

A TEMPO



A Maestro Crash Course, from Yannick Nézet-Séguin

Bradley Cooper turns to Curtis conductor for Leonard Bernstein biopic.

IN PREPARING FOR his portrayal of Leonard Bernstein (*Conducting '41*) in the biopic *Maestro*, actor and director Bradley Cooper sought guidance from several top conductors, notably Yannick Nézet-Séguin. As the film's conducting consultant, the Curtis faculty member recorded dozens of videos on his phone for Mr. Cooper, in which he conducted in Bernstein's manner, and provided "play-by-play voiceovers of Bernstein's performances," according to the *New York Times*.



Mr. Cooper stealthily watched Mr. Nézet-Séguin conduct from the orchestra pit at the Met, once sitting in on a performance of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Coaching also took place on set. For a reenactment of a 1973 performance of Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony—a climactic moment in the film—the two men traveled to Ely Cathedral in England where the filming took place. Mr. Nézet-Séguin supplied the actor with cues through an earpiece.

Bernstein's two years at Curtis are not portrayed in the film, which focuses on his relationship with his wife, Felicia Montealegre. His Curtis years included conducting studies with the formidable Fritz Reiner and piano lessons with the demanding Isabelle Vengerova. While Bernstein's report card shows mostly As, it wasn't an entirely happy period, marked by friction with some classmates who saw him as a show-off and a Harvard snob. Bernstein later conceded that their opinions may have had some credence. Still, by his second year, he had settled in, and as an alumnus took part in the celebrations of Curtis's 50th and 60th anniversaries, in 1975 and 1984, respectively.

For Mr. Cooper, the biggest challenge was "feeling unprotected" and "naked emotionally" on the podium, Mr. Nézet-Séguin told the *Times*. "He wouldn't settle for anything less than what he had in mind."

The movie's soundtrack features Mr. Nézet-Séguin conducting the London Symphony Orchestra in works by Bernstein, Beethoven, Mahler, Walton, and other composers. *Maestro* is in theaters and arrives on Netflix on December 20.



A session at the Orchestra Bootcamp.

At Orchestra Bootcamp, Students Focus on Team Building

A tune-up after the summer break.

BY MARY CLAIRE SULLIVAN
AND SNIYA JOHNSON

This past September, the Curtis Symphony Orchestra tried something new: Instead of launching into concert preparation as usual, it spent four intensive, pedagogically focused sessions with conductor James Ross (Conducting '89). In addition to being music director of the Alexandria Symphony and a Curtis graduate, Mr. Ross is well known for his expertise in orchestral education: He is the orchestra director of the National Youth Orchestra of the USA, where he oversees all artistic and educational activities.

Orchestra bootcamp was a three-week experience focused on developing students' trust in their ability to learn pieces quickly and meaningfully. Students participated in four full-orchestra sessions and two sectionals, covering six pieces of standard repertoire. The goal, said Mr. Ross, was to "plant the seeds that would make the orchestra more productive and alive" throughout the year.

The culmination of bootcamp was an open reading of three of the studied pieces selected by the orchestra. Initially, Mr. Ross was slated to conduct, but when he became ill, four volunteers—three of them students—stepped up to stand in his place on the podium.

Among them was Ben Price, a second-year oboe student from Portland, Ore. The oboist was drawn to the third movement of Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony because of its contrasting feelings of

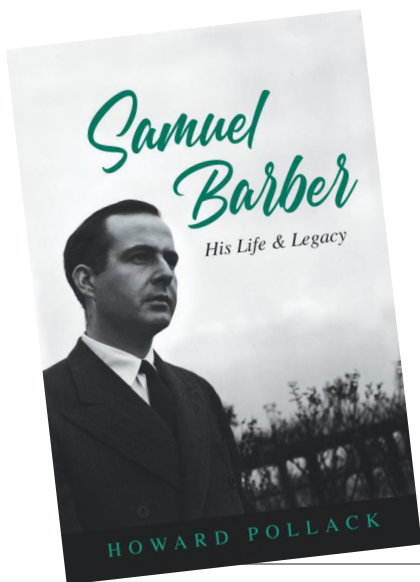
hopefulness and hopelessness. Three years in the National Youth Orchestra provided a familiarity with Mr. Ross's method of adding real-world context to the music. "Conducting the CSO is both a privilege and an incredible test of one's conducting," they said, "because they are such excellent musicians—they respond to everything!"

Benoit Gauthier, a first-year conducting fellow from Montreal, took on Rossini's *William Tell* Overture and the fourth movement of Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony. As someone new to Curtis, he was excited to jump in, but knew he had to be affirmative and convincing in his introduction to colleagues. "Boot camp was a safe space for everyone to work through difficult repertoire in a low-stakes environment," he said.

Finally, Tzu-Yi Yu, a second-year clarinet student from Taoyuan City, Taiwan, led the second movement of Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony. Mr. Yu has long dreamed of being a conductor and tries to take every opportunity to get up on a podium. "The most unforgettable moment of that day," he recalls, "was when I walked into the dining hall and everyone gave me a huge applause."

