

GLC Voice
April 18, 1983

Gay Choral Festival Scheduled at Lincoln Center Next September

New York's Lincoln Center will be the site of the first North American gay choral festival, to be held September 8-11, 1983.

"Come Out and Sing Together!" (aka COAST) is the name of the festival, and participants will come from members of the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA Choruses). More than 1000 singers from the U.S. and Canada are expected to attend.

The COAST Festival will feature three concerts at Alice Tully Hall where individual choruses will be spotlighted. All participants will join one of the massed mixed or men's choruses during the final evening's performance at Avery Fisher Hall. The Fisher concert will premiere some works specially commissioned for the festival.

"There are now more than 35 gay, lesbian and mixed choruses in the GALA network, and they have become increasingly popular and prominent in their home communities," said Charles Carson, festival chairman. "Of course COAST will first and foremost be a celebration of music, but we hope it will also draw attention to our groups' success in presenting a positive image of gays and lesbians to the world at large."

Choruses planning to sing in the three Alice Tully concerts include the Chicago Gay Men's Chorus, the Denver Gay Men's Chorus, the Montrose Chorale of Houston, the Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles, the New Orleans Gay Men's Chorus, the Stonewall Chorale of New York, the New York City Gay Men's Chorus, the Seattle Men's Chorus, and the Gay Men's Chorus of Washington, D.C. Joining these groups in the massed choruses on the final evening will be individual participants from choruses in Atlanta, Boston, Columbus (OH), Detroit, Madison (WI), Portland (OR), San Francisco, and Vancouver.

Tickets for "Come Out and Sing Together!" will go on sale at the Lincoln Center box office sometime in June. The price range will be \$8-\$35 for each performance, with discounts of up to 20 percent for subscription orders.

Further information can be obtained by writing to COAST, 450 Broome St., #4W, New York, NY 10013.

The New York Daily News
Tuesday, September 13, 1983

Daily News, Tuesday, September 13, 1983

Gay choral fest

By BILL ZAKARIASEN

The First National Gay Choral Festival, called "Come Out and Sing Together," was given in Avery Fisher Hall last weekend, and it featured 11 groups from such diverse cities as New York, Chicago, Denver and Seattle—about 800 strong. Fittingly, almost all of them were on hand Sunday night for the finale—the world premiere of Ned Rorem's "Whitman Cantata," which the festival commissioned.

Though much of Walt Whitman's poetry is rife with homophilic yearnings, Rorem chose instead to set passages largely taken from the Civil War-inspired "Drum Taps" and "The Mystic Trumpeter," allowing the listener to hear what he wants to hear between the lines. This 20-minute cantata is surely one of Rorem's most distinguished compositions—simple, direct and affecting in its voicing (accompanied by brass and percussion), and almost ferociously noble in its emotional expression. Whatever the textual connotations, its appeal is immediate.

THE MAMMOTH vocal forces under Gregg Smith's direction didn't allow for many of Rorem's subtle dynamic markings to be observed, but the net result was nonetheless rousing. Three smaller groups from Chicago and New York offered another world premiere—Libby Larsen's brief, yet brilliantly effective "Everyone Sang," and New York's Stone-wall Chorale under Timothy Vernon took part in Calvin Hampton's rough-and-tough "Live or Die: A Ceremony of Healing," in which mezzo-soprano Kay Lighthill's soloing proved especially winning.

The New York Gay Men's Chorus under Gary Miller likewise shone—notably in John David Earnest's deeply moving "Only in the Dream." Almost all the music in this concert was American and exuded a distinctive and fresh American sound: bold, forthright, optimistic, and even on occasion a bit sassy—facets which each chorus rendered expertly.

A Celebration!

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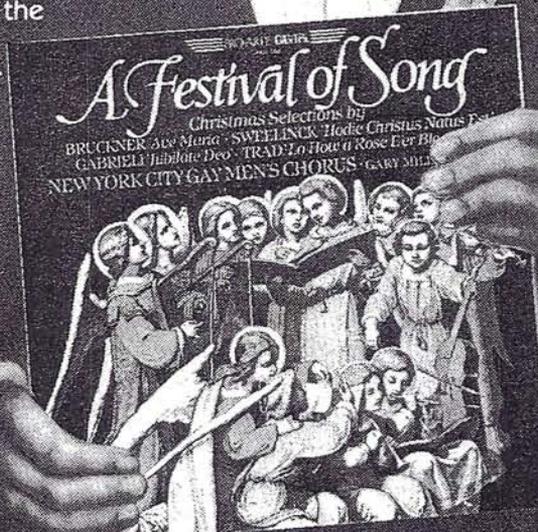
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Christmas Album by NYC Gay Men's Chorus Hits Market

The prestigious New York City Gay Men's Chorus has made their recording debut with *A Festival of Song* on Pro-Arte Records, one of the world's leading classical recording labels. The digitally recorded album, which is scheduled for release in time for Christmas, is the first recording by an openly gay chorus on a major international label. The album will contain Christmas music from the baroque and contemporary literature, as well as a selection of traditional carols arranged for male chorus.

