

## Edmonton Symphony and Chorus give lively rendition of Handel's Messiah

We apologize for a somewhat belated review of the symphony of Dec. 9—the holiday interruption prevented our printing it before this time.

The coming of Advent was joyously proclaimed by the Edmonton Symphony and Chorus under the capable direction of Brian Priestman in their production of Handel's *Messiah*. The enthusiasm of the chorus and conviction of the soloists gave the entire work a welcome liveliness and meaning which is so often lacking in the numerous sepulchral renderings of this work, through which many of us have sat (or perhaps slept). Occasionally the enthusiasm coupled with excessive speed caused more than one chorus to teeter on the edge of disaster, to wit, "And he shall purify the sons of Levi".

The score which was used for this concert included numbers as they were at the *Messiah*'s first performance in Dublin, 1743, and versions of others which were composed at a later date by Handel; for example, "Their sound is gone out" is usually a chorus whereas here it was a tenor recitative. Yet another feature was the addition of material as in the exuberant chorus "Break forth into joy".

Handel's contrast of the chordal and the contrapuntal was well pointed by the chorus; the former by means of constant or increasing dynamic on long held notes, so upholding the tension, and giving the feeling of forward

motion; the latter by good attack on entries in such places as "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed", and "Amen".

Perhaps one of the difficulties, intended or not, of realizing the *Messiah* is that it is written in the third person, and the soloists are narrators rather than actors. I think that all four artists—Bethany Beardslee, soprano, Joan Maxwell-Rempel, mezzo-soprano, Victor Braun, baritone, and Charles Bressler, tenor—transcended this difficulty and presented a convincing, coherent story. These singers were also called upon to decorate, in some cases lavishly, their arias in the fashion of the Baroque. A particularly successful instance was the tenor Arioso "Comfort ye my people".

As is customary in arias and recitatives of the Baroque and so at this performance, concertino, and harpsichord and cello accompanied, which was generally artful, but in places one wished that the harpsichord part would not so faithfully double the cello, but would digress more into the treble register. Not so artful were the transitions between movements, specifically the beginnings of numbers, which were periodically fumbled, this possibly related to the requirements of the conductor's various occupations during the performance.

Considered in its entirety, the Symphony, Chorus, and Soloists are to be congratulated on their musical success of revitalizing the *Messiah* and introducing this new work, for so it should be considered, to the ears of its listeners.

—Barbara Fraser

## films

A comparison of a movie to the book it was lifted from usually makes for irrelevant discussion. A movie is theoretically to be judged on its own artistic merits, independent of source.

I think some fairly interesting, however irrelevant, comparisons can be made between Hardy's novel, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and the film version presently being unwound at the Westmount.

Frederic Raphael's screenplay stays extremely close to the book (almost to the extent of becoming long reeled. While parenthesized, I should add that I read the book after I had seen the movie, and the comparison may really be that of the book to the movie it was written from.)

Many separate events in the book have been synthesized in the movie, but this has been skilfully done at the expense of time between these events only, and not at the expense of continuity or depth in either the characterization or the story. The slow methodical, almost mechanical development, and the overall tone of Hardy's novel is dramatically preserved—especially in the conclusion which is beautifully expressed cinematically.

The moral of all these irrelevancies: if you really like Hardy, you will probably be very impressed with John Schlesinger's interpretation of the book; and if you don't like Hardy you may still enjoy the picture.

It is hard to go wrong when you have captured much of the cream of the British acting crop—Julie Crusty (or something), Alan Bates, Terence Stamp and Peter Finch.

Christie swings another fantastic performance, but no more prejudiced comments on her obviously great talent. Perhaps a little of the plot.

The story happens in the British countryside in the 1860's. Bates plays Gabriel Oak, an honest, ingenuous, and somewhat dull bucolic who apologetically proposes to the vain Miss Bathsheba Everdene (Julie Christie). She declines.

He is impoverished when his mad sheep dog, who turns out to be a typical Hardy anomaly, chases the whole herd of sheep over the white cliffs of Dover. Mr. Oak is left unable to pay the lease on his farm but never destitute. He acquiesces to the hardship and plods on to end up working as a shepherd for Miss Everdene, who has turned gentlewoman farmer on her deceased uncle's estate. He still loves her despite her aggrandizement.

Then Mr. Boldwood, the gentleman farmer next door, who has never loved a woman through the whole extent of his rational life, enters the fray and falls in (or rather collapses neurotically into) love with Bathsheba. Neither will she marry him.

But who does she fall in love with? A stupid, vulgar, ostentatious, wholly loathsome braggart, Sergeant Troy, who flatters her, but has little sincerity in his roguish soul. But despite his shortcomings, he manages to generate a good deal more verve and vitality than the other characters, and it is this excitement which attracts Miss Everdene.

She can see through his flattery, and yet can still be flattered by it. Unfortunately she doesn't see through to the inherent weakness in his character and the romance culminates in a miserable marriage. Mr. Oak is heartbroken. Mr. Boldwood is heartbroken. I was heartbroken.

Terence Stamp gives one of the better performances as this degenerate. He takes delight in his lack of responsibility, and gives a good representation of a rather complicated character. He has a broad range of expressiveness which brings out sympathy and understanding for the character of Sergeant Troy which could easily have been lost.

Every once in a while the shroud appears to lift from these somewhat depressing events only to turn ghoulishly and put another nail in the coffin lid.

The movie is a little depressing, but when things get too bad, you can always resort to viewing the beautifully photographed, beautiful English countryside which is unaffected by the petty struggling of the characters, which ordinarily proves disturbing and engaging.

—Gordon Auck



Edited by Donald Evans  
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