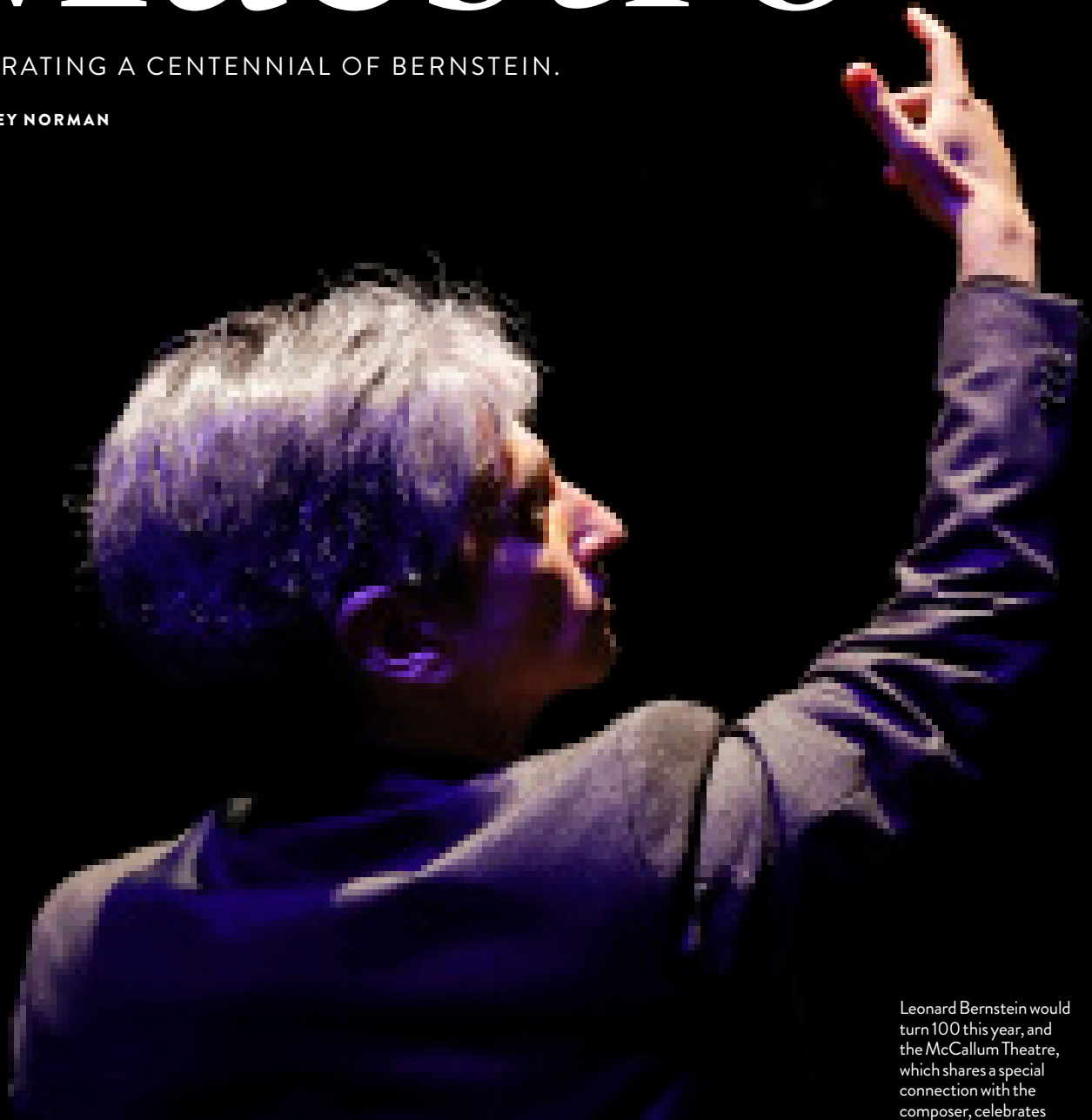


Maestro

CELEBRATING A CENTENNIAL OF BERNSTEIN.

BY JEFFREY NORMAN



Leonard Bernstein would turn 100 this year, and the McCallum Theatre, which shares a special connection with the composer, celebrates with a selection of centennial productions.

M In January 1976, an 18-year-old **Mitch Gershenfeld**, now president and CEO of McCallum Theatre, was a college freshman in Philadelphia, studying to be a musician. That month **Leonard Bernstein** and **Alan Jay Lerner** came to town to run previews of their new musical, *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue*. It was the first musical score Bernstein had written since *West Side Story* in 1957 and the theatre world was buzzing with excitement.

