

# EUROPEAN ROOTS LEAD TO CHOIR'S MUSICAL EXCELLENCE

The success and signature sound of The Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square is a result of more than a century of talented, hard-working men and women, particularly the influence of musical conductors from Europe. Six of the 15 conductors of the Choir have roots in the British Isles: three came from England, two from Wales, and one from Ireland. These individuals helped build a strong foundation for the Choir's world-renowned music.

The first conductor of the Choir, John Parry, was an early Welsh convert to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. After the 1849 general conference of the Church, where Parry led 85 Welsh converts in singing, Brigham Young asked Parry to formalise a choir to provide music for future conferences. Parry organised what became known as the Salt Lake Tabernacle Choir and now The Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square.

Twenty years later, George Edward Percy Careless took up the baton for the Choir. He was born in London on September 24, 1839. At the age of eleven, he was baptised and became a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As George grew to maturity, he became increasingly concerned about his diminutive physical size. On one occasion during these years, he found himself outside Parliament as Lord Palmerston (then Prime Minister) and Lord John Russell came out of the building. Lord Palmerston was a large man, but Lord Russell was as small as George. George thought, "There go two of the greatest statesmen in England; one a man large of stature, the other very small, but both equally great. Now, if Russell can make his mark in the world, so can I."

In 1859 George had the opportunity to begin his formal studies at the Royal Academy of Music in London, finishing the four-year course in only three years, studying violin, piano, harmony, instrumentation, voice, and conducting. Many of his instructors were recognised as some of the great teachers and musicians of their time.

George's musical talent early in life did not escape the eye of Church President Brigham Young. In 1865, President Young called George Careless into his office and said, "I want you to be Chief Musician of the Church. I want you to take the Tabernacle Choir and the Theatre Orchestra and lay a foundation for good music." "I will do the best I can," George replied.

During his music career, George Careless did just that – he acquainted his audiences with classical music. He organised and conducted orchestras, directed The Tabernacle Choir for 11 years, and introduced the pioneer audiences to operas and oratorios. He taught music, published a music periodical, operated a music shop, and composed over 80 hymns; many of which were published in the first Church hymnal containing both words and music, which he helped to prepare.

Another key contributor to the Choir's early success was Evan Stephens who was born in Pencader, West Wales and moved with his family to Utah in the United States when he was twelve.

Stephens was just 36 years-old in 1890 when he was appointed the music director of The Tabernacle Choir, a position he held for 26 years. His contributions to the Choir and to the world were unique. Under his leadership, the Choir grew from roughly 125 voices to over 300. To



accommodate the increased size, the Choir's seating arrangement was redesigned to create the semicircular, tiered seating familiar to audiences today. Additionally, it would become the first large performing group to have its music successfully recorded.

The Choir and Orchestra at Temple Square are thrilled to be going back to their roots for the aptly named 2020 Heritage Tour. The Tabernacle Choir first travelled to Europe on a seven-week concert tour in 1955. Since that first grand European tour, the Choir has toured there five other times: to western and central Europe in 1973, northern Europe and England in 1982, eastern Europe in 1991, southern Europe plus Belgium and England in 1998, and central Europe in 2016. The Choir last toured these four Nordic cities 37 years ago in 1982. It has not visited Wales or Scotland since the first European tour in 1955.

