

Chapter 8

The Mormon Tabernacle Choir's Pacific Tour, 1988

Cynthia Doxey and Lloyd D. Newell

During the twentieth century, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir became well known throughout the world through its recordings and weekly international radio and television broadcast of *Music and the Spoken Word*.¹ The choir was also recognized as representing The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Since the beginning of the Church, the gospel message has been shared through a variety of outreach methods. While the most effective way to teach people the gospel is through personal interaction with Church members and missionaries, the Church has also used other means through the media to promote the awareness and image of the Church. In mid-June 1988, the choir went on a three-week Pacific tour, including concerts in Hawaii, New Zealand, and Australia, for the purpose of sharing their music and providing an avenue through which individuals in these locations could learn more about the Church. This chapter will chronicle some of the events leading up to the tour and activities that took place during the tour and will then evaluate how effective the tour was in building up the Church in the areas in which the choir performed.

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1. *Music and the Spoken Word* is the world's longest continuing network broadcast and is carried on more than two thousand radio and television stations and cable systems. It has been broadcast from locations across the country and around the world.

Purposes of Choir Tours

The Tabernacle Choir has at least two main purposes. One important responsibility is to provide beautiful music at general conferences and other Church-sponsored events to strengthen the faith of Saints across the earth. Another major goal of the choir is to promote the Church's image and the teachings of the gospel throughout the world. Choir members are singing ambassadors of the Church, spreading goodwill and lifting hearts wherever they go. The choir does this through their weekly broadcast, recordings, special concerts in the Tabernacle and Conference Center, and concert tours.² Indeed, the Tabernacle Choir continues to play a vital role in bringing the Church "out of obscurity" (D&C 1:30).

In addition to the concerts the choir provides on tour, Church leaders have found that the choir tours often help the Church in two ways in the areas they visit. First, the tours help Church members outside the Intermountain West feel more connected to the Church. Church leaders have found that many members who live far away from Utah feel stronger ties with the Church as a whole when they see the choir perform. For example, during the choir's first tour to Europe in 1955, their performance in Berlin meant that many East German Saints were able to hear them. Thousands of Latter-day Saints in East Germany at that time were cut off from the body of the Church because the Iron Curtain limited their communication. However, when the choir arrived and performed in Berlin, Church members who heard the concert felt the love of the worldwide Church.³

2. Cynthia Doxey, "International Tours of the Tabernacle Choir," in *Out of Obscurity: The LDS Church in the Twentieth Century* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 86.

3. Herold L. Gregory, interview by Cynthia Doxey, January 28, 2000, Salt Lake City. Gregory was the president of the Berlin Mission at the time

Second, the choir's concerts provide a way to heighten awareness of the Church in the communities in which they perform. Wendell M. Smoot, former choir president, stated that Church leaders use the choir to support their missionary efforts throughout the world.⁴ Furthermore, Udell E. Poulsen, the choir's former business manager, emphasized the media coverage and excellent reviews received in many areas of the world where the Church is relatively unknown, showing that tours have helped "to bring the church out of obscurity."⁵ For example, when the choir visited Spain in 1998, the Madrid Spain Temple was under construction. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, who was Area President in Europe at the time, credits the choir's tour for increasing the community and media interest in the temple and other Church activities in the Iberian Peninsula.⁶

The 1988 tour to the Pacific had the same purposes as other tours, but there were additional roles on this tour. The choir was invited to participate in activities associated with the celebration of the bicentennial of Australia's founding. After the invitation, the choir received a congratulatory telegram from U.S. president Ronald Reagan naming the Tabernacle Choir "America's most renowned musical ensemble."⁷ The American

and later a member of the choir. At the time of the interview, he was the administrative assistant to the choir president. His experience is published as "Testimonial," in Warren John Thomas, *Salt Lake Mormon Tabernacle Choir Goes to Europe* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1957), 201–5.

