

SISTER MABEL, SINGING

By R. Val Johnson
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Sister Mabel's passion for singing was painfully unrestrained.

My best friend shoved his elbow into my side to keep me from laughing. We were in sacrament meeting, after all, and we were singing the sacrament hymn.

But it was hard not to laugh, and Pat wasn't doing much better than I at keeping his mouth shut.

We were 15, and we knew everything. We knew that everyone in our ward was supposed to be perfect—but wasn't. We knew that sacrament meeting talks were supposed to be inspiring—but mostly were boring. And we knew that the worst singer in the world sat among us, mangling hymns that were supposed to send our thoughts heavenward—but usually sent them the other direction.

We could only cover our ears and wince. The occasional laugh seemed to help.

We weren't sure whether Sister Mabel (her first name, and the only one I remember anyone using for her) knew she was painful to listen to and didn't care or if she was totally oblivious to the effect her singing had on the rest of us. It's quite possible

no one had ever broached the topic with her. Though elderly, she was a formidable woman. Not in size, but in energy. Everything she did was energetic and loud. Especially her singing.

Her passion for singing found expression not only in our congregational singing but in our ward choir as well. Her enthusiasm there was unrestrained. Though I don't remember her singing ever being restrained in the congregation, in the choir it had free reign, rising to heights and depths I doubt any diva in the world has ever reached. Or wanted to.



Well, that was a long time ago. In the intervening years, Sister Mabel has passed away. Pat and I have gone our separate ways. And I, at least, have discovered I didn't know as much at 15 as I thought I did. I believe I've learned a few things about life—and singing—over the past 50 years.

I've learned that life needs to be lived with passion and energy. Each minute is a treasure, and once it passes, it's gone forever, reflected only weakly in memory. I've learned that if you're going to serve others or worship the Lord, you're happiest and most effective when you do it with all the joy and energy you have.

I've learned that no one this side of the veil is perfect. All that the Lord asks of us is our hearts, might, minds, and strength—to the degree that we can offer them. He accepts our unrestrained offerings, as poor as they may be, as the full measure of our devotion.

It's ironic, I suppose, that I've also discovered I'm no better a singer than Sister Mabel was. I hope my fellow ward members have more charity for me than I had for her. If she were still here, I'd invite her to sing for me. I miss her angelic voice. ■