

PRESS RELEASE

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Monday, February 16, 2026

**Washington National Opera Announces New Venues and Dates for  
Bernstein's *West Side Story*:  
May 8, 9 and 10 at Lyric Baltimore;  
May 14 and 15 at The Music Center at Strathmore**

*WNO 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala to take place at The National Building Museum on May 16,  
co-hosted by Stephen Schwartz and Jamie Bernstein*

**(Washington, D.C.)** – Washington National Opera announces new venues and dates for its production of Bernstein's *West Side Story*. It will be performed at the Lyric Baltimore on May 8, 9, 10; and at the Music Center at Strathmore, May 14, 15. *West Side Story* will be conducted by Bernstein protégé **Marin Alsop** (May 8, 9, 15) and Grammy Award®-nominated conductor **James Lowe** (May 10 and 14). **For tickets, visit [WashNatOpera.org/tickets](https://WashNatOpera.org/tickets).**

The annual WNO 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala will take place on the evening of May 16 at The National Building Museum. The Gala is co-hosted by famed *Wicked* composer **Stephen Schwartz** and **Jamie Bernstein**, author and daughter of *West Side Story* composer Leonard Bernstein.

Since ending its affiliation with the Kennedy Center, WNO's inclusion of these three new venues for its 70th anniversary season reflects the company's commitment to reaching audiences across the greater Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia region—while continuing to serve as the home opera in the nation's capital.

"We are grateful that so many people and partners have come together so WNO can 'go on with the show,'" said WNO General Director Timothy O'Leary. "The public has rallied around Washington National Opera as more than just an arts organization, but as a part of American civil society, one of many institutions that make our culture more compassionate, connected, and beautiful. As we begin this new chapter, WNO is honored to be partnering with the Lyric in Baltimore and with Strathmore, in addition to our previously announced collaboration with Lisner Auditorium at George Washington University. Through programs at home in D.C., combined with performances throughout our region, we look forward to reaching more people than ever before."

**Bernstein's *West Side Story***

On May 8-15, 2026, WNO presents the company premiere of Artistic Director Francesca Zambello's critically acclaimed *West Side Story* production, which has been lauded for its "masterful combination of high-budget production values and gritty social awareness" (*The Saturday Paper*, Sydney). A truly integrated music theater work, as conceived and created by four giants in their respective fields—Jerome Robbins, Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim, and Arthur Laurents—*West Side Story* reimagines Romeo and Juliet as mid-century New York City residents who navigate between their love and their neighborhood's ethnic rivalries. The work was created in 1956, the year WNO was established. The production will get the big orchestra

treatment that only an opera company can deliver, with Robbins' original choreography, and will be conducted by Bernstein protégé Marin Alsop and James Lowe. In the leading roles, Tony is played by **Ryan McCartan**, whose star turns on Broadway include Hans in Disney's *Frozen*, Fiyero in the long-running *Wicked*, and most recently playing Jay Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby*. **Shereen Pimentel** performs the role of Maria—a role she performed both in the 2020 Broadway revival of *West Side Story*, earning an Outer Critics Circle nomination for Best Actress in a Musical, and last season in Houston Grand Opera's production.

"What an amazing opportunity to tell this particular story at this particular time!" shares WNO Artistic Director Francesca Zambello. "Bernstein examined a violent clash of cultures through an unsparing lens, exposing us to the inevitable tragedy that comes when we see only someone's 'other-ness'—and not our shared humanity. Bernstein' and Shakespeare's powerful stories powerfully depict how easily fear divides us, and how urgently understanding is needed, both then and now."

"*West Side Story* is, for me, one of the greatest scores ever composed," says Alsop, "It epitomizes Leonard Bernstein's eclectic and all-consuming grasp of pop culture, Shakespeare, current events and musical expression. Bernstein takes the interval of the tritone, often referred to historically as 'the devil's interval' and uses it to convey the extreme conflict of the narrative, building the entire score to *West Side Story* on it! Working on this score with this wonderful cast and amazing director will be a privilege."

