

## **Ferris Ohl Birthday Celebration**

September 12, 2004

As I thought about this very special birthday celebration I decided to look at and listen to one of the most precious gifts given to Lisette and me when we joined the Heidelberg College family: the six-volume set of CDs commemorating the five decades of choral music produced under the direction of Dr. Ferris Ohl.

As I reflected on the music on the CDs, it struck me that there is a story to be told by the selections Ferris chose for the choir over those five decades.

As a young, new director it was apparent that Ferris knew both the challenges and excitement of being a new director. One of his early selections was:

“Lord Make Me an Instrument”

And indeed, in the decades that followed, Ferris was a truly remarkable instrument – forging and shaping a choir of extraordinary ability.

His excitement and exuberance were evident in the early days because he had the choir sing such upbeat numbers as:

“Skip to My Lou”

“ The Joyous Christmas Song”

With a bit of time and some experience behind him, Ferris was apparently feeling pretty confident about his role at Heidelberg because a prominent number in the mid-'50s was:

“He’s Got the Whole World in His Hand”

And indeed Ferris did have the whole world in his hand because his was demonstrating that he was a wonderfully talented director who had put together a choir with an outstanding reputation.

As time went by, Ferris added these two pieces to his repertoire:

“The Water is Wide”

“ I’ve Got a Ticket”

Which I expect may have been the inspiration for him to start the well remembered European tours with the Choir.

Curiously, however, at about the time the European tours were in full tilt, some pieces started showing up in his concerts that may have told of the challenges of keeping dozens of college-aged students in tow. For example, there were songs like:

“My Lord, What a Mornin!”  
“ My Sorrowful Grieving”  
“ All My Trials”

And I expect this one told of his temptation:

“Wid a Sword in My Hand.”

Ferris created music that has awed, inspired and moved thousands of people over the years. The selections themselves are descriptive of the music he has created.

Listen to these titles and tell me if they don't describe what you sensed and felt as you sat captivated by a Ferris Ohl production:

“Music, Glorious is Thy Sound”  
“ Me Thinks I Hear the Full Celestial Choir”  
“ Magnificat”  
“ O Clap Your Hands”

We all know that as good as Ferris is, that the old adage, “Behind every man there is a great woman,” is so true in the case of Ferris and Dorothy Ohl. Dorothy too is a legend at Heidelberg College and has been the great woman behind the great man.

It strikes me that a number of the selections that Ferris has chosen over the years speaks to the very special relationship with Dorothy – who obviously is another very important member of the Heidelberg College music family.

Ferris had the concert choir sing:

“No Man is an Island” – recognizing they are a team.  
“ Alleluia and Praise to God” – giving thanks for his special mate, and  
“ There's a Little Wheel A Turnin in My Heart” – speaking to his deep love for Dorothy.

Because both Ferris and Dorothy have touched so many lives at Heidelberg College, it gives me great pleasure to announce that the Board of Trustees has given our Office of Institutional Advancement approval to begin raising the funds necessary to establish the Ferris and Dorothy Ohl Endowed Chair in Music.

As Ferris went into his fifth decade of leading the concert choir, they sang:

“To Everything There is a Season”

And the season was coming when he would retire from a magnificent career. One of his later selections

“Blessing, Glory and Wisdom”

was particularly reflective of the impact Ferris has had on this college.

Ferris, you have indeed been a blessing. You have brought glory to your alma mater. And you have provided sage wisdom to untold numbers of students throughout the years.

And so as I conclude, it is only fitting that two of your selections serve as my toast to you:

“May the Lord Bless You and Keep You”

And may you spend many more happy years with those who love and admire you at your:

“Sweet Alma Home.”

Happy Birthday, Ferris!