IT WAS FOUR O'CLOCK on the afternoon of February 3. Professor David Strickler, chairman of the music department, mounted the podium. Facing him in the chancel of Goodrich Chapel were 175 musicians awaiting their cues for the premier presentation of a new opera, "Noah," written by an Albion College faculty member, Professor Anthony Taffs.

It was a concert performance. There were no costumes, scenery or special lighting effects, although Professor Taffs has constructed the opera to include them. But without benefit of props, one of the most dramatic stories of all time came to life again during the next two hours. The premiere was a smash hit. As the music critic of the Jackson Citizen Patriot said in his review, which is reproduced on the next page, it was a "powerful opera which ... should become one of the most important operatic works of this century."

It took Professor Strickler two hours to conduct the soloists, the Albion College Choral Society and the College Symphony Orchestra through the 343-page score. It took Professor Taffs two years to write the opera, but his interest in the Noachian theme stretches back a good deal farther. He became intrigued with the story of Noah and its implications for the modern world a long time ago when he used it for a sermon topic. His interest grew, and later he wrote an article. Meanwhile, there was other work to be done, and the years passed. Always, the idea was there, in the back of his mind, waiting to be put into a musical setting.

Thus, in the summer of 1960 he began work on the libretto. The Biblical information was scanty. The story chronicled in Genesis called for embellishment, and so Professor Taffs culled the resources of Stockwell Memorial Library which contains a great deal of rabbinical information. In the Book of Enoch, where interpolations from the lost Book of Noah appear frequently, he found much of the actual wording he used in the libretto. Then, with taste an imagination, he added material of his own. Noah and his family, under Professor Taffs' pen, began personalities with emotions an frailties that centuries of flood wars and pestilence have left constant in mankind. There are still wives like Naamah and sons who, like the children of Noah, never measure up to paternal example.

As Professor Taffs said in the program notes for the premier presentation, "Noah, an idealist, is unaware of the prosaic facts of life about him. Naamah, a normal housewife, has practical ability and a love for her husband which coupled, however, with a distinct consciousness of all she gave up to marry him. Completely unspiritual, she is counselor to the sons. For Noah unintentionally neglects the children and ignores his wife wrapped up in communion with God. As a result Naamah becomes a peevish, nagging shrew, starved for affection, and the three sons quarrel constantly among themselves for precedence, as their descendants (the races) have done ever since."
Perhaps the most charming and poignant of Professor Taffs' additions to the story is that of a daughter, Melka. "There is no tradition crediting Noah with a daughter, but I have given him one," Professor Taffs explains in the program notes. "To the objection that a daughter could not inspire the love which Noah shows her, I reply that the culture of his time was completely destroyed by the flood, and we have no reason to assume that she shared the later Hebrew preference for sons." Noah, in his preoccupation, was unaware that his daughter had fallen in love with the son of his mortal enemy. How difficult it was to leave her behind!

Professor Taffs began to write the music during the spring of 1961, and continued that summer under a Faculty Summer Research Grant. Blending the two, music and words, was not a neatly compartmented process. As the music grew, the libretto called for alterations - sometimes it had to be expanded and at other times contracted. Usually the composer does not write his libretto, but Professor Taffs prefers to be his own librettist. "That way you don't have understandings with the author. You just can't alter someone else's creation. The problem doesn't arise when you are both librettist and composer."

"In a sense, an opera is a artificial product," Professor Taffs observes. "You must create drama and you must have vocal variety. For example, I needed a dramatic incident to balance the men's trio. I was able to solve this problem when I discovered that none of the three sons' wives had children 'til after the deluge. This was a natural situation for the wives' lament."

In addition to the conductor’s score, Professor Taffs prepared scores for the chorus, orchestra and piano. This task began in September, 1961, and was not completed until twelve months later. Into rehearsals for the introductory presentation went more than 8,300 man hours, according to estimates by Professor Strickler.

Jacqueline Maag, associate professor of music, sang the role Naamah, Noah's wife. Noah was portrayed by Robert Kuehn, prominent New York baritone, Norma Heyde, also an eastern artist,
was cast in the role of Noah’s daughter, Melka. Four other professional musicians sang principal roles, and nine Albion student had solo parts. Associate conductors were Dr Ralph Long and Philip Mason of the music department.

"Noah" is Professor Taffs' major interpretation of a Biblical theme. Previous works presented by the Albion College department of music are his oratorio, "Son of Man," and the dance-opera, "Ten Virgins."

In concluding his program remarks, Professor Taffs said, “Some may be disturbed by the pessimism which pervades much of the play. However, the events related took place thousands of years before the Incarnation, and even a shadowy conception of the Christian hope may have been unknown to those of the Noachian epoch.”

Professor Vernon Bobbitt, chairman of the art department signed the program cover which, with Professor Taffs’ libretto, is superimposed on a page of the conductor’s score.
Premiere Held

Opera by Albion Professor Shows Great Promise

BY WILLIAM J. SWANK
Citizen Patriot Music Editor

Albion—The story of Noah and his building of the Ark in preparation for the Flood was graphically and dramatically told here Sunday as the Albion College Music Department gave the premiere performance of Anthony Taffs' new opera, "Noah."

The composer was given a noisy ovation at the conclusion of his monumental work which was given in complete, night wheels went off of the pavement. The over several.

Edwin R. Garden called the "good" of the event, severe by possible. Mr. B. exit ramp at Ann Arbor. Today, S. struck a to p.m. and

Mr. Taffs, who is associate professor of piano and theory at the college has put together a powerful opera which, when staged, should become one of the most important operatic works composed in this century. It has as its plot the Biblical story of Noah; it has forceful and descriptive music—sometimes wild and discordant; often melodic and lyrical; but always music which dramatically portrays the mood of the moment.