A Festival of Song will include the music of Gabrieli, Sweelinck, Bruckner, and Conrad Susa's *The Chanticleer's Carol*, a work commissioned and premiered by the NYCGMC in 1981, with a text based on a poem by William Austin. Traditional carols from England, Spain, Germany, and Russia and Randall Thompson's *Alleluia* written in 1940 for the Berkshire Music Center opening as well as his setting of Robert Frost's *Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening* complete the disc.



Recording the New York City Gay Men's Chorus

For more than three years, the NYCGMC has been impressing their SRO audiences in New York's major concert halls with performances of uncompromising excellence. In every case the critical acclaim has been overwhelmingly enthusiastic. In their first review of the NYCGMC the *New York Times* gave these glowing plaudits... "Quality... Dignity... and Style," a classification the chorus wears with great pride.

Under the direction of Gary Miller, the chorus presents music of all periods and styles, with a special emphasis on reviving the great male chorus tradition of the nineteenth-century. They have also commissioned and premiered new works for male chorus, and composers who have written for them included Ned Rorem, Daniel Pinkham, Conrad Susa, Dennis Riley, and John David Earnest.

A Festival of Song is available at better record stores or by mail order directly from Pro-Arte by calling (800) 328-6245 or (612) 559-4166. Mastercard and Visa are welcomed.

Festival of Song Should Be A Favorite Holiday Gift Item

A Festival of Song by The New York City Gay Men's Chorus, Pro-Arte Records. Available at A Brother's Touch and DSP Productions.

Christmas and Christianity have been the inspiration for some impressive and pleasurable music. Apparently in acknowledgement of that contribution, the New York City Gay Men's Chorus has put together a new album of Christmas music called *A Festival of Song*.

The album is comprised of classical, traditional and modern Christmas music and the result is generally quite enjoyable. *A Festival of Song* begins with a pleasing rendition of Bruckner's *Ava Maria*. Those who are tired of the more commonly performed Gounod and Schubert versions of this piece should like this less familiar interpretation.

The Chorus also does a lilting excerpt from Thompson's *Frostiana* and an exquisite rendition of the melancholy carol *Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming*. While the singer's voices are

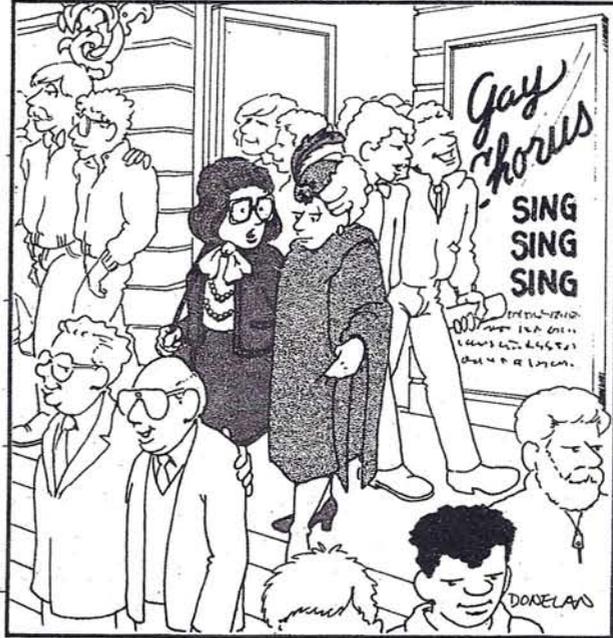
always rich and blend smoothly they don't quite meet the challenge of 17th Century music. *Hodie Christus natus est* and *Jubilate Deo* both tended to drag and have been done in more zest and speed by other choruses. The album concludes with Kountz's *The Sleigh*, a 53 second burst of musical energy.

For those of us who like Christmas music because of or in spite of its link to Christmas, *A Festival of Song* is well worth adding to one's collection of holiday albums.

—Larry Larson

IT'S A GAY LIFE

by DONELAN



...AND I THOUGHT ALL THEY COULD
DO WAS MY HAIR.

