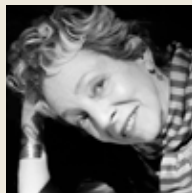


# FAVORITE

## JAMIE BERNSTEIN

Author, concert narrator,  
filmmaker, broadcaster  
Photo: Carol Friedman



*Nina, Jamie & Alexander at La Roccia*  
**JANE WILSON (1924–2015)**  
1967, oil on canvas, 39 x 35 in.  
Private collection



When children pose for their portraits, they often require distractions. When Jamie Bernstein and her siblings, Nina and Alexander, sat for a group portrait in the summer of 1967, the painter Jane Wilson (1924–2015) found ways to keep them patient as they posed on her apartment terrace in Italy.

“She gave us a deck of cards that we could play with,” recalls Bernstein, the eldest daughter, then 14, of the conductor and composer Leonard Bernstein. “I remember, too, that some records were playing on the stereo, though I have to say it was rather boring to sit there and sit there.”

What resulted, though, is something that the three siblings now cherish so much that they refer to the painting as, Jamie explains with affection, “the portrait of the three-headed monster.”

Today she and her siblings share a house in Fairfield, Connecticut, calling it a kind of “country family headquarters,” away from their respective full-time homes elsewhere. “We’re overly connected to each other and so devoted that we love being together here in this house, which my parents bought when we were kids. When I look at this work, it reminds me of being young and the smells and warmth of Italy. It brings it all back to me, being there as a family.”

As Bernstein recalls in her best-selling book, *Famous Father Girl: A Memoir of Growing Up Bernstein*, she and her family were sojourning for two months in the Tuscan coastal town of Ansedonia, while the art critic and historian John Gruen, husband of Jane Wilson, was working on a book about Leonard Bernstein. Wilson was already a close family friend, as well as the painting teacher of Jamie’s mother, Felicia.

“Jane’s work was more evolved than my mother’s; she was a true professional painter who had been doing it much longer than my mother. But my mother was very talented, and she and Jane had a similar sensibility in their works.” Bernstein points to the

fact that the Connecticut house is filled upstairs and down with works by both Wilson and her mother. This particular work, titled simply *Nina, Jamie & Alexander at La Roccia*, takes “pride of place” in the living room, right above the baby grand Steinway on which their father composed and played. Jamie notes that hanging next to it is “the one and only existing painting by Leonard Bernstein, a work that purports to be of Salome and her Dance of the Seven Veils. Let’s just say my father was not visual.”

Wilson’s work is ablaze with the colors of bougainvillea draped on the balcony, orange butterflies embroidered on draperies, the red of the playing cards, the blues of the Tuscan sky and sea, the green shutters. “Jane got the Mediterranean light. She was so good with color.” As the oldest of the siblings, Jamie is clearly the painting’s focal point. “I’m a little embarrassed to be at the center,” she says, “and my sister Nina feels that she’s not to scale here, that she’s too tiny, which may be true. My brother, 12 at the time, is shown studying, since he was preparing for his bar mitzvah at the time.”

The Bernstein clan has never moved the painting from its original location in the house. Their mother, Felicia, chose this spot in the room. “When we’re all there, we hang out in the living room and fixate on it. Maybe for different reasons with different responses, but I find myself looking at it again and again.”