Meet Brad Teare, a Utah Artist

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Strictly speaking, Brad Teare was not a Utah artist until he moved near Logan to study art at Utah State University in the late 1970s. Brad was born in Kansas and has always enjoyed drawing. When asked if there were any artists in his family, Brad replied that his great-grandfather was an artist, and some of his paintings were in his family home. He realizes now that his grandfather's career as an artist was thwarted by the economic problems during the Depression.

Brad's interest in art started early. He remembers his frustration in kindergarten because he couldn't draw as well as an older brother, but by first grade he was happier with his artistic skill and decided he would be an artist. In grade school, high school, and college, he contributed cartoons and comic strips to student publications.

In 1976 Brad and a friend traveled to Idaho and built a log cabin near Moscow, Idaho, on land belonging to an older brother. Brad lived in that log cabin and studied fine art for two years at the University of Idaho in Moscow. A fellow artist and friend recommended the art program at Utah State University, so Brad moved to the Logan area to take art classes for three years. Looking back, he realizes he never really intended to graduate because he took nothing but art classes. Brad married a fellow student and graduated to the "married class." They purchased a home in Providence, Utah (near Logan), which they rented out when they decided to move near the New York City area. For five years (1988-1993) he did freelance work for the New York Times (as an artist for its editorial page) and for the United Features Syndicate, a company that did cartoons and features on current news and sold them to newspapers throughout the United States.

Teare's first children's book was published by Harcourt Brace in 1994. It is entitled Green Song, with narration by Doris Plenn and illustrations by Brad Teare. He has also illustrated Countdown to 2000 published by Gibbs Smith and Will You Still Love Me published by Deseret Book. He wrote and illustrated Cypher published by Gibbs Smith. Brad continues to work as a free-lance artist, and his family have returned to their home in Providence. His current project is a show at the Alliance for the Varied Arts in Logan.

Brad varies his art style according to the project or book he is illustrating, but a frequently used style is the many-lined, cross-hatched style reminiscent of wood-block prints. He got started with that look by actually doing woodcuts. The old fashioned feeling conveyed by the woodcut style probably got him the job of illustrating Rick Walton's recent picture book poem entitled Dance Pioneer Dance. To comply with Brigham Young's advice to the pioneers to mix the recreation of dancing with the hard work of being a pioneer, Rick Walton has created a lively, vigorous poem that celebrates an evening of dancing by the first party of Mormon pioneers who came to the Salt Lake Valley in 1847.

At the beginning, the illustrations show a wagon train stopped for the night, fires burning, food cooking, and a fiddler warming up for the dance. Teare's woodcut style fits the pioneer subjects, and his lively people let the reader know they had energy left at the end of a day of travel. As the poem picks up speed, the dance picks up participants, and Teare begins adding animals to the scene. First, the chickens and roosters join. The cross-hatching and busy lines of this style make even the stationery objects come alive.
Notice the log with its interesting pattern of scratched lines, and the rooster, who is giving his all, as shown by the burst of lines emitting from his beak. Teare’s illustration almost makes the rooster’s song and the stomping of his feet audible. The hens are no less lively as they play instruments; they hold their ears and fly around, leaving a trail of feathers to add to the activity in the picture.

A grizzly bear, goats, pigs, and horses join the dance, evidence for Teare’s comment that the illustrations “get more and more outrageous.” Against the night sky, the prairie dogs and lizards join the dance to the light of a pioneer lantern. The static pop-eyed onlookers and the prairie dog, who looks as if he had too much of whatever is in that jug, provide a dramatic contrast to the wild dance of the gleeful prairie dog and lizard at center stage. Their kicked-up heels would make them good prospects for running the high hurdles on a track team.
All join paws and head on west.
On to Zion now, advance!
With the rest now . . .

Pioneer, dance.
Pioneer, dance.
Pick up your heels and hitch up your pants.
Dance across the prairie.
Everyone be merry.
Dance, Pioneer, dance!

The book ends with the dawn of the next day as the happy pioneers move onward. The narration still dances as the train moves over the horizon, and so do the illustrations. The wagons roll off to the tune of an animal band led by one of the chickens. The grizzly is on the bass, a goat plays a harmonica, a chicken has a tambourine, and a bug-eyed rattlesnake puffs away on a tuba (the coil of the horn neatly fitting on the coils of the rattler). Teare’s illustrations have combined and added to the vigorous, poetic rhythm and sound to show that pioneers did indeed know how to have fun.

As a small footnote, Teare reveals that he often puts his daughter Ashley’s initials somewhere in his books. Look on the back cover at the chest under the rocking chair with the cat on it. On the top of the lid you will see the letters A.T., standing for Ashley Teare. Ashley is also the model for a coloring book on Latter-day Saint temples published by Deseret Book, Ashley T. Pratt’s World Temple Tour.

Watch for more children’s books illustrated by Brad Teare, an artist living in Providence, Utah, whom Utah is proud to claim.