Twin Cities welcome gay and lesbian choruses from across the United States and Canada

GALA Choruses Festival II to feature three new commissioned works

Three commissioned choral works will be premiered at the GALA Choruses Festival II, scheduled for July 3-6, 1986, at Minneapolis' Orchestra Hall.

The Gay and Lesbian Association (GALA) Choruses Festival II is a national gathering of 17 gay and lesbian choruses from across the United States and Canada. More than 1,400 performers will participate in the festival, a triennial event sponsored by GALA Choruses.

The commissioned choral works are by Exxon Composers-in-Residence for the Minnesota Orchestra Libby Larsen and Stephen Paulus, and New York composer John David Earnest.

"One of the goals of GALA Choruses is to commission new choral works," said Richard Weinberg, artistic director for the festival and director of the Twin Cities Men's Chorus, host chorus for the GALA Choruses Festival II. "The festival is the perfect opportunity to introduce new works, providing them with immediate national exposure."

Libby Larsen's piece makes use of the text "Clair de Lune," by Paul Verlaine. Stephen Paulus has selected a text by Wallace Stevens for his work, "Sad Strains," and John David Earnest has adapted William Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" for his piece, "Jubilation."

CONCERT SCHEDULE

Thursday, July 3, 7 p.m.

San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus
Chicago Gay Men's Chorus
West Coast Singers
Seattle Men's Chorus

Friday, July 4, 7 p.m.

Gay Men's Chorus of Washington, D.C.
New Orleans Gay Men's Chorus
Portland Gay Men's Chorus
Windy City Gay Chorus

Saturday, July 5, 2 p.m.

Denver Women's Chorus
Dick Kramer Gay Men's Chorale
Boston Men's Chorus
Madison Gay Men's Chorus

Saturday, July 5, 7 p.m.

Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles
Vancouver Men's Chorus
Rochester Gay Men's Chorus
New York City Gay Men's Chorus

Sunday, July 6, 7 p.m. • Special Finale Concert

FEATURING: The Twin Cities Men's Chorus
Richard Weinberg, Director
Combined Festival Choruses
and World Premier Commissions
by Libby Larsen, Steven Paulus
and John David Earnest.

Under the direction of Phillip Brunelle

"Each of the works is very different in style," Weinberg said. "The audience can expect some very exciting listening at the festival."

Phillip Brunelle, director of the nationally acclaimed Plymouth Music Series, will serve as guest director of the festival. "Phillip Brunelle has worked extensively with Libby Larsen and Stephen Paulus, and is familiar with the works of John David Earnest," Weinberg said. "His understanding of their music will certainly enhance the performances."

The GALA Choruses Festival II will culminate Sunday, July 6, with a "Sunday Special Finale Concert." The Sunday concert will include a performance by the Twin City Men's Chorus. In addition, each of the commissioned works will be performed by group choruses of approximately 400 voices. The finale will feature a combined chorus of all 1,400 festival participants performing excerpts from Randall Thompson's "Testament of Freedom."

This commemorative directory was prepared for the Twin Cities Gay Men's Chorus and the GALA Choruses Festival II by the GLC Voice staff, Tim Campbell and Julie Miller editors.

CHORUS: Commissioning of new works a major goal

Continued from page 1C

include the premiere performances of commissioned works by two Minnesota composers, Libby Larsen and Stephen Paulus, and by New York composer John David Earnest. Singers drawn from each of the participating choruses will perform Sunday night — about 400 voices for each of the works — and for the finale, a chorus of all 1,400 festival participants will sing excerpts from Randall Thompson's "Testament of Freedom." Philip Brunelle, director of the Plymouth Music Series, will conduct the final program.

The commissioning of new works has been a major goal of most of the nation's gay choruses, according to 30-year-old Richard Weinberg, artistic director both of the festival and, almost from its very beginning, of the Twin Cities Men's Chorus. The male chorus or glee club, once a staple of choral contingents, had been declining in recent decades, and with it came a decline in literature composed for male chorus.

"Gay choruses have commissioned works by Ned Rorem, Conrad Susa, Daniel Pinkham and others," Weinberg said. "And in cities where there may not have been an established men's chorus, they've given singers a chance to perform music of this type. We just did Dominick Argento's 'The Revelation of St. John the Divine,' which is for men's chorus. I don't think a work like that would get performed if there weren't an established chorus to take it on."

GALA Choruses (Gay and Lesbian

Association of Choruses), the festival's sponsoring organization, includes 37 choruses. Plans are for the organization to stage a similar festival every three years. The first was held in 1983 in New York City. The next is planned for Seattle.