4. Wendell O. Smoot, interview by Cynthia Doxey, March 15, 2001, Salt Lake City.
5. Udell E. Poulsen, interview by Cynthia Doxey, February 27, 2001, Salt Lake City.
6. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, interview by Cynthia Doxey, August 21, 2001, Salt Lake City.
7. Michael Otterson, "Tabernacle Choir Tours Pacific," *Ensign*, September 1988, 77. Earlier, President Ronald Reagan referred to the Tabernacle Choir as "America's Choir."

Australian Bicentennial Foundation had designated the choir performances as an “official cultural representative of the United States.”⁸ The choir was also invited to perform at the world’s fair, Expo ’88, in Brisbane as the United States’ contribution to the fair and was scheduled to perform on July 4, 1988, the date designated as U.S. Day.⁹

Media involvement for the Pacific tour was great, given that the two major sponsors were the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation (NZBC). They arranged for *Music and the Spoken Word* broadcasts to originate from the Michael Fowler Center in Wellington, New Zealand, and from the Sydney Opera House in Sydney, Australia, and be transmitted via satellite to KSL-TV and the CBS Radio Network. The ABC and NZBC also recorded several concerts in their own countries for later distribution on television and radio stations.¹⁰

Initial Preparation for the Tour

Although specific plans for the Pacific tour did not begin until a couple of years beforehand, perhaps the first step in planning occurred decades earlier. A young New Zealand businessman named Iain B. McKay first heard a recording of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Listening to the recording changed McKay’s life and led to his initial interest in and later conversion to the Church.¹¹ Soon after hearing the recording, McKay

8. “Choir to Sing on Program Honoring Constitution and Will Tour the Pacific,” *Church News*, May 23, 1987, 6.

9. “Tabernacle Choir Plans 1988 Tour to Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii,” press release, May 17, 1987, 3.

10. “Tabernacle Choir Plans 1988 Tour to Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii,” 2–3; Dorothy Stowe, “Anticipation High for Ambitious Tour of Tabernacle Choir,” *Church News*, June 4, 1988, 5.

11. Iain B. McKay, interview by Cynthia Doxey, March 9, 2001, Salt Lake City.

shared it with Sir Malcolm Rickard, the head of New Zealand Broadcasting. He was impressed enough by the music that in 1964 he invited the choir to perform in New Zealand. Unfortunately, the choir was unable to accept the invitation, but the dream lived on for McKay and Rickard.¹²

By the 1980s, McKay was living in Utah. His wife was a member of the Tabernacle Choir, and he was working as a representative for Bonneville Communications (a division of Bonneville International Corporation, the parent company of Church-owned commercial broadcasting operations), which produced and distributed the choir broadcasts. McKay had the specific responsibility of promoting Tabernacle Choir recordings and broadcasts internationally.¹³ In the fall of 1986, McKay received the approval of Gordon B. Hinckley, First Counselor in the First Presidency, to take a preliminary trip to New Zealand and Australia to inquire about the possibility of taking the choir to those two countries. Because he had kept his contacts with media representatives in New Zealand over the years, McKay thought he would be able to obtain a promise of sponsorship from the NZBC for the choir's performances in New Zealand. However, he was unsure of how to establish relations with the directors of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

McKay had planned to attend the Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters Convention in Sydney, hoping that he could find the contacts he needed while he was there. As he sat at dinner during the convention, he heard an announcement that the next morning his friend Geoffrey Whitehead would be appointed as CEO of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. McKay was surprised to hear that Whitehead,

12. Dorothy Stowe, "Tabernacle Choir to Embark on Longest Tour since '55," *Deseret News*, June 12, 1988, E6.

13. McKay, interview.

who was head of Radio New Zealand until that moment, was to become the head of ABC. Right there McKay said a prayer of thanksgiving in his heart that he now had a contact with someone in Australia who could make a decision about sponsoring the choir. In the middle of the dinner, McKay went to Whitehead's table to congratulate him on his good fortune, and they decided to meet to discuss the possibility of bringing the choir to Australia.¹⁴

By the next morning, Whitehead had assembled all the executives concerned with concert promotion at ABC, allowing McKay to present his plan for the choir's concert tour. Although these individuals were somewhat familiar with the choir, they were skeptical about obtaining the necessary concert halls because they are usually booked well in advance. However, after McKay decided on the dates and places for the concerts, Whitehead's secretary went out of the meeting and started phoning booking agents. After each phone call, the secretary returned and announced that there had been no concert scheduled for the night in question and that the hall was booked for the Tabernacle Choir.

