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## Concert: Finger Lakes Environmental Film Festival Opening Night. "West Side Story Counterpoint"

Finger Lakes Environmental Film Festival

Jairo Geronymo

Deborah Martin

Deborah Lifton

Brad Hougham

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FINGER LAKES ENVIRONMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL



## Opening Night

### ***West Side Story Counterpoint***

A multimedia performance of  
Leonard Bernstein's *Symphonic Dances*  
from *West Side Story*  
Celebrating the 50th anniversary  
of *West Side Story*

**World Premiere**

**Monday, March 31, 2008**

**Two Performances  
at 7:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m.**

**Hockett Family Recital Hall,  
Whalen Center for Music, Ithaca College**

Jairo Geronymo and Deborah Martin, piano  
Deborah Lifton, soprano  
Brad Hougham, baritone

Original multimedia projection, design, and lighting  
by Ann Michel and Phil Wilde

Media editing and design by  
Ann Michel and Patricia Zimmermann

Producers  
Thomas Shevory and Patricia Zimmermann

A collaborative research partnership with  
the Human Studies Film Archives, Smithsonian Institution

Everyone knows *West Side Story*. Its melodic songs, syncopated rhythms, pulsing score, explosive dancing, and immigration drama entwine with the American national imaginary. *West Side Story* is part of our American psychic DNA. We know the play. We know the film. We know the songs. We know Tony and Maria. But do we know the music?

This performance celebrates the 50th anniversary of *West Side Story*. Through counterpoint strategies, it pushes against the dominant and accepted ways of thinking about musicals and romance. It invites you to listen to *West Side Story* and hear its polyphonies, harmonies, dimensions, and migrations.

This contrapuntal concert performance of Leonard Bernstein's *Symphonic Dances* from *West Side Story* starts with the music arranged for two pianos—not the play or the characters or the film. It reverses the way we think about the relationship between live music and silent film. It places us not in the plot, but in the exciting, visceral complexities of the music itself.

Leonard Bernstein's path-breaking musical *West Side Story* premiered in New York City in 1957. It altered this distinctly American genre by radically layering together two completely different worlds: the popular culture of the accessible Broadway musical with the high culture and musical sophistication of opera in an urban, youth-oriented, immigrant setting.

Erudite yet accessible, sophisticated yet simple, exciting yet subtle, complex yet popular, *West Side Story* still feels up to date, innovative, and rich. Because the musical was such a hit, Bernstein needed a piece he could perform in a concert hall, and hence, he created the *Symphonic Dances*, heard in tonight's performance as a two-piano arrangement. The score combines many ingredients to generate surprising forces, layered rhythms, and elaborate textures delicately balanced with gorgeous melodies. The sweet simplicity of the

duet “One Heart” is balanced by the density and aggression of “Mambo.”

To translate the rich symphonic textures of the *Symphonic Dances*, the two-piano idiom had to be stretched. John Musto, the arranger, skillfully features effects like snapping fingers, a whistle, words, and chordal glissandi in unusual combinations. All these special effects combined with the nestling of the two lidless pianos produce a larger and richer sound that reads *West Side Story* in a new aural dimension.

With two pianos, soprano, and baritone, this multimedia performance deploys alteration, extension, layering of horizontal lines, and fusion—strategies from musical counterpoint—to transform motives, images, and music. Large-scale projections layer archival amateur film from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe, and the United States with contemporary urban images. This multimedia performance smudges the borders between inside and outside America—it visually amplifies the motifs invoking immigration, migration, and racial and ethnic identities imbedded in the music.

