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Chapman's Annual WASSAIL is Dec. 4-5; Tickets Going Fast!

ORANGE, Calif., Nov. 23, 2009 One of Orange County's most venerable continuous holiday traditions is Chapman University's annual WASSAIL, the seasonal banquet and concert presented by the Chapman choirs and orchestra.

Tickets are moving fast but are still available for the 46th Annual WASSAIL, which will be presented on two nights, Friday, December 4 and Saturday, December 5, 2009 at 6 p.m. Tickets, at \$65 each, include a traditional wassail (hot spiked cider) reception and a sumptuous multi-course dinner served by the choir members, while diners are serenaded by strolling carolers in Victorian garb followed by an hour-long concert (and carol sing-along) featuring the university choirs and chamber orchestra playing holiday favorites. For more information and to order tickets, the public can call 714-997-6812.

The Chapman choirs first presented WASSAIL way back in 1963 when the university was called Chapman College and had already built a substantial national reputation for its choir program, under the direction of Dr. William Hall. We started it as the Chapman Madrigal Dinner Wassail, Dr. Hall, who is now dean of Chapman's College of Performing Arts, recalled. One of those early years, we even went very medieval and had a cooked boar's head that we brought in; it was awful! The event was presented in several locations around the campus in its early years, including Memorial Hall, DeMille Hall and Salmon Recital Hall. One year we wanted it to snow on stage, but we couldn't find any fake snow, Dr. Hall said. So we used rice instead, and when it hit the stage, it sounded like rockets the audience was very amused.

Orange County audiences loved Chapman's WASSAIL and, beginning in the early 1970s, the event went to two nights and started to sell out every year. What people really enjoyed was the intimate, warm holiday tradition and the fact that they could sit so close to the choir and orchestra, Dr. Hall said. That's what they still love about it. He said there was only one year where the event broke with tradition: Instead of the usual holiday carols, we decided to present Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors* that year. It was popular, but everyone said they hoped we would go back to the traditional carols and holiday tunes. And so we have, ever since.

Dr. Hall has conducted at all 45 performances of WASSAIL since 1963; this year he continues the tradition by conducting the grand finale, the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's *Messiah* (with audience sing-along). The Chapman University choirs are under the direction of Dr. Stephen Coker, director of choral activities, and Keith Hancock, director of the Women's Choir; and the Chapman University Chamber Orchestra is conducted by Professor Daniel Alfred Wachs, Chapman's director of instrumental studies.