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Chorus

Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus

Winter 2003

Crescendo!, Winter 2003

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Crescendo!

The Newsletter of
the Buffalo Gay
Men's Chorus

Volume 1 • Issue 2
Winter 2003

Thank You for the Music

by *Delwyn Milander*

When Sophie, Sam, Harry, and Bill sang "Thank you for the music" they could have been singing the response of approximately 70 BGMC members and their guests who attended the December 17th performance of *Mamma Mia!* at Shea's Performing Arts Center.

It was quite a night. For many of us, it was our first opportunity to sit front row center. We had the best seats in the house and we felt the performance was just for us; never mind there was a larger audience of 3,000 sitting behind us!

All this was the result of long range planning that began six months ago. Our thanks go to board member

John Herbert for helping with the arrangements. The whole experience was part of the chorus' holiday celebrations.

Judging by the audible excitement of the chorus members, many of whom knew every word of the songs by heart, and were not inhibited about singing along with the cast, *Mamma Mia!* struck a deep chord.

The overwhelming power of the music stirred our souls and for a rare moment gave us the feeling that this is why we are alive. At the end of each concert, wouldn't it be fabulous if our audience responded by singing "Thank you for the music, the songs

THE MUSICAL BASED ON THE SONGS OF ABBA®

BENNY ANDERSSON AND BJÖRN ULVAEUS'

MAMMA MIA!



I'm singing. Thanks for all joy they're bringing. Who can live without it? What would life be without a song?"

Now there is talk of doing something similar in the spring for an upcoming performance of *The Full Monty*. Stay tuned for further details.

BGMC Retreat a Big Hit

by *Bill Hardy, Tenor II*

The BGMC's first retreat was a most wonderful way to spend the Saturday before Thanksgiving. It was well organized, and Shannetta Mennenga was just fabulous as our facilitator. Kevin Thompson and his crew worked their butts off getting it set up and coordinating all the wonderful food on which we feasted. It was a unique opportunity to get to know fellow choristers and get a feeling for who and what we are. I feel more solidarity, a family feeling, now more than ever before. To be gay, and to be with so many other men with which we share that common denominator, and then to be wrapped up

together in that wonderful blanket of music is a feeling that is beyond words. We are so, so lucky to be in this place at this time. We have a rare opportunity in life to be at the forefront of a revolution, if you will, a revolution where music, the universal language, is used to win the battle against prejudice and ignorance. If we can make just one person out of one hundred sit back and rethink their thoughts and feelings, then we have done a wonderful thing.

Well, there I go again. If I continue, I'll start using hoary sayings like "The world is our oyster" and "The peaches are there for the picking" and so on! Again, thanks to all who organized this event. It was SUPER!

Call for Archival Materials

Our archivist, Ramon Melendez, is always on the lookout for any media (printed materials etc.) featuring or mentioning the BGMC or its members. If you know of any that have NOT appeared in the most popular WNY publications (*Buffalo News, Artvoice, Voices* etc.), please bring them to the next rehearsal or contact Ramon at ramelendez@adelphia.net for additional details.

Barb's Corner
by Barbara Wagner, BGMC Music Director

As we approach the anniversary of our very first concert, I've been doing a lot of reflecting on the past year and I rejoice in the wonder of it all. I've been looking again at the words I spoke to you and the audience at our inaugural concert and I find that they are even more true today than they were a year ago. We still hold each other, we still laugh, we still cry, we still touch and oh, how we sing, but it all happens with a depth of understanding that I never dreamed possible. Your talent, your courage, your unbridled joyousness and love still spill over into my life, but now it feels like a gentle waterfall. My heart belongs to you.

The Retreat Committee and I have been looking over and sharing with many of you some of the extraordinary outcomes of the November Retreat. We realized that BGMC is a much closer knit, supportive community than we had realized. The hopes and dreams that many of us shared around BGMC at its outset were eloquent and often poignant. The same lofty goals and values were shared by many of us. We are indeed "in tune" with each other and all of the friends of BGMC. And now, we are poised to present the finest BGMC Concert ever. The rehearsals are now major events as we find our way into the heart of each piece. We're connecting with the power of the English, French, German and Latin texts and music as well as the lighthearted gaiety of the likes of "Side By Side!" It's a wonder!

