

# Different 'Messiah' deserves some attention


**By Avigdor Zaromp**  
special writer

The coming of the Messiah is a central theme among the faithful of the Judeo-Christian denominations. The time and age of his coming may be elusive to many, evoking anticipation and prayer. To classical music audiences, however, the coming of the Messiah is never in doubt. It happens every year around this season.

Handel's masterpiece, which is completed in 24 days, always has attracted large audiences. To maintain

such interest and attention, this Messiah keeps coming in different forms and guises. The latest of these versions presented here isn't exactly new. It was arranged by Mozart some two years before he died.

Orchestra Hall was packed Thursday for the first of four presentations of the "Messiah" on consecutive days. The guest conductor and soloists, all from Germany, are relatively unknown to local audiences. They were conductor Ernst-Ulrich von Kameke, soprano Mascha Deubner, alto Hildegard Laurich,



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tenor Peter Maus and baritone Bertold Possemeyer.

**PERFORMANCE OF oratorios, especially from the baroque era, is a specialty that is separate from other**

parts of the standard repertoire. Artists who are relatively unknown can frequently prove to be more effective and convincing than their more celebrated colleagues. In this regard, this performance of the "Mes-

siah" had some positive aspects to offer.

The controversial aspect of authenticity has a bearing on one's perception of the quality of the performance.

If the standard version one is accustomed to is the yardstick for authenticity, last week's version certainly deviated. However, Mozart wasn't an ordinary arranger, and my own perception was that, in a strange way, a great deal of authenticity was in this performance.

This version was most illuminating even if I didn't find all its nuances agreeable. For example, the extra dotted edges and extraneous phrases in "His Yoke is Easy" tended to be obnoxious, clashing with the evenly flowing sixteenth originally intended. But other aspects of the performance compensated.

was about alto Laurich. While she had all the notes in place, her voice had a rough, husky quality to it. It would be ideal for tavern or beer drinking songs.

Soprano Deubner conquered the fast sixteenth in "Hallelujah" effortlessly. Maestro Kameke, who had good timing and control most of the time, had some problem adjusting to the slower tempo of the middle portion of this aria.

Tenor Maus had a bright, vibrant voice that was natural and unforced even in the most intense phrases.

Baritone Possemeyer managed to sing even in the lower range without excessive vibrato, even though his voice lacked some strength in these ranges.

The audience spontaneously was on its feet during the "Hallelujah" chorus, a custom initiated by the king who was present during Handel's performance.

This version of the "Messiah" may not prove to be superior to the standard one. Many of us may have greater affinity to the latter due to sheer habit. But this version was instructive and revealing to the majority of listeners who had never heard it before. It is a version that deserves to be performed — at least occasionally.

# Lafayette gaining in stature

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The Lafayette String Quartet performed jointly with the Augustine String Quartet on a program at Varner Hall, Oakland University, recently. The Augustine was established at the Eastman School of Music, where it formed its connections with the Lafayette String Quartet, quartet-in-residence at Oakland University.

The masterful liams made the program hard to beat. Each group performed a string quartet by Beethoven and then combined to perform Mendelssohn's celebrated Octet.

The Lafayette String Quartet is getting to a point where no introduction is necessary — mention of the name is enough.

THE QUALITY of their playing at this concert reflected a standard that one may expect only in the top leagues.

Their performance of Beethoven's Quartet Op. 18, No. 1 left virtually no stone unturned. This earliest Beethoven quartet, whose style is still indebted to Haydn, came through with undistorted clarity, undimmed even by the bursts of intensity. The entire work was held in stylistic perspective without sounding too innocent.

This was in contrast to the performance of the Quartet Op. 95 in F minor. The approach of the Augustine Quartet was reflective of a much later

style. They pushed phrases to the limit, with a resulting sound that was sometimes harsh and abrasive. Their violins also tended to clash with the lower instruments. This was still within the bounds of a high-quality performance, to be sure.

Quite a few performances by established groups make Beethoven's late quartets sound extremely contemporary. If I felt that some aspects of this performance were unduly harsh, it is a reflection of my personal preference.

THE AUGUSTINE String Quartet derives its name from an Austrian folk song that Schoenberg quoted in his Second String Quartet. This name seems to fit too well — I kept associating their sound in Beethoven's Op. 95 with the dissonances in Schoenberg's music. Depending on one's taste, some may consider this to be a positive trait, my own preference notwithstanding.

The performance of Mendelssohn's Octet was one of the most lively and intense that I have heard.

This work, written when Mendelssohn was only 16, is typically played with a sweetness, which tends to diminish its stature. The combination of Lafayette's precise intonation and Augustine's intensity produced a rendition that is likely to leave a long term imprint in one's memory.

VARNER HALL, on the Oakland University

campus, tends to attract small local audiences, typically a fraction of its capacity. On this occasion, however, the attendance was far more substantial, and for good reason. With the stature and prestige of the Lafayette continually increasing, this hall may be too small for them in the near future.

The Augustine Quartet, which may need more time to reach its optimal level, seems to be on the right track toward high professional acclaim. It would be interesting to hear them again in a couple of years.

THE CHAMBER-SIZE orchestra and the 40 singers of the Detroit Symphony Choral proved to be quite effective in the refined acoustics of Orchestra Hall. Handel's music sounded big due to its intrinsic characteristics, rather than through exaggerated size of the performing forces.

The singers were capable for most part. One major reservation I had

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