

## The History in This Program

---

Leonard Bernstein first met Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts during production of a 1956 *Omnibus* television program about Harvard. The pair — who had graduated from the college within a year of one another — immediately hit it off. Kennedy graciously invited Bernstein to Washington, D.C., for lunch and a tour of the Senate floor.

After Kennedy was elected President in 1960, Bernstein took child-like delight in their friendship, visiting the White House on more than one occasion. (He once sat in JFK's favorite rocking chair, to his wife Felicia's embarrassment.) He and First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy were also close: she attended the grand opening of Philharmonic (now David Geffen) Hall on September 23, 1962, and visited Bernstein backstage during intermission. Characteristically effusive, he gave her a sweaty hug and a kiss, sending the press and public into a twitter.

Of course, not all would be well in Camelot. Bernstein, like the rest of the country, was devastated by Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963. Two days later, he conducted the New York Philharmonic in a televised performance of Mahler's Symphony No. 2, *Resurrection*. It was an unconventional choice of repertoire, which Bernstein explained:

We played the Mahler symphony not only in terms of resurrection for the soul of the one we love, but also for the resurrection of hope in all of us who mourn him ... This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before.



Bernstein chatting with First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy and the first Lincoln Center President, John D. Rockefeller III, at the opening of Philharmonic Hall in 1962

On June 8, 1968, Bernstein returned to Mahler to honor yet another slain Kennedy. Jackie had reached out to him requesting that he arrange the music for Robert F. Kennedy's funeral service at St. Patrick's Cathedral. Bernstein and a small band of Philharmonic musicians performed the *Adagietto* from Symphony No. 5.

Bernstein would dedicate two of his own compositions to JFK: his Symphony No. 3, *Kaddish*, which he began before the President's death, and *Mass*, commissioned for the opening of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in 1971.

— The Archives

To learn more, visit the **New York Philharmonic Leon Levy Digital Archives** at [archives.nyphil.org](http://archives.nyphil.org).

# Kaddish, Symphony No. 3 for Orchestra, Mixed Chorus, Boys Choir, Speaker, and Soprano Solo

## Leonard Bernstein

**B**alancing his activities as composer, conductor, pianist, media personality, and all-around celebrity became especially challenging for Leonard Bernstein during his tenure as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic from 1958 to 1969. Apart from his *Kaddish*, Symphony No. 3 (in 1963) and *Chichester Psalms* (1965), which together add up to almost exactly an hour of music, his works from those 11 years were limited to two one-minute Fanfares in 1961 (one for the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy, the other for the 25th anniversary of New York's High School of Music and Art) and a two-minute song, "So Pretty," which Bernstein (at the piano) introduced with Barbra Streisand at Philharmonic (now David Geffen) Hall in 1968.

*Kaddish* was commissioned in 1955 by the Koussevitzky Music Foundation and the Boston Symphony Orchestra to celebrate the latter's 75th anniversary, which was observed the following year without so much as a glimmer of Bernstein's piece. The likelihood of his writing *Kaddish* grew dimmer when he assumed his position at the New York Philharmonic. He did begin to work very sporadically on the piece beginning in 1961, but didn't manage to commit much time to it until the summer of 1963. He wrote to his sister:

On August 1st I made the great decision to go forward with *Kaddish*, to try to finish it, score it, rehearse, prepare, revise, translate into Hebrew. ... I'm terribly excited about the new piece, even about the Speaker's text, which I finally decided has to be by me. Collaboration with a poet is impossible on so personal a work, so I've found after a distressful year of trying with [Robert] Lowell and [Frederick] Seidel; so I'm elected, poet or no poet.

Nine days later the symphony was essentially complete, although orchestration would continue through November.

On the 22nd day of that month Bernstein was at Lincoln Center preparing for a Young People's Concert when shots rang out in

---

## IN SHORT

**Born:** August 25, 1918, in Lawrence, Massachusetts

**Died:** October 14, 1990, in New York City

**Work composed:** 1961 through November 1963, on a joint commission from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, on the occasion of that orchestra's 75th anniversary; revised in 1977; dedicated "To the Beloved Memory of John F. Kennedy"; libretto includes sung texts from traditional Jewish liturgical prayers and a speaker's text by the composer.

