

## Leonard Bernstein at the National Press Club, October 13, 1959



*Leonard Bernstein, October 13, 1959. News Associates, Inc. Library of Congress, Music Division*

On the day after the New York Philharmonic Orchestra returned home from a ten-week performance tour of cities within Western Europe, Soviet-bloc nations, and the Near East, composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990), the orchestra's music director, delivered an extemporaneous talk and answered reporters' questions at a National Press Club luncheon that attracted an audience of some 500 people. The previous evening, Bernstein led the orchestra in a concert at Constitution Hall just hours after arriving at Washington National Airport, before an audience overflowing with dignitaries from the U.S. and the many nations visited. The Philharmonic had played 50 concerts in 17 countries—including three weeks in the Soviet Union—during the tour, which had been sponsored by the President's Special International Program for Cultural Presentations.

The tour—Bernstein called it a “mission of friendship”—occurred during a period of cultural exchange that many hoped would facilitate a thawing of tensions between Cold War rivals. The U.S. and the Soviet Union had signed their first accord since the end of World War II on January 27, 1958—a two-year agreement to exchange persons in cultural, scientific, technical, and educational fields, radio and television broadcasts, and motion pictures, with the prospect of direct commercial flights between the two countries occurring in the near future. A joint statement accompanying the agreement called it “a significant first step in the improvement of mutual understanding between the peoples” of the U.S. and the Soviet Union. A longtime advocate for both music appreciation and world

peace, Bernstein wrote that though the Russian people routinely received impressions from the Soviet press that demonized America, he believed “that these contacts we make with them on so deep a level as that of musical communication can tell them much more about us than their press can tell them.”

## **Cultural Diplomacy**

Cultural diplomacy—distinguished by one scholar as the “fourth dimension” of foreign policy, in contrast to more traditional forms of political, economic, and military interactions between nations—was a relatively new endeavor for the U.S. when Bernstein visited the Soviet Union. By that time, however, U.S. diplomats were beginning to appreciate its potential importance. Robert H. Thayer, the head of the State Department’s Bureau of International Cultural Relations, responsible for administering the program that sponsored the Philharmonic tour, stated in a July 1959 document, “We in the United States are becoming increasingly aware of the strength of validity of the cultures of other peoples, and they are becoming more interested in understanding us. This kind of mutual appreciation is important to stability and progress in the world. Cultural interchange furthers the kind of understanding we seek.”

Those with insider knowledge of the State Department agreed. George Kennan, the department’s top expert on the Soviet Union during the Truman administration and one of the leading architects of the Marshall Plan and the U.S. policy of containment, stated in a 1955 address, “What we have to do is to show the outside world both that we have a cultural life and that we care something about it—that we care enough about it, in fact, to give it encouragement and support here at home, and to see that it is enriched by acquaintance with similar activity elsewhere. If these impressions could only be conveyed with enough force and success to countries beyond our borders, I for one would willingly trade the entire remaining inventory of political propaganda for the results that could be achieved by such results alone.” The journalist Marvin Kalb, formerly on the staff of the American Embassy in Moscow, wrote that violinist Isaac Stern’s visit to the Soviet Union in 1956 did more to help relations between the two countries than fifty diplomatic conferences.

Until 1938, the U.S. had been the only major world power that did not engage in government-sponsored international cultural programs. Private philanthropic organizations, such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the American Council of Learned Societies, had attempted since the early years of the twentieth century to promote peace and understanding between countries through exchanges of people and cultural products, including books, music, and art. In 1938, as Nazi and Fascist propaganda circulated throughout Latin America in an attempt to foster alliances, the State Department established a modestly endowed Division of Cultural Relations to aid private organizations in academic and artistic exchange programs as part of a “Good Neighbor Policy.” In 1941,

President Franklin D. Roosevelt specified that he wanted cultural relations to be a concern of an agency he and Congress created to further promote Pan-Americanism. After the U.S. entered World War II, cultural programs expanded to the Near East, China, Africa, and other regions. With the creation of the Office of War Information in 1942, emphasis in cultural diplomacy shifted from exchange programs to overt forms of propaganda.

