



## Podium Note: *On the Town*

It is often said that the film version of *On the Town* is an adaptation of an adaption. That is to say, the movie was Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen's transformation of a Broadway musical, which in turn had grown out of Jerome Robbins's ballet *Fancy Free*. But Bernstein never saw it this way. "There was not a note of *Fancy Free* music in *On the Town*... We started from Square One with a totally new series of conceptions, different plot ideas, different scenarios..."

The important thing to know is that the road from *Fancy Free* to *On the Town* travelled through Times Square. As with *Oklahoma!*—which also opened in New York in 1944—the music was as much about the location as the characters in it. Bernstein's score is pure New York. Aaron Copland's genius for creating orchestral dances out of American popular styles is an influence, but his wide-open prairie sonorities are not. Bernstein's dances are high-energy, brash, jazz-infused expressions of the big city.

When the transition was made from stage to film, much of Bernstein's magnificent score was cut. Omitted were some of his most memorable ballads, replaced by new songs composed by Roger Edens, a successful MGM arranger and Judy Garland's vocal coach. Surprisingly, what was not cut was some of the more modernistic music that gave the score its bite—what stage director George Abbott referred to as "that Prokofiev stuff."

Gene Kelly attended the Broadway opening of *On the Town*. "I loved it so much I phoned Hollywood that evening," he wrote. In fact, MGM had already agreed to make a film version of the show, largely because of the reputation of Bernstein and director George Abbott. Abbott's involvement was key, attracting both publicity and money. He had been Broadway's hottest director for more than a decade, creating such hits as Rodgers and Hart's *On Your Toes* and *The Boys from Syracuse*, which the Landmarks Orchestra performs on August 31 in partnership with Commonwealth Shakespeare Company.

Leonard Bernstein made his professional conducting debut at the Hatch Shell on July 11, 1941, leading the Boston Pops. While much of his stage work is set in New York, he remains a child of the Bay State. His 100<sup>th</sup> birthday—August 25, 2018—will be celebrated throughout the Commonwealth and the city of Boston. The Boston Landmarks Orchestra has planned three years of Bernstein programming leading up to this milestone. This summer, in addition to tonight's showing of *On the Town*, we perform his complete *Fancy Free* on August 17 with original choreography to the final four scenes by Yo-El Cassell. Next year, we will mount a new production of *West Side Story* in partnership with Commonwealth Shakespeare Company and the Boston Conservatory at Berklee. And the following season—the year of the Bernstein centennial—stay tuned!

- Christopher Wilkins