The Immortal Oratorio

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Anyone who has witnessed
a performance of Handel's
"Messiah" knows why it is called...

"The
Immortal
Oratorio"

by Marilyn Bergeson
Technical Journalism Senior

THE GLORIOUS MUSICAL of combined orchestra
and chorus resounds again with another perform-
The audience is still affected by the great import
of the music, just as countless audiences have been since
its first performance in 1742.
Here at Iowa State, the annual performance of
"The Messiah" just before the Christmas season has
become a loved tradition. Each year a capacity audi-
ence fills the college gymnasium to hear student solo-
ists, chorus and orchestra perform the work. An even
larger audience watches and listens to it through our
college radio and television stations.

MacRae Inspires Student Performances
For the past 31 years, the direction of the Iowa State
performance has been under Prof. Tolbert MacRae of
the Department of Music. A vigorous Scotchman,
Prof. MacRae seems to inspire the student chorus and
orchestra with his sincere, enthusiastic love for the
oratorio music.
Prof. MacRae is well qualified to direct this work of
Handel's. While a music student in London, he
studied with one of the greatest Handelian singers, R.
Watkins Mills, and has performed Handel's works
extensively in his recital and oratorio appearances.
As shown by its continued success through the years
at Iowa State and all over the world, "The Messiah"
is one of the most memorable and best known orator-
ios. An astounding fact is that Handel composed it
in twenty four days, from August 22 to September 14
in the year 1741.

Always Had Capacity Audiences
Since its initial performance was in Dublin, Ire-
land, historical evidence shows that Handel wrote this
work with the Dublin orchestra and chorus in mind.
Realizing their limitations, he kept his work within
modest limits. He did not go beyond four-part writing
in his chorus parts and in the orchestration, limited
solo parts to the violin and trombone.

Writers of Handel's day report that at the first per-
formance of "The Messiah," the expected audience
was so large that ladies were requested to come with-
out hoops and gentlemen without swords to make
room for more people.

First Written For Dublin Chorus
After this performance, which Handel himself
directed, "The Messiah" was presented every year
in London, always with capacity audiences. During
this time Handel made some alterations; he set several
new numbers to music, transcribed a few of the arias
for different voices, but as a whole, left the work un-
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The Festival Chorus, complete with soloists and orchestra give
another of their annual performances of "The Messiah."
Immortal Oratorio—
(Continued from page 7)

changed from its original form, both vocally and instrumentally.

The text for "The Messiah" was taken from the literal words of the scriptures and, following the theme of the message, is divided into three parts. The first part tells of the world's longing for the coming of Christ, prophecies his coming and announces his birth. The moving chorus "Behold the Lamb of God" begins the second part which is devoted to the suffering, death and final exultation of Christ. This part closes with the vigorous "Hallelujah" chorus. The last part of the oratorio, which is not always used, is vibrant with the hope of faith in the existence of God and in a final resurrection of all believers.

Energetic and full of enthusiasm, Professor Tolbert MacRae gives inspiration to the students who perform "The Messiah."

The Iowa State performance of "The Messiah" is not the entire oratorio. Prof. MacRae has chosen arias and chorus parts from the first two parts of the work which carry through the story of the prophecy, announcement and the suffering, death and exultation of Christ. He has included also the great soprano aria "I know That My Redeemer Liveth" from the third part of the oratorio. The performance closes with the "Hallelujah" chorus.

It is necessary to make these cuts because of the extreme length of the oratorio. As it now is, the college performance lasts an hour and a half; and since it is broadcast and televised, there are time limits placed on the performance.

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Immortal Oratorio—

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The audience seemed to be affected as much as Handel during that first performance of the "Hallelujah" chorus. The King of England was so entranced that he rose, followed by the rest of the audience, and remained standing till the last "Hallelujah" died away. This began the custom, followed now both in England and the United States, of standing during the "Hallelujah" chorus.

The music and message contained in "The Messiah" are of timeless beauty and are as effective now in 1952 as they were in Handel's time. Its lasting power is explained by a music critic who said, "Other oratorios may be compared, one with another; 'The Messiah' stands alone, a majestic monument to the memory of its composer and to the highest aspirations of man."

"Hallelujah" Climax

The great "Hallelujah" chorus is the triumph of the work and its real climax. Beginning with repeated shouts of "Hallelujah," it works into phrases which grow out of each other, sustaining and interweaving with the "Hallelujah." The harmonic effects make up a chorus that has never been excelled, both in grandeur and sublimity.

After listening to the first performance of this chorus, Handel said, "I did think I did see all heaven before me, and the great God himself."

Your Christmas Tree—

(Continued from page 11)

It is used effectively to add touches of color to centerpieces, wreaths and holiday corsages. The tiny, wax white berries of the mistletoe are likewise used in table decorations and candle arrangements to add sparkle. Most people don't neglect to hang a sprig tied with a red bow from a doorway or chandelier.

There is much opportunity for originality in decorating a tree. Adorning a small green tree with tiny red ribbon bows, or striped candy canes makes for an interesting and attractive Christmas decoration. Cookies of various sizes and shapes used as tree ornaments give a novel effect also. One department on campus decorated a tree using a large A at the top, and then covering the rest of the branches with B's and C's and suitable items to represent various departments.

The origin of all these decorations has been lost in the maze of antiquity, but it is thought that the use of holly, evergreen, and the other various decorations were used to offer winter hospitality to the spirits that were supposed to haunt the leafless woods. The decorations today symbolize as much in the thought of hospitality and a beautiful holiday season.

The Twelve Days of Christmas

(This poem inspired the picture on the Homemaker cover.)

On the first day of Christmas
My true love gave to me
A partridge in a pear tree.

* * *

On the second day of Christmas
My true love gave to me
Two turtle doves and a partridge in a pear tree.

* * *

On the third day of Christmas
My true love gave to me
Three French hens, two turtle doves and a partridge in a pear tree.

* * *

Fourth day—Four calling birds, etc.

* * *

Fifth day—Five golden rings, etc.

* * *

Sixth day—Six geese a laying, etc.

* * *

Seventh day—Seven swans a swimming, etc.

* * *

Eighth day—Eight maids a milking, etc.

* * *

Ninth day—Nine pipers piping, etc.

* * *

Tenth day—Ten ladies dancing, etc.

* * *

Eleventh day—Eleven lords a leaping, etc.

* * *

Twelfth day—Twelve fiddlers fiddling, etc.

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