

Boar's Head And Yule Log Festival



MEDIEVAL CHRISTMAS LEGEND AND LORE were painlessly and entertainingly reviewed in the two performances last Saturday of "The Boar's Head And Yule Log Festival," at 5 and 7 p.m. in the First Congregational Church Meetinghouse. Before a near-capacity audience at 5 and an SRO audience at 7, some 77 choristers, an orchestra of 44, the 21-piece Palmer Handbell Choir and a huge cast, many youngsters included, gave rousing, "wassailing" performances of the ancient Christmas festival dating back to 1340, at least, when it was first performed at Queen's College, Oxford. A happily unsophisticated mish-mash of reverence and slap-stick humor, the festival is replete with symbolism, all simply explained by the church's Music director, Richard Vogt, in copious program notes, virtually a libretto of the 55-minute blend of entertainment and worship. All the appurtenances of an Old English Christmas were there: The Boar's Head itself (the boar having been in olden times a symbol of evil), the plum pudding, the mince pies, the Yule log, the wassail-barrel, colorful costumes and carols -- familiar and not so familiar. In the picture above, Thiel Ficker (center, wearing glasses), as Old Father Christmas, presides over the mummers' forthright interpretation of "St. George And The Dragon." Standing, L., with sword is Alan Sleath as St. George; next to him are Ridley Pearson as The Doctor (Thiel Ficker had a gag line which sounded suspiciously like the modern query, "Is there a doctor in the house?"), Henry Nickerson as the merry and valuable Clown, and, at extreme R., Bob Squire as The Dragon. A highlight was the able performance of an intricate Elizabethan sword dance (ancestor of a Pershing Rifle Drill Team exercise) by Bob Burton, Jonathan Fales, John Geismar, Jeff Hopkins, Grant Livingston and Gregg Wagner. The festival ended with a beautifully lighted and tasteful presentation of the Nativity. "The Boar's Head And Yule Log Festival" was amusing and touching, and Mr. Vogt and all who participated are to be heartily congratulated. Perhaps the production will become a pre-Christmas tradition at "First" Church. Seeing and hearing it -- AND participating in it, for the audience joined in singing some of the music -- is an enriching experience that makes Christmas come poignantly alive.

--- Photo By Cal Hood.