When the question of the Sydney Opera House came up, everyone at the meeting stated that they never were able use the Opera House except when they had an event scheduled several years ahead. McKay asked them to try to book the hall for two evening performances, along with a Sunday morning for the broadcast of *Music and the Spoken Word*. The secretary came back, saying that the Opera House's booking clerk had just "put the phone down from the [Sydney] Symphony secretary" who had cancelled the Symphony's concerts on those very dates.¹⁵ McKay said that he felt the Spirit guide him throughout the experience of setting up all the concerts for Australia and

14. McKay, interview.

15. McKay, interview; Stowe, "Tabernacle Choir," E6.

New Zealand. McKay stated that this kind of experience “is a typical instance of the wonderful things that happen whenever I work with the Tabernacle Choir.”¹⁶

After the sponsorship of the broadcasting companies was settled, further tour planning was undertaken by choir leaders as they found hotels, scheduled charter flights between cities and buses for traveling around the cities, and provided for all the food and activities of the choir members while on tour. Most of the arrangements were made under the direction of Wendell Smoot and Udell Poulsen, who both spent many hours preparing for the needs of choir members.¹⁷ Traveling for twenty-one days with a group of 450 people, including choir members, some of their family members, technical crews, and the choir staff required detailed organization. Udell Poulsen later made the following observations about the tour: “We made 11 flights, traveled a total of 23,300 miles by air and another 650 by land and by sea, stayed in 11 hotels in nine different cities, performed 17 concerts in nine different concert halls. . . . We were served 19 dinners as a group in 12 different locations, and had 42 bus trips to and from airports, to and from concert halls, and for sightseeing.”¹⁸

In addition to the physical preparations, musical preparation had to be made. Dr. Jerold Ottley and Dr. Donald Ripplinger, the choir's director and associate director, planned and prepared a large musical repertoire so there were several possible combinations for the concerts. The concerts included a work from Mendelssohn, a newly commissioned work by Tabernacle organist Robert Cundick, along with other well-known

16. Stowe, “Tabernacle Choir,” E6.

17. Donald Ripplinger, “A View from the Sidelines,” *Keeping Tab*, October 1988, 2. *Keeping Tab* is the choir's official newsletter, produced every April and October and distributed to all Choir personnel.

18. Udell Poulsen, “Vital Statistics,” *Keeping Tab*, October 1988, 6.

sacred choral music. In addition, many of the concerts contained selections from Broadway show tunes and songs from the countries the choir visited.¹⁹

Events of the Tour

On the tour, the concerts were the most important events because they provided the vehicle for all of the other extra-musical experiences that took place. Choir leaders estimated that approximately 35,000 people attended the concerts. With the audio and videotaping of some concerts, along with other media coverage associated with the choir, it is likely that millions more heard the choir sing on radio and television.²⁰ The concerts were held at the following places and dates in 1988:

- Oahu, Hawaii: BYU–Hawaii’s Cannon Center in Laie and the Waikiki Shell in Honolulu, June 15 and 16
- New Zealand: Auckland Town Hall, June 20 and 21
- New Zealand: Two concerts in Wellington’s Michael Fowler Center, June 22, including taping of *Music and the Spoken Word*
- New Zealand: Christchurch Town Hall, June 23
- Australia: Two concerts in Melbourne Concert Hall, June 25
- Australia: Two concerts in Adelaide Festival Theatre, June 27
- Australia: Two concerts in Perth Concert Hall, June 29
- Australia: Two concerts in Sydney Opera House, July 1 and 2, plus videotaping of *Music and the Spoken Word*, July 3
- Australia: Two concerts in Brisbane Performing Arts Center, Expo ’88, July 4