Following the war, funds for government-sponsored cultural programs were slashed, as Congress reverted to prewar attitudes opposing peacetime government operations that might be considered propagandistic. As part of the reconstruction effort in Germany and Japan, however, the U.S. initiated a number of cultural programs including Voice of America (VOA) radio broadcasts, newspapers, and magazines; support for libraries, schools, and cultural centers that provided lectures, concerts, and art exhibitions; and exchanges of persons, especially students and educators. Bernstein traveled to Munich in 1948 as part of a Visiting Artists Program sponsored by the State Department to conduct the Bavarian State Opera Orchestra and the Jewish Representative Orchestra, a group that included survivors from nearby concentration camps.

In late 1947, a committee of U.S. senators traveling in Europe reported “a campaign of vilification and misrepresentation” conducted by the Soviet Union to discredit reconstruction efforts. Congress subsequently passed the Smith-Mundt Act to establish a permanent peacetime program “to promote the better understanding of the United States among the peoples of the world and to strengthen cooperative international relations.” In 1950, after the Soviet Union unleashed its first atomic bomb test, President Harry S. Truman called for a “great campaign of truth” to provide countries around the world with “honest information about freedom and democracy.” The need to counter a perceived attraction of foreign intellectuals to Marxism was felt as especially pressing.

With the rise of McCarthyism, Congress passed, over Truman’s veto, legislation that ended cultural relations with the Soviet Union. During the Korean War, Congress increased funding for VOA and other programs as the emphasis in cultural diplomacy shifted again from an effort to reach mutual understanding between peoples through cultural exchange to a targeted psychological battle, this time to counter the Soviet Union’s efforts to influence nonaligned nations. In November 1951, Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Edward W. Barrett stated that the Soviet Union had embarked on a “gigantic propaganda offensive” to prove that the U.S. “is without culture and that the Soviet Union is the very cradle of culture.”

What many commentators at the time called the “Soviet cultural offensive” was thought to have intensified even further in the immediate years after the death of Soviet Premier Josef Stalin in 1953. In July 1954, Theodore C. Streibert, director of the recently created United States Information Agency (USIA), warned that “Moscow propagandists are spending untold sums in an immense effort to depict

the United States as a nation of semi-barbarians, or materialists interested primarily in mass production products, and therefore not to be trusted with political leadership.” As evidence for this charge, a Djakarta newspaper was cited during a congressional hearing in 1956 as stating that “Americans live in a cultural wasteland, peopled only with gadgets and frankfurters and atom bombs.”

To compete with Soviet propaganda, President Dwight D. Eisenhower requested from Congress and received in August 1954 an Emergency Fund for International Affairs to support American musical and dramatic presentations abroad and for the U.S. to participate in international trade fairs. Two years later, Congress passed the International Cultural Exchange and Trade Fair Participation Act of 1956, which put such cultural diplomacy on a permanent basis. On signing the act, Eisenhower stated he hoped that by encouraging “some interchange of ideas, books, magazines, students, tourists, artists, radio programs, technical experts, religious leaders and government officials,” that “little by little, mistrust based on falsehoods will give way to international understanding based on truth.”

Ad hoc performing arts exchanges between the U.S. and the Soviet Union had begun prior to the 1958 formal agreement as the power of McCarthyism subsided and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev’s new doctrine of “peaceful coexistence” and “peaceful competition” with the West came into force. An American theatrical company of *Porgy and Bess* touring Europe accepted an invitation in 1955 by the Soviet Union to come to Moscow and Leningrad, although the Eisenhower administration denied its request for supplemental funds. Pianist Emil Gilels became the first performing artist from the Soviet Union to appear in the U.S. since the end of World War II when he toured the same year. Violinist David Oistrakh and cellist Mstislav Rostropovich followed in 1956. The 23-year-old Texas pianist Van Cliburn won the Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition in Moscow in April 1958 and charmed Russian audiences. *Time* magazine noted that his appearance had “done much to disabuse the Moscow public of the impression that the U.S. is backward culturally.”

From 1954 until the time of the New York Philharmonic tour in 1959, some 140 groups of American performing artists and athletes traveled to more than 90 countries. Cultural exchanges involving musicians constituted the most prevalent type of performing arts exchange during this period. The State Department spent approximately one-fourth of its annual budget for cultural presentations on an average-costing symphony orchestra tour. The New York Philharmonic made five such tours between 1955 and 1961.

