

## **MORMON TABERNACLE CHOIR PRESIDENT RON JARRETT: THE MAN BEHIND THE MUSIC**

If you meet with Ron Jarrett in his office at the historic Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, he will likely offer you some chocolate from the basket of wrapped candies on his desk.

“I have a passion for chocolate,” the president of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir says. “It’s not European, but it’s good.”

Besides chocolate, he also has a passion for music that began early in his youth.

President Jarrett was born and raised in Salt Lake City, Utah and remembers having a happy childhood surrounded by many good friends. It was in his local elementary school that he had his first formal musical experiences. He found out quickly that playing a musical instrument was not his forte.

“When I was in about the 4th or 5th grade my parents enrolled me in the school band to play the clarinet. But I would get so nervous about playing that I would just shake! So that didn’t last long.”

His parents were persistent. They signed him up for private lessons to play the piano and then the accordion. The piano took too much practice, and the accordion just wasn’t suave enough for a self-conscious young man concerned about being “cool.” “I just thought it was cheesy; I didn’t like it very much,” he chuckles.

To this day, President Jarrett plays the piano with one finger. But he can sing. When he was at West High School, he began to be heavily involved in vocal performance in a quartet called “The Debonairs” with three of his friends. In the years to come he sang in church choirs; he had natural talent as a tenor.

In 1999 President Jarrett auditioned for the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, where he sang for nine consecutive years, until 2008. When he speaks of his varied experiences singing in the Choir, the word he uses most frequently is “fun.” He still remembers performing in the Opening Ceremony of the 2002 Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City with 16-time Grammy Award-winning artist Sting. “It was a very, very fun, never-to-be-repeated experience,” he says with characteristic enthusiasm.

But “fun” does not adequately describe the breadth of President Jarrett’s feelings about music, which he believes can also be inspiring and deeply moving. He experienced this first-hand when the Choir performed at a September 11 memorial service just hours after the 2001 attack occurred.

“On the night of 9/11, we were supposed to perform a concert for a convention in town. When we heard of the events, we were horrified, but the event was not called off. So we came, got dressed, and met in the specified location. They announced that the concert was going to be changed to a memorial service. So instead of the songs that we had practiced, we sang American patriotic music.



It's hard for me to describe the feelings I had watching the audience from where I sang, seeing them so engrossed with the Choir, its music and its message.”

With his emotions close to the surface, President Jarrett continued, “Music can bring the strength for people to carry on with whatever they're dealing with. And that strength can be brought to people of all cultures and all ages, because music is the only truly universal language.” After retiring from the Choir, President Jarrett continued to serve as an assistant to former Mormon Tabernacle Choir president Mac Christensen from 2008 until May 2011.

In 2011, he thought he had left the Choir behind when he and his wife Lucie left to serve a public affairs mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at its offices in Frankfurt, Germany. About eleven months into that assignment he received a call from Church President Thomas S. Monson to serve as president of the Choir. “I couldn't believe. I was very teary and I tried to squeak out, ‘Thank you.’”

President Jarrett is the first person to have performed in the Choir prior to being appointed president. One of his primary goals for the Choir is to reach out to younger audiences, as evidenced by guests such as hip-hop violinist Lindsey Stirling and Broadway sensation Santino Fontana, who was the voice of Hans in Disney's animated feature *Frozen*. President Jarrett has also been at the helm as the Choir launched its YouTube channel in 2012, continued to expand its website, Facebook and other digital offerings including a mobile app on Apple and Android platforms.

When he is not managing the affairs of one of the world's most famous choirs, President Jarrett enjoys making his own chocolates, baking chocolate chip cookies, gardening, and reading historical fiction with his grandchildren.

