

MACK WILBERG: THE CREATIVE MIND BEHIND THE MUSIC

Mack Wilberg, music director of The Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square, is recognised as a preeminent composer, arranger, conductor and choral clinician throughout the world. Whether it's refreshing a traditional hymn or folk tune through his arrangements, adding new life to a patriotic favourite or Christmas carol or revisiting a classic like Handel's *Messiah* in his 2013 edition, Wilberg's music touches the soul.

Wilberg composes and arranges extensively for the Choir and Orchestra as well as commissions from time to time. He also has a special ability to give renewed vitality to well-loved tunes through his arrangements. For example, his arrangement of "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," an audience favourite, is in the top three most-watched videos on The Tabernacle Choir's YouTube channel with 8.5 million views. There are even "Mack Wilberg Hymn Festivals."

"I work very hard to stimulate and keep people's attention," Wilberg explains. "Music ought to be an enjoyable journey for the listener." He has created music for The Tabernacle Choir that retains the ensemble's classic style while reaching out to draw in those from the digital age. No wonder The Tabernacle Choir is one of the few groups that is as likely to be in your grandmother's record collection as on your nephew's iPod.

Wilberg earned his bachelor's degree in music from Brigham Young University and his master's and PhD in music from the Thornton School of Music at the University of Southern California.

But music was in Wilberg's blood long before he received any formal training.

As a boy living in the small mining town of Castle Dale in central-eastern Utah, four-year-old Wilberg started playing the piano by ear. He was fascinated by the instrument. Wilberg's mother, concerned about balance in her son's life, sometimes had to send him out to play to take a break from the piano. He would go outside to appease her but then would go to his neighbour's home, where he would ask to play *their* piano. Music was more than just diversion for him; it was his life.

Every week, his mother drove him 40 miles to receive quality instruction from a gifted piano instructor. When he was 10 years old, his grandmother took him to see The Tabernacle Choir perform. He says that as he entered the Tabernacle, the effect on him was tangible. "It felt like I had walked into a wall of glorious sound," Wilberg says. He never dreamed that less than 50 years later he would direct the world-famous choir in the world-famous Tabernacle.

In 1999, Dr. Wilberg left his teaching and choral conducting positions at Brigham Young University to take the position of associate music director of The Tabernacle Choir and music director of the Temple Square Chorale. In 2008 he was appointed music director of The Tabernacle Choir. He is responsible for all musical and creative aspects of the Choir, Orchestra at Temple Square, Temple Square Chorale (the Choir's training ensemble) and Bells on Temple Square (a 32-member English handbell choir). He selects repertoire for concerts, recordings and tours; provides the creative direction for the weekly *Music & the Spoken Word* broadcast; carefully selects new choir members and oversees their training with associate music director, Ryan Murphy.



The Choir's library has more than 260 of his works on the shelves. Rarely is there a Choir concert or broadcast without a signature Wilberg piece. Wilberg's compositions and arrangements, published by Oxford University Press, are performed and recorded by choral organisations throughout the world. The *Seattle Times* described his music as having "a flair for ... creating brilliant jewels of orchestration."

He has collaborated with the best of the best from David Foster to Yo-Yo Ma, James Taylor to Sting. He has arranged music for Bryn Terfel, Rolando Villazón, Sissel, Alfie Boe, The King's Singers, Katherine Jenkins, Kristin Chenoweth, Sutton Foster, Nathan Gunn, Renée Fleming, Frederica von Stade, Brian Stokes Mitchell, Natalie Cole and Audra McDonald—to name a few. He has also orchestrated performances for guest narrators Hugh Bonneville, Tom Brokaw, Claire Bloom, David McCullough, Edward Herrmann, Jane Seymour and Walter Cronkite.

Wilberg's music has been performed by the choruses of the Chicago Symphony, San Francisco Symphony and Dallas Symphony orchestras. His works have also been sung by distinguished choral ensembles including the Choir of King's College, Cambridge; St. John's Choir; and Sweden's Orphei Dränger. His arrangement of "Still, Still, Still" was performed in the Royal Albert Hall by the London Philharmonic Orchestra during a holiday concert, and his arrangement of "Ding Dong! Merrily on High" has been featured on King's College's Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols several times. Military choruses and orchestras performed his music at the funerals of President Ronald Reagan and President Gerald Ford and at the World War II Memorial Dedication. In his spare time Wilberg gives volunteer service as the conductor of a men's choir at the Utah state prison.

What do members of the Choir think of their director? They admire his brilliant mind, his exacting perfectionism and his good-natured and quiet manner. They express sincere gratitude for the opportunity to perform his music as do those in church choirs, community choral groups and school ensembles. You will find no greater fans of Mack Wilberg than those who sing or have sung his music.

