

Jerry Blackstone

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

It's time for the GRAMMY Awards in Los Angeles. And the winner is....Jerry Blackstone, a renowned musician and choir director who comes from rural Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Jerry Blackstone is a two-time GRAMMY award winner and internationally known conductor. His roots are found in rural Kansas.

Jerry grew up on the family farm in the northern part of Jewell County. His family consisted of farmers, not musicians, although his grandfather played the harmonica and his dad would sing for fun while riding the tractor. Jerry's mother liked to play piano and sing also. His parents always encouraged and supported his interests.

Jerry grew up going to a one-room country school. His first teacher was a young woman named Miss Lippe. After he completed first grade, Miss Lippe told his parents, "He is a bright little boy and I'm afraid he's going to get bored. Why don't you get him piano lessons?" They did so and Jerry loved it. He grew up playing and singing in church.

Jerry's sisters enjoyed music as well. Sister Marilyn now lives in Iowa and sister Ruth lives at Manhattan.

After four years in the one-room school, Jerry went to the school in town, but it was still quite rural in nature. The town was the nearby rural community of Burr Oak, population 249 people. Now, that's rural.

By the time Jerry was a sophomore in high school, he knew he wanted to pursue music as a career. He took music lessons at K-State while still a high school student. "Those teachers broadened my perspective and encouraged me, 'You can do this,'" Jerry said.

After high school graduation, Jerry went to Wheaton College in Illinois to begin a long and distinguished academic career in music. At Wheaton, he studied piano performance and met his wife. He went on to get a master's in choral performance at Indiana University. "I had some wonderful music teachers through the years," Jerry said.

Jerry's first teaching position was at what is now Huntington University in Indiana. The head of the education department there was named Emmet Lippe. One day Jerry said, "My first teacher was named Miss Lippe." When he explained, Emmet replied, "That was my sister." What a remarkable connection through the years.

Jerry went on to get a doctorate in choral conducting at the University of Southern California. He worked at Westmont College in California and Phillips University in Oklahoma.

In 1988, he joined the music faculty at the University of Michigan. He has risen through the ranks to become the university's Director of Choral Activities and Professor and Chair of Conducting. He is responsible for 11 choirs at the university and still conducts the Chamber Choir. He was a long-time conductor of the men's glee club as well as the 180-member university-community choir named Choral Union.

Jerry Blackstone has served as chorusmaster on several internationally-acclaimed music projects. One of those, a recording of William Bolcom's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, earned him two GRAMMYs for Best Choral Performance and Best

Classical Album in 2006. Another project earned him a nomination for Best Opera Recording in 2015.

Dr. Jerry Blackstone is a highly sought-after guest conductor and workshop leader. He has fulfilled that role in thirty states plus New Zealand, Australia, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. He has received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Michigan chapter of the American Choral Directors Association. Through the years, he has touched the lives of thousands of musicians and their audiences.

“It’s a privilege to work with people to create a community and make music come alive,” Jerry said. “These choirs become more than people on stage, they become a family,” he said.

What is his advice to aspiring musicians? “Play your best, sing your best,” Jerry said. “If you love it, go out and play and sing at church and school. Put yourself in positions to be challenged.”

It’s time to leave Los Angeles, where chorusmaster Jerry Blackstone has earned two GRAMMY awards. We commend Dr. Jerry Blackstone for making a difference by sharing his musical talents and leading others in their musical careers.

Miss Lippe would be proud.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.