



Christmas with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir's 14th Annual PBS Broadcast Features Cross-Cultural, Latino-Themed Celebration with Renowned Operatic Tenor Rolando Villazón

No. 1 watched program on PBS during holidays brings poignant, cross-cultural, Latino-themed celebration to millions of viewers in December

SALT LAKE CITY, Dec. 5, 2017 – *Christmas with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir* premieres on PBS Dec. 15 at 9 p.m. ET (check local listings). This annual spectacular, the top viewed holiday program on PBS for 12 years, will feature world-renowned operatic tenor Rolando Villazón as guest artist and narrator. Co-presented by BYUtv and WGBH Boston, this year's broadcast debuts its first Latino guest artist and weaves beloved Latin-American Christmas carols with traditional holiday favorites to deliver a poignant cross-cultural holiday celebration.

"My first major performance as an opera singer was on PBS with *La Bohème* at Lincoln Center, so it's wonderful to be part of such a rich PBS tradition and broadcast," said Mr. Villazón. "Set against the spectacular backdrop of the Conference Center at Temple Square in Salt Lake City, this concert includes beautifully arranged arias and treasured 'villancicos' that speak about connecting with others and giving shelter to the wanderer and the homeless."

This concert is really about reflecting on what makes us human and unites us as part of the universal Christmas tradition. The music, the orchestra, the acting and the singular sound of the beautiful Choir are very inspiring. There's nothing quite like this in the world in terms of the scale, grandeur and purpose."

Christmas with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir unites a 600-person-strong cast comprised of the 360-voice world renowned choir, 150-piece orchestra, bell-ringers, dancers and actors to deliver an unforgettable program of music, pageantry and storytelling. The program is filled with holiday carols in both English and Spanish, including: "Deck the Hall," "Carol of the Drum," "I Saw Three Ships," "Angels from the Realms of Glory," "Parade of the Wooden Soldiers," "Campana Sobre Campana" and others. Mr. Villazón also provides narration both for the Christmas Story as recorded in Luke 2 of the Bible, and a new retelling of the classic Hans Christian Andersen story, "The Little Match Girl," complete with a live-action performance.



“Rolando is one of the most versatile artists alive today, who, with concurrent careers as opera singer, television host, author, stage director and cartoonist, assumes the dual role of singer and narrator with ease,” said Mack Wilberg, music director of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. “He brings a deep passion for his Mexican culture and characteristic wonder and enthusiasm, which are reflected throughout the program in a unique way. We knew for years that we wanted Rolando to join us for a performance in Salt Lake City, and are delighted by the chemistry, creativity and diversity that came about as a result.”

The 2017 broadcast of *Christmas with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir* is co-presented by WGBH, the largest creator of PBS content for TV and the Web, and BYUtv, a nationwide satellite and cable network and an anchor broadcaster of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir’s weekly program, *Music and the Spoken Word*. BYUtv produced the concert, which was taped and produced by BYUtv over three nights with a combined live audience of 63,000 people in Salt Lake City’s Conference Center, a state-of-the-art cultural and event center with what is believed to be the largest theater-style auditorium ever built.

Christmas concerts with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir have been a Temple Square tradition for decades but the current format dates back to 2000, when the completion of the new Conference Center provided a technologically advanced venue that enabled the Choir to expand the size and scope of the annual program both for those attending in-person and via broadcast.

Over the years, a diverse roster of notable guests has visited Salt Lake City to take part in the production, including Gladys Knight, Angela Lansbury, Natalie Cole, Renée Fleming, Deborah Voigt, Bryn Terfel, David Archuleta, Laura Osnes, Audra McDonald and The Muppets from Sesame Street, among others. Beloved narrators have included David McCullough, Tom Brokaw, John Rhys-Davies, Martin Jarvis, Jane Seymour, Walter Cronkite, Roma Downey and many more. The annual *Christmas with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir* program on PBS began in 2004 with performances by American mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade and Welsh baritone Bryn Terfel and has continued each year since.

Christmas with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir featuring Rolando Villazón will air on PBS stations beginning Dec. 15, 2017. Check local listings for airtimes. It will also air on BYUtv beginning Dec. 17 at 7 p.m. MT. DVDs, CDs and a book of the concert are also available for purchase. For more information, visit: <https://www.mormontabernaclechoir.org/shop/christmas.html>

Funding for *Christmas with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir* on PBS is provided by Ronald C. and Kaye Gunnell; Timothy E. and Teresa J. Wright; Rex and Ruth Maughan; Greg and Monica Drennan; Richard and Shellie Silliman; Tom and Leslie Thomas; Gary and Cathy Crittenden; Jim and Sandy Cook; The Charles and Janet Stoddard Foundation; Andrea Golding; Björn and Cydnee Farmer; and The Alan and Jeanne Hall Foundation.

For more information, please visit www.pbs.org/mormontabernaclechoir.

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About WGBH

Public media producer WGBH is America's preeminent public broadcaster and the largest creator of PBS content for TV and the Web, including *Masterpiece*, *Antiques Roadshow*, *Frontline*, *Nova*, *American Experience*, *Arthur*, *Pinkalicious & Peterrific* and more than a dozen other primetime, lifestyle and children's series. WGBH's television channels include WGBH 2, WGBX 44, and the digital channels World and Create. WGBH Radio serves listeners across New England with 89.7 WGBH, Boston's Local NPR®; 99.5 WCRB Classical Radio Boston; and WCAI, the Cape and Islands NPR® Station. WGBH also is a major source of programs for public radio (among them, PRI's The World®), a leader in educational multimedia (including PBS LearningMedia™, providing the nation's educators with free, curriculum-based digital content), and a pioneer in technologies and services that make media accessible to deaf, hard of hearing, blind and visually impaired audiences. WGBH has been recognized with hundreds of honors: Emmys, Peabodys, duPont-Columbia Awards and Oscars. Find more information at wgbh.org.

About BYUtv

Owned by Brigham Young University and based in Provo, Utah, BYUtv is a groundbreaking high definition cable television network that has created a breadth of original "see the good in the world" programming that fills a void in entertainment the entire family can enjoy together, including sketch comedy, scripted, history, music and documentary offerings. The cable television network continues to build steady momentum, drawing new viewers to its shows from every state of the country. The non-commercial station is available in more than 65 million households in every state of the country on Dish Network, DirecTV and over 800 cable systems, and offers approximately 1,000 hours of original programming annually, including 500 hours of live HD collegiate sports. More info at www.byutv.org.

About the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra at Temple Square

The Mormon Tabernacle Choir is a world-renowned, 360-member choir credited with over 4,600 episodes of its weekly live performance of *Music and The Spoken Word*, making it the longest continuing network broadcast in history. The Choir has traveled around the world performing in acclaimed concert halls, for the inaugurations of seven U.S. presidents beginning with its first for President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965, at World's Fairs and expositions, in acclaimed concert halls, on television and radio broadcasts and now internet streams, and numerous other prestigious events and occasions.

The Orchestra at Temple Square is a 150-member, all-volunteer symphony orchestra organized in 1999 to perform and accompany the musical ensembles of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir organization. With their incomparable medley of voices and instruments and their shared faith in God they are a significant, recognizable presence in the world of music, giving service through song. More info at www.mormontabernaclechoir.org.

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