A number of cultural exchanges, including the New York Philharmonic tour in 1959, ruffled diplomatic feathers. After the Igor Moiseyev Dance Company returned home from a successful U.S. visit, Moiseyev delivered a talk in Moscow to an audience of some 600 actors, dancers, musicians, and writers entitled “The Cultural Life of America.” He described in positive terms much of what he had

encountered abroad, including the Broadway musicals *West Side Story*, composed by Bernstein, and *My Fair Lady*. Moiseyev's comments, reported extensively in the *New York Times*, displeased Soviet Minister of Culture Nikolai A. Mikhailov, who warned him a few days after the *Times* account appeared, "to consider the larger implications of excessively favorable commentaries about capitalistic and specifically American society," according to the *Times*. The newspaper speculated that censoring Moiseyev could serve to discourage other Russian figures from straying from the party line in public discussions of their experiences abroad.

### **Sokolniki Park Controversies**

In the weeks prior to the New York Philharmonic tour in the summer of 1959, the two countries exchanged national exhibitions. Bernstein attended both—the Soviet exhibition held at the New York Coliseum and the American National Exhibition in Moscow's Sokolniki Park—and commented during the Press Club talk on two controversies resulting from the latter exhibition that had made international headlines.

On July 24, 1959, at the opening of the exhibition in Moscow, Khrushchev and Vice President Richard Nixon engaged in what *New York Times* columnist James Reston called "perhaps the most startling personal international incident since the war," as they paused in front of the kitchen of an American model house display. With the press surrounding them and cameras rolling, Nixon pointed out that most American veterans of World War II had bought houses in the cost range of the attractive model home on display, equipped with modern labor-saving appliances, and that "any steel worker could buy this house." Khrushchev countered that steel workers *and* peasants in the Soviet Union also could afford it, and that all Soviet citizens "are entitled to housing," unlike in the U.S. The exchange, punctuated at times by overheated rhetoric, finger-pointing, and moments of laughter, offered both participants the opportunity to compare rival free market and command economies, debate the continued existence of U.S. bases on foreign soil that Khrushchev maintained threatened the peace, and talk about the nuclear threat. In the Press Club talk, Bernstein, advocating an expansion of federal funding for cultural diplomacy, invoked Nixon's call during the debate for a "free exchange of ideas," and insisted that international understanding could be furthered as well by an "exchange of feelings and there are no feelings warmer than those engendered by music."

Bernstein also offered his opinions about a second controversy surrounding the Sokolniki Park exhibition. In the month before the exhibition's opening, the chairman of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), Francis E. Walter, tried to force the USIA to bring home a collection of post-World War I American artworks that had been sent to Moscow to be part of the exhibition. Walter complained that one-third of the artists represented held "significant records of affiliation with the Communist movement in this country." He

subpoenaed three artists, including Jack Levine, whose postwar painting *Welcome Home* drew his special ire. *Welcome Home* presented an unsightly image of an American general dining at a lavish homecoming banquet with other grotesquely drawn figures. Walter stated that the “picture of the gum-chewing ‘stuffed shirt’ American general will help the Kremlin convince its enslaved people that its vicious propaganda about American military leaders is true, and is supported even by the American people.” Other conservative commentators protested against the inclusion of the 1947 abstract expressionist “action painting” *Cathedral* by Jackson Pollock, one of his early “poured” works. Ironically, the Soviet press also derided the Pollock painting.

Since the 1940s, members of Congress had objected to government support of modern art. One congressman had stated that the “ultimate effect of nonrepresentational and abstract art will be to muddle the brains of decent, innocent Americans,” leaving them susceptible to a communist takeover. In 1946, Congress had succeeded in recalling an exhibit entitled “Advancing American Art” that the State Department, in an early attempt at cultural diplomacy, had sent to Europe and Latin America. At the time, Secretary of State George C. Marshall declared “no more taxpayers’ money for modern art.”

Walter and his colleagues wanted to recall the paintings in the 1959 Moscow exhibition as well. Eisenhower himself criticized *Welcome Home* in a press conference, stating that it “looks like a lampoon more than art.” He adamantly refused, however, “to be the censor” of the show, and it remained in Moscow, though supplemented by the addition of traditional paintings from pre-World War I periods. In an August 1959 appearance before the National Press Club, USIA director George V. Allen reported that Soviet visitors to the exhibit understood the Levine painting as a “symbol of freedom in contrast to a closed society” because it had not been removed from the exhibition despite the president’s criticism. Bernstein in his Press Club talk noted similarly the value of showing the Russian public that the U.S. did not censor its artists. His meeting during the tour with the acclaimed censured Russian author Boris Pasternak also served to convey to the Russian people his support for freedom of expression.

