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Men's Chorus

Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus

Spring 2006

Crescendo!, Spring 2006

Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus

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Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus, "Crescendo!, Spring 2006" (2006). *Crescendo! The Newsletter of the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus*. 10.

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Crescendo!

The Newsletter of
the Buffalo Gay
Men's Chorus, Inc.

Volume 4 · Issue 3
Spring 2006

The BGMC triumphs in benefit concerts

Just a few days after a very well attended and well received concert at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Amherst, the BGMC took to the road yet again to appear in Niagara Falls at a benefit concert at the First Baptist Church. On a beautiful April afternoon, our chorus, resplendent in their now famous tuxedos, stood outside that beautiful old edifice greeting those who would fill the house with delight, laughter and applause. The church was full and over \$5000 was raised to assist Community Missions and Mark's Place, a home that exists to serve those living with AIDS in the Cataract City.

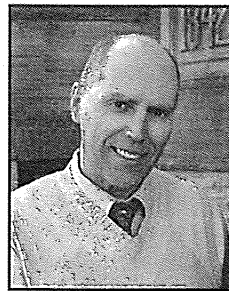
Pastor Mark Breese in a very moving editorial entitled "The Faces of God" wrote "...what matters most is that to the end of my days I will be thankful that for even just once in my life I was blessed to stand in front of a sanctuary, any sanctuary, and see, in all its fullness, what I had only seen in brief glimpses before. What a joy to stand there and look all around me and suddenly have the thought, the truth, leap into my heart and mind: 'So this is what the face of God looks like!'"

We state in all of our literature that the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus' mission is to educate, entertain and enlighten. Each time we perform, in every venue where we perform, whether sanctuary or secular hall, with every song that we sing and with every breath we take, we remain dedicated to that mission. Every performance gives us more strength, more fortitude, and a greater sense of purpose. We strive to provide the opportunity within the context of music, to illustrate to our audiences and any would-be detractors that we are indeed part and parcel of the billions of faces of God. We are music. We are hope. And, we are committed to the arts community and all of the people of Western New York.



More photos on page 4.

In the spotlight: Paul Cassavaugh



A great friend and supporter of the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus, Paul Cassavaugh, began life in the Adirondack Mountains. He was raised in the Saranac Lake area and attended local schools. While he claims his early education was without distinction, he later excelled at SUNY Brockport earning a BA in Education in 1966....cum laude!

Paul accepted his first and only job in the Niagara-Wheatfield Central School District and spent the next thirty-two years teaching. He retired in 1998. After a year of what he terms "floating around," he began volunteering at the North Tonawanda Inter-Church Food Pantry. He enjoys that activity so much that he currently works there both Thursdays and Fridays. Additionally, he puts in full weeks after the Post Office Food Drives to sort and stack all the food donated to the pantry.

Paul first encountered BGMC President Dave Gannon through mutual acquaintances at Anderson's. They bonded on a sweltering night over cool ice cream cones. As that friendship grew, Paul began to support the BGMC and to attend our concerts. Coincidentally, Paul was assigned the #1 and #2 tickets for the very first BGMC performance. In a historical coup, he chose to use ticket #2 and save ticket #1 to that first, ground-breaking concert in the Buffalo arts community. Rather than cashing in on the burgeoning EBay collector's market on concert tickets, Paul chose to gift our archives with that most meaningful ticket. Paul has attended each of the bi-annual concerts, enjoying all of them. Additionally, he has given his financial support to our efforts as well.

The BGMC is very proud and grateful to have such a friend as Paul Cassavaugh. His commitment to the arts community in Western New York makes him a great friend not only to us, but also to the entire arts community. We salute him!

Way to go chorus!

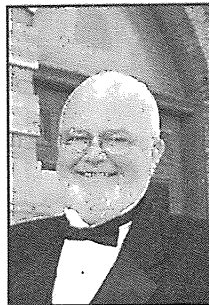
The BGMC called in the most pledges on "chorus night," more than any other choral group in the area during WNED-FM's spring membership pledge drive in April.

The challenge was to have anyone who sings or ever sang in a choir, chorus, or choral group of any kind to call in and make a pledge. We called in with the most.

Way to go guys!

President's Column

by Dave Gannon, BGMC President



There is an e-mail joke that made the rounds sometime ago, advising that the purpose of life is not to arrive at the grave in a perfect, well preserved body, but to go slip sliding in side ways and yelling "What a great ride!"