"The groups vary in size from 11 members to 130," Weinberg said. "They're not all men's choruses. Some are SATB (soprano-alto-tenor-bass) and some are women's choruses. And they differ in their purposes and goals. Hopefully, musical quality is their primary reason. And also to provide a positive setting for gay men to be together — speaking of the men's choruses — and to present a positive image to the greater community."

Historically, the precedent for the gay-chorus movement is perhaps the black-chorus tradition: the choruses and smaller vocal ensembles that began in the 1930s to tour from the black universities of the South. If the major goal was a certain quality of musical performance, nearly as important was the presentation of a positive image of black people to audiences both black and white.

"In a way, we almost have to set our standards higher than the other choruses in town do," Weinberg said. "We don't want people to say 'Gee, for a bunch of gay singers, they're good.' The truth is we're gay, but we're a bunch of good singers. Besides, in an area like the Twin Cities, I don't think a chorus can survive if it's not good."

But Weinberg's ensemble doesn't

identify itself as a gay chorus by its name, as choruses do in San Francisco, New Orleans, Chicago, Washington, D.C.; Madison, Wis.; Los Angeles, Rochester, N.Y., and New York City, all of which will be performing this weekend at Orchestra Hall. "Some do and some don't," Weinberg said. (Among those that don't are choruses from Seattle; Vancouver, British Columbia, and Boston.)

"We discussed that a good deal in our early years," Weinberg said. "We don't because we want people to understand that we are a serious men's chorus. However, everything that's part of our purpose, our statement of purpose and our by-laws is very open about the gay nature of the organization. It's certainly not done to hide anything."

Membership of the Twin Cities Men's Chorus has remained at about 75 since it was formed five years ago. Singers range in age from 20 to 48, Weinberg estimates. "And we have every possible profession in the group, as is the case in every other chorus," he said. (Weinberg, a native of West Hartford, Conn., holds an undergraduate degree in conducting from Duke University and a master's in choral conducting from the University of Cincinnati.) Many of the group's singers have been members of other area choruses such as the Bach Society or the Minnesota Chorale.

Since 1981, the group has performed concerts at Orchestra Hall, the Ordway Music Theatre and several of the larger churches in the

Twin Cities. Repertoire has been wide-ranging: medieval to contemporary music, as well as Broadway show tunes. The ensemble has enjoyed one major advantage over other local choruses: It hasn't had to scramble to find an audience. As those who attended any of the chorus's initial concerts will attest, the group's audience is immense. Though the audience of any local chorus varies from concert to concert, the Twin Cities Men's Chorus may have the biggest regular audience of them, even though it is one of the youngest. Audience surveys indicate the Men's Chorus audience is mixed: gay and straight.

The size of the audience poses a special challenge, Weinberg said. "Early on, I know we had a lot of support from people who just wanted to see what we were like. I have no doubt that if we relaxed our standards our audience numbers would drop considerably."

The line-up of choruses runs as follows:

Today, 7 p.m.: Gay Men's Chorus of Washington, D.C.; New Orleans Gay Men's Chorus, Portland Gay Men's Chorus, Windy City Gay Chorus.

Saturday, 2 p.m.: Denver Women's Chorus, Dick Kramer Gay Men's Chorale, Boston Men's Chorus, Madison Gay Men's Chorus.

Saturday, 7 p.m.: Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles, Vancouver Men's Chorus, Rochester Gay Men's Chorus, New York City Gay Men's Chorus.

Sunday, 7 p.m.: Twin Cities Men's Chorus and Combined Festival Choruses.

Variety

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MINNEAPOLIS STAR AND TRIBUNE

FRIDAY / JULY 4 / 1986

Gay choruses: A matter of quality, image



Staff Photo by Regene Radniecki

Members of the Twin Cities Men's Chorus rehearsed earlier this week.

By Michael Anthony / Staff Writer

Minnesota is known throughout the nation as choral country, both for the large number of college, community, church and professional choruses in the area and for their high quality of performance.

It's no surprise, then, that the ever-growing gay-chorus movement, which began in San Francisco in the late '70s, should find expression in the Twin Cities. Not only does the area have its own gay chorus — the Twin Cities Men's Chorus, founded in 1981 — but that ensemble will play host this weekend to GALA Choruses Festival II, a gathering of 17 gay and lesbian choruses from the United States and Canada — an event that will feature more than 1,400 singers in a series of concerts at Orchestra Hall.

The final concert in the series, at 7 p.m. Sunday, will

CHORUS Continued on page 17C

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

GAY CHORUSES

17 singing groups gather in Minneapolis for festival

It promises to be the sort of event that finds its way into the Guinness Book of Records.