### **WNO 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala**

In celebration of Washington National Opera's 70th anniversary and new chapter as an independent organization, this year's annual Gala on May 16 offers a celebration at the historic National Building Museum. The evening includes cocktails, dinner, dancing, and a stirring program of operatic selections paired with musical theater counterparts, performed by stars from the company's May production of *West Side Story*, WNO's Cafritz Young Artists, and the WNO Chorus and Orchestra, alongside leading opera and musical theater headliners. The popular composer of *Wicked*, Stephen Schwartz, and the author, director, broadcaster and filmmaker, Jamie Bernstein, daughter of Leonard Bernstein, will co-host. WNO's annual Gala raises support for the company's acclaimed productions, professional training programs, educational initiatives, and community engagement programs.

Gala co-host Stephen Schwartz shares, "I'm so pleased to be able to participate in the gala for Washington National Opera as it starts its next act as a fully independent organization. WNO has always been a musical treasure, as evidenced by its new production of *West Side Story*, one of the great works of American musical theatre."

Jamie Bernstein adds, "I'm honored to be participating in WNO's Gala in this especially consequential year for them. I'm proud to be able to express my admiration and support for Francesca Zambello, whose artistic vision is so skillfully steering WNO's ship through this season's turbulent waters. My sister and I are particularly moved that music from our dad's beloved work, *West Side Story*, is a part of the proceedings this year. We're additionally happy that our dear friend Marin Alsop, who studied with Bernstein, will be conducting. All in all, a celebration with so much meaning, music, and affection—all rolled into one gala!"

## **Ticket Information**

Tickets will go on sale to the public for *West Side Story* on February 20, with a special pre-sale option for WNO Subscribers on February 17. For tickets and information, visit <https://washnatopera.org/productions>. Patrons who purchased tickets for WNO productions previously held at the Kennedy Center are receiving refunds from the Center and will need to purchase new tickets.

## **COMPLETE EVENT INFORMATION**

### **West Side Story**

Music by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, book by Arthur Laurents; conceived by with original choreography from Jerome Robbins. Original release 1957. *West Side Story* is a co-production of Houston Grand Opera, Glimmerglass Festival, and Lyric Opera of Chicago.

*In English with Projected English Titles.*

**Lyric Baltimore**, 140 W. Mt. Royal Ave, Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Friday, May 8, 2026 at 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, May 9, 2026 at 2 p.m.

Saturday, May 9, 2026 at 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, May 10, 2026 at 2 p.m.

**Music Center at Strathmore**, 5301 Tuckerman Ln, North Bethesda, Md. 20852

Thursday, May 14, 2026 at 7:30 p.m.

Friday, May 15, 2026 at 7:30 p.m.

### **Cast**

Ryan McCartan\*, Tony

Shereen Pimentel\*, Maria

Taylor Harley\*, Riff

Amanda Castro\*, Anita

Yurel Echezarreta\*, Bernardo

### **Creatives**

Marin Alsop, Conductor (May 8, 9, 15)

James Lowe, Conductor (May 10 and 14)

Francesca Zambello, Director

Eric Sean Fogel, Associate Director

Joshua Bergasse\*, Choreographer

Kiira Carper, Associate Choreographer

Peter J. Davison, Scenic Designer

Jessica Jahn, Costume Designer

A.J. Guban, Lighting Designer

Mark McCullough, Original Lighting Designer

\* Mainstage Debut

### **WNO 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Opera Gala**

**The National Building Museum**, 401 F Street NW, Washington, DC 20001

Saturday, May 16, 2026, evening- Opera Celebration Gala.

Stephen Schwartz\*, co-host

Jamie Bernstein\*, co-host

Marin Alsop, conductor

Featuring: Guest soloists, Cafritz Young Artists, the WNO Chorus and Orchestra

*Soloists to be announced at a later date.*

\* Mainstage Debut

## ABOUT WASHINGTON NATIONAL OPERA

Founded in 1956, Washington National Opera (WNO) is one of the leading opera companies in the United States, presenting a diverse repertory that spans classic masterworks, contemporary opera, and newly commissioned American works. Under the leadership of General Director Timothy O’Leary, Artistic Director Francesca Zambello, and Music Director Robert Spano, WNO is known for ambitious productions, world premieres, and a deep commitment to artistic innovation, education, and community engagement. In 2026, following 15 years as an artistic affiliate of the Kennedy Center, WNO returned to full independence, building on a storied legacy that includes landmark productions, international acclaim, and nationally recognized programs such as the American Opera Initiative, the Cafritz Young Artist Program, and Opera in the Outfield®, which brings opera to new and diverse audiences across Washington, D.C.

### **MEDIA CONTACT:**

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