### **“Another Pasternak Case”**

According to press reports, Eisenhower warned Republican congressional leaders that censorship of the American art exhibit could result in “another Pasternak case.” In October 1958, following the publication in Italy the previous year of his novel *Doctor Zhivago*, Pasternak was notified by the Royal Swedish Academy that he had been selected to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature “for his notable achievement in both contemporary poetry and the field of the great Russian narrative tradition.” The novel had been rejected for publication in the Soviet Union as it did not adhere to the socialist realist aesthetic norms in force since the Stalin era. The historical novel’s title character was critical of Bolshevik leaders and committed more to his own spiritual independence than to the party’s

revolutionary ideals. The head of the Central Committee Cultural Section characterized the book as a “heinous calumny” of the Revolution and subsequent life in the Soviet Union.

The Western press in covering the incident emphasized the novel’s criticisms of Soviet life and system of government more than the book’s aesthetic merits. In response, the Soviet press initiated a campaign to vilify the novel and Pasternak. The Writers’ Union expelled him for his “political and moral downfall, his betrayal of the Soviet Union, of socialism, peace and progress.” Although Pasternak then renounced the Nobel Prize, harassment continued—he was called in print a “traitor,” “bourgeois reactionary,” and a “hack”—while world leaders and public intellectuals expressed their solidarity with the author and attempted to intercede with Khrushchev. After Khrushchev had his son-in-law read the book, he realized that the detrimental publicity the Soviet Union had received worldwide could have been avoided had the Cultural Committee approved the novel for publishing with only a modicum of censorship, a course it failed to take because of ideological infighting.

Pasternak’s first public appearance following the censure occurred when he attended Bernstein’s farewell Moscow concert in September and greeted the conductor backstage. Pasternak’s mother had been a concert pianist, his son was a pianist and professor of music, and the writer himself had studied musical theory and composition before embarking on a literary career. Pasternak hosted Bernstein and his wife Felicia to a dinner at his *dacha* near Moscow a few days before the concert after Bernstein had sent Pasternak an invitation to attend. “We talked for hours about art and the artist’s view of history,” Bernstein told an interviewer, calling his meeting with the writer “the high point of the entire trip.” After the concert, Pasternak remarked to Bernstein, “I’ve never felt so close to the aesthetic truth. When I hear you I know why you were born.”

### **“The Joy of Music”**

Much of Bernstein’s professional life had indeed been spent trying to communicate to the public “The Joy of Music,” as he titled a best-selling collection of television scripts and essays published two months after the meeting with Pasternak. Music to Bernstein, his biographer Meryle Secrest has pointed out, was “a calling.” Having established a reputation as a flamboyant conductor, eclectic composer for the concert hall, opera, ballet, and musical theater, an accomplished pianist, exacting recording artist, engaging television personality, and dedicated teacher, Bernstein often characterized himself simply as a musician communicating with an audience. “I’m a sometime conductor and an all-the-time musician,” he told an interviewer, “for whom conducting, like composing, teaching, and playing the piano is part of the same activity: sharing with people what I feel and what I know about music.” The conductor Seiji Ozawa, who met Bernstein in Berlin during the 1959 tour and subsequently became an assistant conductor at the New York Philharmonic, noted Bernstein’s

distinctive orientation to teaching. “He is a great educator, who can take a subject, any subject, and explain it simply, naturally, truthfully, convincingly and with great passion,” Osawa observed.

Bernstein had become music director of the New York Philharmonic at the beginning of the 1958-59 season, the youngest ever engaged by the orchestra and the first American-born. Fifteen years earlier in November 1943, as the Philharmonic’s assistant conductor, Bernstein at age 25 had come to national attention when he was called upon at short notice to substitute at a Carnegie Hall concert for guest conductor Bruno Walter, who had taken ill. His triumphal debut, broadcast nationally over the radio, made front page news in the *New York Times*. Olin Downes, the *Times* music critic, wrote that Bernstein’s success “showed that he is one of the very few conductors of the rising generation who are indubitably to be reckoned with.”

