

[Moussorgsky's] *Boris Godunov* may be entitled Cacophony in Five Acts and Seven Scenes.
– Nicolas Soloviev, February 11, 1874.



In the best
of all possible worlds...

"A cow appears, as Candide, Cunegonde, and the company in rustic clothes pick up pitchforks, buckets, and other farm implements. As they lift their grateful eyes to God, the cow drops dead of the pox and Dr. Voltaire, back in nightshirt, draws the curtain."

There – I've told you the ending. Don't you hate it when people do that! Voltaire said "The secret of being a bore is to tell everything". But I hope that this will make you wonder what led up to it, and you'll come along on July 23rd or 24th to find out.

Candide is now part of our culture. Choir tenor Bob Berghout quotes New Scientist magazine advising that scientists would "...do well to avoid the adaptationist fallacy of Dr Pangloss from

Voltaire's *Candide*, who claimed that 'the nose is formed for spectacles, therefore we wear spectacles'."

Critic George Ryan says: "The music of Leonard Bernstein is sheer loveliness, solidly in the operatic vein and most pleasant to hear..." and offers some more advice: "[T]he ideal spectator of this new *Candide* would approach the playhouse armed with some knowledge of Voltaire's period and his philosophy, which latter earned his complete works, in 1804, a special place in the Church's Index of Forbidden Books."

Lillian Hellman says "[In 1953] I was reading *Candide* in bed. I was laughing and having such fun with it. I had read it first when I was very young and I guess I read it every five or six years from that time on. To me it was a great book, full of laughter, wisdom, comment, satire and bite. I thought of it as an attack on all rigid thinking, on all isms. I decided that night I'd like to do something with it."

Bernstein had often told Hellman that he would like to collaborate with her in writing a musical. After her bedtime revelation, she sent him a cable – he was conducting at La Scala – suggesting that they work together on *Candide*. Bernstein agreed, and their work began.

Bernstein says "The challenge to us was to dramatize and musicalize the stinging satire of *Candide*, without turning it into burlesque. That's why this so-called Broadway Show was subtitled an operetta, in which we could play with time, place and style... *Candide* was written as a kind of personal love letter to European music. It's... a pastiche, it's eclectic, that's the whole point of it. [It's] a kind of salute to everything I love in Gilbert & Sullivan, in Offenbach, in Bellini, even.

"Voltaire's satire is international. It throws light on all the dark places... Puritanical snobbery, phony moralism, inquisitorial attacks on the individual, brave-new-world optimism, essential



Lillian Hillman and Leonard Bernstein in the 1950s

superiority — aren't these all charges leveled against American society by our best thinkers? And they are also the charges made by Voltaire against his own society."

As we have seen, these were turbulent times for many artists, including Bernstein's close friend, composer Aaron Copland.

Copland was summoned to appear before Joe McCarthy, but was treated quite leniently. "My impression," he wrote, "is that McCarthy had no idea who I was or what I did." Copland was in fact quite a socialist with Communist connections. Apparently McCarthy was warned off "one of America's greatest living composers". Copland still experienced difficulties travelling abroad – his passport was not renewed, and many engagements were rescinded.

Copland was a rebel. Alex Ross describes his *Connotations* as 'by some margin the most dissonant score [of his] career, [culminating] in an apoplectically orchestrated sequence of chords... a barbaric yawp of a piece...' When performed at the Lincoln Centre, he continues, 'the composer was greeted by... Mrs John F Kennedy... Ordinarily at ease in cultural settings, the First Lady was this time rendered more or less speechless. "Oh Mr Copland," she said. "Oh Mr Copland."'

Copland wrote to Bernstein "Don't forget *our* party line – you're heading for conducting in a big way – and everybody and everything that doesn't lead there is an excrescence on the body politic."

Bernstein left the New York Philharmonic in 1969 to concentrate on composing. Jackie Kennedy, now Mrs Onassis, commissioned him to write his *Mass* for the opening of the Kennedy Centre in 1971.

Not achieving critical success, he returned to conducting, specialising in the works of Mahler. According to Bernstein "It is only after fifty, sixty, seventy years of world holocausts... that we can finally listen to Mahler's music and understand that it foretold all." Bernstein certainly saw himself as a product of very difficult times.

The now standard version of *Candide* premiered in 1974.

I first discovered *Candide* on one of those nights when there is nothing on the TV that I wanted to watch. I noticed in a program that Bernstein's *Candide* was scheduled, and it was Bernstein's name that attracted me. I hadn't read Voltaire since high school.

I loved the show! I'm sure you will too.

Yodelling Brahms



An old school friend, Tomas Kalmar, attending the Interlaken Jodlerfest in Switzerland recorded this interesting clip: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5R4KvLRnDs&feature=player_embedded

He notes that "the fair-haired youth in the middle with the (very traditional) ear-ring sings the descending alphorn motif that Brahms transcribed onto a postcard, mailed to Clara Schumann and then used for his First Symphony. Note the sharpened fourth: g - f# - d - G."

Tomas also provides an interesting insight into the music of Chopin at www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxDIJh14jaU&feature=related