



THE TABERNACLE CHOIR AT TEMPLE SQUARE

Press Release

The Tabernacle Choir's PBS BYUtv Special Is 2021 Christmas Concert Taping Sessions for 2022 TV Special Announced

SALT LAKE CITY — Michael O. Leavitt, president of The Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square, announced that The Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra at Temple Square's December Christmas musical event for 2021 will be a unique two-hour retrospective television special and internet stream entitled "20 Years of Christmas with The Tabernacle Choir" featuring Tony® Award-winner Brian Stokes Mitchell as narrator and guest soloist.

Leavitt explained, "Every year, the Christmas concert by The Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra at Temple Square is a gift to the world from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This year, our gift is this 20th anniversary special with highlights from two decades of concerts celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. Since COVID precluded holding and recording a live Christmas concert last December, we are extremely pleased to continue our decades-long tradition of Christmas programming on PBS, with this exceptional broadcast." Leavitt also announced that in order to continue the TV special tradition in 2022, taping sessions with the Choir organization ensembles and guest artists will be held in December.

"Putting together this retrospective was a remarkable, unexpected journey," remarked Mack Wilberg, music director of The Tabernacle Choir. "The difficult part was selecting what should be included, given the wealth of material we had to work with. We also wanted to provide the interesting story of how the Christmas concert has been put together, featuring not only the army of volunteer performers from the Choir organization, but also the many world-class guest artists we have had the privilege of working with over the past 20 years."

Tony Award-winner Mitchell—"Stokes" as he is known to colleagues—narrates the two-hour retrospective program. Stokes demonstrates to the audience that what happens in the Conference Center every Christmas is more than just the wide range of musical periods and genres and the diversity of guest artists. It's about bringing people together—about Christmas for everyone.

Audiences will be thrilled with never-before-seen additions to Christmas content including Brian Stokes Mitchell's performance of a new Mack Wilberg arrangement of "That's What Christmas Means to Me" with Wilberg at the piano; a new Richard Elliott organ solo—an adaptation of Tchaikovsky's "Trepak" from *Nutcracker Suite*; and an amazing rendition of "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly" recorded using a socially-distanced Orchestra at Temple Square and separately recorded "selfie" videos of each individual Choir member compiled together as they float onto the screen in a spectacular virtual choir.

Stokes tells the audience, "The message of Christmas is universal.... The music, the stories, the singing, the dancing, and the sharing are all a reminder that the birth of Jesus Christ is about peace and goodwill for everyone. It's why the joy of Christmas really is joy to all the world."



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“20 Years of Christmas with The Tabernacle Choir” will air and stream on PBS TV and PBS.org on Monday, December 13, at 7 p.m. mountain/9 p.m. eastern with a reairing on PBS TV on Friday, December 24, at 6 p.m./8 p.m. BYUtv and BYUtv.org will air and stream the program on Thursday, December 16, at 7 p.m./9 p.m. with reairings on BYUtv on Sunday, December 19, at 5 p.m./7 p.m., Friday, December 24, at 8 p.m./10 p.m. and Saturday, December 25, at 1:35 p.m./3:35 p.m. On-demand viewing of the two-hour program will be available on both networks’ websites after the respective premieres on pbs.org/tabernaclechoir and byutv.org.

Since 2004, the Choir’s Christmas specials have become a beloved PBS tradition where the programs have consistently ranked as the most viewed PBS holiday programs. BYUtv has worked with The Tabernacle Choir since 2017 to bring the specials to PBS, working hand-in-hand with partner station GBH—the largest creator of PBS content for TV and the web.

The full two-hour special plus over 30 minutes of bonus features is on a [DVD entitled “20 Years of Christmas with The Tabernacle Choir”](#) available for order now. Audio recordings of most of the music from the special—either recordings of songs in the special or another Choir and Orchestra recording of the same title—can be streamed on a [Spotify](#) playlist entitled “20 Years of Christmas with The Tabernacle Choir.” Videos of many of the segments can be viewed on a [YouTube playlist](#) of the same name. All three links can be found on smartURL.it/TabChoirChristmas.

Again in 2021, health challenges persist for live performances with audiences and performers. Commenting on the pandemic’s continuing impact, President Leavitt said, “The Tabernacle Choir organization has been gratified to slowly return step by step to rehearsals, general conference participation, and recently to live broadcasts of *Music & the Spoken Word*, all with strict health protocols—but still without audiences in attendance.”

“As a further step in that progression,” he continued, “to create a *Christmas with The Tabernacle Choir* TV special for PBS and BYUtv for 2022, the Choir, Orchestra, and Bells will hold several closed TV taping sessions in December. Regrettably, due to the ongoing pandemic, we will have only a small, masked and socially-distanced audience present, comprised primarily of Choir organization members’ families. This follows the pattern of recent general conference sessions and the upcoming First Presidency Christmas devotional.”

The guest artists who will join the Choir, Orchestra, and Bells for the December TV taping sessions are Megan Hilty and Neal McDonough. Hilty is most recognizable for her portrayal of Ivy Lynn in NBC’s musical drama “Smash.” A Tony nominee, she is a dynamic performer both on stage and on screen. Hilty starred in “Patsy & Loretta” on Lifetime, which earned her a Critics Choice Award for Best Actress. Hilty’s television credits include Hulu’s “Difficult People,” the final season of CBS’s “The Good Wife” and “The Good Fight” for CBS All Access. On stage, she is known for her Broadway performances as Glinda the Good Witch in *Wicked*, Doralee Rhodes in *9 to 5: The Musical*, and her Tony Award-nominated role as Brooke Ashton in *Noises Off*. Megan is married to singer/songwriter Brian Gallagher and they have two children.

Neal McDonough is a multi-talented and award-winning actor who has been seen in over 100 films, including the award-winning Christian film *Greater* (2016), *Captain America* (2014), *Forever Strong* (2008), and *The Warrant* (2020) and nearly one thousand hours of major television dramas, including Lt.



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Compton in the World War II mini-series, *Band of Brothers*, many seasons as Sean Cahill in the hit TV series, *Suits*, and Robert Zemeckis's *Project Blue Book*. Not limited to feature films and television, McDonough has also recently finished stage runs as Daddy Warbucks in *Annie* and the title role in *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. Born to Irish parents and raised in Dorchester, Massachusetts, Neal is a devout Catholic. His most prized accomplishment is his relationship with his wife Ruvé, their five children, and with God.

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