"THE GIRL AND HER BALLOON"

and

LEONARD BERNSTEIN'S *SYMPHONY NO. 2* "THE AGE OF ANXIETY": INTRICACY GROUNDED IN PROGRAMMATICISM

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The Girl and Her Balloon

Sarah Mauro

Instrumentation

Piano

Flute I and II
Oboe I and II
Clarinet in B♭ I and II
Bassoon

Horn in F I and II
Trumpet in B♭ I and II
Trombone

Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Double Bass

Glockenspiel
Timpani
Percussion (crash cymbal, snare,
tambourine, triangle, woodblock)

Program Notes

I wrote "The Girl and Her Balloon" with a short story in mind. The piece is in free form, but several motives associated with different actions recur throughout the piece in different contexts. It is also broken into segments, sometimes fluidly moving from one to another, other times separated by a pause. In my mind, each segment represents a part of the story. Still, I do not intend for the interpretation to be set in stone. One of the wonders of music is that we all, as listeners, have our own unique ways of understanding. I have decided not to title each segment, rather just to provide the story so that the audience members can listen for musical hints that match the action and visualize other details for themselves.

"A young girl and her parents have decided to spend the day at the carnival. As they are preparing to leave, she hears the carnival's music coming in through her window. She becomes excited and dashes downstairs to the front door, ready to bound to the fairgrounds. Her parents are not quite ready, so she waits for just a moment to decide whether to bound off without them. Too excited to wait, she runs off. As she gets closer, her house gets smaller in the background behind her. It is somewhat daunting, but she doesn't second guess herself. She runs faster and faster and finally ducks into the carnival.

As she strolls around by herself, she takes in all the wonders. There are clowns, games, and a beautiful carousel. Soon, though, she begins to feel scared. Everything had seemed so big and exciting before, but now the girl feels very small and becomes aware that her parents are nowhere in the crowd of strangers.

Right when she is ready to cry, someone notices how frightened she is and hands her a balloon to cheer her up. Somehow, the girl is at ease. She holds the string tightly and begins to play and dance with it, running through the carnival as if she is the only one there. With her balloon, she has entirely forgotten how scared she was before, and now she doesn't want the day to end.

The girl is so caught up in the moment that she is startled when she unexpectedly hears her parents call out her name. The balloon accidentally leaves her grasp and is carried away by the wind. The girl watches it float away.
She has been found, but she has also lost something."

Sarah L. Mauro

The Girl and Her Balloon

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INTRODUCTION

Leonard Bernstein was one of the most ubiquitous musical figures of the 20th century, with a career spanning the fields of conducting, composition, performing, and education, yet it is this very ubiquity that many consider his downfall. Several writers feel his compositions suffered due to the fact that he was balancing writing with a rewarding but time-consuming career as a conductor. One target of criticism is Bernstein's *Symphony No. 2* "The Age of Anxiety", written in 1948-49. Several criticisms of this piece center around the notions of musical disunity and too-extreme juxtaposition. Olin Downes believed the symphony to be "a triumph of superficiality."[1] Nicholas Tawa wrote, "["The Age of Anxiety" is]… more slackly put together than the *Jeremiah* Symphony. The meticulous musical itemization of a wide-ranging poetic story generates an awkward and discontinuous musical dialogue. The music remains unconvincing

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[1] Meryle Secrest, <u>Leonard Bernstein</u>. (New York, 1994) 176: "Olin Downes… felt that the score [to *The Age of Anxiety*] was 'a triumph of superficiality.'"

to the ear."[2] These claims are representative of a body of criticism of the symphony focused in the same vein.

However, those who make these claims lack awareness of a crucial aspect of the symphony. "The Age of Anxiety" is programmatic, a response to W. H. Auden's *The Age of Anxiety: a Baroque Eclogue*, which centers around four characters' search for faith. The poem, written in 1947, communicates "postwar themes of anonymity, estrangement, and rootlessness"[3] that were relevant to the wider public. Bernstein identified with the poem on a personal level; in fact, he calls the symphony autobiographical.[4] Still, he remained faithful to Auden by structuring his symphony the way Auden structured his poem, in six main divisions: "The Prologue", "The Seven Ages", "The Seven Stages", "The Dirge", "The Masque", and "The Epilogue". One must be familiar with these aspects before making any criticisms, for Bernstein's purpose in writing justifies his compositional procedures and stylistic decisions.

To say "The Age of Anxiety" is an unsatisfactory work[5] additionally shows unfamiliarity with the cultural context of the time. The aforementioned critics offered no attempt to place the symphony in the context of the rapidly changing musical climate of the 20th century. This century saw the dawn of the

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[2] Nicholas Tawa, <u>The Great American Symphony: Music, the Depression, and War</u>. (Bloomington, 2009) 116-117.

[3] Barry Seldes, <u>Leonard Bernstein: The Political Life of an American Musician</u>. (Los Angeles, 2009) 49

[4] Leonard Bernstein. The Age of Anxiety: Symphony No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra: after W. H. Auden. (New York: 1993). (Prefatory note)

[5] David Gow, "Leonard Bernstein: Musician of Many Talents," <u>The Musical Times</u>. July 1960: 428

American modernist movement, championed by figures such as Aaron Copland.