“A friend of mine was playing trumpet in the orchestra and said if I cut classes that day, I could sneak into Town Hall and hear the first rehearsal,” Gershenfeld recalls. “I sat in the back of the auditorium and saw the world’s most famous classical musician walk into the room. The music was amazing and very difficult. One of the musicians was having a bit of trouble with the part, and Maestro Bernstein was not happy about it. My trumpet-playing friend whispered something to the orchestra contractor that eventually got to Bernstein. He turned around and pointed at me. He crooked his finger indicating that I should come down from the back of the hall. ‘So you play the tuba?’ he asked. ‘Yes sir, I do.’ ‘Well, get your tuba and I will listen to you play.’ I ran downstairs, got in a cab, and raced back with my horn. I played my tuba for Leonard Bernstein and he hired me to play the show.”

They premiered *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue* at the Forest Theater and it ran for a month. “It was a difficult time and the critics were not kind,” Gershenfeld says. “As the show headed to Broadway, I was offered a chance to go to New York with the show. I didn’t want to interrupt my education, so I declined. And it’s a good thing because the show only lasted one week on Broadway.”

That experience left a lasting impact on Gershenfeld, who has cultivated a career in the arts ever since.

“I’ve worked with a lot of artists since 1976, but I can say that I never met a more generous, kind, or brilliant musician than Leonard Bernstein,” he says.

It should come as no surprise, then, as the world celebrates the 100th anniversary of Bernstein’s birth, that Gershenfeld wanted to do something special to commemorate the occasion at the McCallum. In conjunction with the Theatre’s own 30th anniversary, Gershenfeld put together a series of events to honor the Leonard Bernstein centennial.

The biggest and most ambitious project is *West Side Story: In Concert*, an original McCallum production slated for five performances only from March 9 to 11. For this large-scale endeavor, Gershenfeld turned to the McCallum’s very own **Chad Hilligus**, who produced *Carol Channing’s 95th Birthday* during the 2015–2016 season.

“The music of *West Side Story* has played an integral role in my career,” says Hilligus, who, prior to joining McCallum staff, performed in more than 20 countries — from North America to Europe to Asia to Australia. A former member of the multiplatinum international crossover group The TEN Tenors, Hilligus also appeared regularly



Keigwin + Company appears Feb. 5.

as a solo artist at concert venues across the country, including a well-received stint at the McCallum in January 2017.

Hilligus gained acclaim for his portrayal of Tony in the 50th anniversary world tour of *West Side Story*, appearing in 14 different countries. “It is both a thrill and an honor to now produce and direct an incredible company of talent, both on and off stage,” he says.

“We knew we wanted to do something big to celebrate the Bernstein centennial,” Hilligus adds. “And we knew we were going to have to produce it ourselves. *West Side Story* has been called the greatest love story of all time and is arguably Bernstein’s most well-known masterpiece.

“For this production, we’ve chosen to present the complete score in concert format because we want people to experience the music of Bernstein in all of its glory. We’ve assembled a stellar cast of Broadway all-stars, accompanied onstage by a full 40-piece orchestra with the finest musicians in Los Angeles and Grammy-winning conductor **Richard Kaufman** at the helm.”

Ali Ewoldt plays Maria, a role she’s played more than a dozen times throughout her young career, including with the national tour of the 2009 Broadway revival. She’s currently starring on Broadway as Christine in *Phantom of the Opera*. Tony will be played by **Matthew Hydzyk**, who starred in the Broadway revival of *West Side Story* and most recently appeared at the Kennedy Center in the National Symphony’s centennial tribute *Bernstein on Broadway*.

“We are truly fortunate here at the McCallum to have a professional production team in place, all equally excited to create something exclusively for our audiences,” Hilligus says. The March 9 performance of *West Side Story* is presented through the generosity of **Annette Bloch**. The March 11 performance is presented through the generosity of **Edeltraud and Patrick M. McCarthy**.

The Bernstein festivities begin in earnest Feb. 5 when the McCallum presents **Keigwin + Company Celebrates Bernstein**. The dance company’s artistic director, **Larry Keigwin**, has put together a program that blends his own electrifying vision with Bernstein’s iconic scores in *Episodes* and *Waterfront*, plus a brand-new work developed just for this event.

