

CONDUCTOR'S NOTE

A WORK FOR ALL TIMES

"This will be our reply to violence:
to make music more intensely,
more beautifully,
more devotedly than ever before."

—Leonard Bernstein

In our first week of rehearsals for this production, it became clear that our minds were clouded and our hearts were weighed down—from personal issues of family, health, and stress over preparation, to global issues like the pandemic, war, and inflation. We resolved not to suppress, but rather to invest all of this into the work we present for you. Each day in rehearsal, we considered the implications of the scenes and music for our world, and in every performance we will open our hearts to the joys and tragedies of the characters we portray. This is the great pressure and pleasure of being an artist, to pour oneself into the creative process and the performances.

West Side Story was, of course, created in a time of great turmoil as well. On the heels of a world war (*West Side* was originally conceived in 1949), came a new era of Cold War, interventions in Korea and Vietnam, waves of immigration and refugees; McCarthyism—of which Bernstein was a target and victim—created an atmosphere of "caution and fear," slum clearance destroyed neighborhoods for interstates or development projects, and teenage gang violence became a major concern. Clearly, the creators chose to imbue *West Side Story* with the weight of their own world. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is transported to the gritty streets of New York: a tale of the power of hate to destroy, the power of love to overcome, and the hope of a place "Somewhere" where these problems and troubles cannot touch us.

As we consider the challenges Bernstein faced and those we face today, it becomes clear that they are a common thread in every period in history: war, poverty, disease, rejection and fear of the immigrant or refugee... These things stay with us, but so do the moments of joy that can transport and carry us through. The creators of this work have given us a perfect reflection, a true likeness upon which to gaze and consider what things can stay and what things must change, and it is our great pleasure to join you today to perform this incredible American Masterpiece.



CHRISTOPHER JAMES RAY