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Crescendo! The Newsletter of the Buffalo Gay  
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Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus

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Fall 2010

### Crescendo!, Fall-Winter 2010

Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus

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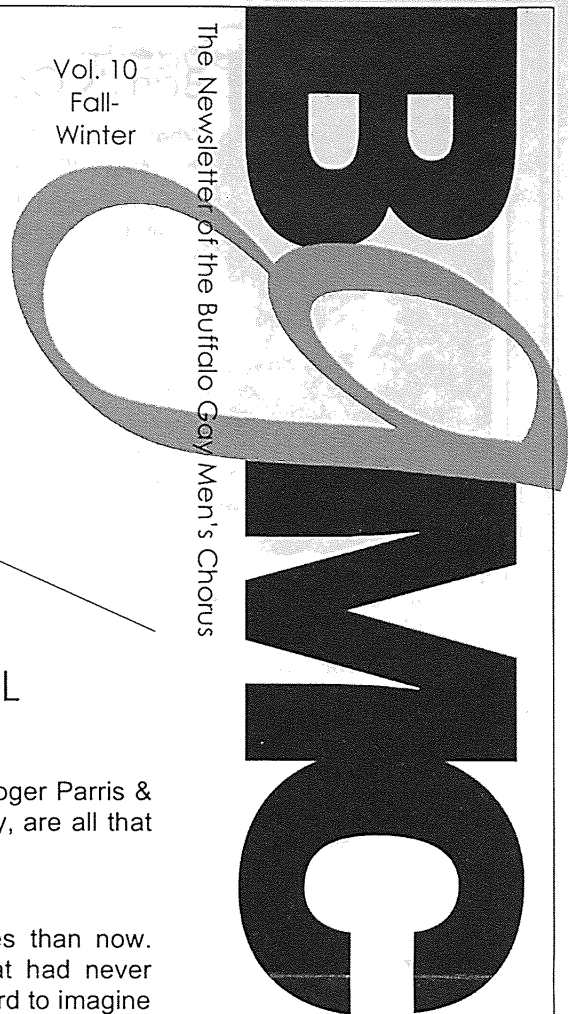
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# CRESCENDO

Vol. 10  
Fall-  
Winter

The Newsletter of the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus



## BGMC FOUNDERS ROGER PARRIS & MICHAEL LONGO HONORED AT JUNE CONCERT

Visionaries. Dreamers. Determined. Ambitious. We know that partners Roger Parris & Michael Longo, who celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary together last February, are all that and more.

They had to be.

Back in 2000 our LGBT community lived in even more challenging times than now. Roger and Michael harnessed their talents to found an organization that had never existed in Western New York before: The Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus. It's hard to imagine the energy of these men and the depth of their dedication.

First came a steering committee and an endless series of meetings. That first core group of what became the BGMC embraced Roger and Michael's vision, hammered out our mission statement and by-laws, and hired Barbara Wagner to be our first Artistic Director. On September 11, 2001 this newly formed organization became a reality when it held its first rehearsal.

Roger & Michael have created a legacy of beautiful music—music that has enlightened as it has entertained, music that has brought a better understanding of what it is to be gay, music that has opened hearts and changed minds. Thank you to our beloved founders, Roger & Michael.



THANK YOU  
ROGER & MICHAEL!

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## Barb's Corner

When I walked into the BGMC rehearsal space at St. John's Grace this past September, I felt like I'd just entered a sunny summer garden, filled with the most beautiful flowers I'd ever seen.

I saw the bright, happy faces of brand new and returning singers and heard the laughter and joy that was present everywhere. There were beautiful men, some probably no more than 22 years old, others in their 30's, 40's—all the way up to 70—waiting eagerly to join or rejoin our beloved BGMC.

I expect that every organization goes through rough spots, and we certainly faced some challenges last season. But music can heal almost anything. What I felt and saw in September was no miracle, but the result of the hard work of listening, acting, analyzing and changing that our amazing board and wonderful singers have done. That willingness to grow is what has allowed the BGMC to survive and now to thrive more than I've ever seen it.

I'm so happy to be back with my beautiful singers, new and returning. There is a rich, burnished bronze sound that comes from these amazing men of every age, and you can hear it in a lovely song called *There Is No Rose* that is part of our wonderful holiday concert. Every time we sing it I feel like it represents in sound a part of our history.

It begins softly with just one voice. Then more voices are added—quietly—without a change in dynamic level. As the piece begins to grow, more and more voices are asked to join, and soon we are all singing in gratitude for each other and all of you. It feels to me like our own special prayer, and it ends as it began—in a soft, gentle expression of thanks. I love it when music can represent what's happening in our real lives with such perfection.

Our holiday concerts are being presented in three very different and very spectacular venues. Being a graduate of the University of Buffalo (from a few years ago!) I'm delighted to go back to UB and to Slee Hall with this wonderful chorus on Saturday night, December 11th. I only wish that my mentor, Cameron Baird, were still alive so I could introduce him to all of you! I'm sure Mr. Baird would be happy to see the BGMC performing in one of UB's wonderful halls, and happier still to hear our *Sounds of the Season*.

