alexander's final monologue became all-too-relevant; “If disaster ever threatens again, I'll call all of Russia to arms!” In fact, the state-run Studio was quite public about the film project's intention to “prepare every Russian man, woman and child to meet with optimism any war that came.” During World War II, *Alexander Nevsky*, with Prokofiev's heart-stirring music, was shown over and over at the front to boost morale and inspire Russia's soldiers. The movie, a massive box-office hit, was quickly acclaimed as a masterpiece - not just in Russia but in the West.

Prokofiev's eloquent film experience further inspired him; he felt he had all the ingredients needed for an important new stand-alone composition. He selected the most dramatic portions of the score, amplified and extended the music, and developed the material into a cantata. The new 40-minute work was premiered in Moscow in May, 1939, and in America in 1943.

Annotator Olin Downes enthusiastically wrote, “The music is built on grand lines with great mass effects... The work has a master's simplicity, orchestral music of extraordinary power, and in the choral writing the racial accents of the people and of the composer who is here a true descendant of Mussorgsky. The orchestral coloring is very remarkable and so is the superb writing for the voices... moving picture music! Then there is the contralto solo, the lament of the field of the dead. Here again is a real simplicity, a real emotion, expressed in a radical way, with fine art.”

The cantata includes seven intense sections or “pictures”:

**RUSSIA UNDER THE MONGOLIAN YOKE.** In somber music, the composer evokes the desolation of the Russian people following the Tartar invasion in the middle of the thirteenth century. Annotator Harrison Hollingsworth summarized that, within this instrumental prelude (the shortest of the cantata's movements), "Prokofiev juxtaposes the full orchestra with wind solos, contrasting power and cruelty with pity and grief". The storyboard for the movie succinctly outlined, "Woeful traces of the ravages wrought on Russia by the Mongols – heaps of human bones, swords, rusty lances. Fields overgrown with weeds and ruin of burned villages."

**SONG OF NEVSKY.** The chorus praises their hero, Alexander Nevsky, who has helped defeat the Swedes on the Neva River, with the rousing text, "They who march against Russia shall meet their death." After the strong Russian theme, the lively middle section represents Nevsky's most recent victory.

**CRUSADERS IN PSKOV.** The Teutonic Knights, masquerading as religious crusaders, are represented by music that combines Latin chant (the text intentionally makes no sense!) with brutal, clashing dissonances – starkly highlighting the hypocritical righteousness of the Crusaders. Historians Sharon Pedersen and Steve Ferrand ferreted out a fascinating explanation of the nonsensical text; "An astute singer in the BBC Symphonic Chorus, soprano Morag Kerr, figured out the hidden ruse that is typical of Prokofiev the joker. The words *Peregrinus expectavi, pedes meos in cymbalis* are taken from the three movements of Igor Stravinsky's Symphony of Psalms. 'Peregrinus' comes from Mvt. I, 'expectavi' comes from Mvt. II, as does "pedes meos". The words 'in cymbalis' come from Mvt. III. It is not known whether Stravinsky ever recognized this riddle." Midway, a sad Russian melody in the style of a lament portrays the exhausted common people. A second theme, heroic and turbulent, provides memorable contrast; this theme will reappear in the sixth section.

**ARISE, YE RUSSIAN PEOPLE.** The citizens of Russia are urged to stand up to the invaders – "Arise you people free and brave, defend our fair native land!" This is a rousing, militaristic call to expel the hated enemy. The altos are featured - "In our beloved Russia no foe shall live" - in a compelling legato middle section.

**THE BATTLE ON THE ICE.** This is the centerpiece of the cantata, a gruesome and hair-raising sonic picture of the savage fighting on Lake Chud - one of the greatest depictions of a battle in music ever written. The movement opens with anxious expectations and mounting tension as the invaders advance; the tambourine depicts the sound of horses galloping. The initial attack is frenzied and the counterattack builds to a tremendous climax as the ice breaks and the Teutonic Knights are drowned. Larsen points out, "According to history, the ice broke under the weight of their horses and heavy armor, and anyone who escaped drowning was killed by the Russian defenders." The sounds of victory evolve into a pensive, calm hymn.

**FIELD OF THE DEAD.** The mezzo-soprano soloist, full of anguish, grieves for the dead Russian soldiers. Annotator Harrison Hollingsworth shared an insightful backstory/translation; "A woman searches the battlefield for two wounded soldiers; she has promised her hand in marriage to the braver of the two. As the woman passes soldiers on the battlefield, she sings: 'He who died a noble death Shall have my kiss on his dead eyes, And to a brave one who survived the fray I shall be a true wife and loving friend.'"

**ALEXANDER'S ENTRY INTO PSKOV.** Nevsky's victory results in a triumphant hymn by the chorus and orchestra, with church bells ringing. As he proudly enters the

city, “Celebrate, rejoice and sing, our beloved Russia.” All the citizens joyfully dance; Prokofiev ingeniously embroiders a tender melody from the 4<sup>th</sup> section’s **Arise Ye Russian People** with this exciting music. The trumpets announce a return of the celebration chorale from the opening of this movement, now at half-tempo, with over-the-top orchestration added to the choral ecstasy that leads to an indescribably exultant conclusion.