

THE UNSUNG HEROES OF THE TABERNACLE CHOIR AT TEMPLE SQUARE ON TOUR

When The 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 three masters of organisation—the Choir’s two managers and its experienced production manager.

The logistical wizard is the Choir’s administrative manager of 19 years, Barry Anderson, who is always 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 and Orchestra hit the road, which is usually every two years. Smaller, less extensive tours are sandwiched in between the major tours.

All in all, Anderson 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 buses. Anderson never fills the buses to capacity, even though people have 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. Anderson has always insisted he needs more buses.

“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 buses is broken down.’ Well, I’m 250 miles from our next concert in Minneapolis and there’s nothing around,” Anderson says. “But I had the extra seats in all of the other buses. We put the stranded Choir members on these buses, and all went to Minneapolis, on schedule, and right on time for the concert. The moral of the story is always have more buses than we need.”

“Tour is like a very delicious pie,” Anderson says. “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 the Choir and Orchestra perform for a full house. That falls to the marketing talents 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 says, "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 on tour is enabling the Choir and Orchestra to get their message of peace and joy out to as many people as possible through live performances," Barrick says. "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 organisations; 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 says. "It lifts and inspires. It moves us in different ways. It's in a language 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 theatre groups, and before coming to the Choir, she was a stage manager for musical icon Celine Dion's Las Vegas Show, *A New Day*.

According to Casson, one of the biggest challenges of 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 theatre 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 says. “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.”

