



Nonfiction Award Finalist Remarks

Susan Goldman Rubin

I thank the 2012 YALSA Nonfiction Award committee for choosing *Music Was It: Young Leonard Bernstein* as a finalist. I was thrilled and amazed when I received the news. I am deeply honored to be in the company of such outstanding writers of nonfiction. My congratulations to Steve Sheinkin for winning the award for *The Notorious Benedict Arnold: A True Story of Adventure, Heroism & Treachery*.

I'm especially stunned to be a finalist because I never expected an award for what was truly a labor of love. From the start I adored working on this book. For years I have enjoyed the music of Leonard Bernstein, music he composed such as *Fancy Free*, *Candide* and *West Side Story*, as well as the symphonies and concertos he so passionately conducted and performed on the piano. I even loved *Age of Anxiety* when I discovered the recording at Oberlin College, much the way Lenny discovered the music of Aaron Copland on records when he was a student at Harvard. When Lenny's series of televised concerts for young people was reissued as a set of DVDs in 2005, I had the idea of

writing this book as a way of introducing a new generation to his art.

Before I had a publisher, I visited the Leonard Bernstein Office in New York when I was in town one time, and introduced myself. I figured it couldn't hurt to begin by getting their approval. And Marie Carter and Craig Urquhart were supportive and interested right away. So I must thank them again, for without their generous cooperation I wouldn't have had access to Bernstein's family photographs, original documents, unpublished interviews and music manuscripts, or have been able to afford permissions for reproducing this material. Later on in the project on another trip to New York, they arranged for me to meet and interview Lenny's adult children, Jamie and Alexander Bernstein. What a pleasure to talk to them about their famous dad and hear touching family anecdotes. Thanks to Jamie and Alexander I spoke to their Uncle B.B. (Lenny's younger brother Burton), and I traveled to the Eda Kuhn Loeb Music Library at Harvard where an extraordinary student project had been exhibited concerning Bernstein's early years, the focus of my book.

I decided to write about Lenny's struggle as a young adult to become a professional musician despite his father's objection. His father wanted him to have security and go into the family business, the Samuel J. Bernstein Hair Company. Furthermore, Sam Bernstein knew that a young American, especially a Jew, could not hope to find a place in the world of classical music at that time. Their ongoing conflict seems almost funny now because we

know that Lenny was enormously famous and successful. As his father said when Lenny at age twenty-five made his brilliant conducting debut at Carnegie Hall, "How could I know my son was going to grow up to be Leonard Bernstein?" But I thought that story of a young person striving to achieve a goal despite a parent's opposition was universal. I hoped that readers would be engaged in the story and feel inspired to follow their own dreams. Most of all I hoped they would listen to Lenny's music on CDs, iPods or YouTube and experience that enormous pleasure. It was daunting to limit a list of CDs since Lenny is one of the most recorded conductors of all time. So I decided to start with recordings in my own personal collection that I've heard over and over again, especially while working on this book.

None of this would have happened without my editors at Charlesbridge, Emily Mitchell and Yolanda Scott. It was lucky for me the day that my friend Eve Bunting introduced me to Yolanda at a midwinter ALA conference. Over lunch Yolanda talked about her love of musical theater and her experience as a performer, and I impulsively asked if she'd be interested in doing a book about Bernstein.

Emily worked with me throughout the five years it took to research and shape this manuscript, develop the back matter and obtain photographs and materials at the Music Division of the Library of Congress. Lenny's charisma spurred us on.

My agent, George Nicholson, who is dedicated to books on the arts for children, shared my enthusiasm and offered suggestions. He had even met Lenny once and spoke admiringly.

So I have to thank Leonard Bernstein for the gift of his music, his teachings, and the joy he shared with so many. As he once wrote, "Life without music is unthinkable."