Well, I'm not ready to go slip sliding anywhere just yet, but this is my last *Crescendo* column as president of the Board of Directors. My term ends June 30.

I am proud and get an ego boost every time I go somewhere and some one finds out I am the president of the BGMC and they start singing (yes the pun was intended) the praises of the chorus. The Office of President does involve a lot of work and I say that not because I am looking for a pat on the back for the work that is involved, but only that it demonstrates the depth of love I have for the chorus and for the respect and admiration for all the men with whom I have had the pleasure of singing and have known for the past five years.

And of course I can't go anywhere without saying how much I have learned both musically and otherwise, and the great respect I have for Barb Wagner. As a singer I have amazed myself with the musical knowledge I have learned under her direction. But there is more than just music that I have learned. The manner in which she conducts herself as the Artistic Director of the chorus, makes every singer, no matter his skill level, believe in himself and that he can be part of making the music which allows the chorus to become one voice. Aside from her artistic and musical ability, you will be hard pressed to find a stronger ally for GLBT rights, anywhere.

There then comes a point when you decide for yourself and for the best interests of the chorus, that its time for you to step aside, even though you remain confident in your own leadership skills. It really is in the best interest of the chorus, because the BGMC has accomplished so much since its

inception. I certainly like to think I had some small role in part of that. We've come so far and it is important for us, not only from an artistic or arts standpoint, that we continue our journey, but we have also, from the perspective of the gay man, done some wonderful outreach to different areas of not only the gay community, but the straight or non-gay community if you prefer that term. The chorus is a living and growing organization and it is important for everyone to recognize that it will always be. So a change in the presidency is a healthy one. I will still be here helping, where I can. But for now I want to tell you what a wonderful and terrific 28 months it has been.

To my sisters, my brothers, and I make no distinction here commonly made by the words "in-law" but include you in that first definition, thank you for your continual love and support. Over my lifetime, you have been an instrumental part of my life. There is never any way I can adequately say thank you.

To my family with whom I may not share a genetic connection, but certainly a parallel and equivalent experience, and to the BGMC supporters, friends and audience, thank you for making these past five years meaningful and joyful.

OH! WHAT A RIDE! The journey continues.

Dave Gannon

The Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus, Inc. is a member of the **Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses, Inc.** (GALA Choruses). GALA Choruses fosters the artistic and organizational development of member choruses through a variety of programs and services.

For more information, visit www.galachoruses.org

Crescendo!

The Newsletter of the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus, Inc.

Volume 4 · Issue 3 · Spring 2006

Editor: **Delwyn Milander**
Designer: **Vilardo Printing**

Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus, Inc.
Incorporated 2001 as a 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit corporation in the State of New York.

Artistic Director: **Barbara Wagner**
Accompanist: **Debi Overton**

News & Information Director:
Kathleen Niles

Officers 2005-2006
President: **David Gannon**
Vice President: **Dennis Stuart**
Secretary: **Timothy H. Mahiques**
Treasurer: **R. Mark Meyer**
Directors: **Christopher S. Babbitt, Bill Gardner, Edward N. Giannino, Michael P. Gillis, Steve Young**

Crescendo! is published three times a year (Fall, Winter, and Spring) by the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus. Periodicals paid at Buffalo, NY. Postmaster: Send address changes to *Crescendo*, 695 Elmwood Avenue, Buffalo, NY 14222.



Opinion: It's time to cross Main Street

by Larry Van Heusen

Nearing the fifth anniversary of BGMC, I see a celestial spark developing before us which could compass our direction for the next five years and beyond.

The recent journey, which fostered fireworks of its own, began with our singing at Blessed Trinity, a Catholic church on the East Side, a neighborhood substantially composed of African-Americans and those in poverty. We all remember the outside protestors who showed up objecting to gay men singing in a Catholic Church, the several months of letters to the editor, and prominent figures getting involved in the discussion. The Diocese defended our right to sing, despite the protests. We saw the event as a powerful success for our mission because music had touched the hearts of the powerful.

A few years ago, Buffalo News reporter Harold McNeil published an article—a synoptic 150-year history of Buffalo's Main Street—a street which he found to be "a sort of Maginot Line, dividing city not just east from west, but, at various times in its history, separating affluent from working class or poor, Catholic from Protestant, and more recently black from white."

By going to Blessed Trinity, we crossed Main Street.

