

Leonard Bernstein's Children Defend Bradley Cooper's Prosthetic Nose in 'Maestro'

Leonard Bernstein's three children came to the defense of the actor and director Bradley Cooper on Wednesday after he drew fresh criticism for wearing a large prosthetic nose in his portrayal of the midcentury American composer and conductor, who was Jewish, in the forthcoming movie *Maestro*.

5 When the makeup was first revealed last year, some questioned the decision by Cooper, who is not Jewish, to play Bernstein, who died in 1990. In the Netflix film, he stars opposite Carey Mulligan as Bernstein's wife, Felicia Montealegre Bernstein. The debut of a teaser trailer on Tuesday prompted further discussion on social media about both the prosthesis, which critics said played into an antisemitic trope, and about whether an actor who is Jewish should instead have been cast to play Bernstein, the *West Side Story* composer and music director of the New York Philharmonic.

10 David Baddiel, a British comedian and author of the 2021 book *Jews Don't Count*, cited Cooper as the latest instance of a gentile actor objectionably portraying a real-life Jewish figure. "I've talked about authenticity casting not applying to Jews — and what that means — many times," he wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter. "The only difference here is it's more — well — on the nose."

15 In a series of posts on X, the Bernsteins' three children — Jamie, Alexander and Nina Bernstein — said that Cooper had consulted with them "along every step of his amazing journey." "It breaks our hearts to see any misrepresentations or misunderstandings of his efforts," they said of Cooper. "It happens to be true that Leonard Bernstein had a nice, big nose. Bradley chose to use makeup to amplify his resemblance, and we're perfectly fine with that. We're also certain that our dad would have been fine with it as well." They added, "Any strident complaints around this issue strike us above all as
20 disingenuous attempts to bring a successful person down a notch."

Through a representative, Cooper declined to comment. Netflix did not reply to a request for comment.

In recent years, the question of which actors are eligible to play certain roles has been a hot-button issue in movies, television and theater, with an increasing consensus against actors' portraying characters from marginalized groups whose traits they do not share.

25 Tom Hanks told *The New York Times Magazine* last year that in contemporary times he would correctly not be cast as a gay man with AIDS, as he was in the 1993 drama *Philadelphia*. At the 2016 Emmy Awards, the actor Jeffrey Tambor said he hoped to be the last cisgender man to play a transgender character, as he did in the series *Transparent*.

30 Some critics, like Baddiel, argue that there is a double standard when it comes to casting Jewish characters, whose portrayal by gentiles is widely tolerated. Helen Mirren, who is not Jewish, plays the Israeli prime minister Golda Meir in a biopic coming out this month (even as Liev Schreiber, who is Jewish, plays Henry Kissinger in the film, *Golda*). In the recent biopic *Oppenheimer*, the Jewish title character was played by the non-Jewish actor Cillian Murphy.

Marc Tracey, *The New York Times*, August 16th, 2023.