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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 MUSIC of combined orchestra and chorus resounds again with another performance of "The Messiah," Handel's memorable oratorio. 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 audience fills the college gymnasium to hear student soloists, 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 oratorios. 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, Ireland, 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 performance of "The Messiah," the expected audience was so large that ladies were requested to come without 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."





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Immortal Oratorio—

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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 enthralled 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—

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It is used effectively to add touches of color to centerpieces, wreaths and holiday corsages. The tiny, waxy 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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