

THE TABERNACLE CHOIR AT TEMPLE SQUARE PRESIDENT RON JARRETT: THE ORGANISATION 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 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.

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 fourth or fifth 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, 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 that followed, he sang in church choirs. He had natural talent as a tenor.

In 1999 Jarrett auditioned for The 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 ceremonies of the 2002 Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City with 16-time Grammy® Award-winning artist Sting accompanied by 18-time Grammy® Award-winning cellist Yo-Yo Ma. “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 Jarrett’s feelings about music, which he believes can also be inspiring and deeply moving. He experienced this firsthand 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, 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, Jarrett continued to serve as an assistant to former 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 11 months into that assignment he received a calling from then Church President Thomas S. Monson to serve as president of the Choir. "I couldn't believe it. I was very teary, and I tried to squeak out, 'Thank you.'"

Jarrett is the first person to have performed in the Choir prior to being appointed its 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*. The Choir's May 2020 CD release of inspirational music from the movies is another example. Jarrett was also at the helm when the Choir launched its YouTube channel in 2012 and as the Choir continued to expand its website, Facebook presence and other digital offerings. He is particularly proud of the YouTube channel, which has more than 200 million views, 1 million of them coming in one day, Christmas Eve 2019.

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