Maestro



Natalie Cortez, Matthew Hydzik, and Ali Ewoldt of *West Side Story: In Concert*.

The show offers audiences an experience that enriches their appreciation of both artists while paying tribute to the significant impact of Bernstein's work on American dance and the broader culture. "Larry Keigwin is a skilled choreographer," wrote *AltDaily.com*. "His work has depth, and mixes a wide assortment of styles and emotions that the dancers present exceedingly well. Their technique, strength and presence fill each moment and phrase."

Founded in 2003, Keigwin + Company reaches national and international audiences and invigorates diverse communities with a refreshing vision of dance that embodies a theatrical sensibility of wit, style, and heart. The company regularly partners with venues for community and education projects that seek to physically engage audiences and aspiring dancers in movement and the choreographic process. The company will perform its Bernstein tribute for local schoolchildren in

grades two through six as part of McCallum Theatre Education's Field Trips Series, Feb. 6 at 9:30 a.m.

Keigwin + Company Celebrates Bernstein is presented through the generosity of **Diane and Gerald Wendel**.

Rounding out the McCallum's Bernstein Centennial Celebration is **Maestro: The Art of Leonard Bernstein**, starring Canadian pianist, actor, playwright, composer, producer, and director **Hershey Felder**, coming to the McCallum for three performances, March 20 and 21, presented through the generosity of **Dan and Brooke Koehler**.

IN CONJUNCTION with the McCallum Theatre's Leonard Bernstein Centennial, McCallum president and CEO Mitch Gershenfeld will be teaching a three-part course, "Leonard Bernstein at 100," at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute on the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus. Gershenfeld will discuss three areas of Bernstein's genius; as a conductor, educator, and media personality; as the composer of classical music and opera; and as a composer of music for film and Broadway. Through recordings, videos, and personal anecdotes, the life of this uniquely American musician will be explored.

Course Dates and Times

Saturday, March 17: 10 a.m. to noon
Saturday, March 24: 10 a.m. to noon
Saturday, April 7: 10 a.m. to noon

For information, call 909-537-8121
or email olli@csusb.edu.

McCallum audiences are familiar with Felder from his previous well-regarded appearances in one-man shows about Irving Berlin and George Gershwin. He also directed concert pianist **Mona Golabek** in an adaptation of *The Children of Willesden Lane*, which returns to the McCallum in May as a focus work of McCallum Theatre Education's Aesthetic Education Program and Field Trip Series, presented through the generosity of **Mary Lou Graziadio Area and Jack Area**.

Felder says he's looking forward to being with McCallum audiences again, particularly with a show highlighting someone who has inspired him for many years. "When I reached my 20s, I became highly aware of [Bernstein's] circle," Felder says. "I had the opportunity to meet many of those people including family members, musicians, directors, artists, and so many others who were influenced by his creativity. Over the years, I came to understand that magnitude of his contribution."

Felder says that celebrating a great artist's 100th birthday is "a great opportunity to review the artist's commitment and contribution to culture. It puts those contributions in context and allows us to experience the individual's life and art through the century prism."

A chance meeting with another great artist actually inspired Felder to add Bernstein to his canon of one-person shows. "Years ago, I ran into Mike Nichols, the great auteur director, in Chicago," shares Felder. "He was aware that I was performing a show about Gershwin. After a few visits with him, he suggested that I investigate the Bernstein character. He knew Bernstein very well and thought that I could bring his story to veritable life."

We asked Felder if there was one moment in the show that makes him happiest re-creating. "When doing these pieces, I don't think of things in terms of happy or sad," he says. "I think more in terms of responsibility — have I re-created, or suggested ideas responsibly and truthfully? If the answer is yes, then I am happy."

Felder says he hopes McCallum audiences learn that Bernstein was "a complicated man, with interesting reasons."

The McCallum invites you to revel in the artistry and legacy of this complicated man and extraordinary musical icon for three outstanding productions celebrating a true American icon.

THE MCCALLUM THEATRE PRESENTS:

Keigwin + Company Celebrates Bernstein, Feb. 5
Presented through the generosity of Diane and Gerald Wendel

West Side Story: In Concert, March 9–11
March 9, *presented through the generosity of Annette Bloch*
March 10, March 11, *presented through the generosity of Edeltraud and Patrick M. McCarthy*

Maestro: The Art of Leonard Bernstein starring **Hershey Felder**,
March 20 and 21
Presented through the generosity of Dan and Brooke Koehler