Nadine Hubbs defined the principle of the movement, stating,

> "Identifying a distinct American style in concert music and a great American composer became a fervent concern, beginning in the nineteenth century, for several generations of American audiences, artists, and critics seeking to counter the domination of European cultural products and values, and to prove America's high-cultural worth and maturation."[6]

Essentially, the movement epitomized the concerns musicians had about creating an inherently American music. Bernstein responded to these concerns in his 1939 senior thesis at Harvard, "The Absorption of Race Elements into American Music", by offering a "manifesto calling for an organic, vernacular, rhythmically based, distinctly American music.[7] Bernstein answered his own call throughout his career; indeed he made it a lifelong ambition to advocate and create a discernable American musical language.

Bernstein is arguably best known for proponing these American vernaculars in his writings for musical theater, and he himself said, "I have a suspicion that every work I write, for whatever medium, is really theater music in some way."[8] Perhaps critics were blinded by a sense of theatricality from "The Age of Anxiety", which contains a great variety of juxtaposed styles and timbres. But to dismiss the piece for this is a rather unreasoned response. Critics have failed to demonstrate awareness of the extramusical aspects that influenced Bernstein's writing and have consequently presented distanced generalizations

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[6] Nadine Hubbs. The Queer Composition of America's Sound. (Los Angeles, 2004) 72
[7] Barry Seldes, Leonard Bernstein: The Political Life of an American Musician. (Los Angeles, 2009) 8
[8] Leonard Bernstein. The Age of Anxiety: Symphony No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra: after W. H. Auden. (New York: 1993). (Prefatory note)

that do not reflect the intricacies beneath the surface. Bernstein's music must be

placed in the context of the program so one can appreciate his techniques, which

are purposeful and closely reflect the themes presented in Auden's text.

ANALYSIS

"The Prologue"

Auden's Prologue describes four characters sitting in a bar musing individually over their personal conflicts, questions, and sense of unfulfillment. In time, they join together to discuss their common situation.

Bernstein begins the symphony with a heartrending melody presented as a clarinet duet, from this point on called "A" [Ex.1].[9]

Ex. 1, "The Prologue", mm.1-3, Clarinets in A

There is a degree of rhythmic and harmonic independence between the two lines, creating an atmosphere of loneliness, paradoxical since it is a duet. As they drift poignantly in and out of dissonance, they generate feelings of anxiety and tension that set the mood of the whole symphony beginning with the very first harmony, a

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[9] All examples are from the source: Leonard Bernstein. The Age of Anxiety: Symphony No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra: after W. H. Auden. (New York: 1993).

tritone. The clarinets continue their duet until measure 20 where the texture

thickens and darkens with the entrance of lower instruments. This cloud is pierced

by the entrance of a flute line [Ex. 2] descending to its lowest range, which

Bernstein says "acts as a bridge into the realm of the unconscious, where most of

the poem takes place."[10]

Ex. 2, "The Prologue", mm.22-26, Flute (treble clef)

Underneath this bridge are sustained chords in the cello and harp made up of

stacked fourths[11], beginning with F-Bb-Eb in measure 23 [Ex.3].

Ex. 3, "The Prologue", mm.21-27, Harp, piano, and cello

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[10] Leonard Bernstein. The Age of Anxiety: Symphony No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra: after W. H. Auden. (New York: 1993). (Prefatory note)
[11] "Fourth" from here on will refer to the interval of a perfect fourth unless otherwise stated

This trichord's sound as a vertical stacking is open and somewhat unclear. A single ascending fourth in conventional tonal music is a common resolution, recognizable and affirmative. But in the case of Bernstein's fourths, there are two layered in a harmonic context, hardly traditional. This is subtle, but it indicates two important aspects that will recur throughout the symphony: the very interval itself, which makes up much of the musical material, and the sense of ambiguity and conflict. The fact that this line is juxtaposed with the descending flute line, in both register and contour, furthers the feeling of conflict. As the flute descends, the low line rises, setting up an opposing duality that also recurs in the symphony. The final notes spell a G# minor triad with nonchord tones C# and F# in the clarinets.

<u>"The Seven Ages"</u>

At this point in Auden's poem, the four characters are discussing the

progression of the life of man. The various theories proposed by the characters are

subjective and therefore a cause of disagreement. Edward Callan puts forward that

this section of the poem can "be compared to a musical composition in which

[one character's] narrative represents successive phases of the main theme while

variations on each phase are provided by the other characters."[12] In fact,

Bernstein's structuring of "The Seven Ages" is comparable to Callan's

suggestion. His rendering is a series of seven variations (fourteen counting those

in "The Seven Stages"), although what he means by variation is that "each

variation seizes upon some feature of the preceding one and develops it,

introducing, in the course of the development, some counter-feature upon which

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[12] Edward Callan, "Allegory in Auden's *The Age of Anxiety*," <u>Twentieth Century Literature</u>.
January 1965: 158

the next variation seizes".[13] Bernstein's ingenuity allow him to remain faithful to

Auden while also keeping his music interesting.