On Friday, we go back to the Riviera in North Tonawanda to frolic in their grand, historical theater, and on Sunday we'll perform once again at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church on Main St. in Buffalo. There's a huge variety of music—all the way from a rousing Kwanzaa processional to some old spirituals, to the craziness of *Variations on Jingle Bells!* And prepare yourselves for the lyric beauty of our *Auld Lang Syne*, a setting of the beloved Scottish folk song that we commissioned from the gifted arranger, Kathleen McGuire.

As the cold of December presses in, the warmth I felt in September has been transformed into our *Sounds of the Season*. I can't wait for you to see and hear this magnificent group of men. I can't wait for you to enjoy the fruits of our labors over these many weeks since we embarked on our new season together. Most of all, I can't wait to welcome with you in song to this time of drawing near to one another, as we of the BGMC have continued to draw near in song, to grow together in harmony.

—Love, Barb

**P.S.** David Matthewson, one of our fine soloists and conductors, will be lending a hand at the podium during our December concert series, and David Bond, our fine new accompanist, will be making his BGMC debut with us as well. See you soon!

## THANKING DEBI

Debi Overton has served as the principal accompanist to the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus since the chorus was founded in 2001.

Throughout her tenure with the BGMC, Debi's devotion to the people and mission of this organization was surpassed only by the power and artistry of her musicianship. From her place at the keyboard beside us, Debi helped each one of us reach for the highest levels of our potential for excellence in performance.

This past summer it was announced that Debi was stepping down as our accompanist. Though absent from our rehearsal hall and stage, Debi will never be far from our hearts.

All of us at the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus join our voices in thanking Debi for sharing her time and talents with us from our very earliest days. Debi will forever be a part of our family as she is forever a part of our music.

## CRESCENDO

The Newsletter of the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus

Editor: Andrew C. Pollard

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Barbara Wagner  
Artistic Director

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The Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus is dedicated to producing vocal music of high quality in the rich tradition of men's choral singing.

We sing to create harmony as we celebrate pride in the community and in ourselves.

We seek through song not only to entertain, but to enlighten.

## President's Note

The holidays are approaching and it is the time of year when family and friends come together to celebrate life, love and health.

The BGMC began our tradition of holiday concerts three years ago because we wanted to share this special season with our audience through song.

Whether you deck the halls with silver and gold or you spread the cheer with yuletide gay, we ask that you come celebrate the holidays the BGMC way. On December 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, the BGMC presents *Sounds of the Season*, our annual holiday concert series.

Renditions of classics such as *Silent Night* and *Angels We Have Heard on High* will be performed, as well as soothing prayers for peace and maybe even a sing-along. There is something for everyone this year and the BGMC would love to have you as our guests for the holidays.

Come treat yourself to a night joyful and triumphant and let the men of the BGMC put you in the holiday spirit. Thank you for your continued support and on behalf of all the men and women of the BGMC, may you have a happy and healthy Holiday Season. See you at the show!

Yours in Harmony,  
Christopher S. Babbitt  
President, BGMC



## Why We Sing

Years ago I heard Peter Yarrow—of the famous folk-signing trio *Peter, Paul and Mary*—tell an audience: "You can't lie with the sung voice." This was the reason, he then quipped, "why all candidates for president should be required to sing to the American people."

The laughter died away but the truth of what Peter Yarrow said that night—you can't lie with the sung voice—stayed with me. I never forgot it. In fact, I recalled those words years later as I was walking up on stage for the very first time as a member of the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus.

↪ An occasional essay exploring the gay choral movement and its significance—past, present and future ↪

The voice that many gay and lesbian people used to keep ourselves in hiding was almost always the spoken voice. It was the stern voice of condemnation we internalized from the world around us. It was the desperate voice of fear telling us what would happen if we acknowledged our true self. It was the whispered voice of secrecy—hushed words in confession—followed by the resolute voice of contrition that vowed to "try harder" to "change" into the kind of person we thought we had to be.

All those spoken voices and, for many of us, all those years of loneliness and self-hatred caused by listening to them.

But then there was the *sung voice*. For many of us the sung voice was a lifeline through school trials and teenage years, an oasis in music where we felt we could express who we were. Maybe it was the school musical or the senior class choir. Maybe it was the friends we knew in chorus who let us be, accepted us, and helped us accept ourselves by becoming our friends. Many of us found community in music and an avenue for self-expression, even as our spoken voices denied and dodged and deflected what our sung voices seemed always to know was *truthful* about who we were—and are.

Dr. Timothy Seelig, former artistic director of the *Turtle Creek Chorale* and a leader in the gay choral movement, observed the irony that many of his best singers had learned to sing in church—the very churches that condemn gay and lesbian people. One can surmise that, for a lot of those souls, whatever unwelcoming messages might have been issuing from the spoken voice of the pulpit, they were softened, rendered less harsh and more loving, perhaps even over-written entirely, by the sung voices of the choir loft.

