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Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus

Spring 2011

Crescendo!, Spring/ Summer 2011

Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus

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CRESCENDO

SPECIAL EDITION

Spring/
Summer
2011

The Newsletter of the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus

BUFFALO GAY MEN'S CHORUS

FOREVER OUR

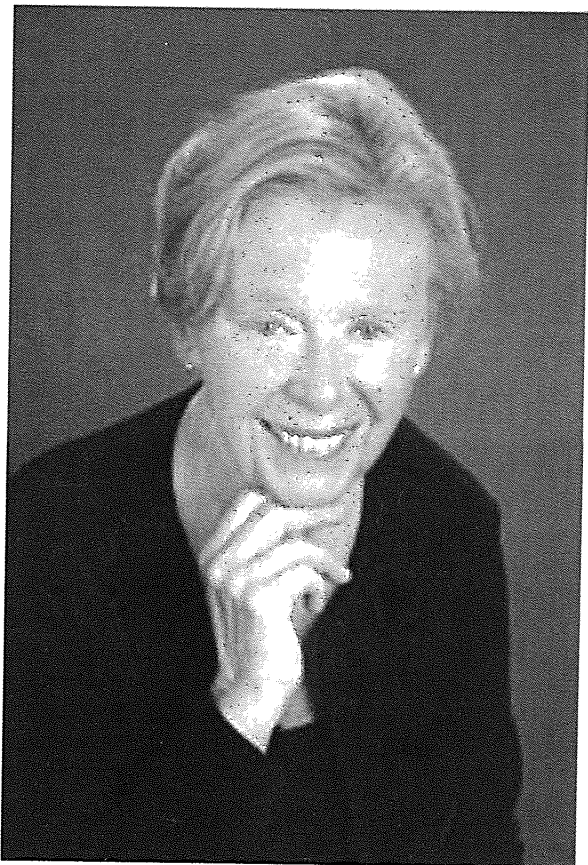
Barbara

From the *Oxford Dictionary of Names* we learn that "Barbara" comes from a feminine form of the Greek word *barbarus* and it meant "foreign woman". Apparently, the word derived from "the unintelligible chatter of foreigners, which sounded to the Greek ear like no more than *bar-bar*."

There could be no more perfect metaphor for Barbara Wagner's nearly ten years of service to the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus as our founding Artistic Director. A woman whose very name identifies her with the voices of foreigners, our Barbara has been the instrument by which those of us who have known the pain of being outsiders have found our way into the embrace of a community that has allowed our voices to be heard and understood through the universal language of music.

This is Barbara—*our Barbara*. She is our conductor, our teacher, our guide. She is the upturned face of joy in the power of music we see beaming during our concerts. She is our strength when we are tired, our determined taskmaster when we are lazy, our greatest promoter to a world that has not always accepted us. She is laughter, enthusiasm and grit all laced-up with bemusement, befuddlement and Converse sneakers. She is "an old, straight broad" who cast her lot with a bunch of gay men who wanted to sing, and wanted their singing to matter. And no matter whether you've known her for decades or you're her brand new friend for life, she is Barb—*our Barb*: the beating heart and soul of the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus.

(Continued inside)



Member Spotlight: Barbara Wagner

On the weekend of Friday, June 10th, Saturday, June 11th and Sunday, June 12th, Barbara Wagner will conduct the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus for the last time as the BGMC's Artistic Director.

The Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus
proudly presents

Live Out Loud

Friday, June 10, 2011
First Presbyterian Church
1 Symphony Circle
Buffalo, NY • 8pm

Saturday, June 11, 2011
Orchard Park Presbyterian Church
4369 South Buffalo Street
Orchard Park, NY • 8pm

Sunday, June 12, 2011
Temple Beth Zion, Buffalo
805 Delaware Ave.
Buffalo, NY • 7pm
*Interpreted for the Hearing Impaired

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buffalogaymenschorus.org
716.883.1277

BGMCO
The Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus

Editor's Note: From the beginning of this newsletter it has been our practice to include in each issue a feature on one of the members of the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus highlighting that person and celebrating their contributions to the BGMC. In honor of our founding Artistic Director, Barbara Wagner, we are dedicating this special edition of our newsletter to her.