We planted seeds of beauty and exposed our gay selves in environments where gayness is oppressed more often than in our own lives. Same-gender-loving men and women (known in the parts of the black community as SGL) have been isolated in their own ethnic communities for being gay as well as in the predominantly white population for being black. We are the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus and should be singing to and for all of Buffalo, including the 30 percent of the city's residents who are African-American and the SGL folk in their ranks! We need not wait for others to cross the line of racial intimidation to our side of Main Street. We need to reach out.

Here are some ideas.

- We could take inspiration from The Seattle [Gay] Men's Chorus's production, *Soul Full*, in which black gospel and jazz choruses join SMC on stage in Seattle's largest music hall.
- We could bring or invite, Lavender Light, the NYC gay gospel choir, to Buffalo's East Side
- We could approach MOCHA (Men of Color Health Awareness) as a resource for reaching out to SGL folk.
- The Challenger, Buffalo's largest African-American Newspaper, has been increasingly open to printing articles about being black and gay in America.
- We now have an African-American mayor, Byron Brown, and perhaps he could be involved in this process.
- As a first step: our June 23rd and 24th concerts will feature several musical references to the liberation of African-Americans which will appear in the program notes.

Dr. Lawrence Van Heusen sings second bass in BGMC, and published his dissertation on James Baldwin and Black Religion in 1980. He is a trustee at Pilgrim-St. Luke's United Church of Christ and works for Jewish Family Service. He was a social worker on the East Side for ten years.

Editor's Note: If you have ideas or would like to help, please contact Larry at (H) 875-3771 or cityimpact@aol.com.

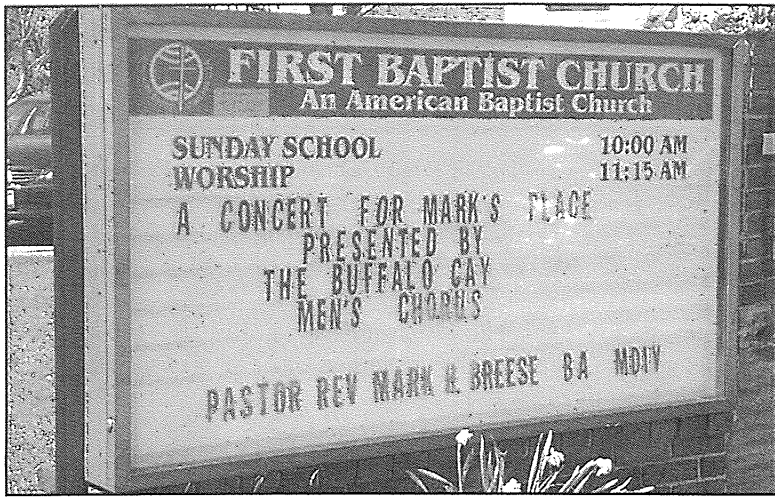
Corporate sponsors answer the call

This year, for the first time, the BGMC invited area businesses to become corporate sponsors. We wanted to see if this initiative was one that companies in Western New York would welcome. We sent packets to nine representative businesses in the hope that one might answer the call. We were amazed at the response! Northtown Automotive, M & T Bank, Greater Buffalo Savings Bank, and Jeffrey Freedman, attorneys, each stepped up to assist the BGMC in providing outstanding concerts for those who enjoy great music. This is just the beginning of our expansion into the community, our desire to partner with those individuals and corporations who believe that doing "business" with the BGMC is good for business, good for the community and good for their gay and lesbian employees, too.