Variation I

The first variation begins by introducing the solo piano. It's first chord, C# Major,

is a resolution of the previous G# minor chord from "The Prologue". However,

there is a degree of doubt and even dissatisfaction aroused by the use of this

implied minor dominant movement to its major tonic (traditionally we would

expect V-I) as well as by the nonchord tones C# and F# in the G# minor chord.

The piano continues its melody [Ex.4], which is more harmonically driven

than "The Prologue".

Ex. 4, Variation I, mm. 1-5, Piano

Measures 1-3 constitute a melody that cadences on a G# Major chord. In light of

this, the opening C# Major chord seems to have had a double function: acting as

the tonic to the G# minor chord, but also acting as the subdominant to this G#

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[13] Leonard Bernstein. The Age of Anxiety: Symphony No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra: after W. H. Auden. (New York: 1993). (Prefatory note)

Major chord. This duality combined with Bernstein's mode mixture results in a sense of ambiguity; we are torn between grounding in C# or G#. This ambiguity continues, for measures 3-6 answer with the "A" motive, which cadences on A Major – now we are torn between three pitches.

Looking at them metaphorically, these musical phrases can be compared to a conversation. As if the first melody (measures 1-3) was dissatisfied with the subsequent response, it starts up again defensively in measure 6 a bit louder and at a different pitch level. The original descending whole step to the last note now becomes a descending fourth harmonized by an F Major chord with an added second. This cadential sonority is not as pure as the prior G# Major, as if the melody is suddenly second-guessing itself. The responsive "A" motive does not share in this uncertainty, for it repeats at the same pitch level and cadences on the same A Major as before. Traditionally, we expect cadences to provide a sense of finality, but because this variation contains several, all ending with different chords, there is instead a sense of uncertainty. Just as Auden's characters are uncertain about their proposed theories, we as listeners are uncertain about tonal grounding.
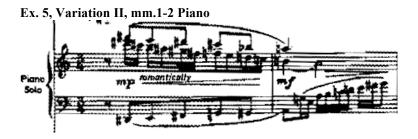
This variation ends with a quote from "The Prologue": The harp enters with the "bridge into the realm of the unconscious" line from The "Prologue" [Ex.2b], while underneath this line the cellos repeat their stacked fourths. The octave doubling signifies the characters moving even further into their subconscious.

Ex. 2b, Variation I, mm.12-15, Harp (treble clef)

Variation II

Bernstein changes the mood and texture at the beginning of the second variation, symbolizing the characters' drifting deeper into unknown territory. The piano plays a tumultuous line in contrary motion between the two hands, summoning back feelings of conflict and duality. The link from the previous variation is the D#-C#-B-A#-G# segment of the harp's "bridge" line. Here it appears as the lower voice in the right hand, although it is disguised against contrasting rhythm and melody [Ex. 5].

Ex. 5, Variation II, mm.1-2 Piano

The winds enter with an eighth note countermelody in measure 5 that begins with rising fourths [Ex. 6], leading to measures 7-11, a section dark in timbre with moments of distorted meter. For the first time, Bernstein is employing the full orchestra, minus percussion, to fill out his sound.

Ex. 6, Variation II, mm. 4-6, Flutes 1 and 2, clarinets in Bb 1 and 2, bassoons 1 and 2

There is a transition to a lighter mood at measure 16 characterized by fluttering figures, the entrance of the celesta, and the return of the rising fourths countermelody, organized in contrary motion. But the piano interrupts this mood in measure 22 with the return of its tumultuous line, and follows it with a declamatory solo [Ex.7].

Ex. 7, Variation II, mm. 23-25, Flutes and piano

The music slows to end softly with the initial piano motive now in the winds and harp. While the variation ends on a calmer note, the overall mood is one of deliberate commotion - it is consistent with the commotion between Auden's

characters. Bernstein calls back the rising fourths fragment from measure 5 to end

the variation [Ex.8].

Ex. 8, Variation II, mm.31-32, Clarinet in A (treble clef) and harp (bass clef)

Variation III

The rising fourths fragment becomes the link to the third variation,

recontextualized in the strings at a trudging tempo and extended into a

disheartening melody [Ex.9], ending with a series of three falling intervals- a

fifth, and fourth, and a fifth- that briefly disrupt the meter with beams across the

barlines [Ex. 10].

Ex. 9, Variation III, mm.1-7, Violin 1

Ex.10, Variation III, mm.11-12, Violin 1 (treble clef)

At measure 26, the concept of duality returns again with a solo violin variation on the opening theme. It is nearly a strict inversion of measures 1-3 [Ex. 11]. Any discrepancies can most likely be accounted for as alterations made to fit underlying harmonies.

Ex. 11, Variation III, mm.26-29, Violin 1 (treble clef)

This mirror variant ends as the original, with the three falling intervals. The variation finishes in the low range of the strings and clarinets.

Variation IV

Bernstein takes just the fifth-fourth fragment of the previous falling motivic figure as the connection to this variation and develops it into the main material, a curious and somewhat quirky piano melody in 5/4 [Ex. 12], a stark contrast in mood, timbre, and register from the previous variation.

