

Performance notes

Mass was a collaboration and experiment. Credit goes to many people, and special thanks to Jenny Rohn, who helped innovate ways of working dramatically with a music that demands a lot from the performers.

Mass began as an electronic maquette, a collage of samples with which the singers then trained themselves to mix their voices, lipsynch, and coordinate their movements. Mary Montgomery was instrumental in music rehearsals as the music director, working with the performers to learn the difficult, sometimes atonal melodic lines. Mike Rugnetta has been the mixmaster behind the scenes, mixing the performers with the samples something like a hand-colored photograph, and offering invaluable input.

As the performers started to learn the musical score, Jenny would start with freer exercises based on Viewpoints technique, which would develop a movement vocabulary surrounding the piece. We would then cull movements from these exercises to fill the form and energy of each section.

Chris Edwards was instrumental in the fight choreography. Many thanks goes to Sue Rees and Mike Giannitti, who considered working on this project late in the game.

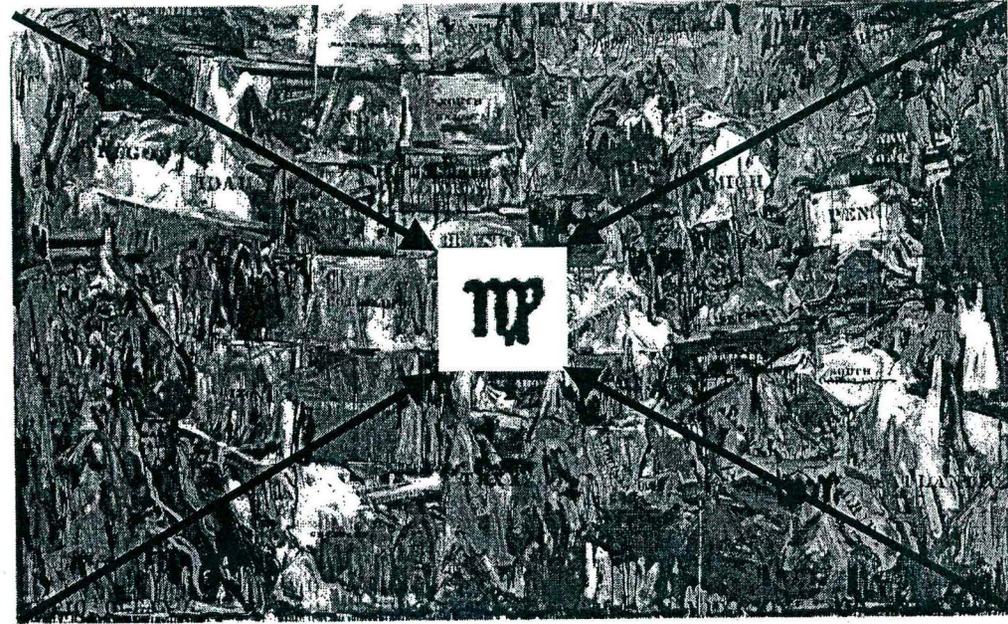
A final, and most important thanks goes to the performers, who worked tirelessly, with seriousness and humor, in a process that was experimental from square one. -Nick Brooke

Bennington College Drama
Faculty & Staff:

Kathleen Dimmick
Michael Giannitti
Michael Heil
Linda Hurley
Dina Janis
Kirk Jackson
Frank LaFrazia
Daniel Michaelson
Michael Rancourt
Jean Randich
Jennifer Rohn
Caridad Svitch
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Joel Chadabe Mary Montgomery
Jay Clayton Randall Neal
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Marianne Finckel Rachel Rosales
David Gibson Yoshiko Sato
Milford Graves Allen Shawn
Frederic Hand Kaori Washiyama
Suzanne T. Jones John Van Buskirk
John Kirk Bruce Williamson



M A S S

FRIDAY, APRIL 28 8 PM, 10 PM
SATURDAY, APRIL 29 8 PM

MARGOT TENNEY THEATRE

12 Stations
Credo
Ave Maria (Somewhere)
4'33"
Delicate Arch
Last Song

Genevieve Belleveau, Emma Givens,
Caleb Rupp, Brian Schultis
performers

Nick Brooke, composer/codirector
Jenny Rohn, codirector
Mary Montgomery, music director
Chris Edwards, fight choreographer
Mike Rugnetta, live mixing
Sue Rees: set design
Michael Giannitti, lighting design
Kaley McMahon, Rebecca Grabman: costume design
Susanna Martin: stage manager
Andrew Kaluzynski, light board
Jessa Brown, wardrobe
Jes Condyles, Iris Dauterman, Danny Herter,
Griffin Maloney, spot operators

In the "parody" masses of the 16th century, fragments of romantic, patriotic, and popular songs were rearranged into religious masses. Mass also reworks pop tunes heard over the last 30 years, creating a kind of secular service based on ephemera of U.S. pop culture. Top-40 pop often could double as religious incantations; the phrase "I believe" echoes from American Idol to Cher, and the "you" in U2 alternately means God or some romantic other. The piece tonight is conceived like the parody mass someone might really sing at home, quilted together from pop songs that identify some Americans more than religion.

If there's any scripture to this Mass, it's John Cage's Lecture on Nothing, a text that is spoken throughout the piece. Cage was America's most infamous musical innovator, best known for his silent piece, 4'33". Cage originally titled 4'33" "Silent Prayer", and saw the piece as a commentary on radio, given that its length slightly exceeds the standard plug-in length of most muzak and pop tunes of the 1950s (4'30"). Cage's later Lecture on Nothing elegantly expounds his philosophy of sound and silence; this text argues against ideas of musical and even cultural progress, celebrating that "more and more, we are getting nowhere"; the lecture climaxes in an enormous silence—notated, in Cage's writings, by the symbol **TTT**.

Cage was inspired, in his Lecture and elsewhere, by the radio stations of the 1950s and 1960s. His work, Imaginary Landscape #2, was for 12 performers playing radios, each scanning the waves for stations. Cage seemed fascinated with how radio was a peculiarly American way of identifying oneself, through locating one's taste with a invisible, far-off station. One of those distant locations that is felt throughout Cage's work is Kansas. He refers to the silent **TTT**, the center of the Lecture, as a "bit like passing through Kansas"—it's the eye of hurricane, Dorothy's home. Driving across the States, Kansas is where one's car radio might fall silent.

In Jasper Johns' encaustic map of the U.S., Kansas looks like a black smudge, an explosion at ground zero. Mass is structured somewhat like Cage's Lecture and Johns' map—as an analogy to the space the U.S. inhabits, and the different "somewheres" Dorothy might go if she just taps her ruby slippers. The performers walk, run, and crawl across the stage towards a frontier, or collapse into the center like a critical mass; their movements are spurred on by ideas of manifest destiny, technological progress, and the American dream so often symbolized in contests such as American Idol. The stage becomes at points a map, a battlefield, a four-channel mixer, a reality show.

Mass was originally inspired by Indonesian composer Djadug Ferianto's vocal piece Ngeng. "Ngeng" is the Javanese word for the background noise that is always there, the eternal buzz from which all sounds emerge. For Cage, silence never truly exists, for you can always hear the incidental noises of the audience, or your heartbeat, or the background fuzz of the radio. In Ferianto's Ngeng, four performers stand on stage, buzzing, chirping, and singing. Mass follows the original four-voice idea of Ferianto's piece, as well as some of its legal content (Ngeng was banned after its premiere): Mass is quilted together from so many samples that the piece can never be released on CD.