19. Stowe, “Tabernacle Choir,” E6.

20. Otterson, “Tabernacle Choir Tours Pacific,” 76.

In addition to the scheduled concerts, some impromptu singing occurred as the choir waited in airports because of fog or delayed flights.²¹ One of these experiences is particularly noteworthy. As the schedule shows, there was little time between concerts for travel or sightseeing. The flight between Auckland and Wellington in normal circumstances would take only about an hour. The plan was to leave on the morning of June 22 to fly to Wellington, where there would be matinee and evening performances, the first of which would include the videotaping of *Music and the Spoken Word*. McKay, a native of Wellington, knew that sometimes the airport in Wellington could be fogged in, so he asked choir members to pray that the fog in Wellington would not cause any delays as the choir traveled on several small airplanes. McKay said that before he left the hotel in Auckland, he called his mother in Wellington to ask about the fog, and she said the airport looked clear.

As the first busload of choir members arrived at the Auckland airport, however, there was so much fog that no airplanes were departing. In retrospect, McKay lightheartedly said that they had prayed for the wrong airport, but at the time, he was extremely worried about how the choir was going to arrive in Wellington in time for the matinee concert. McKay went directly to Wendell Smoot, who said, "Iain, the Lord hasn't brought us this far to fail. We're going to Wellington."²² Sometime later the choir leaders, including President Smoot, Udell Poulsen, Iain McKay, and Jerold Ottley, met in a room where they knelt in prayer, asking for help to complete their mission that day.²³ After they left the meeting, one of the Air New Zealand officials found Poulsen and McKay,

21. Otterson, "Tabernacle Choir Tours Pacific," 77.

22. McKay, interview.

23. Poulsen, interview.

telling them to get their people loaded on the planes because as soon as there was an opening in the fog they would send each plane out one by one.²⁴

While they waited, Dr. Ottley stood on top of the baggage claim and conducted the choir in several songs, which calmed both the choir and the other passengers waiting for planes. One member of the Church who was working at the airport that day remembers how much everyone in the airport appreciated the music.²⁵ The planes were loaded, went out to the end of the runway, and then whenever there was an opening in the fog, an airplane flew off as quickly as possible. By the time of the intermission during the matinee performance, nearly all the choir members were there. The performance may not have been their best because only a portion of the choir was there on time, but they felt it was an answer to prayer and a miracle that they arrived in Wellington at all.²⁶

Blessing Church Members in the Pacific

On May 17, 1987, the announcement of the Pacific tour was made by President Hinckley, the choir's priesthood adviser. President Hinckley told the choir that their "performances will be 'tremendously significant' to the people of Hawaii, New Zealand, and Australia, particularly Church Members."²⁷ As stated earlier, one of the major purposes of a tour is to help build up the Church in the areas where the choir travels. Udell Poulsen told the choir, "This trip was a marvelous means of bringing the spirit of the Gospel to the peoples Down Under. For many, it was an introduction to the Church; for others it

24. Poulsen and McKay, interviews.

25. Kelly Harris Jr., e-mail message to Cynthia Doxey, August 30, 2007.

26. Poulsen, McKay, and Smoot, interviews.

27. "Choir to Sing on Program," *Church News*, May 23, 1987, 6.

served as a deepening of testimony of the restored truth; for members it was a means to strengthen and fortify themselves as part of a great organization.”²⁸

The Pacific tour blessed Church members through both concerts and firesides. During the concerts, Church members heard not only beautiful choral masterworks but also Latter-day Saint hymns such as “Come, Come, Ye Saints” and “O My Father.” On two occasions during the concerts in Wellington, the Maoris in the audience expressed their goodwill and greeting by chanting and singing to the choir.²⁹ A woman from New Zealand wrote to the choir office after hearing the concert in Wellington, stating that her family (including some who were less active in the Church) was touched. She wrote, “Somehow you know that the Church is true when you listen to the choir.”³⁰ Similarly, after the choir visited the Polynesian Cultural Center, the center’s president, Ralph G. Rogers Jr., wrote a letter to Wendell Smoot saying that the event of seeing the choir perform would live on in the hearts of everyone who attended.³¹