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The Curtis Bookshelf



Samuel Barber: His Life & Legacy

by Howard Pollack

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS PRESS, 2023

Despite his established place in the 20th-century canon, Samuel Barber (Composition '34) is "relatively understudied and undervalued among musicologists, music theorists, and cultural historians," writes Howard Pollack in the introduction to this 700-page critical study of the composer's life and works. Mr. Pollack, the author of sweeping biographies of Aaron Copland and George Gershwin, devotes five chapters to Barber's formative years, including the nine years he studied at Curtis. After taking piano lessons in the nascent preparatory division in 1924, Barber's full-time studies included

Biographers make their cases for Barber and Schoenberg, and a venerable publicist tells her story.

a lengthy apprenticeship with Rosario Scalerò, an exacting mentor who heaped on counterpoint exercises while nurturing his better creative instincts.

Barber's friendships and his budding romance with Gian Carlo Menotti (Composition '33) are chronicled through diary excerpts, but especially remarkable is the lavish support from Curtis founder Mary Louise Curtis Bok. "Bok's sponsorship of Barber and Menotti seemed to touch every aspect of their professional lives," Pollack writes, whether providing financial assistance with car, piano, and home purchases or facilitating contacts with publishers and conductors. Barber and Menotti dedicated several works to Mrs. Bok and remained close to the conservatory well into their later years.

Schoenberg: Why He Matters

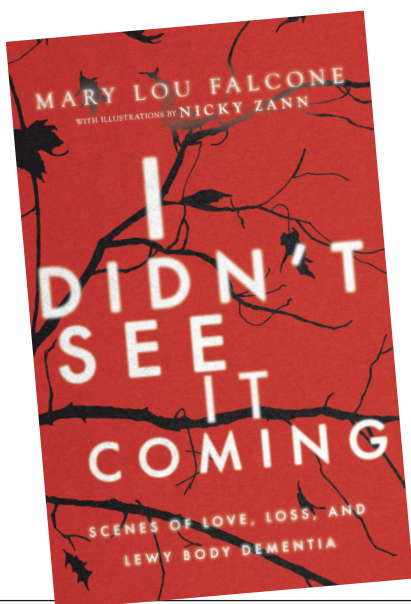
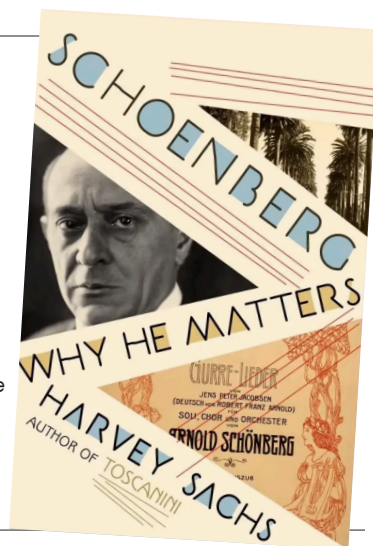
by Harvey Sachs

LIVERIGHT, 2023

Curtis music history teacher Harvey Sachs acknowledges from the start of this, his twelfth book, that he has an uphill climb in promoting the merits of Arnold Schoenberg, noting that the composer's music is mostly absent from orchestra calendars and shunned by many top soloists. It goes beyond a simple dislike of atonality. "I know of no musician who would claim that Debussy, Rossini, Wagner, or Brahms destroyed music's future," he writes,

"whereas I have heard many make that claim, explicitly or implicitly, about Schoenberg."

But Mr. Sachs fervently believes that Schoenberg's story has yet to be fully understood or solidified. In a lively, accessible prose, he explores the composer's Viennese roots, Jewish heritage, financial struggles, and eventual exile in America. Particularly engaging is a chapter on Schoenberg in California, where his students included the pianist-actor Oscar Levant and baseball legend Jackie Robinson—the latter of whom was excused from class to attend batting practice.



I Didn't See It Coming: Scenes of Love, Loss, and Lewy Body Dementia

by Mary Lou Falcone

EAST END PRESS, 2023

Mary Lou Falcone (Voice '66) emerges from her background role in guiding public relations campaigns for leading artists (including Gustavo Dudamel, Van Cliburn, and Georg Solti) and organizations (the New York Philharmonic) to tell her own story—and that of her late husband. In 2019, Nicholas "Nicky" Zann, a noted illustrator and cartoonist, was diagnosed with Lewy body dementia, a relatively unknown neurodegenerative disease. He died the following year. The memoir is, in part,

an effort to raise awareness about the condition and shed light on the role of a caregiver.

The larger story spans Ms. Falcone's New Jersey childhood, studies at Curtis in the 1960s (where director Efrem Zimbalist, Sr. identified her talents), a period as a freelance singer and elementary school music teacher in Bryn Mawr, Pa., and the launch of her New York P.R. firm in 1973, the same year she met Mr. Zann. Ms. Falcone uses an intriguing literary device that involves inhabiting the voices of those who have known her, including Mr. Zann. Chapters are dotted with meaningful anecdotes and lessons about caregiving and compassion.