When I chose the following Shakespearean text for my Holiday card, the shining faces of my beloved BGMC were what I saw as I read the words.

"First, rehearse your song by rote, to each word a warbling note. Hand and hand with fairy grace, will we sing and bless this place."

With much love and good wishes for a peaceful, healthy and joyous New Year to all of you glorious singers and the community that has encouraged us and had faith in our work.

Barb

Special Thanks to The Friends of the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus

On behalf of the Board of Directors and the entire BGMC membership, we extend to our Friends a very hearty and heartfelt thank you!

Your generous financial contributions help us not only to entertain but also to enlighten. You may not realize it, but a very large portion of our funding comes from gifts from concerned music lovers like you, and your generosity has played a significant part in our ability to fulfill our mission of producing vocal music of high quality in

the rich tradition of men's choral singing.

You've helped us to accomplish several things important to the stability of our chorus, from purchasing music to offering our singers our first full-day BGMC retreat/rehearsal with a very capable facilitator. We've established a scholarship fund, which permits BGMC to help worthy singers who could not otherwise afford the membership dues.

Your gifts let us know that you

Crescendo!

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Volume 1 • Issue 2
Winter 2003

Editor **Delwyn Milander**
Designer **Max Phillips**

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

Music Director **Barbara Wagner**

Officers and Directors 2002-2003

President **James A. Estep**
Vice-Pres. **Sherwood Sipprell**
Treasurer **R. Mark Meyer**
Secretary **Daniel Wasinger**
Directors: **William B. Gardner,**
John Herbert, Douglas Levy,
Roger Parris, and Max Phillips

The Board of Directors of the BGMC meets at 7 PM on the third Monday of every month (subject to change). Meetings are open to all members of the organization. Please check our website for updates.

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

share in the vision of BGMC. We hope we repay your confidence in us through the music we bring you.

Thank you for attending our concerts, thank you for spreading the word, and especially thank you for your continued support!

President's Column

by James Estep, BGMC President

Throughout our nation's history, gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender persons have seldom, if ever, had a "voice" in society in the fullest sense of the word - a comprehensive, recognized presence with complete participation in American culture. But in our nation today, gay and lesbian choruses are flourishing. Our voices, artistically and politically, are being heard. The NYS Senate's passage of the Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act (SONDA) and the appearance of the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus are two recent examples.

Although we have a registered membership of 69 singers and about 10 volunteers in our support group, few of our membership know where and when we originated; how we came to be the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus. Here's the story of how we came to be, the shortened version.

In December 1999, Roger Parris, a former music history student and part-time music critic, spoke to some friends about a dream he had for a gay men's chorus in Buffalo. An earlier gay and lesbian chorus had folded several years before. A new gay men's chorus would give our community a voice that would build bridges to join straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people through beautiful music.

Roger asked several of his close friends, his partner, Mike Longo, Mike Bardo, a paralegal and Jeff Wilson, an accountant, to contribute ideas about building a new gay men's chorus. By January 2000, this Steering Committee was exploring the possibilities. They envisioned a singing group of out, proud, gay men who would produce music of high artistic excellence for a wide audience of men and women who love male choral singing; a chorus rising out of the gay men's community of which all of Buffalo could be proud. In March 2000, the original Steering

Committee expanded to include attorney Bill Gardner, music educator Bill Fay and retired US Navy pilot Jim Estep. By March 2001, the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus (BGMC) was incorporated by the State of New York.

In May 2001, Barbara Wagner, the Music Director of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo, joined us as our charter music director. She always wanted to direct a male chorus, but never imagined she'd get the opportunity. Barb was retiring from Nichols School and ready for something with a venturesome note to it. We were ready to hire a music director. We are proud to have one of the best music conductors in Western New York. We scheduled auditions for the BGMC on May 19, 2001. By the end of that day, we had a chorus: thirty-six men were singers in the nascent Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus. By the end of the month, we had 45 committed men in the chorus.

The Rochester Gay Men's Chorus gave us much support during this formative period, coming to Buffalo to do a benefit concert and "friend raiser" for us in June 2001. They were our mentors and we relied on their 18 years of experience to guide us. After fifteen months of planning and, seemingly, endless meetings dealing with by-laws, incorporation papers, fund raising and organizational details, we were ready for our first rehearsal.