—Patricia Zimmermann and Jairo Geronymo

## Biographies of *West Side Story* Counterpoint Ensemble

**Jairo Geronymo** was born in Brazil, where he studied with Attilio Mastrogiovanni and Gilberto Tinetti at São Paulo State University (B.M.). Currently assistant professor of piano at Ithaca College, he has studied with Caio Pagano at Arizona State University (M.M.) and Craig Sheppard at the University of Washington (D.M.A.). He lived for 12 years in the Seattle area, teaching at Pacific Lutheran University and Western Washington University. A winner of many competitions in Brazil and the United States, he maintains a busy schedule as a recitalist, chamber musician, and orchestral soloist. He has performed as a soloist with the São Paulo State Symphony, Brazilian Symphony (Rio de Janeiro), Northwest Sinfonietta (Tacoma), Lake Union Civic Orchestra and Eastside Symphonies (both in Seattle), and as a solo recitalist in Brazil, Canada, and Portugal.

**Brad Hougham** is a lyric baritone born and raised in Saskatchewan, Canada. He sang with the Saskatoon Opera Association and the Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan Festival. He has performed many roles with various opera companies including Il Conte (*Le Nozze di Figaro*), Demetrius (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*), Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*), Mercutio (*Roméo et Juliette*), and Schaunard (*La Bohème*). He sang at the Metropolitan Opera for eight seasons and has appeared in their productions of *Benvenuto Cellini*, *Fidelio*, *Götterdämmerung*, *Lohengrin*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *Moses und Aron*, *Oedipus Rex*, *Parsifal*, *Tannhäuser*, and *War and Peace*. He has worked with companies such as the Aldeburgh Festival, Bronx Opera, Jarvis Conservatory, New Rochelle Opera, and Manhattan Opera Ensemble. He has also been featured as a soloist on National Public Radio. His singing can be heard on two recordings: *Rossini in Venice* (Albany Records) and *Soldier Stories* (Mulatta Records) with the Manhattan Chamber Orchestra. Each summer, he teaches voice at the Spoleto Vocal Arts Symposium, an international institute for vocal studies and opera performance in Italy. He has taught master classes and clinics in the United States, Europe, and Canada. He is assistant professor of performance at Ithaca College.

**Deborah Lifton** is a soprano at home in opera, song recital, and musical theater. A recent winner of the 2007 Joy in Singing Award and the David Adams Art Song Competition, her recent appear-

ances include both Susanna and Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Valenciënne in *The Merry Widow*, Beth in *Little Women*, Ellie in *Showboat*, Elisa in *Il Re Pastore*, and Catherine in *A Death in the Family* (Albany Records), as well as the title roles in *Bastien und Bastienne*, *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*, and *Armida*. Lifton has sung with Mercury Opera Rochester, Natchez Opera Festival, Ash Lawn-Highland Festival, Rising Sun Opera Theatre, Aspen Music Festival, Bronx Opera Company, University of Michigan Opera Theatre, and the Long Island Philharmonic. She regularly performs on soundtracks for documentaries and nationally televised commercials. She is assistant professor professor of voice at Ithaca College.

**Deborah Martin** is a pianist who began her performance career in California when she was selected as a member of the Young Artists Guild and played with the Bakersfield Symphony Orchestra while still in high school. With a special interest in piano pedagogy, she has been a high-profile figure in the National Piano Pedagogy Conference and New York State Music Teachers Association. An active seminar and workshop presenter, she was invited to speak on teaching excellence at the state convention for the National Federation of Music Clubs. She has also adjudicated for numerous music organizations across New York State and the Northeast. She coauthored the text *Tonal Harmony at the Keyboard* with Gary Wittlich. She is associate professor of piano at Ithaca College.

**Ann Michel and Phil Wilde** (FLEFF distinguished multimedia producers in residence) have produced award-winning film, video, interactive, and digital media for three decades. They are the principals of Insights International, a production firm that specializes in science and educational nonfiction media for international clients. Their groundbreaking use of media has been widely recognized for bringing the real world into the classroom and the classroom into the real world. They have produced media for major museums, educational institutions, and organizations, professional and scientific associations, and corporations. Most recently they were awarded the blue ribbon for educational aids competition from the American Society of Agricultural Engineers. They serve as technical consultants for the Light in Winter Festival, an annual festival in Ithaca that links science and the arts. They have been involved with the Robert Flaherty Film Seminars for over two decades.

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