

June 17, 1978

Felicia Montealegre C. Bernstein, Actress, Composer's Wife, Dead

By ROBERT McG. THOMAS Jr.

Felicia Montealegre Cohn Bernstein, the actress and wife of Leonard Bernstein, died yesterday of cancer at their home in East Hampton, L.I. She was 56 years old.

Although she was a mainstay in acclaimed dramas on television and won critical praise in the theater, she attained far wider fame as the elegant wife of the conductor and composer and as a New York hostess.

Miss Montealegre had been stagestruck since she was a star of amateur productions in her teens. A native of Costa Rica, she was educated in Santiago, Chile, where her father, Roy Cohn, headed the American Smelting and Refining Company. As Felicia Cohn Montealegre, she made her professional acting debut in Santiago before coming to New York in 1944.

Broadway Debut in 1946

She enrolled in the Drama Workshop of the New School for Social Research, studied with Herbert Berghof, made her

first New York appearance in Garcia Lorca's "If Five Years Pass" at the Provincetown Playhouse and made her Broadway debut in "Swan Song," by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, in 1946.

That was the year she began her relationship with Mr. Bernstein, whom she met at a party. Before the end of the year they announced their engagement, but within a few months decided they were not ready for marriage, and parted.

They did not meet again until four years later, after the actress had established herself in television drama. The romance blossomed again and they were married in September 1951.

Marriage did not mean abandoning her career, however, and from 1953 she continued to act; in 1961 she began as a narrator of concerts with the New York Philharmonic.

Devoted to Flowers

As other interests drew her more and more from the theater, Miss Montealegre took up painting, entertained at a hectic pace and filled her homes with flowers, which she once called "my single greatest extravagance."

She was chairman of the American Civil Liberties Union's women's division, and in 1967 she helped found an antiwar organization, "Another Mother for Peace." Her most famous political venture, however, occurred in January 1970, when she sent shock waves through New York society by acting as hostess for a Black Panther fund-raising party. She shrugged off the controversy, and two years later she was among 100 war resisters arrested at a Washington demonstration.

In 1973, Miss Montealegre made her Metropolitan Opera debut as Andromache in Berlioz's "Les Troyens." She returned to the Broadway stage in "Poor Murderer," in 1976, the same year she and Mr. Bernstein announced a "trial separation," with "hope of reconciliation."

In addition to her husband, Miss Montealegre is survived by two daughters, Jamie and Nina; a son, Alexander Serge, and two sisters, Nancy Alessandri and Madeline Lecaros, both of Santiago.

Private funeral and burial arrangements, for the family only, have been made.



The New York Times

Felicia Montealegre Cohn Bernstein
in a photo made in 1967.