

# 'Never a Mass Like This One'

Washington, D.C. — (RNS)— The "theatre-piece Mass" that composer Leonard Bernstein wrote for the opening of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts has been received with enthusiasm following opening performances here.

Bernstein, a Jew, said in the 130-page program that "the intention of 'Mass' is to communicate as directly and universally as I can a reaffirmation of faith." The famed American composer was conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra for a decade before retiring to have more time for composing.

Sen. Edward Kennedy, brother of the assassinated president after whom the \$66.4 million center was named, said following the first of three performances he and Mrs. Kennedy attended. "It was moving." Similar sentiments were expressed by others witnessing the colorful and often frenetic two-hour performance.

"Never before has any prominent Jewish composer written a Mass," noted Washington Post music critic Paul Hume. "But for that matter, never before has a composer written a Mass at all like this one."

"It is not merely that Bernstein has set many lines that are purely peripheral to the text of the Mass itself," Hume stated, "such as the invitatory and 'dominus vobiscum' and its response, 'et cum spiritu tuo,' as well as the opening phrases, 'asperges me' and 'vide aquam.' He has gone far beyond the portions of the Mass that are al-

most universally composed: Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Benedictus and Agnus Dei. These are what you hear in the B Minor Mass of Bach, the Missa Solemnis of Beethoven or any of the magnificent settings by Palestrina, Mozart, Haydn or Bruckner."

Bernstein said his "Mass" is a "sincere work about faith" and he has tried hard, not to be pretentious. Latin and Hebrew texts are used, but most of it is in English, including modern day slang. It is a theatre piece with singers, a mixed chorus and boys choir, dancers, a marching Sousa-type band, blues, jazz, and rock groups, and a full symphony orchestra.

The performers on stage were dressed in everything from hot pants to sweat shirts and ran the gamut from a long-haired youth to a middle-aged businessman.

In his work, for which this was the world premiere, Bernstein is again as in a previous work (his "Third Symphony") "actively and deeply concerned about the violence in a world that prays 'give us peace,'" Hume wrote.

"Like Haydn and Beethoven before him," he continued, "Bernstein makes the prayer for peace a time for extreme turbulence. Faced with the need to set every syllable of the text of the Mass, Bernstein comes up to those awesome ideas in the Credo, each of which begins, 'I believe.' It is clear in Bernstein's Mass that some people say 'I believe' who

do not believe, while others wish they could say it, but cannot bring themselves to do so.

"There has never been a Mass like this one," the Post critic asserted. "The English commentary is longer than the Latin text. It included moments that came out of Vatican II and the ensuing ecumenical dialogue."


the audience was that of Sister Desiree Trainer of Immaculata College here who said at the conclusion of the "Mass": "I can hardly breathe. The 'Mass' shows the terrible tension of man today as he lives and as he prays. It is terribly contemporary."

Among reactions of those in

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