Ex. 12, Variation IV, m.1, Piano (treble clef top; bass clef bottom)

As the right hand plays the melody, the left hand moves in running sixteenth notes against it, creating a motoric effect. Along with the articulation of the asymmetric meter, it suggests the inner-workings of a machine, almost perpetually moving with very few points of rest. Measures 9-13 recall the fourths and fifths as short, rising figures in the brasses and strings; the following measures repeat this figure in layered successions [Ex.13].

Ex. 13, Variation IV, mm.10-13, Orchestra

This culminates with a unison rising figure G#-B-F^x-G# in measure 23 [Ex. 14].

Ex. 14, Variation IV, m.23, Piccolo (treble clef)

At measure 24, the variation repeats in decorated form. Bernstein finishes with a

modified and brash version of the figure from measure 23, C-Eb-B-C [Ex. 15].

The pitch content is transposed and the intervals are more compact.

Ex. 15, Variation IV, measure 39, Trumpet in C (treble clef)

This variation is quite interesting to discerning listeners; it is at once a layering,

intersection, and manipulation of simple musical motives.

Variation V

Bernstein uses the ending figure [Ex. 15] of variation IV as the link to this

variation. The clarinet presents the fragment transposed and expands upon it

[Ex.16].

Ex. 16, Variation V, mm.1-6, Clarinet in Bb

The piano continues it in the right hand and furthers the development. The same motive craftily occurs at a new pitch level and in a new rhythm, in the left hand's lower voice in measures 11-12 and then the right hand's upper voice in measures 13-14 [Ex.17].

Ex. 17, Variation V, mm. 11-14, Piano (treble clef top; bass clef bottom)
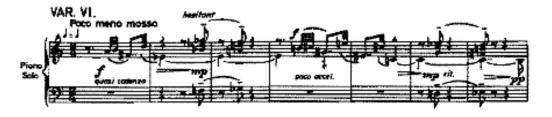
This variation is even more saturated with motives and patterns than the previous - the main musical material is a dense layering of extended variants on the opening figure. Detailed articulation and exciting textural changes suggest a frantic atmosphere, though the ending is a calm reiteration of a new figure F#-A-B [Ex. 18] in a long-short-short rhythm spanning a fourth.

Ex. 18, Variation V, mm. 71-79, Piccolo, Flutes 1 and 2, Oboes 1 and 2, English Horn

Variation VI

This variation is entirely a piano solo. The preceding F#-A-B figure opens as A-B-F#, a unit identical to measures 72-75 in variation V. It is answered tentatively by stacked fourths (see measures 2-3, marked "hesitant") [Ex. 19].

Ex. 19, Variation VI, mm.1-7, Piano

The figure repeats transposed up a step, expanded further with large leaps and short rhythms that feel as though they are tripping over themselves. Once more, the same tentative response follows (measures 6-7). For the first time since the initial variation, there is a hint of the "A" motive in the left hand at measure 10. There is also an allusion back to the third variation in measures 19-20 with the

falling fifth-falling fourth figure in the left hand [Ex. 20]. It is as if the piano is

reflecting over the journey thus far.

Ex. 20, Variation VI, mm.19-20, Piano (treble clef top; bass clef bottom)

Measures 20 to 26 repeat measures 1-7. Listening closely, one can hear middle C

moving down to B [Ex. 21]. This small gesture becomes the opening of the next

variation.

Ex. 21, Variation VI, mm.25-26, Piano (treble clef top; bass clef bottom)

Variation VII

The oboe repeats the C-B movement and continues with material from variation

VI. This time, it is not just a hint of "A" that is heard, but the return of the motive

in its entirety, first in the oboes and then the clarinets. Amidst all the tumult,

Bernstein interjects this motive to summon feelings of nostalgia. He is reminding

us of the purpose of the characters' journey: to find faith.

Just as "The Prologue" transitioned into "The Seven Ages" with the "bridge" into the unconscious, "The Seven Ages" transitions into the next section of music by the same means. There is an extreme case of contrary motion between the rising chords in the winds and the descending piano line, which falls significantly farther than either of the previous instances (Auden's characters are about to reach the most profound depths of their subconscious minds in the next section). As they reach their limits, they cadence on C Major. The ending of "The Seven Ages" is a rare instance of conclusiveness within a frantic and questioning mood. It signifies a point of preparation for further exploration of the characters' psyches as well as for departure from familiar musical motives.

<u>"The Seven Stages"</u>

At this phase in the poem, Auden's characters are in the most foreign part of their subconscious minds. They embark on a journey seeking simple forms of happiness, but it is a failed venture. Instead, they are met with disappointing "insight into the weakness of [their] conscious ideals."[14] Each character becomes aware of a personal flaw that prevents him/her from finding a faith that will help lead to personal fulfillment and resolution of conflicts.

<u>Variation VIII</u>

This variation starts by pulling G and C out of the previous C Major chord from variation VII and turning them into a melodic motive marked by repeated fourths proceeded by slithering chromatic figures. Worthy of note is the ground bass [Ex.22] used in this variation.