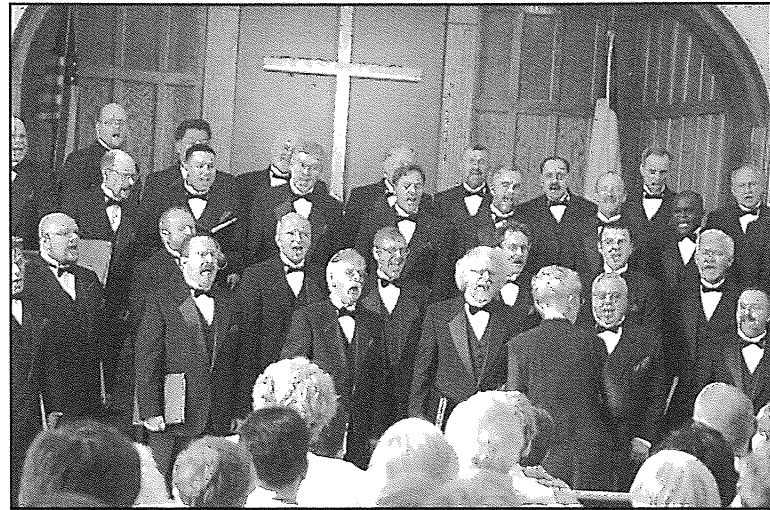
If you wish to become a corporate sponsor and show your support for the WNY Arts Community, please do not wait to be invited. Call us and we will send you a packet with many options from which to select where your business might best fit in. Our success in the past five years signals our staying power and our ability to delight audiences year after year. Our audiences support those companies that support their BGMC. Please take your rightful place as a corporate sponsor. It makes good business sense, good community sense, and good sense for your gay and lesbian employees.



Peter Smith accompanies the chorus in "Beautiful Dreamer."



Dan Folwell, Ramón Melendez and Roger Parris take a moment before the Niagara Falls concert.



Pictures from First Baptist Church, Niagara Falls on April 30.

all photos by Mike Longo



Let us Entertain You.

Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus
Presents:

Friday, June 23, 2006 at 8pm
and
*Saturday June 24, 2006 at 8pm

*interpreted for hearing impaired

BGMC
at
Buffalo State College
Performing Arts Center
Rockwell Hall
1300 Elmwood Ave
Doors Open at 7pm

Artistic Director: Barbara Wagner
Accompanist: Debi Overton

Tickets: 18\$ for adults
16\$ for seniors/students/disabled

BGMC Office:
695 Elmwood Ave
Buffalo, NY 14222.
716-883-1277

www.buffalogaymenschorus.com



From the keyboard

by Debi Overton, Accompanist



Having trained as a solo pianist but having chosen the life of an accompanist may not be unique but it is certainly interesting. I get to choose with whom I work and when I work. This provides a freedom and a luxury that tours would never allow. I elected to work with BGMC for several reasons: First, I have had a long and successful relationship with conductor Barbara Wagner and appreciate her skills

in selecting music for choral groups. Second, I have a commitment to the gay community in Western New York and believe that the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus is among the finest representatives of our community. Third, I truly enjoy the camaraderie, enthusiasm and excellence of these fine singers. We work very hard but it is always accomplished with fun, fellowship and a sincere desire to offer our listeners the very best in entertainment, education and enjoyment.

Accompanists are often in the shadows making certain to keep the program moving without a great deal of fanfare. We follow the conductor keeping pace with whatever speed or finesse is required in a piece. We move along with the individual voices of soloists being absolutely certain not to overshadow their performances but equally alert to any changes in tempo that might signal our need to alter the manner in which a piece is delivered. We are part of the support personnel in a chorus. We offer our skills to make their skills shine.

To me, making music with others is always more important than being the center of attention on a stage. I love choral music and I love being able to lend my years of playing the piano to the joy that the BGMC brings to thousands of audience members each year.

Three veteran board members retire

Bill Gardner, Dave Gannon, and Mark Meyer retire from the BGMC board of directors on June 30 having given an accumulated total of eleven years to the gay men's chorus. Bill was interim secretary to the board and one of the founders of the chorus. Dave was vice president for one year and president for two. Mark was treasurer for all of his four years.

All three men generously gave their time and energy, volunteering for numerous tasks in addition to singing and the regular work of the board. They endured countless hours on metal chairs in the cold basement of the Unitarian Universalist Church at board meetings.

We thank them for their commitment and achievements. Although no longer on the board, all three will remain active in the chorus in some capacity.

Tribute to David Gannon

The BGMC's beloved president, David Gannon, will finish his extended term of office this June. Dave's leadership skills are nothing short of extraordinary. We are a young and vibrant organization, filled with gifted, thoughtful, loving and, just once in a while, opinionated people! In his infinite wisdom, Dave has found a way to hold this disparate and amazing group of men together. He has been a constant source of inspiration and support for me. He has held my hand through times of discouragement and despair and he has reveled with me in our successes. David has picked up the pieces hundreds of times in the past 3+ years without complaint, and has taken care of me even when I didn't even know I needed it. I'm sure he's done the same for many of you. We will miss his leadership, but are comforted to know that he will still be actively among us.

