**SET WORK SUMMARY**

**“Something’s Coming” from West Side Story**

**PART 1 – Placing the Set Work in its Musical, Social and Historical Context**

**About the Composer** – Placing the Set Work in a Social and Historical Context

Leonard Bernstein – 1918 -1992 - "the godfather of the modern musical!"

Born in 1918 in Massachusetts. At 10 his aunt gave him a piano and his teacher couldn’t keep up with him! His family were from the Ukraine and his dad didn’t want Leonard to study music. He went to Harvard and met **Aaron Copland** who encourages him to be a conductor. Bernstein was a conductor, broadcaster, pianist and composer. He was in demand as a conductor and was the conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. He excelled in two principal forms – the ballet and the musical.

**About the Set Work** – Placing the Set Work in a Musical Context

- Lyrics written by Stephen Sondheim who also wrote musicals of his own later on
- Mirrors the plot of Shakespeare’s “Romeo and Juliet”
- Based on a love story set in New York in the 1950’s gang culture – “turf wars” and the threat of them creating tension in the musical from the beginning. The dark theme rooted in violence and tragedy, the use of long, extended dance scenes to convey the drama, the mix of jazz and classical music and the focus on social problems and tensions in contemporary America are key features of West Side Story.
- 2 acts with dialogue between songs – lots of dance scenes
- “Something’s Coming” is a solo character song sung by Tony early on in the story before he meets Maria at the dance

“Something’s Coming” is an example of a song from a **STAGE MUSICAL** – features of musicals include:

- Types of songs – solo character, duets, action songs, chorus numbers
- “Singable” melodies – use of memorable hooks and traditional verse, chorus, middle 8 structures
- Musicals written in popular music style influenced by jazz and later rock music
- Use of songs, dance and dialogue to tell stories – some musicals made into films and some films adapted to musicals; some musicals based on novels e.g. Oliver.

**PART 2 – Musical Elements, Instrumentation & Musical Features**

**Musical Elements**

- **Time Signature**: Written in 3/4 but has CROSS-RHYTHMS and sounds like it is in 6/8
- **Tonality**: D Major “Happy” key to reflect the happy mood of the song
- **Tempo**: Fast 176bpm! “one in a bar” feel
- **Dynamics**: Tony starts singing pp – breathless and excited, half-whispering, impatient
- **Pitch & Melody**: Contains lots of little ideas – SHORT RIFFS
- **Rhythm**: Lots of SYNCOPATION, especially in the orchestra CROSS-RHYTHMS working “against” each other PUSH-RHYTHMS anticipate the beat Accented OFF-BEATS
- **Harmony**: Use of the TRITONE (devil in music!) – Augmented 4th - to create tension and something bad is about to happen despite the love story. Gives edgy, unpredictable feeling JAZZ HARMONY – ordinary chords have added “BLUE NOTES”
- **Texture**: The song has lots of different layers in the exciting way the music has been arranged for instruments

**Form & Structure** – not a typical verse-chorus structure

**Intro**

Bars 1-3

Uses 3-beat Ostinato to set breathy and excited mood. Jazz Harmonies, Syncopated Rhythm & Tritone

**Section A**

Bars 4-39

Starts off quietly with Tony’s thoughts – “Could be”, “Who Knows?”, 3-beat ostinato continues with push rhythms. Then fast, loud recitative-like section with word painting – “cannonballing”

**Section B**

Bars 40-105

More “on beat” rhythm giving strength to lyrics. Change of time to 2/4 creates feeling of drive. Syncopated rhythms, blue notes, riffs,

**Section B1**

Bars 106-140

Shortened version of Section B.

**Section A1**

Bars 141-157

Feels like a return to the beginning, back to 3/4 time, orchestral riff and Tony’s hopeful questions – “Maybe Tonight” base on the tritone. Riff starts to fade under the held note (sempre dim.)

**Outro**

Bar 158 – fade out

Simple “ad lib fade” bar taking us into the music for a change of scene (instrumental)

**Instrumentation** – solo singer (male tenor) and large orchestra with added instruments

Bernstein orchestrated the music himself and called for a large orchestra including five woodwind players, two horns, three trumpets, two trombones, seven violins, four cellos and two double basses. In addition, he used a drum-kit, two other percussionists, piano, electric and acoustic guitars, saxophones, a mandolin and celeste. Uses Latin-American instruments – castanets and maracas to reflect the Puerto Rican gang