Although Bernstein had studied music composition as an undergraduate at Harvard, the composers Aaron Copland, Roy Harris, and William Schuman, his mentors and friends, encouraged him to conduct. They “all planned for me to become America’s Great Conductor,” he wrote in 1939 to his boyhood piano teacher and later secretary and lifelong friend Helen Coates, who also encouraged him in that direction. Bernstein studied with Fritz Reiner at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, but emulated the demonstrative conducting style of Serge Koussevitzky, the musical director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, who held summer conducting classes at the Berkshire Music Center (later the Tanglewood Music Center) in Lenox, Massachusetts, the summer home of the orchestra. Bernstein became Koussevitzky’s teaching assistant at Tanglewood and eventually joined the faculty himself. Koussevitzky predicted to Bernstein in 1942 that conducting would “open to you all the gates from the world.”

Bernstein’s impassioned conducting style thrilled many. His emotional exuberance also brought rebukes. *New York Times* music critic Harold C. Schonberg often complained that Bernstein’s overwrought podium performances interfered with the music itself. Schonberg offered a cartoonish depiction of a typical Bernstein maneuver in 1960—“Toward the end of the Liszt concerto he rose vertically into the air, à la Nijinsky, and hovered there a good fifteen seconds by the clock”—but concluded, “one did wish that there had been more music and less exhilaration.” When confronted with such criticisms, Bernstein related that in 1947 when critics had complained about his intense conducting style, “I determined to do the next concert motionless.” The result, he said, was deadened music. “And I got bad reviews for a dull performance,” he remembered. “Since then I conduct the way I feel.” In later years, however, Bernstein himself acknowledged that he had a tendency to “overconduct.”

Bernstein’s first stint as a music director—conducting the New York City Symphony for three seasons from 1945-48—was “held up as about the most stimulating symphonic concerts New York has ever had,” Schonberg conceded.

Bernstein was acclaimed for arranging concert programs according to thematic concerns, a talent he brought to the Philharmonic in 1958. “The old norm, the idea of the well-balanced variety program—this does not any longer belong to the Philharmonic,” he told a reporter. “The programs should add up to something; they should have a theme running through them.” As with much else he did, he understood the role of music director as pedagogic. “In a way my job is an educational mission, using the term ‘educational’ in its broadest sense,” he explained.

To further this aim, Bernstein instituted a subscription series of Thursday Evening Preview Concerts, during which he would lecture informally on topics relevant to the music performed. Also in 1958, Bernstein initiated his televised “Young People’s Concerts,” a series that aired for fifteen years, and he continued to write and present music programs directed at adults for the NBC-TV cultural magazine series *Omnibus*. [Drafts and finished scripts for both the Preview talks and the Young People’s Concert series are available online at the Library of Congress Bernstein Collection website, “The Leonard Bernstein Collection, ca. 1920-1989,” <https://www.loc.gov/collections/leonard-bernstein/about-this-collection/>.] Bernstein’s television appearances, in addition to his successes on the Broadway musical stage, especially with the widely acclaimed *West Side Story*, gave him celebrity status in the eyes of Americans from many walks of life. His numerous conducting ventures abroad in the years after he left the New York City Symphony had made him “the first American-born conductor to enjoy international fame,” according to biographer Humphrey Burton.

## **The Tour**

The New York Philharmonic, which had gone on a South American tour sponsored by the President’s Special International Program for Cultural Presentations in the summer of 1958, was chosen to go on the 1959 tour only after Chicago Symphony Orchestra conductor Fritz Reiner had cancelled. Reiner thought the planned tour would be too strenuous. Reporters also speculated that he did not want to conduct in the Soviet Union due to that country’s brutal intervention in Hungary, his place of birth.