**World premiere:** December 12, 1963, in Tel Aviv, Israel, with the composer conducting the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, Hannah Rovina, speaker, Jennie Tourel, soloist; the revised version was introduced August 25, 1977, with the composer conducting the Israel Philharmonic in Mainz, Germany, Michael Wager, speaker, Montserrat Caballé, soloist, with the Wiener Jeunesse Choir and the Wiener Sängerknaben

**New York Philharmonic premiere:** April 9, 1964, with the composer conducting, Felicia Montealegre, speaker, Jennie Tourel, soloist, with The Camerata Singers and the Columbia Boychoir

**Most recent New York Philharmonic performance:** September 27, 1988, Zubin Mehta, conductor, Sam Waterston, speaker, Wendy White, soloist, with New York Choral Artists and The American Boychoir

**Estimated duration:** ca. 39 minutes

Dallas, Texas. He immediately resolved to dedicate *Kaddish* “to the Beloved Memory of John F. Kennedy.” It was an appropriate dedication since the Kaddish (the word means “sanctification”) is a centrally important Jewish prayer associated with mourning, although in various forms the Kaddish actually serves a breadth of liturgical functions. The Kaddish does not mention death; instead, it is a prayer of praise that focuses on the sanctification of God’s name. To

Bernstein, religion was never simple, and he accordingly built his *Kaddish* into a complex structure by interweaving the traditional prayer — repeated in each of the three sections by mixed chorus, soprano solo and women’s choir, children’s choir, and, in the *Finale*, combined choral forces — with an extended narration he wrote himself, an emotionally potent argument between man and God, a rumination on faith, doubt, and mortality.

---

## A Kaddish for Our Time

In February 1963, when I was 19 years old, my father died suddenly at age 47. My family was not pious: we respected our Russian-Jewish heritage but didn’t attend temple, so at my dad’s memorial service, when I was summoned to the platform, I didn’t understand the Hebrew words the rabbi had me repeat. They were the Kaddish, which, the rabbi explained, was not a prayer of mourning: it never mentions death, but rather celebrates life and those whose time on earth brings peace, especially needed in troubling times.

On November 22 of that same, dark year, President Kennedy was killed. I thought about my dad and the President, both taken so young. What was God’s role in all this? How could He make a mockery of what was supposed to be good in the world? A few months later, I heard the American premiere of Leonard Bernstein’s *Kaddish*, Symphony No. 3, and discovered that the composer whom I’d always admired was wrestling with the same doubts about the Creator.

As I prepared for this week’s performances, I asked myself if *Kaddish* might now have more meaning. Everyone, regardless of religious belief or even the lack of same, struggles with their relationship with God. The Speaker, at least in my opinion, is not only exploring his or her own feelings, but also those of all who inhabit our planet.

This argument between Man and God can be construed as a take on the turmoil of our own time. How can God permit the turbulence abundant in today’s world? How are we to reconcile the conflicts that exist inside each of us?



To underscore the continuing relevance of this internal struggle, I received permission to remove the Speaker’s few lines that echoed the sung Hebrew. Now only speaking in an English vernacular, the Speaker is more clearly a character of ambiguous religion, speaking for all in decrying the upheaval of our time. But the essential questions remain: How can a good and just God permit all this turmoil? How do we reconcile the conflicts inside each of us?

— Leonard Slatkin

---

## Father and Son

The narration of Bernstein's *Kaddish* intermingles sung texts from traditional Jewish liturgical prayers with a Speaker's text crafted by the composer that repeatedly turns to the theme of Son vs. Father. The Speaker debates in his mind with God on thoughts of faith, peace, death, and grace, sometimes escalating into violent outbursts.

One may imagine that this uneasy filial conflation of the paternal human and the paternal divine reflected Bernstein's relationship with his own father, who had emigrated from a Ukrainian shtetl and, as a naturalized American, earned a handsome income selling beauty products to hair salons. Samuel Bernstein never connected very closely with Leonard, the eldest of his three children, and would have preferred that his son continue the hair-products business or become a rabbi rather than pursue music professionally. He was proud of Leonard's eventual accomplishments, but even when he sat in concert-hall boxes to witness his son preside over the world's great orchestras he was not demonstrably enthusiastic.

Bernstein was just beginning to focus on *Kaddish* when, in January 1962, he delivered a speech at his father's 70th birthday celebration, which was attended by some 800 prominent Bostonians who must have squirmed when confronted with these thoughts at what was, after all, a birthday party:

What is a father in the eyes of a child? The child feels: My father is first of all my Authority, with power to dispense approval or punishment. He is secondly my Protector; thirdly my Provider; beyond that he is Healer, Comforter, Law-giver, because he caused me to exist. ... And as the child grows up he retains all his life, in some deep, deep part of him, the stamp of that father-image whenever he thinks of God, of good and evil, of retribution.

For example, take the idea of defiance. Every son, at one point or other, defies his father, fights him, departs from him, only to return to him — if he is with God: Moses protesting to God, arguing, fighting to change God's mind. So the child defies the father and something of that defiance also remains throughout his life.