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[14] Edward Callan, "Allegory in Auden's *The Age of Anxiety*," <u>Twentieth Century Literature</u>. January 1965: 160
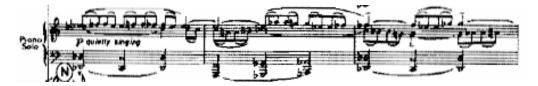
Ex. 22, Variation VIII, mm.2-4, Piano (treble clef top; bass clef bottom)

Its six note ground bass figure, as it finishes, overlaps with the next as it starts again in a different instrument group. Unlike in traditional passacaglias, the ground bass does not work together with the melodic material to create harmonious moments. The ground bass fits within the notes of Db Major although the beginning gesture seems to suggest C, an implication of bitonality that further demonstrates Bernstein's propagation of opposition and duality. We can particularly relate these themes that Bernstein has been foreshadowing to Auden's characters at this stage in the poem. It is here that they discover an inherent paradox in their quest: because their conscious ideals conflict with their spiritual ideals, it seems that they must give something up in order to be fulfilled. The two sets of ideals cannot coexist; neither can Bernstein's C and Db. Just as Auden's characters yearn for fulfillment, we listeners yearn for resolution. In addition, the austerity and marked style of the ground bass imparts a feeling of doom, of being caught in a continuous and inescapable cycle. Indeed, the ground bass is the epitome of paradox.

The concept of layering returns here and continues throughout the variation. The right hand piano part in measures 10-15, for example, is divided into overlapping moving lines [Ex. 23] while the ground bass appears underneath.

Ex. 23, Variation VIII, mm. 10-12, Piano

Similarly, measures 16-21 have the piano playing the original motive layered over the slithering figure in the violins and the ground bass in the low strings. The first three notes of the ground bass, Db-C-Db, become the motivic link to the next variation, to which it transitions without pause.

Variation IX

Bernstein extends the half step lower neighbor figure Db-C-Db to create this variation's theme. Underneath it is a unison rising line in the lower instruments made up of diatonic notes of Db Major, like the ground bass, though the music is still not clear tonally. With the return of chromatic slithering figure from the previous variation, it is hard to feel drawn consistently to any one pitch.

A fragment of the ground bass, Db-C-Db-F, appears in measures 26-31. As a four quarter note motive in a 3/4 section, once again there is a feeling of confusion through misplaced downbeats. The mood is frenzied and sometimes harsh, culminating in an accented declaration of the theme in all instruments but the piano in measure 39.

With the entrance of the piano at measure 48, there is a sudden change of mood. The half step figure returns in a new whimsical setting accompanied by fragments of motives from variation VIII. The light texture continues to measure 80 where it is interrupted by the clamoring return of the theme. Musical badinage occurs between the orchestra and the piano, which mockingly retorts to whatever the orchestra says. The variation closes with a unison descending line out of which comes the link to the next variation, a rising half step followed by a falling fifth [Ex. 24].

Ex. 24, Variation IX, mm. 98-99, Violin 1, violin 2, viola, cello, and bass (clefs top to bottom: treble, treble, alto, bass, bass)

Variation X

Originally G-Ab-Db in variation IX, this figure is transposed, layered, reordered, and found in diminution throughout the variation [Ex.25].

Ex. 25, Variation X   a) mm.1-4, Layered in the piano

b) m. 7, Reordered in the Piano (treble clef top; bass clef bottom)

c) m.10, In diminution in the Piano (both clefs treble)

Bernstein uses this three note motive to create most of the material presented here. Staggered entrances as well as the 2/2 + 3/4 time signature give a warped and muddled sense. Rapid piano runs starting at measure 15 [Ex. 26] provide linking material, although it is essentially undetectable at first hearing.

Ex. 26, Variation X, m.15, Piano (both clefs treble)

Variation XI

This variation does not open with linking material. Rather, the piano plays a single line in the right hand characterized by large leaps. A similar line follows in an almost taunting manner. This line ends with an eventual inward collapse in measures 10-12 [Ex. 27].

Ex. 27, Variation XI, mm. 10-17

As the left hand picks up this line, the right hand draws on material from the tenth variation's rapid piano runs, the linking material for this variation, in measures 13-17. Both this material and the opening piano lines are dispersed throughout the variation. Measure 62 begins yet another disruption of meter with the timpani, viola, and bass accenting every third beat (the time signature is 2/4). The variation ends with an extension of the final two notes of the collapsing line, comprising a
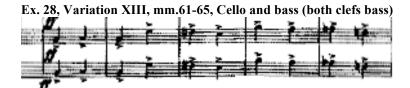
whole step that falls to a half step, which becomes the connecting material into the twelfth variation.

Variation XII

This rising half step becomes the beginning figure of continuous running eighth notes in the piano, like a mechanical circuit. The two hands play in mirror-like contour much of the time, trickily accenting every third eighth note in measures 5-7 (the time signature is 2/4) . The piano continues its brisk line smoothly into the next variation.

Variation XIII

While the piano continues, the ground bass returns in altered but recognizable form in staggered entrances at different levels of transposition and augmentation. Indeed this variation is a nightmarish weaving of the ground bass among instrument groups, as if the characters' paradox it taunting them with its inevitability. Layered tension, both textural and tonal, finally builds to a marcato declaration of the ground bass at measure 61. Bernstein brings back the idea of duality with an exact inversion of the ground bass in double time underneath [Ex.28].

