



FILM: **MAESTRO**

FDG RATING: 3.4 ☺☺☺○○

Bradley Cooper: *director*
Bradley Cooper: *actor, Leonard Bernstein*
Carey Mulligan: *actress, Felicia Montealegra*

DATE: January 21, 2024

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **MAESTRO**

Leonard Bernstein is remembered as a passionate conductor with extremely expressive gestures, a great musician, dedicated educator, writer, and an exceptional composer in classical and contemporary styles, composing notable musicals, especially the 1957 ground breaking West Side Story, which is considered to be his greatest compositional achievement. He was also a concert pianist, philanthropist, and political activist. But most of us thought that Bradley Cooper's film, Maestro, put the emphasis in the wrong places. The film follows his rise to fame beginning as a young man and focuses on his complex relationship with his wife, Felicia Montealegra, (Oscar nominated performance by Carey Mulligan), and his homosexual tendencies and snippets of him creating. Finally, near the end, his music greatness is truly captured in the extended segment showing his absolute rapture when in 1976 Bernstein famously conducts the London Symphony Orchestra in the magnificent Ely Cathedral in England.

As a child, for eight years, Bradley Cooper asked Santa for a music conductor's baton, so one discussion participant said it seemed as if that exuberant segment was what Cooper really wanted to showcase allowing him to morph into the internationally renowned conductor and display all of Bernstein's passionate expressions and gestures. And then other scenes were included to make a necessary time line. The result was that the film didn't really show the breadth of Bernstein's genius. We do see him teaching a student conductor the gestures for a section of a piece that the student was struggling with and this quickly captured Bernstein's talent as a teacher. It was interesting that the student conductor though only on screen for a short time was very compelling with his gestures as a student conductor.

Another criticism of the film was that there was a lack of tension, except in the scene where, in the hotel hall, in front of the door to his room, Leonard is flirting with a handsome young man with shoulder length hair and says "I love your hair" and they kiss just as Felicia Montealegra is appearing at the end of the hallway. A significant quote is Felicia uncharacteristically deriding Bernstein saying how sloppy and indiscreet he had become.

Several discussion participants said the focus on relationships made the film more interesting and that emphasizing his conducting career would have been boring. Another observation was that Bernstein was complicated, fragmented, so the film reflected that. His marriage was unconventional but we could see his deep love for Felicia when he showed his pain by screaming into a pillow as she lay dying. Some discussion participants liked that the film didn't include a lot of his music.

Most of us appreciated the creative film elements such as beginning in black and white reflecting 40s and 50s, then switching to color for the 60s and 70s. And the playful editing of Bernstein jumping from his bed out the window and onto the stage. Another favorite scene was when he was writing the music for the sailors' dance and we could see his immense joy as he was creating the score.

Cooper and Mulligan gave very good performances but their characters felt one dimensional. One opinion was that the film was a missed opportunity to capture the breadth of Bernstein's hugely significant contributions to the music world. It has been said that he "revolutionized the role of the classical musician". Another discussion participant thought the film was terrific and very brave. But another would have preferred less relationship angst. And maybe Cooper tried to do much as actor and director.

For some the film was a one note performance, but others applauded Maestro resulting in an aleatoric 3.4 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best)



See you at the movies!
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