Even as I will never, ever forget that day when we sang in the filled to overflowing Blessed Trinity RC Church, I will never forget what Dave said to us all that day just before the concert. He stood proud and tall in front of us and reminded us all of who we are and what we've accomplished and asked that we stand proud and strong and even serene in the face of whatever we might face that afternoon. That's exactly what happened.

Thank you, David, for your positive, loving presence in our lives.

Barb Wagner, Artistic Director

Shop & Smell the Flowers

Third annual BGMC garage sale & Buffalo Garden Walk weekend

That's right! The weekend of July 29 & 30 from 9:00 to 5:00 promises both the Third Annual BGMC Garage Sale and Buffalo's Garden Walk! So, shop with us in the morning and smell the flowers in the afternoon. Furniture, clothing, antiques, jewelry and all manner of treasure, all at rock bottom prices, will be on sale at our usual location in the Hamlin House Restaurant, in the American Legion Troop I Post 665 at 432 Franklin between Virginia & Allen.

With the BGMC's 80 singers and volunteers donating merchandise, this year's sale promises to be bigger than ever. "We'd be most appreciative to receive any items that anyone would care to donate" reports garage sale chairman Woody Sipprell. Simply call the chorus phone at 883-1277 and arrange for a pick up. And thank you for your support of the arts in Western New York in general and the BGMC in particular.

Barb's Corner

by Barbara Wagner, BGMC Artistic Director

It is with great pleasure and pride that I tell you that our dedicated and talented Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus has just participated in their seventh outreach concert of this, our fifth season together.

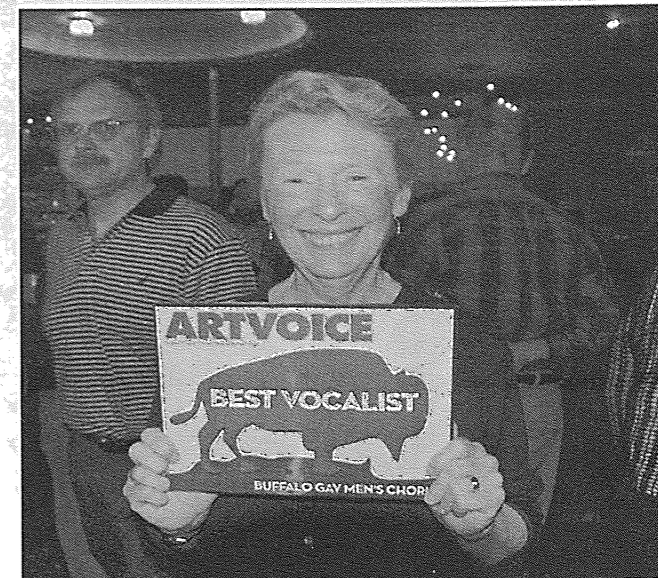
We began in October, traveling to Fredonia to sing for the students at the college, sponsored by the Multi Cultural and GLBT campus organizations. Earlier that same week we were pleased to be invited to perform for the entire upper school student body at Nichols. We were warmly and joyously received by the students there and those who could, stayed to participate in a lively question and answer session. Many of these same students and many from other urban and suburban schools were given comp tickets to our Winter Concert by the BGMC. We worked closely with Marvin Henschberger and GLYS on this brand new endeavor. Late in October, we joined a number of local choruses in a concert to benefit victims of Hurricane Katrina. Approximately \$5000 was raised through our joint efforts. At the close of the BGMC performance that day, we were greeted by a noisy, enthusiastic standing ovation. That never hurts!

We were delighted to be invited to sing once more for Cause for Celebration in the Statler Golden Ballroom. Vicky Vogue was our lovely bride as she was escorted down the aisle to the mellifluous tones of the BGMC singing "Goin' to the Chapel." Spring brought many of us to the Empire State Pride Agenda luncheon as we honored our good friends from the Unitarian Universalist Church by singing "Standing on the Side of Love," as they received the Community Service Award for 2006, the same award that BGMC received last year.