Ex. 28, Variation XIII, mm.61-65, Cello and bass (both clefs bass)

Variation XIV

The final variation immediately repeats the ground bass in the piano in four
octaves. The music that follows is frenetic and scurrying, as if trying to run from
the anxiety that has been following it thus far. There is no hiding though, for as
the rhythm picks up speed it finally explodes in a chaotic conglomeration of
pounding sound. The final two notes are C# (the enharmonic equivalent of Db) in
a high register followed by an extreme register shift to a heavy C in a low register;
these are the same notes we have been pulled between since the beginning of
"The Seven Ages". Their juxtaposition does not provide tonal stability or any
sense that the music has arrived at a cadential point. The mood matches Auden's
characters' unsatisfactory arrival back to their conscious state. The problem of
finding faith is still with them.

"The Dirge"

This section of Auden's poem describes the four characters lamenting their loss of faith, of the "'colossal Dad', the great leader who can always give the right orders, find the right solution."[15] Bernstein, interestingly, makes use of twelve-tone rows in a harmonic context against a mournful largo melody.

The first row is presented immediately as a rising line in the piano. Using pitch-class notation, the row is (4 11 3 7 1 10 2 6 9 0 8 5). Bernstein actually inserts another 9 after the 0, but eliminating this odd pitch from the series produces a pure twelve-tone row. However, the row does not dictate the development of this section.

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[15] Leonard Bernstein. The Age of Anxiety: Symphony No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra: after W. H. Auden. (New York: 1993). (Prefatory note)

Matrix for first row; highlighted sets recur in later rows

4	11	3	7	1	10	2	6	9	0	8	5
9	4	8	0	6	3	7	11	2	5	1	10
5	0	4	8	2	11	3	7	10	1	9	6
1	8	0	4	10	7	11	3	6	9	5	2
7	2	6	10	4	1	5	9	0	3	11	8
10	5	9	1	7	4	8	0	3	6	2	11
6	1	5	9	3	0	4	8	11	2	10	7
2	9	1	5	11	8	0	4	7	10	6	3
11	6	10	2	8	5	9	1	4	7	3	0
8	3	7	11	5	2	6	10	1	4	0	9
0	7	11	3	9	6	10	2	5	8	4	1
3	10	2	6	0	9	1	5	8	11	7	4

Directly after the statement of the first row starts the mournful melody set against a trudging funereal rhythm. As the melody progresses, a high piccolo cuts through the texture with a piercing melody of its own, drawing on the minor third figure in measure 3 (what would have been 9 0 9 in the row). The combination of sounds produces a hazy atmosphere full of musical misalignment. Everything disperses at measure 14 with the entrance of the second row in the piano, (9 4 11 3 7 10 2 6 1 5 8 0), the beginning of a section of sequencing. There are some pitch order commonalities with the first row: (4 11 3) appears in both, as does (10 2 6), though the row is not a permutation of the first. Two measures later is the third row, (6 4 9 2 7 0 5 10 3 8 1 11).[16] Unlike the two previous rows, the majority of intervals between notes are fourths, an interval that hasn't been prominent since "The Seven Ages". A fourth row, (8 4 0 2 10 6 9 5 1 11 7 3), appears in measure 17 against the strings, which have taken up the previous piccolo melody. The

[16] Vertical pitch stackings are read bottom to top.

collections (10 2 6) and (11 3 7) both appear reordered, but, again, this row is not a permutation of the first. Bernstein next uses a row similar to the third, (10 2 7 0 5 3 8 1 6 11 4 9); it, too, contains mostly fourths.[17] This section of sequencing in the piano closes with an ascending line that one is inclined to think is yet another row. However, there are two flaws: a Bb which repeats twice and the lack of a B natural.

Bernstein's employment of twelve-tone rows is quite intriguing. A striking observation is the recurrence of the pitch sets (10 2 6) and (11 3 7) in the matrix of row 1, sets also found in subsequent rows that are not permutations of the original. Bernstein is aware of the rows' special properties, but he does not use the rows conventionally. He seems to be intentionally creating a puzzle. What are we to make of this? Perhaps the rows are a tactic in further depicting Auden's mood of frustration, but why make a direct reference to serial procedures? I propose that his purpose in using such procedures is to draw an extratextual parallel. "The Dirge", while a lament over loss of faith, can also be interpreted as Bernstein's personal lament over the loss of tonality in Western music. His feelings towards atonality were bitter, and he claimed, "[T]he moment a composer tries to 'abstract' musical tones by denying them their tonal implications, he has left the world of communication."[18] Serialism, he said, was "almost a mathematical

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[17] Rows discount interval direction, ie. two pitches "x y" could be read as x moving either up or down to y. Therefore, what appears as an ascending fourth in the row may actually be a descending fifth in the music.
[18] Meryle Secrest. Leonard Bernstein. (New York: 1994) 287

takeover"[19]. (Considering my own approach to analyzing his rows, I feel this opinion is justified.) Consequently, serialism was "antithesis of his… conviction that music must be understood intuitively and perceived through the senses."[20] Bernstein's connection of serialism with moods of frustration, grief, and even antagonism is a purposeful decision on his part. He is speaking through his music, an idea that is further supported by his claim that the symphony is autobiographical.[21] Given the above reasons, it is reasonable to deduce that Bernstein is interjecting a personal statement.

