Craig Jessop, dean of the new Caine College of the Arts, speaks on his USU roots and the power of creative activity.
Alone

soldier lay quietly on a single bed in the isolation ward of Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. Both legs and both arms had been lost in a bombing attack on his unit in Vietnam. Most of his fellow soldiers were killed in the attack. Now he was left alone, totally withdrawn into a psychological isolation—never speaking, nor showing emotion of any kind.

“We were asked to visit this soldier in his private room and give him a short program,” said Craig Jessop, dean of USU’s Caine College of the Arts. “We surrounded the foot of his bed and sang a few numbers with our guitars and then finished our program with a quiet a cappella hymn.”

As they sang, tears began to fill the soldier’s eyes. Before long, his nurses were also crying. Everyone in the room had been moved by the music. When the song was over, the man quietly spoke a very faint “thank you” as tears streamed down his cheeks. The nurse informed the group that this was the first time that the soldier had spoken or shown any emotion since his arrival at the hospital.

“It was at that moment that I fully understood the power of the arts and the effect that they could have upon the human heart,” said Jessop. “The
“It was at that moment that I fully understood the power of the arts and the effect that they could have upon the human heart. This ability to change lives is one of the many reasons I feel so passionate about the arts and the important role that they play for each of us on a daily basis.”

In 1968, as an incoming freshman at USU, Jessop had no idea that his participation in one of USU’s entertainment ensembles, the Balladeers, would lead to a most powerful and moving experience in a far off country. The folk singing group of five women and seven men was selected by the Department of Defense to give United Service Organizations shows to U.S. soldiers stationed in southeast Asia during the Vietnam war. It was on this unforgettable tour—through a lone soldier in the isolation ward—that Jessop felt the impact of music and chose the direction of his lifelong pursuit.

A native of Millville, Utah and alumnus of Utah State University, Jessop has come full circle in his latest position as dean of the new Caine College of the Arts. In spring 2010, the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences split to become the Caine College of the Arts and the College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

“Dr. Jessop distinguished himself by the breadth and depth of the relationships he has developed throughout his career,” said Carol Strong, chair of the search committee for the position.

Jessop spent his education and career putting into practice what he learned at that hospital ward in Vietnam. After graduating from Utah State, he continued his music instruction at Brigham Young University and Stanford University, where he received his doctorate of musical arts. His first career step was director of
ch oral activities at Granite High School in Salt Lake City.

Jessop spent much of his career in the military, serving as a lieutenant colonel in the United States Air Force, where he conducted choirs and bands from 1979 to 1995.

Jessop also served as the director of the Carnegie Hall National High School Choir Festival from 2005 to 2010.

Best known for his direction of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, Jessop served as its associate director, and then director, from 1995-2008. Under his musical direction, the choir elevated its national and international presence and was honored with numerous awards, including the National Medal of Arts in 2003, the nation’s highest honor for artistic excellence.

Jessop said he loved “every minute” of his work with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, acknowledging the job was also “very intense.”

During his tenure with the choir, Jessop recorded over 15 CDs with the group and carried them through their 80th year of broadcasting “Music and the Spoken Word.” He was privileged to conduct the choir and the Utah Symphony during the Opening Ceremonies of the 2002 Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City, where he worked with world-renowned artists Sting and Yo-Yo Ma and composers John Williams and Michael Kamen. He has traveled the world with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and has also shared his talents around the globe as a baritone vocalist in other renowned choirs.

“Whenever we were on tour I saw the emotion that the choir could generate from the audience,” said Jessop. “It’s a wonderful experience.”

Now, as a distinguished professional of the arts, Jessop has returned to his roots, to once again share his talents and passion for the arts. He is using his nationally renowned conducting expertise to lead the American Festival Chorus in Logan, Utah. The choir consists of 270 members from the Cache Valley area combined with a talented orchestra of professional musicians, including USU’s own Fry Street Quartet.

“I look forward to the future as a member of the Caine College of the Arts,” said Jessop. “We hope to achieve excellence in all aspects of our college, and through excellence, we will share the value of our work in the arts and hopefully make a difference in someone’s life in the process.”