The last weekend in April, we sang for a standing room only audience at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Amherst in a concert to benefit their piano and organ fund. Perhaps, most importantly of all, we sang for the benefit of Mark's Place, a facility much like Buffalo's Benedict House, where people living with AIDS can find comfort. The concert took place at First Baptist Church in Niagara Falls and for several weeks prior to the program was fraught with controversy, threats and ill will. It was a stark reminder of the days last spring when we ultimately would be given permission to sing at Blessed Trinity Church. As it was in Buffalo, pickets and much more were always a possibility for which we must be prepared. In the end, Sunday, April 30, was a warm, sunny afternoon and the church was filled with loving, happy people. The BGMC was able to help Community Mission of Niagara Falls raise well over \$5000 for Mark's Place. It was an important day for all of us, as we continue the seemingly endless struggle to enlighten our audiences.

Now we look forward to singing with our brothers of the Rochester Gay Men's Chorus on June 17 and to our much anticipated concerts at Rockwell Hall on June 23 and 24.

When we chose the title "Let Us Entertain You," I began searching for entertaining, light hearted music. It will all be lots of fun, but BGMC never does concerts without a message. "Fluff" is wonderful, but there must be more. In this concert the message is one of liberation and transformation, not only for gay and lesbian people, but for African-Americans and some of the music itself. I think the spiritual "Plenty Good Room," arranged by Moses Hogan, says it all - "there's room enough for you an' room enough for me, so choose your place and sit down - there's plenty good room in my Father's kingdom."



Barb Wagner holds the award for Best Vocalist awarded to the chorus by Artvoice on May 8.

There is a whole segment of familiar American songs moving from "Beautiful Dreamer" to "O Susannah" and "Ching a Ring Chaw." The latter two songs have been tainted by their use in the old minstrel shows, but over time and because of the work of gay composer Aaron Copland and scholars like LeRoi Jones these associations have faded and the music has been liberated and transformed. We're going to sing the exciting "Rhythm Medley," a selection of songs about rhythm by George Gershwin. Listen for lots of blues harmony and syncopated rhythms. As *Larry Van Heusen tells us in the wonderful program notes you'll see when you come to the concert, even "I've Been Working' on the Railroad" has been transformed by a new funky street-corner style rendition. Even our big opener "Let Us Entertain You" is liberated from being sung by burlesque strippers and transformed into a rousing opener to welcome our audience into the music and into our lives.

After seeing the amazing film "Brokeback Mountain," I knew we had to pay tribute to Jack and Ennis. What could be better than a lovely arrangement of "Home on the Range"? The opening of the second half is a transformation of "Mary Had a Little Lamb," but you'll have to come to the concert and hear what happens to little Mary and her fleecy little pet! And then there are the songs like "You Can Fly," "Come Away with Me," and "No Matter What" that take my breath away with their beauty and messages.

Come with us on June 23 and 24 as we go to a place where we can kiss on a mountain top, believe what we choose, spread our wings and fly among the stars.

See you at the concerts.

Love,

Barb

*Thank you for the insights, your scholarly program notes and the inspiring conversations we've had, Larry.

SAVE THESE DATES!

Sunday, June 4, 2006 • Annual Pride Parade and Celebration • Parade begins at 1pm from Kleinhans Music Hall
visit www.PrideBuffalo.org for more details

Saturday, June 17, 2006 • Joint Concert with the Rochester Gay Men's Chorus • Rochester, New York

Friday, June 23, 2006 • Concert—"Let Us Entertain You" • 8pm • Performing Arts Center, Rockwell Hall,
Buffalo State College, 1300 Elmwood Avenue

Saturday, June 24, 2006 • Concert—"Let Us Entertain You" • 8pm • Performing Arts Center, Rockwell Hall,
Buffalo State College, 1300 Elmwood Avenue

Tuesday, June 27, 2006 • Annual meeting and election of new board members • BGMC members check your e-mail for venue

Saturday, July 29 and Sunday, July 30, 2006 • Third Annual BGMC Garage Sale • Hamlin House, 432 Franklin Street • 9:00-5:00 daily

Tuesday, September 5, 2006 • First rehearsal for 2006-2007 season (Singers check your e-mail for exact date)

July 12-July 20, 2008 • GALA Festival VIII • Miami, Florida

BGMC 695 Elmwood Ave.
Buffalo, NY 14222
(716) 883-1277
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Cut along dotted line and mail bottom portion with your donation today to: **BGMC, 695 Elmwood Ave., Buffalo, NY 14222**

Yes, I'll join the Friends of the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus!

Thank you for helping the growth & success of BGMC. Your contribution is tax deductible.

- | | | |
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- Please add me to the BGMC mailing list.
- I have time or services that may help the BGMC. Please contact me.