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International Adventist Musicians Association



The Heritage Singers

Founded in 1970 by Max and Lucy Mace, the Heritage Singers, a pioneering self-supporting Seventh-day Adventist gospel music ensemble and now the longest running group of its type, has flourished for four continuous decades. It has traveled to more than sixty countries, performed in every state in the U.S., released over 100 recordings, and inspired the formation internationally of numerous similar singing groups and other self-supporting music ministries.

The idea for the Heritage Singers grew out of the Rose City Singers, a choral group sponsored by United Medical Labs in Portland, Oregon, which was conducted by Max Mace, an employee of the company. After conducting and singing in the group for four years and observing the effect its music had on its audiences, particularly the young, he and his wife, Lucy, also an employee, decided to leave their jobs at

UML and launch a full-time performing group.

By fall 1970, he had formed a group of eight singers and accompanying instrumentalists, chosen a name, scheduled some performances, and started to travel. From the start, they met with success and numerous invitations to appear at churches, schools, church meetings, and conventions.

They also made a number of successful records, which were then

distributed by Chapel Records. At the time of their 25th anniversary, they had started to reissue older LP recordings in two-CD sets, a 25th anniversary project that when completed included ten sets.

From the first, when Max, Lucy, and those members of the Rose City Singers gave advance notice to the president of United Medical Labs about their plans to form their group and then were peremptorily

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fired, there were challenges. In the three-month interim between their release and their first tour in June, the Maces, who had two children in church school and pressing financial commitments and needs, were without an income.

They used that three months to get organized and to give a few practice concerts in the Portland area. Local churches lent their support, admiring the Maces and members of the group for what they were undertaking. Lucy later described the first of what through the years would be several providential miracles:

The day we walked out of our house for our first trip to board a rental bus, because the bus we had purchased had not been delivered on time, I thought, "I think I will go and just check the mailbox one last time." There was one letter from someone who had been at one of the practice concerts. They wrote that they had been impressed to help us and had enclosed a check. It was the exact amount of money needed to pay for that rental bus.

They were flooded with more requests for concerts than they could fill. Young people in particular were moved by what they heard. Large numbers came forward near the end of concerts in response to an invitation to have a member of the group pray with them, a tradition that continues.

They were not without their critics including conservative church members and some classically trained musicians who decried what they felt was a lower class of sacred music. There were many members and trained musicians, however, who recognized the professionalism of the presentations, the integrity of the music, and its inspired lyrical quality and felt that the Heritage Singers were providing an important music ministry in the church.

For the first twenty years, all of the members were full-time paid singers. The group kept an arduous eleven-month schedule with as many as six concerts a week in order to satisfy the requests for appearances. Two-week Christmas and mid-summer vacations, along with seasonal brief breaks to restock and make adjustments in traveling attire, gave the Maces and the



The Heritage Singers in the late 1970s. Max Mace, standing far left, Val Mace lower right.

performers the respite they needed.

Even with this full schedule, it became necessary in 1973 to add a second group, Heritage Singers II, to meet the invitations. For five years both groups responded to what seemed an insatiable hunger on the part of schools and churches for the type of programming they provided. When Max formed the second group, he wanted it to be a mirror image of the original, performing the same repertoire and singing in the same style and with the same unique harmony associated with the first group. Leaders of group II, however, drifted away from that ideal, and eventually the second

group disbanded, with some of its singers joining the first group.

In the early years, many members were college-age students who would sing one or two years before returning to school to continue their education. In the last two decades, with a reduction in the schedule to mostly weekend tours, Mace has been able to retain singers for several years by drawing today's seven-

member ensemble from a pool of about a dozen experienced singers, all of whom have other jobs. Max, his daughter, Val, and son, Greg, who is the sound engineer, take all of the trips and provide a stable base.

From the first, Mace family members participated in the group and provided technical assistance. Lucy, who had been an alto in the Rose City Singers, encouraged Max in his dream to form an independent ensemble and then became a member in that first group of eight, along with Max, a baritone who on occasion would sing second tenor.

After singing with the group for ten years, during which time she was known as "Mom" to its members, she injured her legs in an accident in the 1980s and was unable to walk for three months. Although she eventually healed, during the time of convalescence, Lucy assumed direction of a television series they were

starting and led out in that activity for over ten years and 200 programs. Because of these responsibilities and others, she no longer sang with the group.

Son Greg began running the soundboard at age eleven, when the group started, and has continued in that capacity ever since. Drawing on that experience, he formed a sound company, which he owns and operates between tours.

Daughter Val began traveling with them on tours at age nine and became a member of the group at age eleven. Her distinctive soprano voice has become the basis for what is known as the "Heritage sound."

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Both she and Greg married persons who are also part of the group. Greg met his wife, Adrienne, during a 1995 tour in Brazil. She had grown up in a family where music was important and, before meeting the Maces during that tour, had been in several gospel groups in her country. Two months after the tour, she traveled to the U.S. to learn English, and two years later she and Greg married.

