

## Concert at American Heritage raises money

Karissa Neely - North county staff | Posted: Wednesday, December 10, 2008 11:00 pm



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It was hard not to feel the Christmas spirit, and the giving spirit, at the American Heritage Christmas benefit concert Dec. 4, featuring renowned tenor Michael Ballam.

Ballam was there to support the school's effort to raise \$4 million to expand the school to be kindergarten through 12th grade, with growth in all levels, and an orchestra/choir facility.

The stage had a professional feel to it, with the school's Lyceum Philharmonic in a half circle flanked by Christmas decorations. More decorations, depicting scenes from the birth and life of Jesus Christ, shimmered from the auditorium ceiling, and sometimes shivered in the waves of words sung by the school's Festival Choir.

With KBYU Broadcasting recording the entire show, and award-winning composers, directors and singers, the only thing to remind spectators they weren't in a grand concert hall were the lines on the gym floor.

The Festival Choir, which included students from seventh to 10th grade, a few teachers, and American Heritage Principal Grant Beckwith, started the evening, led by choir director Cheri Hancock.

They were accompanied by the astoundingly skilled Lyceum Philharmonic, led by Kayson Brown. The philharmonic is made up of students in the ninth through 12th grades. Students from American Heritage and elsewhere who were formerly a part of The Music School meet after school to be a part of the

program.

Opera singer Michael Ballam then took the stage, for a segment that felt as though the audience had suddenly been invited into Ballam's living room for caroling. Ballam sat at the piano with glasses perched at the end of his nose and flipped through his song book, commenting on songs, sharing the history and tidbits about a few carols, singing some on his own, and then asking the audience to join him in singing a verse on others.

He stood and then removed his glasses, transforming into the well-known tenor, and sang a few carols with the philharmonic and choir.

For the last song in his session at the piano, though, he told how "Silent Night" was composed by two ordinary "Sunday school teachers," only to become one of the most recognized hymns around the world. He attributed that to the spirit that is in the song, and said, "This institution is like this song."

Beckwith took a break from performing with the Festival Choir to explain the school's situation. "When we moved here, we thought we'd be big enough for decades," he said. "We're not."

Beckwith referred to the program statement that explained how the school is out of room to enroll and teach the many students who want to be a part of this private, tuition-based school offering a "Christ-centered, principle-based education."

He then said the "most asked question" since announcing that the school would feature Ballam at this concert was "How did you get Michael Ballam?" Beckwith explained that he asked Ballam in the spring, but he was too busy then, so Beckwith went back to him again.

"I said, 'Dr. Ballam, I know how busy you are, but when it comes to the kids of this school I'm very loyal ...' So I asked him to come at Christmas," He said with a bit of a chuckle.

Ballam does have a packed schedule during this holiday season, in both his personal and professional life, but he was willing to do this for American Heritage.

"I believe in what they're doing here. There is no other school like this. They are going to affect the future of this nation," he said during a quick interview after the concert, while he graciously posed for pictures with students and their families.

Shirley Andersen, one of the school's original founders, complimented Beckwith afterward on the beauty of the proceedings. "I'm just grateful the Lord has chosen such wonderful people to carry on here," she said.

One woman commented after the last song, "This was absolutely gorgeous, what a success."

The school has raised about \$2 million of its goal already, but is pushing for the rest. For a gift of \$50 or more, the school will send donors a KBYU-produced DVD copy of the night's performance.

All donations up to \$100,000 will also be matched five-to-one by an anonymous donor.

Community members can donate to American Heritage, 736 N. 1100 East, American Fork, Utah 84003, or (801) 642-0055, or [www.American-Heritage.org](http://www.American-Heritage.org).

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