

PROGRAM NOTES by Aaron Grad

Morton Feldman had returned to traditional music notation by 1971 when he composed ***Rothko Chapel***, but the sonic impact of his music, with its intense quietude and haunting patterns, remained remarkably consistent even as his methods evolved. Feldman's inspiration for *Rothko Chapel* was a recently completed building of the same name in Houston, Texas, an ecumenical "spiritual environment" oriented around fourteen large canvases by the painter Mark Rothko. The fact that Rothko died shortly before the chapel's completion made Feldman's tribute all the more poignant.

Feldman scored *Rothko Chapel* for a chorus with alto and soprano soloists, supported delicately by celesta, percussion and viola. "Rothko's imagery goes right to the edge of his canvas," Feldman wrote, "and I wanted the same effect with the music — that it should permeate the whole octagonal-shaped room and not be heard from a certain distance." He also acknowledged, "There are a few personal references in *Rothko Chapel*. The soprano melody, for example, was written on the day of Stravinsky's funeral service in New York. The quasi-Hebraic melody played by the viola at the end was written when I was fifteen. Certain intervals throughout the work have the ring of the synagogue."

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