On Tuesday, September 11, 2001, we gathered for our first rehearsal and mourned the tragic passing of the men and women killed in the unimaginable attacks that day on the World Trade Centers and the Pentagon. Many of us felt the need to be with one another, to share our feelings, and to find some relief from the horror of the day's events. We went on with the rehearsal, and we learned a song that night that brought us together. The Quaker hymn entitled "How Can I Keep From Singing?" gave us comfort and has become a signature anthem for us.

We sang our first concert, *Music*

From the Heart, to a sold out house on February 9, 2002. None of us could have predicted the unbelievable support and response we received from the audience that night. Even before the last note died away, the audience was on its feet applauding. That energy validated us and made the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus a living reality. Our second sold out concerts of 2002, during Pride Week in Buffalo, were called *The Sounds of Summer*. We marched in the Pride Parade as a community of singers and we sang our songs in celebration of our gay heritage.

This year we've had some notable achievements which the public did not see, but which will make a difference in our concert performances: potluck dinners every month; a retreat to foster camaraderie and morale; music classes for chorus members, organized by Bill Fay (which will continue this Spring); and a retreat for Chorus members. We are well into planning for the GALA Festival in Montreal July 17-24, 2004. We attended the performance of *Mamma Mia!* at Shea's and had the cast and audience talking about "those guys in the front four rows." We'll be attending a performance of *The Full Monty* in May 2003. At the present time, we're in rehearsal for a real foot stompin', hand clappin' mid-Winter concert on January 24 and 25, 2003.

Our vision is to live in a community that supports gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender men and women. Our membership is open to any man who wants to sing and who can pass a simple voice placement audition. We welcome all men and women who want to support our singers by volunteering their support in ushering, receptions, mailings, coffee breaks during rehearsals and who wish a closer association with the BGMC. Our mission is to produce high quality vocal music in the distinctive and rich tradition of male choral singing that will entertain a wide audience and will enlighten by creating harmony and celebrating pride in ourselves and in our community. In our second performing year, we move toward realizing this vision through our music.

SAVE THESE DATES!

Monday January 20 2003 • **Dress Rehearsal** • 7:30 pm at the UU Church

Tuesday January 21 2003 • **Dress Rehearsal** • 7 pm at St. Paul's Cathedral

Friday January 24 2003 • **Winter Concert, Of Sweet Harmony** • 8 pm at Unitarian-Universalist Church

Saturday January 25 2003 • **Winter Concert, Of Sweet Harmony** • 8 pm at St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral

Tuesday January 28 2003 • **Post-concert party** (no rehearsal)

Friday June 13 2003 • **Spring Concert, Songs of Freedom** • 8 pm at Unitarian-Universalist Church

Saturday June 14 2003 • **Spring Concert, Songs of Freedom** • 8 pm at Westminster Presbyterian Church

Tuesday June 17 2003 • **Annual Meeting and Elections**

Friday-Saturday August 22-23 2003 • **Chorus retreat**

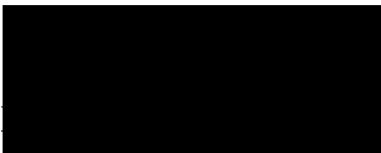
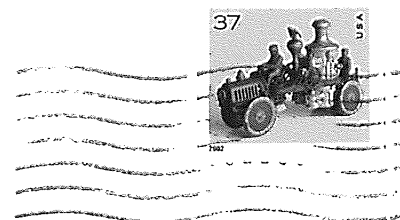
Saturday-Saturday July 17-24 2004 • **GALA Choruses Festival, Montreal**

BGMC • PO BOX 448 • Buffalo, NY 14207

TWO PERFORMANCES OF BGMC'S NEXT CONCERT!

Of Sweet Harmony

January 24 / 8 pm at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo
 January 25 / 8 pm at St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral
 for tickets, contact any BGMC member or send e-mail to
Tickets@BuffaloGayMensChorus.com



Cut along dotted line and mail in bottom portion with your donation today!

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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Friends who contribute at the \$200 "Conductor" level and above will receive two tickets to our next concert.

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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.