The choir also held nine firesides during the evenings when the choir was not performing at concert halls. Because many Church members were unable to attend the concerts, these firesides provided an opportunity for local Saints and their friends to mingle with choir members and staff. The choir was split into small groups so that several firesides could be held simultaneously. Choir members were assigned to speak at the

28. Poulsen, “Vital Statistics,” 6.

29. Dorothy Stowe, “Choir Drawing Raves on Its Musical Sweep through New Zealand,” *Deseret News*, June 24, 1988, C8.

30. Jill Carpenter, letter to Mormon Tabernacle Choir, July 21, 1988; Tabernacle Choir Office.

31. Ralph G. Rodgers Jr., letter to Wendell M. Smoot, June 17, 1988; Tabernacle Choir Office.

firesides, and they sang a few musical numbers.³² Thousands of members and investigators attended the firesides held during the tour. Wendell Smoot said, “We thought perhaps 200 or 300 people might show up. We were astonished at numbers like 2,000 in Auckland and 1,500 adults in Perth.”³³ These firesides provided both beautiful music and spiritual experiences for the Church members and their friends. One choir member met a woman who said she had been struggling with Church attendance, but after feeling the Spirit at the fireside, she decided to become involved in the Church again.³⁴

Building Up the Church in the Pacific

Right before the choir left for the Pacific, President Hinckley spoke with the singers about the trip. He stated, “It is an important thing for the Church because it can do so very much to affect the image of the Church in those great lands down under. It is a very important thing for the missionaries who are counting on your doing much to help them. . . . Very much rides on what you do. You go as the Choir of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and you will be so looked upon.”³⁵ President Hinckley’s hope was that this tour would make a difference for the Church in Hawaii, New Zealand, and Australia. He also blessed choir members to remember that they would be singing anthems to God and Jesus Christ and that they would remember that they were “on

32. Herold “Huck” R. Gregory, “The Mormon Tabernacle Choir Goes Down Under,” unpublished transcript of a speech given on July 17, 1988, in the Monument Park Ninth Ward of the Salt Lake Monument Park Stake.

33. Otterson, “Tabernacle Choir Tours Pacific,” 77.

34. Suzanne Tate, letter to Dorothy Stowe, no date; Tabernacle Choir Office.

35. Gordon B. Hinckley, remarks to the Tabernacle Choir, Thursday, June 2, 1988; Tabernacle Choir Office.

their mission, to promote their work and build their kingdom in the earth.”³⁶

Musical missionaries. Soon after Wendell Smoot became choir president, he realized that tours needed to include missionary activities, and he organized a missionary committee to help choir members distribute choir recordings, Articles of Faith cards, and copies of the Book of Mormon.³⁷ Smoot also recognized that if being a part of the choir was a Church calling, everyone should be set apart for that calling. He found that setting apart the choir members helped them become more willing to do what was asked and more focused.³⁸

Choir members took their responsibility of being musical missionaries seriously. They purchased and gave away more than twelve hundred copies of the Book of Mormon, almost ten thousand Articles of Faith cards, and more than thirteen hundred choir tapes as they traveled.³⁹ Elder John Sonnenberg of the Pacific Area Presidency said that the choir tour “touched the lives of common people and dignitaries the length and breadth of these lands.”⁴⁰ Elder F. Arthur Kay, also of the Area Presidency, remarked that the choir tour made a major impact in the area and that he could see that the members of the choir were “purified and sanctified through ordinances and covenants and years of gospel living in a pure form of missionary service.”⁴¹

Elder Yoshihiko Kikuchi of the First Quorum of the Seventy was the president of the Hawaii Honolulu Mission

