

The Unsung Heroes of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir on Tour

When the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra at Temple Square go on tour, it is a logistical feat unlike any other, transporting hundreds of people, thousands of pieces of luggage, a clothing store-equivalent of concert attire, dozens of musical instruments and staging equipment to venues far from home. The operation is as well-orchestrated as the musicians themselves by four masters of organization—the Choir’s two managers and two of its veteran audiovisual producers.

The logistical wizard is the Choir’s administrative manager of 18 years, Barry Anderson, who always is one step ahead of the action. Just as one tour ends, he is out scouting for hotels and venues for the next time the Choir hits the road, which is usually every two years. Smaller, less extensive tours sandwich in between the major tours.

In all, he creates detailed itineraries for dozens of distinct groups, including bus drivers, caterers, security personnel and even a medical team, so they each know, day by day, minute by minute, exactly what their responsibilities are during the tour, whether it’s juggling hundreds of pieces of luggage or having food ready for a small army in a very short window of time to stay on schedule.

“That’s how my mind is wired,” the pragmatic Anderson says. “I’m not Mack Wilberg. I don’t make any musical decisions. I don’t make a sound. But this is the piece that I can do, just like everybody else has the piece that they do.”

One thing Anderson has learned over the years is that even with the most detailed plan, unexpected events always pop up, and he has contingencies in place for flexibility in difficult situations.

For example, when the Choir goes on tour, it travels in multiple busses. Anderson never fills the buses to capacity even though people often tried explaining to him that it would be more efficient and cost-effective to fit everyone into fewer buses and not leave any seats empty, but Anderson insisted he needed more busses.

“In 2013, we got to a place where we were having lunch on our way to Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the lead bus driver came up to me and he said, ‘Barry, we’ve got a real problem. One of the busses is broken down.’ Well, I’m 250 miles from our next concert in Minneapolis and there’s nothing around,” Anderson said. “But I had the extra seats in all of the other busses. We put the stranded Choir members on these busses and all went to Minneapolis, on schedule, and right on time for the concert. The moral of the story is always have more busses than we need.”

“Tour is like a very delicious pie,” Anderson said. “Administrative people, staging people, the audiovisual people—all of those people work so hard to make sure their piece is just right, and what you end up seeing in concert is the delicious result.”



A critical piece of the tour is filling the seats at each venue so that the Choir and Orchestra perform for a full house. That falls to the marketing genius of the Choir's general manager, Scott Barrick.

Before taking his position with the Choir in 2001, this Harvard MBA grad spent time honing his talent as a brand manager for products like Zest soap, Mr. Clean, and even pet food. He says he often draws on these experiences as he performs his role as manager of the Choir.

"Whether its soap, pet food or choral music, the main objective is trying to match the needs of the end user," Barrick said, "giving them what they need when they need it, at a time and a place where they're ready to consume it."

But Barrick says the Choir's music moves beyond being a product; it changes people's lives.

"Our objective is enabling the Choir to get its message of peace and joy out to as many people as possible through live performances," Barrick said. "There's a certain electricity when you have a full house and a fully engaged audience." Such attention results in a demand for return engagements.

That's because the Choir makes a concerted effort to reach out to arts organizations; community, government, and interfaith leaders; and others in special receptions prior to each concert.

"It's a beautiful opportunity because the music of the Choir has religious moments but it's not solely religious," Barrick said. "It lifts and inspires. It moves us in different ways. It's in a language that communicates that can touch a lot of people from a variety of backgrounds."

The Choir is known for its signature wall of sound, and it's that sound that fans want to experience at every concert. But getting the sound of 360 voices to reach the ears of thousands of audience members is no easy task. Production manager Heidi Casson spent years as a stage manager touring nationally with musical theater groups and before coming to the Choir, was a stage manager for musical icon Celine Dion's Las Vegas Show, *A New Day*.

According to Casson, one of the biggest challenges with taking the Choir on tour is maintaining consistency in how the Choir sounds when performing in unique venues that vary in size and style.

"The Choir has mastered its sound in the traditional venues on Temple Square, but when we go on tour, it's my responsibility to try and make the same thing happen in an arena or in a theater or in a concert hall anywhere in the world."



That means the Choir travels with its own sophisticated equipment package of microphones, speakers and amplifiers that have to be set up and taken down for each concert, requiring an enormous amount of time and energy.

“A typical day on tour begins at 7:00 a.m. and usually ends by one or two in the morning. And then we’re out of the venue and moving on to the next city,” Casson said. “It’s an awful lot of work, but the satisfaction of a job well done and the fact that people got to see and hear the Choir live makes it worth it.”

The Choir’s producer, Ed Payne works to capture the magic of the Choir and to share it with audiences throughout the world. He’s been producing the Choir’s weekly broadcast, *Music and the Spoken Word*, for over 35 years and is a critical to how the Choir is literally viewed. If a Choir tour provides the opportunity for filming on location, Ed will handle that. For tours where that isn’t a possibility, he is involved in helping promote the tour.

“Live concert goers are the audience that’s watching the Choir in concert,” Payne said. “But we have tons of people that are out in the world and across the United States that want to follow the Choir while it is on the road.”

To make that happen, Payne produces behind-the-scenes video and digital media packages that are posted on all of the Choir’s social media platforms—Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, web site-- to bring the Choir’s touring experiences into the very lives of tens of thousands of people.

“When you have a great experience, you want to share that,” Payne said. “I get to see and hear the Choir every week, but even after three decades, I still get goose bumps listening to the magnificent music that they produce. And to be able to take that part of my life and to share that joy with others, that’s what makes all the hard work worth it in the end.”