We should not be surprised that one of the most vibrant and enduring strands of the broader gay rights movement as it has emerged over the last several decades has been the gay choral movement. From its beginning, the sung voices of gay men and women have captured and communicated the meaning of our lives, to ourselves as well as to others, better than the spoken word. The truth of who we are has come out more fully and more impactfully through music than perhaps any other medium of communication precisely because, as Peter Yarrow said, you can't lie with the sung voice.

Where all this leads for us in the BGMC is to places such as the campus of SUNY Fredonia just this past October. The performance was on a Friday night, and many of us had had a grueling week at work. We were tired, and scheduled for the very end of the concert. It was going to be 9:30 before we took the stage in a program that began at 7. The spoken voices were grumbling.

Finally our time came. We strode on stage and took our places. One of our section leaders, Greg Ciupak, read this introduction to an audience composed mainly of young people, many of whom were gay:

"Our opening number is particularly poignant in light of the most recently publicized senseless deaths of young men in this country, for whom being gay seemed impossible. We want you to know that is not true. In fact, today and for all of your years to come, your life is full of possibility. You CAN be anybody that you want to be, and you CAN love whomever you will. That is our message to you, and a message that you in turn must pass on in your community, to your friends, your families and to those who you know are struggling to find their voice. To those brothers and sisters and to you, we dedicate our opening number, *Everything Possible*."

Our conductor for the evening, David Matthewson, raised his arms. Then, to a room full of gay young people, fifty proud gay men sang:

*You can be anybody that you want to be,  
You can love whomever you will.  
You can travel any country where your heart leads,  
And know I will love you still...*

—Andrew Pollard

## Member Spotlight: Greg Ciupak

Time is an integral part of music, it is an integral part of the gifts we share with one another, and it is often an integral part of the stories of how our singers come to join themselves to our BGMC family.

In the case of Greg Ciupak, a singer in the baritone section since 2009, the time to join the BGMC came after years of being one of the chorus's most devoted audience members.

"I attended all the concerts from the beginning of the chorus."

Greg grew up in Buffalo on the traditionally Polish east-side and attended St. Luke's parish school before going on to the Buffalo Academy for the Visual and Performing Arts. Long involved in music, Greg—a guitarist in addition to being a fine singer—later co-directed a folk group at his home parish.

But the musician also became a researcher. Greg attended the University of Buffalo where he majored in psychology as an undergraduate. He then went on to complete graduate studies in Public Health.

In time this led Greg to Buffalo's famed Roswell Park Cancer Institute where today Greg serves as Scientific Research Project Administrator in the Department of Cancer Prevention and as the Director of Recruitment for the Institute's Data Bank and BioRepository (DBBR) Team. Greg's research efforts have been published in prominent biomedical journals and Greg is currently planning to pursue his doctorate in Public Health.



Although the musical and the scientific may not immediately appear to coincide with one another, in Greg they form a harmony that has added time as well as quality of life to countless persons around the world.

Greg's professional career has involved critical research on HIV transmission. Greg helped conduct clinical trials in HIV treatment, including one in which AZT (an early drug developed in the fight against HIV/AIDS) was administered to HIV-infected pregnant women in order to prevent transmission of the virus to their newborns during delivery. These

trials succeeded in reducing mother-child HIV transmission rates down to 2-3% and quickly became the basis for standards of care that are still in place today.

After years of research work that added time to the lives of others, and following the cancer death of a cherished family member a few years ago, Greg the researcher decided it was time to get back in touch with Greg the musician.

"I wanted to get back to something I really loved," Greg says, reflecting on his decision to become part of the BGMC. "By being back in music, I was doing something joyful. It was time to reconnect."

Soon Greg was standing with the chorus up on stage after spending so much time as a loyal member of our audience.

Greg is now in his second full year as a member of the BGMC and was recently named leader of the baritone section.

In Greg Ciupak, the researcher's patient temperament and attention to detail and the musician's skill and sensitivity combine in a quiet, friendly, supportive presence that has greatly benefitted all the members of the baritone section, and the entire chorus as well.

Time brings good things: good research, good music, and good people like Gregory Ciupak

# BGMC

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**JUNE 10, 11 & 12<sup>TH</sup>**

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 BGMC Summer Concert Series

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The Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus  
 proudly presents  
*Sounds of the Season*

Friday, December 10, 2010  
 The Riviera Theater  
 67 Webster Street  
 North Tonawanda, NY • 8pm

Saturday, December 11, 2010  
 University at Buffalo, North Campus  
 Slee Hall, Coventry Road Entrance  
 Amherst, NY • 8pm

Sunday, December 12, 2010  
 Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
 1080 Main Street  
 Buffalo, NY • 4pm

**BGMC**  
 The Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus

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The Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus

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