All of this sequencing in the piano leads to a mighty restatement of the mournful theme at measure 21, this time severe. The lament has turned into one of anger. Fragments of the melody repeat in the winds and strings and then subside. The piano takes over with a saddened response (measures 27-63). As the tempo fluctuates, the piano seems in conflict with itself. Its agitation increases and is joined by the orchestra in yet another reiteration of a twelve-tone row at measure 64. This time the row is (1 4 11 3 7 10 2 6 9 0 5 8), and again it is not a permutation of the original row.

A ferocious version of the funereal rhythm builds to the climax of "The Dirge". Its explosive sonority epitomizes feelings of loss and frustration, even total breakdown, for measure 65 contains all twelve chromatic pitches stacked vertically. Literally, the music has taken a turn into the unknown; at the moment it

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[19] Meryle Secrest. Leonard Bernstein. (New York: 1994) 287
[20] Meryle Secrest. Leonard Bernstein. (New York: 1994) 335
[21] Leonard Bernstein. The Age of Anxiety: Symphony No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra: after W. H. Auden. (New York: 1993). (Prefatory note)

is at a loss for conventional musical sense. The looming intensity of this

dodecachord lasts only briefly, but it is one of the most ominous sonorities yet

encountered. As the music proceeds with the mournful theme drifting between the

winds and strings, the piano returns one more time, now marked "nostalgically"

(measure 76) as if yearning for more reassuring times. (Again, I cannot help but

connect this to Bernstein's yearning for more "reassuring" music, that is, tonal

music.) They are not to be, for the strings are still lurking eerily on the

dodecachord in the last measure [Ex. 29].

Ex. 29, "The Dirge", mm. 79, Violin I (treble clef), violin II (treble clef), viola, cello (bass clef), 2 basses (bass clef))

<u>"The Masque"</u>

In this section, Auden's poem takes a turn. His characters relocate to an apartment to hold an impromptu party with the intention of comforting themselves after such a discouraging lament. Bernstein matches the frivolity with a giddy scherzo for piano and percussion. The previous dodecachord remains tied over into "The Masque" for several measures, but the bubbly piano chooses to ignore the ghost-like reminder; the ominous mood retreats for the time being.

The piece seems to be in three divisions but not exactly in ternary form, for the middle section is very similar to the first. I have designated the material as such:

Section 1	Section 2	Section 3
mm. 1-11 Introduction	mm. 128-136 Introduction	mm. 278-286 Introduction
mm. 11-23 A	mm. 136-148 A	mm. 286-289 A fragmented
mm. 24-30 B	mm. 149-159 B	mm. 290-303 G
mm. 31-40 B	mm. 160-167 Transition 2	
mm. 41-51 B	mm. 168-185 G	
mm. 52-57 C	mm. 186-190 Transition 1	
mm. 58-68 Transition 1	mm. 191-197 B	
mm. 69-80 D	mm. 198-203 C	
mm. 81-90 E	mm. 204-210 B	
mm. 91-110 F	mm. 211-218 C	
mm. 111-127 D2	mm. 219-230 D'	
	mm. 231-240 E	
	mm. 240-260 F	
	mm. 261-277 D2	

Given the similarity between the first two sections and the length of section 3 compared to the previous two, one might even see the scherzo as AA' with a coda. However, since Bernstein has thus far been quite untraditional in writing this symphony, I have chosen to view the scherzo simply as an embodiment of the merriment of Auden's characters. It is certainly a tipsy piece, very much in the jazz vein and full of eccentric rhythms and a meter that is rarely clear cut. Bernstein frequently places beams across barlines to obscure the meter and often has the pianist's hands working against each other. But within the depiction of drunkenness, Bernstein clearly has order, evidenced by the above chart. Themes repeat, sometimes with new transitory material interjected, to create familiar patterns. Compared to nearly all of the previous material in the symphony, it is refreshing to hear this delightful change of pace. Bernstein has his fun and then reverts back to abruptness and interruption moving into "The Epilogue".
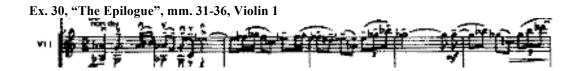
"The Epilogue"

After the party, the characters part ways still feeling empty and at a loss. As the characters return home, each comes to certain realizations about the nature of his/her original quest. Nothing has changed; they prepare for another mundane day.

Here, Bernstein diverts from Auden's text with his own interpretation of the characters' search for faith. He introduces the idea of "something pure"[22] that lies underneath the characters' emptiness. Under all the superficiality, Bernstein proposes that there is an innate faith, something for which the characters were looking all along but did not find.

"The Masque" ends brusquely with a clamoring outburst from the orchestra in a mocking rendition of its final rhythmic figures. The piano tries to finish its thoughts, but slowly fades into the background to give way to a lone trumpet calling the idea of "something pure", characterized by descending sets of fourths. In response, the orchestra enters with the "A" motive from "The Prologue", extending it with rising triplet figures [Ex. 30].