Val's husband, Art Mapa, a native of the Philippines, is a gifted guitarist, arranger, producer, talented recording technician, and videographer who has been with the group since 1985. He operates the Turning Point Studio, part of the Heritage Singers operation, where he creates accompaniments for the ensemble and produces CDs, videos, and DVDs of the group and its singers.

Like Art and Adrienne, singers in the pool from which the rest of the Heritage Singers are drawn are a cosmopolitan group, coming from Australia, Canada, and Chile, as well as the U.S. Even though the Maces are Seventh-day Adventists and the Heritage Singers are often identified with that church in the minds of its members, from the beginning it has been an independent ministry. Accordingly, a few of its singers are committed Christians from other faiths.

Many of its singers have been in the HS a minimum of ten years, several having sung longer than that. David Bell, an accomplished basso profundo who has been with them for 26 years, has one of the longest tenures for a non-family member.

He started singing in the group at age nineteen, dropping out of his studies at Walla Walla College, now University, at the beginning of his sophomore year. Known for his singing with the Messengers Quartet, a group that traveled extensively throughout the Northwest on promotional trips for the college, he responded quickly to an invitation from the Maces to audition and then sing with their group.

Bell joined at a time when the group was constantly on the road and put his education on hold for two years. He returned to WWC in 1984, completing a degree in electrical engineering three

years later. He continued his studies at Cal State in Sacramento, earning a master's degree in Management Information Systems at CSS in 1999. Throughout those years he also continued to sing with the Heritage Singers when possible and continued to do so while completing a Ph.D., and teaching full-time as an associate professor at Pacific Union College.

In a recent article about him he observed, "One of my real joys in life is to sing. It can reach people in ways preaching can't." He particularly enjoys the contact with those who come forward at the end of their concert. "People come with all sorts of things - individually, we pray with them. Really making those connections is the most special part to me."¹

Concerts have through the years been influenced to some extent by the evolving tastes of Heritage Singer audiences. While choices of music and the accompaniments have reflected these changes, their repertoire is for the most part traditional gospel music with a small amount of conservative contemporary Christian music, along with music for the children who attend.

In its first years, accompaniments were provided by members of the group who were also instrumentalists and others who traveled with the singers. Today's accompaniments are all prerecorded except for special event concerts and some appearances.

Starting in its second year the group was doubled in size to provide a fuller and richer sound. Singers along with accompanists and support staff meant that as many as nineteen people were at times on the road. When, because of advances in sound technology, the same breadth of sound could be achieved with fewer singers, the group returned to its original size. While the smaller group facilitated travel arrangements, it also reduced expenses. Over 250 musicians have been part of the Heritage Singers in its nearly four decades of existence.

From the beginning, the group has traveled abroad. On two of those trips, taken in one year with a short break between, they literally

circled the globe. In that year they journeyed through the Middle East, performing in the Holy Land, Egypt, and Jordan; concertized in South Africa for five weeks; and then performed in Australia, New Zealand, and Hawaii.

Beginning in the early 1990s, with the decision to reduce performances in the U.S. to mostly weekend tours, they continued to take one or two foreign tours annually. They have traveled and performed in over sixty countries.

One of the most memorable trips was to Romania, where audiences who had listened to them on smuggled-in tapes during the years when the country was part of the Soviet Union shared with them how important their music had been to them during those troubled times. This past year's travel included concerts in the Philippines and in the Czech and Slovak Republics.

Finances have been an ongoing challenge. In the beginning when they were constantly on the road, offerings, along with sales of records and later CDs, covered ongoing expenses. In their first three years they were able to pay off all expenses associated with starting the group, including purchase of a bus. More recently, however, offerings average only about a dollar per each person in the audience, the same as when they started in 1971, even though travel expenses have significantly increased.

Additionally, churches in some regions of the country now charge the group when hosting them for a concert. The income from sales at concerts of CDs, DVDs, and tapes of the group and its singers, all of which are produced at their studio, has helped offset the decline in offering income and increase in expenses.

There were times during the years when cash flow was a problem and the Maces didn't cash their paychecks so that there would be enough to pay the singers. Lucy recently recalled,

When we started the Spanish Heritage Singers, and the time came to do payroll, there wasn't enough money. I told Max, "We don't have money to pay their salaries this month." When the mail came and we

opened the envelopes and counted the contributions, it was just the amount we needed. The lack of a predictable source of income has made this a faith ministry, sometimes a day by day operation in which God has provided in one way or another.

In 2000, because of the increasing gap between income and expenses, Max established a 29er's club, persons who would be willing to support the ministry for \$29 a month, a dollar for every year they had been on the road. This group, known as their "Faith Partners," has proven to be an enormous help.

Some in that original group have since increased their contribution to match the passage of years. These donors receive a monthly letter with photographs about activities and plans for the group and a free copy of each new CD.

Overseas travel expense is underwritten by those who host them or by sponsors, many being Christian businessmen. While few concerts in the U.S. have an admission charge (the Maces feel people shouldn't have to pay to hear music of the gospel), concerts abroad are usually ticketed events to help sponsors recover some of their expenses. The Heritage Singers also help groups by giving fundraising concerts for a fee with the understanding that proceeds above that amount will be retained by the hosts.