Because of Barbara Wagner, how can we keep from singing?

From our first rehearsal on the evening of that searing day of September 11, 2001, Barbara Wagner has drawn from us the music that transcends pain and division, builds up community and celebrates love. That night, Barbara taught the small group of men gathered around her in the fellowship hall of the Unitarian Universalist Church on Elmwood Avenue the simple, beautiful American hymn, "How Can I Keep From Singing?" The song remains to this day our anthem and musical touchstone, the song we sing, arm-in-arm, at the end of each and every rehearsal.

Barbara Wagner was already a mainstay in the western New York musical community when she drew together with the founders of the BGMC that September evening. For almost 50 years now Barbara has served as the Minister of Music at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo, which acted as the cradle of the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus and hosted our first concert on February 9, 2002.

From those humble beginnings in the shelter of that safe and welcoming stone church, the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus has ventured forth, under Barbara's conscientious and maternal guidance, to "entertain and enlighten" audiences around western New York and beyond.

One of those early performances took the fledgling BGMC to Blessed Trinity Roman Catholic Church where, confronted by protests, the chorus stood fast, heads held high, and delivered a concert to an audience of over 700 grateful listeners. As Barbara herself recounts:

"I treasure the extraordinary times—when we sang so well to over 700 people in the sanctuary of Blessed Trinity, along with our friends from the Unitarian Universalist Church. We all had to justify our very existence to the heads of the Diocese, but it was worth every word when dear Father George stood up after the Zulu processional sung by over 100 singers. He said simply, "Welcome to Blessed Trinity Church," as the audience leapt to their feet with tears streaming down their faces and cheers of triumph echoing through the vast church. We were singing to raise money to repair the church's roof and to give to Habitat for Humanity. It was the proudest day of my entire life and for many of our singers. A barrier came down..."

"A barrier came down." No single statement could better describe one's experience of Barbara Wagner than the absence of barriers. Her very presence is welcoming: a smile and a gaze that mix authenticity and enthusiasm so potently that she goes straight to your heart and draws out a response. And that response is always the same—you want to sing. To know Barbara Wagner is to know the joy of music; to know the insistent press of emotion and intent that draws breath to sound and feeling to lyric—the sharing of voice, the drawing together with others, close in, to render that which perhaps most ennobles our species—the making of music.

"How Can I Keep From Singing?" This is Barbara Wagner. This is her singular gift and legacy to the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus. She drew us together; she gave us our voice. Indefatigable, she coached us and led us and challenged us and drew from us more than we thought we had. And now, as we stand poised to move to the next level of our development as an ensemble, she graciously hands us off. Her work done, her journey with us complete though never ended, she leads us one last time, allows us to shine, and then quietly retires.

But we will always hear her. We can be sure that Barb will be out there in our audience clapping loudly at our next concert. She has been our greatest supporter, our biggest fan. We will see her face beaming yet, not from the podium but from the audience. We will see her clear eyes and draw confidence from her smile. We will hear her say "yeah" in that way that she does and we will know when she does that we got it right, that we rose to what she knows we're capable of doing.

You see, we will always have *our Barbara*, and she will always have us. We are "her boys" and we are the men of the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus. We have a mother, a believer, and a stock-solid supporter for all time. We know where we're going, because we know where we've been. And we wouldn't have been without Barbara. Simply, at the end now, we say: *We love you, Barb.*

My dear friends, my final concerts with my beloved men of the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus will be this June. These amazing men have graced my life with love, respect, splendid good humor (more than you could ever imagine!) and an unbridled zest for life. Most of all, they have shared with me their love for singing and their willingness to trust a "straight old broad" that many of them did not even know nine years ago.

Back then, for me, it was love at first sight. I knew right away that we could make beautiful music together and, hopefully, make a difference in and out of the gay community. I've been told on many occasions that we have done this well, and my love for these men has only grown over our years together.

