

## Boar's Head and Yule Log Festival at Trinity Cathedral (Dec. 30)

by Kevin McLaughlin



Goats and donkeys and camels — oh my. Add Elizabethan music, costumes, the noble company of Beefeaters and attendants processing under the magnificent arches of Trinity Cathedral, and you have yourself a merry little Christmas pageant.

A celebration that dates to the Roman Empire and Norman times in England, the Boar's Head and Yule Log Festival has been a Cleveland tradition since 1960. The festival is typically held on December 30th, as it was this year, with shows at 2:00 and 4:30 pm — I saw the latter — and the promise of a ham-and-mincemeat feast after the second performance.

The principal task of the volunteer cast of troubadours, shepherds, and sprites, besides singing, parading, and cavorting, was to present the titular giant boar's head and lighting of the yule log — offering symbolic import for the Christian, and theatrical whimsy for everyone. Soloists, choirs, and audience sing-alongs were accompanied by Todd Wilson at the organ.

The first to enter were the Beefeater Yeomen in their Gilbert and Sullivan-reminiscent red and black costumes. With self-serious demeanor they stage-marched in, striking the floor hard with every other step (*step-step-stomp!*). The mock-vehemence was evidently part of the act, but how did they do it without hurting themselves?

A lusty fanfare on the herald trumpet followed, and then a choir of superb male voices emerged from the darkness for two chants associated with Christmas Day, *Hodie Christus est* and *Puer natus est*. Todd Wilson led the men and later provided thrilling organ sounds, especially the solo offertory, Gigout's *Grand Choeur Dialogué*. Though the singing was beautiful, and intonation pure, two chants in a row made for a dramatically

slow start.

Meanwhile, a living creche accompanied by a spectacular petting zoo strolled by: Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, donkey in tow — an animal who showed off its fine tenor voice during a lull — shepherds with their goats, three Kings, and a very tall camel. The live animals were something to see, if only in anticipation of some sort of accident on the nice church floors. All took a couple of laps around the Nave in case you didn't quite believe what you saw the first time.

A regular at Trinity Cathedral and adjunct instructor at Wooster College, Victoria Peacock directed the choir. She drew taut and finely balanced performances from this mostly volunteer group.

A musical highlight was provided by the Ladies of the Court, who sang a John Dowland *Lute Lullaby*, set to these tender words: “Sweetly sleep, Jesu my joy; My little son, my little King.”

The audience, mostly bystanders (and occasional targets of feather-jabs by a zealous sprite), got to participate in due time in several seasonal carols, including *Deck the Hall*, *Good King Wenceslas*, *O Come All Ye Faithful*, and *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*.

By the program's end, the spectator was hooked. The music, color, animals, costumes, and drama all had a disarming, uplifting effect on one's outlook going into the night and for the year to come.

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