36. Hinckley, remarks to the Tabernacle Choir, Thursday, June 2, 1988.

37. Poulsen, interview.

38. Smoot, interview.

39. Renon Klossner Hulet, “The Tabernacle Choir: Beyond the Crossroads of the West,” *Ensign*, September 1989, 14.

40. Otterson, “Tabernacle Choir Tours Pacific,” 77.

41. Otterson, “Tabernacle Choir Tours Pacific,” 77.

in 1988. He remembered that the missionaries on Oahu were able to participate in the concerts and that “the Choir provided a big boost to the missionary work.”⁴² Two specific instances described by Elder Kikuchi showed the choir’s impact on individual lives. On the way home from the concert, one family of five told the missionaries that they had decided to be baptized. Another young man who had “bitter, negative feelings toward the Church” attended the Choir concert and “was so touched by their music and spirit that he decided to investigate, and soon joined the Church.”⁴³

An ambassador for the Church. Another way the tour helped build up the Church in the Pacific was in bringing greater credibility and goodwill to the Church where it is relatively unknown.⁴⁴ During many tours, people become friends of the choir, and they begin to look at the Church in a more positive light. For example, one of the music critics from the Christchurch, New Zealand, Press wrote, “In ambassadorial terms for a faith, a top-quality music group is well worth its weight in tithes. Certainly, as was so powerfully evident last evening, an ensemble such as the Salt Lake Mormon Tabernacle Choir is capable of generating an enormous amount of goodwill. . . . It will surely spring to mind the next time a pair of smartly suited gentlemen ring my doorbell.”⁴⁵

Whenever the choir is on tour, choir leaders and local Church leaders meet with local or national dignitaries at a reception either before or after each concert. These receptions allow individuals who might not have had an opportunity to meet with Church leaders before to understand more about who they are and what they represent. Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf

42. Yoshihiko Kikuchi to Lloyd Newell, October 2007.

43. Kikuchi to Newell, October 2007.

44. Hulet, “Tabernacle Choir,” 14.

45. Philip Norman, “Tabernacle Choir,” *The Press*, June 24, 1988.

mentioned the concerts and receptions as being important during tours in Europe, where many of the countries had not yet granted official recognition to the Church.⁴⁶ While governmental recognition was not an issue in Hawaii, New Zealand, or Australia, the receptions with government officials and leaders from many churches allowed the choir and the Church to become better known and accepted. These receptions may be one reason why Elder Sonnenberg had said that the choir had touched the hearts of many dignitaries.

Evaluation of the Pacific Tour

One aspect of the tour that has not been examined is the involvement of the media in publicizing and reviewing the concerts. Probably because of the sponsorship of the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, the choir received a large amount of media coverage on the Pacific tour. After the tour, the Church's Public Affairs Department in Sydney submitted their report to the choir with a summary of the media involvement. The numbers were impressive. There were ninety-four newspaper articles featuring the choir or the Church with a combined circulation of almost fourteen million. Over eight million viewers saw television news or programs, including the broadcasts of *Music and the Spoken Word*, in New Zealand and Australia. In addition, numerous on-air interviews were conducted with choir personnel on television or radio, reaching another large segment of the population.⁴⁷

Although difficult to quantify in the aggregate, media reports show that the choir tour impacted missionary work

46. Uchtdorf, interview.

47. Public Affairs Department, Sydney, Australia, "Summary," in *The Mormon Tabernacle Choir Australia/New Zealand Tour, 1988: Media Coverage and Public Visibility*. Report submitted July 1988; Tabernacle Choir Office.

and enhanced the visibility and perception of the Church. One New Zealander who was a missionary in Adelaide, Australia, wrote, “The Choir’s presence opened up many doors when tracting if only to talk about them. They were in the papers, on the radio, and on television. Missionary work was helped immeasurably.”⁴⁸ In the historical report of the New Zealand Auckland Mission, President Herschel N. Pederson wrote that he could not “judge the effect at this time other than the fact that many people saw it. We witnessed it ourselves. They were great, the reception was great. They have had much television coverage, radio coverage and it has already been announced that they will have rebroadcasts of the choir during the next three months.”⁴⁹