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[22] Leonard Bernstein. The Age of Anxiety: Symphony No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra: after W. H. Auden. (New York: 1993). (Prefatory note)

Ex. 30, "The Epilogue", mm. 31-36, Violin 1

"A" had originally captured the essence of loneliness, but here, redeveloped in the context of Auden's Epilogue, it is tinged with despair and yearning. The entire symphony has painted an atmosphere of anxiety that has yet to be alleviated. Everything heard so far has been building to the next moment; now, at last, this yearning is answered.

At measure 38, the winds begin a hopeful gesture characterized by repetition of the "pure" idea harmonized with the beginning of an ascending and uplifting Lydian scale [Ex. 31].

Ex. 31, "The Epilogue", mm. 37-41, Flutes 1 and 2, Clarinets in Bb 1 and 2, Celesta

Unconvinced of this hopeful gesture, the piano persists with the redevelopment of "A". Still, the winds continue to suggest it, shifting pitch center at measures 50 and 62 as if positing their suggestion in a different way. But the piano remains adamant. Eventually these two melodies merge, the hopeful melody interspersed

with the triplet figures from "A". As the dynamic grows, the rest of the orchestra eventually takes up the message of hope. Every instrument but the piano seizes on the mood in a triumphant declaration of optimism.

But there is a sudden interruption at the end of the final phrase (measure 77). As if calling out to say "Stop!", the piano begins a distraught solo that recollects the declamatory line from variation II [Ex. 7], then harshly retorts "The Epilogue"'s tragic opening melody back to the rest of the orchestra. As it quiets, it recalls the self-conversation from the first variation [Ex.3] and even short segments of "The Masque". These nostalgic melodies poignantly remind us of past feelings of sadness and longing. Thankfully, though, the piano sighs and lets them go. After the final rendition of "A" in measure 101, it surrenders to the orchestra, which tries once more to convince the piano to join in its message.

Measure 102 begins softly and slowly, marked "with serenity". As agitated as the piano was, the orchestra has remained calm and steadfast. This is their final affirmation, a glorious sound that builds both in range and dynamic. Within the greater sound, rising major sevenths in the cello in measures 106-107 further the growing sense of hope. Measures 106 to the end are the most majestic, with brilliant brass unabashedly proclaiming the final message accompanied by tam-tam and tubular bells. Finally, the piano is persuaded. In a forte affirmation, the piano sounds its "eager chord of confirmation"[23], a sixth chord built on C#, repeated by the orchestra in a final avowal of optimism. Bernstein has come

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[23] Leonard Bernstein. The Age of Anxiety: Symphony No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra: after W. H. Auden. (New York: 1993). (Prefatory note)

through with a much anticipated and inspirational conclusion to a staggering musical journey. It is at once a tonal resolution (recall the G#/C# dichotomy from variation I, as well as the C-Db juxtaposition in "The Seven Stages – finally, C#, Db's enharmonic equivalent, has settled as our pitch center), a mood resolution, and Bernstein's personal response and resolution to the crisis of faith Auden presents.

REFLECTIONS

Three aspects have proven essential in understanding the inner-workings of "The Age of Anxiety": willingness to probe beneath exterior characteristics, awareness of its programmatic aspect, and an understanding of the musical climate of the first half of the 20th century. Bernstein demonstrates great faithfulness to Auden's text while simultaneously proving his command of composition; the symphony is intricate and eclectic but unified by recurring motives. Furthermore, it exemplifies an original response to the 20th century music crisis: by using as his program a text whose themes were relevant to the wider public, Bernstein communicates American sentiment; by his profound display of musical ingenuity, Bernstein creates a work that is worthy of scrutiny and that naturally lends itself to discerning concert-goers. He is an informed artist both culturally and musically, and his symphony is a direct reflection of this.

Yet the symphony reflects something more. Recall that Bernstein's ending takes a turn from Auden's original. While Auden's characters resume their lives without closure in their search for faith, Bernstein channels a message of optimism. Indeed, this work is his own interpretation of man's search for faith, a

search in which man must be hopeful. But I propose a second message Bernstein

is trying to convey, one even more close to his heart. Yes, the symphony clearly

parallels Auden, but it is also a metaphor for the venture of modern American

musicians in the first half of the 20th century. Anxieties presented in the music

parallel the anxieties musicians had about coming into their own and defining a

quintessential American music. Bernstein's final message proclaims his faith in

music. Read in a biographical and historical light, his symphony is a call to

Americans to find their own voices and to create. "The Age of Anxiety", then, is a

direct response to the cultural milieu as well as a very personal endeavor of

Bernstein's; it is, in fact, "civically responsible art."[24] Bernstein has successfully

fulfilled his purposes in writing.

"The Age of Anxiety", seen only for its surface, is not a precise reflection

of what lies underneath. It is in this way that the symphony is most

autobiographical; Bernstein was not just his public image of celebrated musician,

but was truly a philosopher, humanitarian, and the embodiment of conviction. The

symphony is a deep reflection of its creator.

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[24] Barry Seldes, Leonard Bernstein: The Political Life of an American Musician. (Los Angeles, 2009) 19

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