Leonard Bernstein with his son, Alexander, and his father, Samuel, in 1963

## Listen for ... the *Din-Torah*

“He was always taking on God in one form or another,” wrote *Los Angeles Times* music critic Mark Swed of Leonard Bernstein in 2008, “in his argumentative *Kaddish* Symphony, his messy *Mass*, or his mystical Kabbalistic ballet, *Dybbuk*.”

Argumentative is certainly an apt description for the second section of the *Kaddish* Symphony, *Din Torah*, the Hebrew term for a dispute brought before a rabbinical court. In text that Bernstein fashioned himself, the Speaker takes his (or her) case before God, alternately displaying respect (“With Amen on my lips, I approach your presence, Father.”); fury (“Lord God of Hosts, I call You to account! You let this happen, Lord of Hosts! You with Your manna, Your pillar of fire!”); blasphemous questioning (“Your bargain is tin! It crumples in my hand! And where is faith now — Yours or mine?”); and penitence (“Dear God, how You must suffer, so far away, ruefully eyeing Your two-footed handiwork — frail, foolish, mortal.”).

Then calmed, the Speaker’s outburst is followed with a repetition of the *Kaddish* prayer by the solo soprano and choir.

— The Editors

---

The Boston Symphony, which had shown such patience in waiting for Bernstein to fulfill its commission, outdid itself with forbearance when he expressed a desire that the work be premiered in Israel. Bernstein led the premiere in Tel Aviv, with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, to enormous acclaim, and Boston graciously settled for the U.S. Premiere a month and a half later, when the piece earned more modest reviews than it had in Israel. The score qualifies as one of

its composer’s eclectic endeavors, its language embracing a variety of styles. Bernstein’s writing ranges from forthright diatonic harmonies and melodies reminiscent of chant, folk song, or Copland to intense chromaticism (stretching to tone rows) and dense polyphony, from passages flavored with jazz to the enveloping lyricism of musical theater.

Narration for the symphony was an ongoing work-in-progress. For the premiere, in Tel Aviv, Bernstein had the text he had authored translated into Hebrew, but the American premiere employed his original English words, delivered by the Chilean actress Felicia Montealegre (a.k.a. Mrs. Bernstein). When he revised the score in 1977, Bernstein tamed some of the text’s most extroverted outbursts and wrought changes that would allow it to be delivered by a man or a woman.

**Instrumentation:** four flutes (one doubling alto flute and one doubling piccolo), two oboes and English horn, two clarinets with E-flat clarinet and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets and piccolo trumpet, three trombones, tuba, alto saxophone, timpani, vibraphone, xylophone, orchestra bells, snare drum, field drum, tenor drum, bass drum, Israeli hand drum, two suspended cymbals, crash cymbals, antique cymbals, tam-tam, three bongos, three temple blocks, wood block, sandpaper blocks, rasp, whip, ratchet, triangle, maracas, claves, tambourine, chimes, harp, piano, celeste, and strings, plus a mixed chorus, boys choir (here sung by mixed youth chorus), speaker, and soprano soloist.

# Text and Translation

---

## Bernstein's *Kaddish*, Symphony No. 3

Traditional Hebrew prayer

*Yit'gadal v'yit'kadash sh'mē raba, amen,*

*b'al'ma div'ra chir'utē, amen,*

*v'yam'lich mal'chutē  
b'chayēchon uv'yomēchon  
uv'chayē d'chol bēt Yis'raēl,  
ba-agala uviz'man kariv,  
v'im'ru: amen.*

*Y'hē sh'mē raba m'varach  
l'alam ul'al'mē al'maya.*

*Yit'barach v'yish'tabach v'yit'pa-ar  
v'yit'romam v'yit'nasē  
v'yit'hadar v'yit'aleh v'yit'halal  
sh'mē d'kud'sha, b'rich Hu,  
l'ēla min kol bir'chata  
v'shirata, tush'b'chata v'nechemata,  
da-amiran b'al'ma,  
v'im'ru: amen.*

*Y'hē sh'lama raba  
min sh'maya v'chayim alēnu  
v'al kol Yis'raēl  
v'im'ru: amen.*

*Oseh shalom bim'romav,  
Hu ya-aseh shalom alēnu  
v'al kol Yis'raēl  
v'im'ru: amen.*

Magnified and sanctified be His great name, Amen.

Throughout the world which He hath created according to His will, Amen, And may He establish His kingdom During your life and during your days, And during the life of all the house of Israel, Speedily, and at a near time, And say ye, Amen.

May His great name be blessed, Forever and to all eternity.

Blessed and praised and glorified, And exalted and extolled and honored, And magnified and lauded Be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He; Though He be beyond all blessings, And hymns, praises and consolations, That can be uttered in the world. And say ye, Amen.

May there be abundant peace From heaven, and life for us And for Israel; And say ye, Amen.

He who maketh peace in His high places, May He make peace for us And for all Israel; And say ye, Amen.