Long a champion of American-born composers, Bernstein included in every concert on the tour at least one work by an American. A critic of the Soviet socialist realist norms in music composition, Bernstein also brought to Russian concertgoers music by Soviet composers that the Soviet music establishment had banned or discouraged during the previous decade. After World War II, the Soviet Central Committee, led by Andrei Zhdanov and in accordance with Stalin’s postwar anti-Western policies, launched purges characterized by one scholar as “a ferocious campaign to restore orthodoxy in cultural and scientific life.” In 1946, the Central Committee enacted three ideological resolutions pertaining to literature, theater, and film. On February 10, 1948, the committee issued a resolution denouncing composers, such as Dmitri Shostakovich, Sergei

Prokofiev, and Aram Khachaturian, “whose work . . . illustrates the formalistic distortions and anti-democratic tendencies in music.” The edict condemned their “cult of atonality, dissonance, and discord, which are supposed to represent ‘progress’ and ‘novelty’ in the development of musical form.” The committee’s analysis, rooted explicitly in Cold War ideological terms, judged that “This music distinctly smacks of contemporary modernistic bourgeois music in Europe and America, which expresses the decay of bourgeois culture, the total negation of musical art, its impasse.”

Music historian Boris Schwarz has written that the 1948 decree “initiated a musical witch-hunt and stifled creativity,” while also “exposing the cultural policy of the Soviet Union to world-wide ridicule and contempt.” Following Stalin’s death in 1953, many Soviet composers pushed for liberalization of the aesthetic policy. After Stalin’s legacy was attacked by Khrushchev in February 1956 and a process of de-Stalinization began, tensions in the musical world were relaxed. In 1958, in addition to the cultural exchange agreement signed with the U.S., Soviet officials passed a resolution admitting “blatant errors” in their previous censoring of music and noted that “gifted composers,” including “comrades Shostakovich, Prokofiev, and Khachaturian,” had been “indiscriminately denounced as the representatives of a formalist anti-people trend.” Still, the 1948 resolution was praised for playing “a positive role in the subsequent development of Soviet music.”

At the Philharmonic’s first concert at Moscow’s Tchaikovsky Conservatory, Bernstein chose to close with Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony and as an encore played the scherzo movement of Prokofiev’s Fifth Symphony. The audience’s ovation, lasting 20 minutes, according to the Soviet news agency Tass, exceeded any Bernstein had ever received, he said. The Associated Press reported, “The uninhibited Bernstein conducted with every bone and muscle in his body. He jumped up as though to pull the notes he wanted from the superb orchestra and he had the audience open-mouthed.” A Soviet critic commented, “We never saw anything like him before. He leaves us without words.” According to Tass, Soviet composer Dmitri Kabalevsky remarked about the Shostakovich piece, “Never before have I heard a better interpretation of this symphony.”

During the second night’s performance, the Philharmonic played one of Bernstein’s own compositions, his second symphony, *The Age of Anxiety*, based on a poem by W. H. Auden. The response, according to the *New York Times*, was warm, but Bernstein was concerned that the audience did not grasp the work’s full intent because the “copious notes” he had prepared in order to relate the piece to Auden’s “comment on the search for happiness in Western society” were not included in the program. Bernstein especially was unhappy, the *Times* reported, because he “believes that the biggest single commodity Americans on tour can sell is American freedom of expression in art.”

At the fourth concert, coinciding with Bernstein's forty-first birthday, he chose to highlight two works by Igor Stravinsky, *Le Sacre du Printemps* and the 1924 neoclassical *Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments*, and an obscure short piece by Charles Ives, *The Unanswered Question*, considered a precursor to modernist trends. Stravinsky, a Russian expatriate, had left his homeland prior to the 1917 revolution and had become a U.S. citizen in 1945. The *New York Times* reported that the reaction of the audience to the Stravinsky works was "overwhelming" and commented, "It was as if a new era had been born in the conservatory." As program notes had not been issued to previous audiences, Bernstein delivered a short lecture from the podium with the aid of his interpreter to introduce the pieces.

The official Soviet response to Bernstein's remarks was hostile. Critic Aleksandr Medvedev, writing in the Ministry of Culture newspaper *Sovetskaya Kultura*, called him "conceited" and "immodest," complained that he championed Stravinsky's later "tragic period," and charged him with violating "all tradition by presuming to instruct the Russian audience in music from the podium," according to a *New York Times* account. In addition, Medvedev wrote that Bernstein inflicted an encore of the Ives piece on an audience that had only politely acknowledged it with applause the first time. Bernstein, who insisted that the audience indicated they desired an encore, exploded in reaction to Medvedev's characterization, stating, "I find it an unforgivable lie and in the worst possible taste. I would rather die than repeat a piece the repetition of which had not been demanded by the audience." Bernstein repeated the Stravinsky and Ives program in Leningrad *sans* lecture to comply with his hosts' request. To counter Bernstein's claim in Moscow that *Le Sacre du Printemps* had not been performed in the Soviet Union for 30 years, the entire Tallinn Orchestra from Estonia, which, the Soviets stated, had played the piece the previous year, attended the Leningrad concert.