Newspaper reviews were generally positive. Descriptions of the performances included words such as “strengths in intonation, diction, ensemble sensitivity and, perhaps most of all, strength in numbers give the choir its distinctive sonority.”⁵⁰ One critic mentioned that “choral virtuosity would not be an exaggerated description” when discussing the concert.⁵¹ Most reviewers commented that despite the size of the choir, the sound was technically correct, had balanced harmonies, was disciplined, and was unified in pitch.⁵² However, not every

48. Raewyn Viljoen, quoting Vernon Ruwhiu, e-mail message to Cynthia Doxey, October 1, 2007.

49. *New Zealand Auckland Mission Report*, 1988, 5, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

50. Gregory Shepherd, “Tabernacle Choir Shows Its Strength,” *Honolulu Advertiser*, June 17, 1988, B9.

51. L.C.M. Saunders, “Choral Virtuosity,” *New Zealand Herald*, June 21, 1988.

52. Several reviews are cited: Michael Brimer, “Subtle Skill of a Musical Phenomenon,” *Australian*, June 28, 1988; Ian Dando, “Perfect Blend of Voices,” *Christchurch Star*, June 24, 1988; Kenneth Hince, “Excellent Singing, but Bland Material,” *Age*, Melbourne, June 27, 1988; Elizabeth Silsbury, “Only the Best Will Do,” *Advertiser*, June 30, 1988.

music critic appreciated the musical repertoire, sometimes calling it too bland or lighthearted and a “mixed bag with too much chaff and not enough wheat.”⁵³ In spite of the musical criticism, the audiences appreciated the concerts, as mentioned by one critic in Perth, “It was an evening to savor and the ‘house-full’ audience gave the singers a standing ovation.”⁵⁴

In recalling the events of 1988, Kelly Harris Jr., a Church member in New Zealand, said that while he could not say the tour was responsible for a certain number of baptisms or activations, it certainly helped bring the Church out of obscurity in New Zealand. He stated that today *Music and the Spoken Word* is shown every Sunday morning on New Zealand television, something that did not occur before the tour. He continued, “Now, whether or not these advents have been due to the 1988 tour, we’re not sure. But, what we are sure of is that the profile of the Tabernacle Choir has definitely been a positive to the gathering of many ‘friends of the Church.’”⁵⁵

Conclusion

When the choir finally returned home to Salt Lake City on July 5, 1988, they were greeted at the airport by President Hinckley, who said, “You have done tremendous good for the Church, for the state of Utah, for Salt Lake City, and for the nation as you represented the United States at the 200th anniversary of the founding of Australia. . . . God bless you for all the good you have done.”⁵⁶ This tribute sums up a prophet’s perspective on whether the Choir accomplished the goals of

53. Dando, “Perfect Blend of Voices,” 1988.

54. Peter Wombwell, “Angel Voices in Halleluja Choir,” *Sunday Times* (Perth), July 3, 1988.

55. Kelly Harris Jr., e-mail message.

56. John L. Hart, “Dignitaries, Brass Band Greet Choir,” *Church News*, July 9, 1988, 4.

helping the Saints and building up the image of the Church in the South Pacific. Another evidence that the tour bore fruit in the Pacific comes from a quote from a former premier of Western Australia, Sir Charles Court, who said, “The visit by the choir and their performances as well as their friendliness will have done much to further the understanding of Australians of the origin and beliefs of those who follow the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”⁵⁷

Given the views of these two prominent leaders and of unnumbered admirers who heard the choir perform in the Pacific, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir’s tour to Hawaii, New Zealand, and Australia in the summer of 1988 can be considered a noteworthy success. The music, mission, and members of the choir came together in a remarkable way to strengthen the Saints, open doors for the Church, build bridges of goodwill and understanding, and share the message of the restored gospel.

57. Public Affairs Department, Sydney, Australia, 1988.