



The Face of Fillmore

By Sherry Shepard
December 21, 2011

The sound of choirs, bands, and orchestras has filled the Face of Fillmore ever since its earliest history and are continuing to bring a great deal of pleasure to the performers and listeners alike, not just during this Christmas season, but at other times throughout the year.

December 18 saw the 35th annual performance of Handel's Messiah by singers in Fillmore. This Christmas tradition was begun all of those years ago by Dallin Nielsen and has been continued each year since then. Since the first performances by the Fillmore Choir with piano accompaniment, the event has grown. Now it includes singers from Fillmore and Delta, as well as the orchestra from Delta.

This year's performance in Fillmore was conducted by Doug Jenkins with Lisa Crosland as accompanist. Berdine Tingery also accompanied some soloists. Playing along with the orchestra and in one special number with McKay Shields was Nyle Steiner. Mr. Steiner is the inventor of the EVI (Electronic Valve Instrument). He has performed several concerts throughout the area, as well as done sound effects for several well-known motion pictures.

In the early days of Fillmore choirs were not as sophisticated, but were well known throughout Utah for their musical expertise. The earliest of these was known as the Beeston Choir or the Pioneer Choir seen here in a group of pictures collected and arranged by Isabel Carling Brunson in 1950 for the Daughters of the Pioneers.

Born in England in 1832, William Beeston was the choir's director for over thirty years. He converted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1861 and came to Utah. He was sent by Brigham Young to Fillmore in 1864. That very year, recognizing the great musical talent here, Mr. Beeston organized a mixed choir. After four years of training, this group was considered one of the best in the territory. Under his direction, the choir continued until 1903.

During his years as choir director, Mr. Beeston and his daughter Eliza would go to the church an hour before practice time, carrying armloads of choir music as well as a lantern to find their way during winter months. They would light the fire in the winter and have the building warm for choir members when they arrived.

Mr. Beeston bought all of the music with his own money and often copied music by hand for choir members to use.



Sounds of Choirs

The singing of the choir was accompanied on a Mason and Hamlin organ which is currently in the Statehouse Museum. The keyboard on this organ is very unusual. Middle “C” was not in the middle of the keyboard as it is usually, but a few keys lower, about where “A” would normally be placed. This would have been a handicap for more organists but not for Mr. Beeston. He transposed many of the songs with the unusual keyboard in mind.

In 1893 the Beeston Choir was given special recognition. They were invited to sing “Song of Redeemed” by Evan Stephens with the Tabernacle Choir at the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple.

Other choirs from the Fillmore area have had the privilege of singing in Church conferences.

In 1950 the Beehive Choir from the Millard Stake was invited by the General Board of the Mutual Improvement Association to sing at MIA General Conference. Under the direction of Marilyn Brunson with Marjorie Robison as their accompanist, the group sang at Barrett Hall and at the Tabernacle on Temple Square. This group of 100 young voices was the only single stake Beehive Chorus in the entire church.

Over fifty years ago 24 Relief Society members from the Millard Stake sang as part of a larger choir for two sessions of General Conference in Salt Lake. Seven states participated and practiced regularly in Nephi under the direction of Florence Jepperson Madison.

In recent years, one singing group that amazes listeners is the Fillmore Middle School Sixth Grade Chorus. This group under the direction of Kae Starley performs three concerts at the school during the years, as well as for other community events. The quality of their singing delights their proud parents as well as all who enjoy their programs.

Church, school and community choirs continue to fill the Face of Fillmore with music and add a touch of culture to our historical community.

