

2024 MEMORIAL CONCERT
Fountain Street Church Oratorio Choir Presents

BERNSTEIN

MASS: A Theatre Piece

for Singers, Players, and Dancers

Saturday, April 27 @ 7:30 pm



Free and open to the public

24 Fountain Street NE, Grand Rapids, MI

PROGRAM NOTES

The most important thing to know about Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* is that it isn't a Catholic Mass at all, although it is based on one. Instead, it's a wild kaleidoscope of music, dance and theater depicting a clergyman's spiritual crisis when faced with young people's distrust of organized religion. The Celebrant, as the main character is known, played by Dominic Aragon, journeys through doubt, angst, and complete spiritual breakdown to eventually find peace, but only after a musical journey that evokes everything from a symphony orchestra to a marching band to a rock band and a jazz combo. In a program note from the premier, Bernstein called the piece a "reaffirmation of faith." McWilliams says, "*Mass* may have been ahead of its time when it premiered in 1971 but is finding increasing relevance now as faith-based organizations struggle for membership."

Commissioned by former First Lady Jackie Kennedy Onassis for the 1971 dedication of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., Bernstein said at the time he had long wanted "to compose a service of one sort or another" and hit on the idea of using the Mass as a fitting form to honor the late President John Kennedy. Struggling to finish the piece on time, Bernstein invited Stephen Schwartz, composer and lyricist of the then-brand-new Broadway hit *Godspell* to collaborate on the text and music.

Mass has been performed many times, but the complexity of the production and some of the language of the text make it a rare choice for a church. It was last performed in Grand Rapids in 1994.