By the end of their second year, it had become obvious that the organization needed a base from which it could operate. The Maces, who had been renting when the group started, were staying in friends' homes or in motels between tours and operating out of their business manager's garage.

In 1973, they and their business manager found and purchased a large acreage, previously the site of a working cattle ranch in Placerville, California.

Construction of an 11,000 square foot lodge was started in 1973 that included a rehearsal area, offices, nine bedrooms with shared baths, and two one-bedroom apartments for Max and Lucy and the business manager and his wife. A recording studio was added later.

Although the facility, which has become known as "The Ranch," was not finished by Christmas 1974, the Maces, tired of sleeping in motels, moved into their apartment, which had just been sheetrocked to provide privacy, for the holiday.



Max and Lucy Mace

Members of the group, wanting to be the first to also sleep at "The Ranch," joined them, even though it meant they had to sleep in their sleeping bags on the first floor, which was totally open and strewn about with building materials. Five years after the purchase of the land, when the business manager and the Maces dissolved their business relationship, the Maces retained the facility and 35 acres.

In 2001, the Heritage Singers had a reunion concert at the Ontario, California,

Convention Center. More than 125 former and current singers gathered for this gala event. Five years later, the group gave a 35th anniversary concert in the nationally famous Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California. This 3 1/2 hour evening concert was an ultimate performing experience, as much an inspiration to Mace and the group as it was to the audience. Both events were recorded and are available on DVD. In September 2009, another concert was given at the Crystal Cathedral to celebrate the group's 39th anniversary and as a tribute to its Faith Partners.

For Max Mace, the Heritage Singers is a natural outgrowth of a love for music that started while he was a child growing up in a musical family in a farming community in Eagle, Idaho, near Boise. From his earliest years, he sang in a trio with his two brothers and later in male quartets while at Gem State Academy and Walla Walla College, now University.

While at WWC, He met and dated Lucy Hatley, a musically talented student at Walla Walla College Academy, now Walla Walla Valley Academy. They married in January 1958, following her graduation from the academy in 1957.

A typical concert today starts with the full ensemble doing a lively opening number and then continues with a wide variety of contrasting music. Soloists and music by smaller vocal groups, including a male quartet with Max, whose love of that genre has continued through the years, provide contrasting polished and professional sounds in a program that proceeds smoothly from beginning to end.

Musical segues between numbers along with comments by Max and members of the group establish rapport with the audience, which in a recent concert I attended, listened attentively and responded enthusiastically to the music. Just before the final number, the traditional invitation for those with prayer

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needs was given and led to some in the audience going forward.

Many aspects of the ministry of the Heritage Singers have been publicly recognized. They have received more Angel Awards from "Religion in the Media" than any other gospel group. These have included "Album of the Year," "Best Children's Album," "Vocal Group of the Year," "Best Christian Television Variety Show," and "Best Music Video."

When this recognition is mentioned to the Maces, they are quick to observe that the real reward for them is the realization that they have been able to change lives and to share in this ministry with so many talented young people.

While the decision to start the Heritage Singers was a leap of faith, Max and Lucy were convinced it was worth doing, if only on a trial basis. Lucy recently talked about that decision and all that has followed:

When we started the group in 1970, we had no idea that we would still be going strong today. We had planned to commit to this ministry for one or two years, then go back to our "real" jobs. Well, the Lord had a different plan and I'm so glad He did! We've tried to listen and obey His will. Oh, we've made plenty of mistakes, but God's grace is amazing and He has been by our side every step of the way. It doesn't seem possible that it's been more than 40 years already! What a

journey we've been allowed to experience. One thing I have learned over the years is that when God calls you to do His work, you don't have to worry about the details...you just obey and He takes care of the rest.

Dan Shultz

Sources/Endnotes

This article is based on interviews/conversations with Lucy Hatley Mace, June 2009, 20 July 2009, and 13 October 2010; Max Mace, 20 July 2009 and other online sources. *Beyond Our Dreams, The Heritage Singers Story* provides a more detailed history of the Heritage Singers and can be ordered at www.heritagesingers.com.

¹ Some of the biographical detail about David Bell and quotes by him are from an article by Lainey S. Cronk, "Angwin, London, Bucharest, and So On," *Pacific Union College Progress*, March 2009.

Noteworthy Achievements & Events

- ♦ Toured in over 65 countries
- ♦ Won more Angel Awards than any other gospel group
 - ♦ Produced more than 100 albums
- ♦ Sang at President Reagan's inaugural celebration
 - ♦ Performed in the Sydney Opera house
- ♦ Appeared multiple times in the Crystal Cathedral

Heritage Singers Members

David Bell
Cindy Haffner
Adriane Mace
Gregg Mace

Lucy Hatley Mace
Max Mace
Valorie Mace Mapa
Art Mapa

Biographies for these members of the Heritage Singers can be found at www.iamonline.com