Easter Sunrise on Mirror Lake:
The A Cappella Choir in Yosemite

The Pacific A Cappella Choir, originally founded in 1916, became one of the University’s most highly acclaimed and widely traveled performance groups. By 1939, the choir had won much notoriety and was invited to perform at the annual Easter Sunrise Service at Mirror Lake in Yosemite National Park. The choir returned every year for 30 consecutive years.

Meaning “in the manner of the chapel,” a cappella referred to older church music that was written for unaccompanied voices. The term later encompassed unaccompanied vocal music in general.

Pacific’s A Cappella Choir was the first collegiate a cappella choir west of the Mississippi. Membership continued to grow, eventually numbering more than 40 voices under the leadership of its much-loved director, J. Russell Bodley, who led the choir from 1934 to 1972.

In 1944, World War II drew away most of the choir’s male voices to serve in the military. That year, Bodley took an all-female A Cappella Choir to Yosemite. Despite the impact of the war, the A Cappella Choir continued its concert schedule and spring tours. On the spring 1950 trip, President Robert E. Burns ’31, who had been a tenor in the choir as a student, traveled with the choir to Mirror Lake as a speaker.

The A Cappella Choir performed at Chapel services in Morris Chapel and at concerts both on and off campus throughout the year. It also performed at the World Conference of the Methodist Church and the governor of California’s Prayer Breakfast, and made appearances on both radio and television, including a nationwide radio broadcast on NBC.

In 1981, 140 A Cappella Choir alumni, including actress Janet Leigh ’47, sponsored a reunion luncheon honoring Bodley. They announced the creation of the J. Russell Bodley Scholarship to benefit students in the A Cappella Choir. The choir was renamed the Pacific Singers in 1990.

Do you remember singing in the A Cappella Choir? Tell us about it at pacificreview@pacific.edu.