

Opera at USC Presents

The Overture



with Kevin Vortmann as the Celebrant
Conducted by Dr. Scott Weiss
Directed by Ellen Douglas Schlaefer

March 2, 3 at 7:30 pm and 4 at 3 pm at
the Koger Center



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Opera at USC Spotlight

Stann Gwynn and Palmetto Paper Products



From financial support to Opera in the community to providing props for our shows and paper products for our Galas, Stann Gwynn and his company, Palmetto Paper Products, have been active supporters of Opera at USC. Stann has also performed in several Opera at USC productions, including *Light in the Piazza* as Roy Johnson, *A Little Night Music* as Fredrick, and most recently in *Sunday in the Park with George* as Jules. We are very grateful to have such a talented performer and supportive company involved in Opera at USC.



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About the Mass

In 1971, former first lady, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, asked Bernstein to compose a piece for the inauguration of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. to honor the late John F. Kennedy and the creation of the Kennedy Performing Arts center, Bernstein wanted "to compose a service of one sort or another." Having been raised in a Jewish family, Bernstein surprised the world with the choice of a Roman Catholic Mass. However, instead of the traditional purely musical setting of the Latin liturgy, he created a theatrical piece by placing the text to dramatic dialogue, music, and lyrics befitting of the 20th century. He used this unique dialect to explore the crisis in faith and cultural breakdown of the post-Kennedy era. The MASS follows a Celebrant and his Church who trusts in a traditional authority, a congregation that questions that authority, and demonstrates the struggle between these two sides as they try to find a reaffirmation of faith and hope for peace. Bernstein incorporates many different genres and styles ranging from Broadway and Rock to Hymns and Chorales. Bernstein specifically uses tonal rock'n'roll for the congregation that challenges him to contrast the uncompromising music of the Church. MASS premiered on September 8th, 1971 at the inauguration of the Kennedy Center. The performance consisted of over 200 participants and the orchestra contained a variety of instruments including strings, percussion, a concert organ, a rock organ, and others that belonged to the varying styles of the piece. Audience members were deeply moved by the message of peace and hope. Today, the MASS stands as one of America's most seminal dramatic works and a piece that remains relevant to what we face in America today.

Getting into Character

with Kevin Vortmann



What has your experience with the Celebrant been like and has it changed over time? “The first time I learned it was in an emergency situation. I was a soloist in the street chorus and the Celebrant was having vocal issues. The day before the performance, I was called into the Conductor’s Office and asked if I could learn the part in 24 hours. My first experience with the Celebrant was influenced by the Celebrant I had watched for months. Fortunately, with my second experience I got to build the character back up from the ground with my own take and perspective. This will be my third time playing the Celebrant. The last time I played the Celebrant I had one child. Now I have two and

since then my perspective on life has changed, thus changing my perspective of the Celebrant and the journey he takes throughout the mass.”

How do you relate to the Celebrant and what does the Mass mean to you? “I relate to his empathy for humankind. He sees the good in people and hopes they’ll come through in what he sees in them and then he is heart broken whenever mankind shows its flaws. The Mass is so relatable in today’s society when we see extremely good and yet presumably evil and the Mass tells this beautiful message that the only way we’ll find peace is through each other. That message is something I deeply believe in. For me, it is easy to relate the Mass to all stages of life. I can look back at my times as an adolescent, a young adult, and a grown man where I felt lost or unheard, grasping desperately at things that brought me comfort and having to let some of them go and trust that the world is good and to look forward to the future.”

Is there anything you are looking forward to in playing the Celebrant this time? “What is special to me this time is that I’m doing this at a university. Leonard Bernstein’s message, as a part of his life and legacy, was to reach out to the next generation of musicians. It feels like I am honoring his tradition and getting to share my enthusiasm for the piece with the next generation. There is something very special about being back in a conservatory like program where everyone is so enthusiastic about being part of a production and I hope they will share that enthusiasm with the generation after them.”

Opera at USC Alumni



Alexander Cammarota is quickly making a name for himself, building a diverse repertoire both onstage and off. He graduated from USC with a Master in Music in Opera Theatre. As acting assistant director and stage manager, Mr. Cammarota oversaw several productions with Opera at USC. He has directed productions of *Rita*, *Pepito*, and *La dolorosa*. Since graduating, he has become a sought after stage manager working on productions of *La Traviata*, *Pirates of Penzance*, *La Cenerentola*, *The Mikado*, *L'elisir d'amore*, *Turandot*, *Pagliacci*, and *Rigoletto* with Shreveport Opera; as well as, *Pagliacci* and *Cavalleria Rusticana* with Amarillo Opera.

Hinde Garrison is a Carolina alumna and a cast member in our production of Bernstein's *MASS*. In 1978, she was first introduced to the *MASS* when she studied the piece back in high school. She says that the *MASS* is one of the reasons she was inspired to study music in college and participate in Opera and Choir. Since graduating from USC, she has worked in and managed a number of businesses in Media Sevice, including the University of South Carolina's D.E.I.S.-TV from 1986-2000.



Can Music Heal a Broken World? A Message from the Dean



On February 1st, *The State* newspaper wrote an article featuring the Bernstein MASS and Dean Tayloe Harding. In the article, Dean Harding addresses the importance of the MASS to our world today and how excited and honored the School of Music is to perform and share this profound and amazing piece with our community. Dean Harding states "At the University of South Carolina School of Music, our mission is to transform lives through excellence in music. This moment of social and civil unrest presents the perfect time to engage

in that mission, and the 2018 centenary of Bernstein's birth presents the perfect opportunity for us to bring this epic stage production to life and revisit the inclusiveness and hopefulness this remarkable work inspires." The Dean's words are inspiring and motivating as the students, faculty, and community members reach the final week of preparation for the MASS. Our mission to bring peace, hope, and healing to our community through music is one of the most prominent and important reasons to perform the MASS.

To read the full article, visit: <http://www.thestate.com/opinion/op-ed/article197791209.html>