

# getting to know us

## Minnesota Orchestra

*Leonard Bernstein's televised Young People's Concerts with the New York Philharmonic offered a thrilling introduction to orchestral music to a generation of children in the 1960s. His daughter **Jamie Bernstein**, who helps celebrate our Bernstein Festival this month, continues that tradition with concerts based on her father's model—and offers a unique perspective on the great composer-conductor.*

**Showcase:** What was it like to grow up in the Bernstein household?

**Bernstein:** It was incredibly lively! Our house was always full of people laughing and scrambling around the piano and having a good time into the wee hours of the morning. I assumed this was all that grown-ups did, and I couldn't wait to be one of them! Although my father had this illustrious career and spent time on the road, he loved to be around his family. He was very affectionate, sort of gallumph like a big St. Bernard, though he was very graceful on the podium. He was always telling stories: he loved words as much as music. And he was a compulsive teacher. We'd hear a song on the radio, and he'd say: " 'You Really Got Me' — that's in the Mixolydian mode. You know what a mode is?" And if we kids got turned on by the discussion, his next Young People's Concert would be about modes, unless something else excited him more in the meantime.

**Showcase:** That excitement comes alive in his music.

**Bernstein:** Yes, it has a kind of joy that's palpable, and that's part of why it's so irresistible. His music seems to dance for you: it has a propulsive quality. It's also amazing the way it bridges the gap between Broadway and the concert hall. His concert music is full of tunes and rhythms worthy of Broadway, while the scores of his musicals are as well-wrought and sophisticated as a Beethoven symphony.

**Showcase:** How did you come to develop family concerts of your own?

**Bernstein:** By fluke! About ten years ago my father's publishing company was talking about creating a young people's concert modeled after my father's, except *about* him and his music. I thought this was a fantastic idea and volunteered to develop it. I teamed up with my friend Michael Barrett, who had studied and worked with my father, and we split the job my father had handled by himself—I wrote and narrated, Michael conducted. To our surprise, the show became a hit with audiences around the U.S. and abroad. We used similar concepts to develop educational programs on the music of Mozart, Copland and other composers. I never anticipated this career, but it's been so rewarding.

**Showcase:** What's the best part about traveling with these concerts?

**Bernstein:** Honestly? It's my loyal fan base of five-year-olds—they like me the best, because I'm comfortable being silly. It's also been wonderful to meet musicians and audience members who knew my father and have stories about him. I love hearing them. They still illuminate that famous Leonard Bernstein personality and creative drive: they let *me* know him a bit better, too.