We have received many awards along the way—many "Best of Buffalo" awards, the prestigious Arts Council Award, and a recent Community Service Award from Aids Community Services. We've graced the stages of schools, churches, theaters, Pride events, and twice, the stages of international gay and lesbian choral (GALA) festivals. We now have a well-established reputation in the gay choral movement on which we can continue to build. We're even recognized by people in elevators during these weeklong events!

We've sung twice with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra and I remember that first appearance in Kleinhans Music Hall so very well. We were warmed up and ready to make our debut with the singing of Faure's exquisite "Cantique de Jean Racine". As my beautifully prepared men left the warm-up space two-by-two, I began to feel the tears starting. They had begun to sing so well, and I was so proud. I felt like the mother bird who has taught her fledglings and now they were about to take flight. As I watched them take their places on the risers it began to dawn on me that we were again breaking a major barrier. Seventy proud gay men were about to sing on the stage of Kleinhans Music Hall for the very first time. When the final notes of our performance died away the audience stood and cheered for these men who were singing for their lives.

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The Newsletter of the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus
Editor: Andrew C. Pollard
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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.

Your tax-deductible contribution is always deeply appreciated, payable to "The Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus"

Through our years of making music that touches hearts and changes minds we've listened to stories of how the BGMC has impacted the life journeys of strangers and friends alike. We've heard from youth who have told us that we saved their lives. We've heard from adults who tell us their stories of coming out. As the family that we are, we've struggled and argued when we needed to, but we love each other in spite of our differences. The memories we have made and my dreams for many more positive successes feed my soul and assure me that the work and music of the BGMC will continue proudly into the future.

There will be more concerts, more benefits, more people approaching us with tears of gratitude, more special moments that knit together the fabric of this chorus that I will always hold deeply in my heart. I've loved every moment and I treasure having been a part of this special group of men who have lifted their voices so that barriers could fall.

The barriers will continue to fall as we continue to sing for the lives of the persecuted every week. I have been blessed to share the triumphs (and, yes, even the struggles) with "my boys" for the past 10 years. Thank you for having faith in me.

With Much Love,
Barb

President's Note

As we near the end of our 9th season, the BGMC is experiencing the end of one era and the beginning of the next. Our beloved Barbara Wagner is retiring her position as Artistic Director of the BGMC.

Our June 10-12 concert series, "Live Out Loud," celebrates how far we have come under Barbara's leadership with a collection of songs containing strong melodies, complex harmonies and messages of civil rights, praise, belief and guidance. It is fitting that Barbara has chosen such powerful music for her final performance with the BGMC because it has been her time with us over these



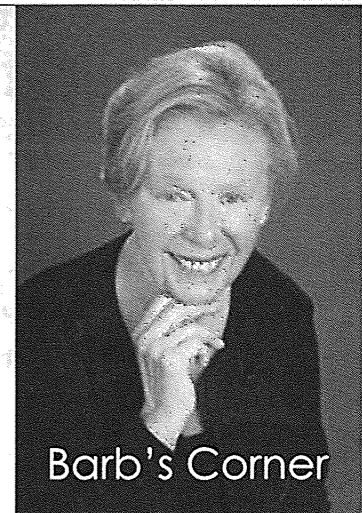
past nine years that has enabled us to present such a vivid and challenging program.

The end of this season also sees me ending my term as President of the BGMC. It has been my honor and privilege to serve on the Board of Directors for the past six years and as President for the last two. These years have been a learning and growth experience for me personally, and I am thankful for Barbara Wagner's friendship and guidance.

Our faithful supporters have enabled the BGMC to grow and prosper these past nine years and your continued support is what will help propel us forward on our journey as we embark on our next chapter. Thank you friends, donors and supporters for all that you do for the men of the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus, our music and our mission.

We look forward to seeing all of you at one of our final farewell concerts for the original Artistic Director of the BGMC, Barbara Wagner. Again, know of my gratitude for the love and support that you have shown the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus over the years and please join with me in conveying to Barbara, on behalf of the entire BGMC family, our warmest regards and best wishes as she retires from our podium, but never from our hearts.

Yours in Harmony,
Christopher S. Babbitt, President, BGMC



Barb's Corner



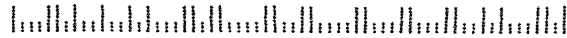
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