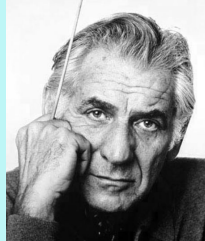


Theatre music: West Side Story - Latin American rhythms

Key composers, genre and instruments

**Leonard Bernstein 1918-1990**

Leonard Bernstein was an American conductor, composer and pianist. He began playing piano when he was 10 years old. In the 1940s he was a conductor for the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.



He wrote many pieces of classical music for orchestras including music for musicals. He became known for the way he conducted with flair!



**West Side Story**

His most famous music is for the film *West Side Story*. The original film was made in 1961 but was remade in 2021 and directed by Steven Spielberg. It is a romantic story set in New York based on Romeo and Juliet. A man and woman from two different gangs and cultures fall in love. Stephen Sondheim is famous for writing the powerful lyrics which reflect the cultural context and have social meaning.

**Instruments**

The Latin beats in the music of *West Side Story* need strong percussion to create the special sound. Claves are one of the key instruments in creating this sound. Claves were originally used in Afro-Cuban folk music and are among the instruments that maintain various fixed rhythmic patterns in Latin-American dance bands.

Key Skills

Play instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression.

Appreciate, understand, review and evaluate music by famous composers.

Use and understand staff and other musical notations.

Develop an understanding of the history of music.

Describe how lyrics often reflect the cultural context of music and have social meaning.

Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory.



Relevant songs

Songs from West Side Story:  
**America**  
**Mambo**

Bernstein's rhythmic patterns

Key Vocabulary

**musical** A film with a variety of songs which help tell the story.

**cultural context** Cultural context is related to the society individuals are raised in and at how the culture affects behaviour. It incorporates values that are learned and attitudes that are shared among groups of people. It includes beliefs, meanings, customs, ideas, language, norms.

**timbre** The quality and difference of sounds between instruments

**duration** How long or short a note is.

**time signature** This denotes how many beats to count each bar. 4/4 3/4 2/4 are some examples.

**notations** Written music

**claves** Two wooden sticks hit together for a short percussive sound.



**Mambo** A style of latin American dance music - it has its origins in Cuba and resembles the rumba and cha-cha.

