**CHRISTMAS ORATORIO**

**By CHRISTOPHER J. ANDREWS**

The Christmas season is rich in music, from carollers performing gratis (or for the occasional plum pudding) to grandiose productions of The Nutcracker. The most joyful sacred music of the year is reserved for the Christmas season; unlike the great Easter season works, wrought with overtones of sin and guilt, Bach's Christmas Oratorio is a set of joyful cantatas with music as uplifting as St. Luke's test. The Boston Premiere Ensemble, under the direction of F. John Adams, gave some 300 years ago a bewilderingly performed gift of music that was pleasing to the ear and mind; unfortunately, Adams' production was just a little too restrained, failing to dole out the full ration of joy permitted by the Church in this holiday season.

Televised television viewers are treated yearly to Nicholas Harnoncourt's grand production of the Oratorio; the golden hair of the robed boy sopranos is upstaged only by the Church in this holiday season. Adams' production of the oratorio is entirely consistent with Emmanuel. Emmanuel is not renowned for its musical snobbery, though, to deny that Bach fans who extol the cerebral" nature of his work; it would be more to Kelley's feat considering the acoustical "deadness" of Emmanuel. More to Kelley's advantage throughout the church, no small triumph. Colorful choir robes are replaced by stark black and white tails and gowns; no gold can be seen within this church; absolution is the pomp, the glory and, unfortunately, the excitement. The ensemble performed the music with a refined precision; however, the sensuous half of the soul was left unfulfilled. There are plenty of Bach fans who extol the "creet" nature of his work; it would be musical snobbery, to deny that Bach can also be great fun. Saturday's concert just was not enough fun, or not enough fun for Christmas.

The most pleasurable performances of the evening belonged to the young tenor Frank Kelley; also singing the role of The Evangelist. Kelley's lead, clear voice spread easily throughout the church, no small feat considering the acoustical "deadness" that plagues Emmanuel. More to Kelley's credit was the precise diction and intonation that never failed, despite a fairly grueling three-hour performance. (A Ger-