Despite the dispute, the Philharmonic tour was characterized as a great triumph. Bernstein reported "everywhere we went, audiences broke all the rules. They shouted and screamed and wouldn't let us go." The Russians, he told reporters, "were the most remarkable. For them music is a very special outlet. It is something that gives them a release and their response is more than just their enthusiasm for music which is enormous." He added that he found a "tremendous response to our playing of contemporary music." *Time* magazine predicted that the tour was "likely to go down as the most successful of all time."

Russian composers added expressions of gratitude for the tour. At the close of the Philharmonic's final Moscow concert, Shostakovich, who had been away during the earlier performances, embraced Bernstein. He wrote in 1960, "I was very taken with the performance of my Fifth Symphony by the talented Leonard Bernstein. I like it that he played the end of the finale significantly faster than is customary." Stravinsky's personal manager, press representative, secretary, and companion, Lillian Libman, wrote that the composer was "deeply touched by

Bernstein's efforts on behalf of his music, for he spoke of them with appreciation to me and others." Historian Boris Schwarz considered that "the public discussion engendered by Bernstein's remarks began to pave the way to an eventual reconsideration of Stravinsky's role in Russian music—a reconsideration that culminated in the master's visit to Russia three years later, in 1962." At a White House dinner on January 18, 1962, Bernstein told Stravinsky, "I saw tears in people's eyes and not only for the *Sacre* but for the Piano Concerto, which is, after all, an astringent piece." Libman, though she noted that Stravinsky "was inclined to be skeptical . . . about the effect on the populace of his Piano Concerto," agreed that the Philharmonic tour was an "influencing factor" for Stravinsky's return visit to Russia at the age of 80.

Televised programs of the Philharmonic tour were shown both in the Soviet Union and in the U.S. Boris Yarustovski, a Soviet music critic and professor of the Moscow State Conservatory, said that especially since Bernstein's visit, "The works of American composers are frequently heard in the Soviet Union now." For the American television documentary, Bernstein lectured on the similarities between the twentieth-century music of the two countries. In the film, he was shown telling Russian musicians, "Your music and ours are the artistic products of two very similar people who are natural friends, who belong together and who must not let suspicions and fears and prejudices keep them apart."

### **The Press Club Talk**

During the Press Club talk, Bernstein again upset Soviet music officials when in answer to a reporter's question, he lamented a lack of experimentation in recent Soviet works and judged that the socialist realist ideology ironically had resulted in preserving stale traditions from the Czarist period. *Sovetskaya Kultura* accused him of "tendentiously distorting the truth." Noting that Bernstein included in the tour's repertoire works by Shostakovich and Khachaturian, the journal asked, "Is it possible he thinks that in the new works of these composers there is a lack of musical experimentation—that there is a rehashing of old Czarist themes?" That month, Shostakovich and Russian composer Tikhon Khrennikov published a report in *Pravda* in which they charged that although Bernstein praised Russian musical life while he was in the Soviet Union, he "changed his tune the minute he was out of the country."

Bernstein also made reference during the talk to a controversy much closer to home. In September 1959, when Khrushchev visited the U.S. and appeared at a National Press Club luncheon, the Soviets insisted that female members of the press be allowed to attend and sit in the Press Club auditorium, a venue that traditionally had been solely a male domain. While the first African American reporter had been inducted into the Press Club in 1955, women in 1959 still were excluded, though they recently had been permitted to sit in the balcony overlooking the auditorium when newsworthy speakers appeared. During the "kitchen debate," after Nixon pointed out a washing machine designed "to save

hours of labor for women,” Khrushchev had countered by stating that the Soviets did not have “the capitalist attitude toward women.” Bernstein chided the Press Club for its policy of exclusion during his introductory remarks, then responded to a question by the Press Club chairman by firmly affirming that women should play in symphony orchestras if they are good enough. It was not until 1971, however, that women were welcomed into the Press Club as members.

-- Alan Gevinson, *Special Assistant to the Chief,*  
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