

# Bernstein - Something's Coming from West Side Story. 1957

## The Elements of Music

Melody



Rhythm



Texture



Instruments



Genre



Harmony & Tonality



Structure



### MELODY

Almost entirely syllabic (one note per syllable). Based on the alternation of three main themes.

*Syncopated, opening.*

Could it be?

*Loud, dramatic theme in 3/4.*

It may come can non-ball-ing down through the sky gleam in its eye  
bright as a rose

*Lyrical and slow moving.*

A round the corner

Repetitions are not exact. Bernstein varies the words or metre.

### RHYTHM

The metre changes between  $\frac{3}{4}$  and  $\frac{4}{4}$ . Fast tempo and syncopation help to maintain excitement and anticipation. Accompaniment - on beat bass part off beat chords. Creates cross rhythms. Push rhythms anticipate the beat.

### INSTRUMENTS

Song for solo tenor accompanied by a band made up of woodwind, brass, percussion and strings.  
#  
Quiet dynamics  
Soft timbres (muted trumpets, pizzicato strings)

*The air is humming*  
Strings use harmonics (very high notes) and tremolo.

### HARMONY AND TONALITY

In the key of D major. Two contrasting sections in C major.

Sharpened fourth. TRITONE! This interval is common throughout West Side Story. (This interval was banned by the church years ago. Creates tension...)

Flattened seventh. (jazz influenced) This is the last sung note. Unusual - the note is unresolved - matches the sense of expectation in the story.

Jazz influenced harmony.

### GENRE

Integration of songs and acted scenes to tell a story.  
Bernstein - influenced by jazz and music of Stravinsky.  
West Side Story is based on Romeo and Juliet.  
Set in New York. Rival gangs are the Sharks and the Jets.  
Groundbreaking: dark theme of violence and tragedy.  
Extended dance scenes. Focus on social problems of America.

### STRUCTURE

Intro - bar 1-3 (bar 3 repeats ad lib)  
Section A - 4-39  
Section B - 40-105  
Section B1 - 106-140 (shortened)  
Section A1 - 141-157 (shortened)  
Outro

### TEXTURE

Homophonic (melody and accompaniment)

Three main ideas in the accompaniment:

1. Repeated riff
2. Short, mainly syncopated chords (this starts at bars 21-26)
3. Fast 'um-cha' accompaniment (first heard at bar 32)