It's the second national GALA Choral Festival, sponsored by the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses, and it begins today at Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis.

For four days, more than 1,200 members of 17 gay, lesbian and mixed choruses will gather at the hall, taking turns as performers and spectators. There will be one concert each evening, plus a Saturday matinee, and at Sunday's finale — are you listening, Mr. Guinness? — all 17 choruses will join forces for part of the program.

The first GALA Choral Festival was held in September 1983 in New York. Eleven choruses with a total of 650 members took part. New works by Ned Rorem and Libby Larsen, both commissioned for the occasion, received their premieres.

Three works have been commissioned for this year's festival. Both Larsen and Stephen Paulus, with whom she shares the post of Minnesota Orchestra composer-in-residence, have been asked to write choral works to be performed Sunday by the Twin Cities Men's Chorus, the host organization, under the direction of guest conductor Philip Brunelle. A new work by New York composer John David Earliest will be presented on the same program.

Here's the lineup:

Today, 7 p.m. — San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus, Chicago Gay Men's Chorus, West Coast Singers (Los Angeles), Seattle Men's Chorus.

Friday, 7 p.m. — Gay Men's Chorus of Washington, D.C., New Orleans Gay Men's Chorus, Portland Gay Men's Chorus, Windy City Gay Chorus (Chicago).

Saturday, 2 p.m. — Denver Women's Chorus, Dick Kramer Gay Men's Chorus (San Francisco), Boston Gay Men's Chorus, Madison (Wis.) Gay Men's Chorus.

Saturday, 7 p.m. — Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles, Vancouver Men's Chorus, Rochester (N.Y.) Gay Men's Chorus, New York City Gay Men's Chorus.

Sunday, 7 p.m. — Twin Cities Men's Chorus, combined festival choruses.

— Roy M. Close



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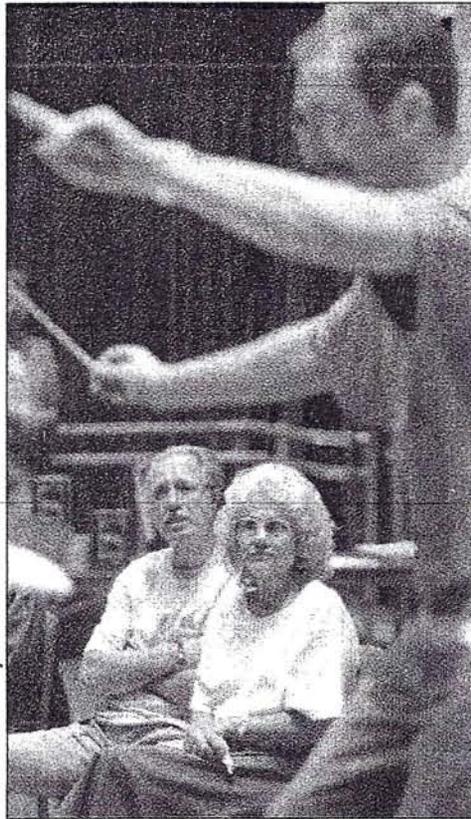
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The Times[®]

AN EDITION OF THE *St. Petersburg Times*

FRIDAY
JULY 12, 1996



Times photo — VICTOR JUNCO

Bob and Mary Griffith watch Jay Kawarsky conduct the cantata about their son Bobby, who killed himself.

A Son, His Mother **THEIR SONG**

■ A performance today details Bobby Griffith's suicide and his mother's change of heart.

By PAUL WILBORN
Times Staff Writer

TAMPA — The rehearsal hall was cold, even with 150 singers and musicians inside. Mary Griffith, clutching a tissue in one hand, folded her arms across her chest to keep warm.

Her husband seemed not to notice the cold.

Instead, Robert Griffith's mouth was moving. He was following the words of the singers as they performed a choral cantata titled *Prayers for Bobby*.

This is a story he knows by heart. The story of his son, Bobby, who was pinched in a vise between his homosexuality and his family's religious beliefs. Mary Griffith had prayed that God would change her son into a heterosexual. Instead, Bobby, at age 20, jumped from a highway overpass into the path of an 18-wheeler.

After Bobby's suicide, Mary discovered his extensive diaries, which led her on a spiritual journey. She ultimately rejected her beliefs that her son was going to hell for his homosexuality. She became an outspoken supporter of other parents with gay children.

Her and Bobby's story was told in the 1995 book, *Prayers For Bobby*, written by nationally known journalist Leroy Aarons. The book inspired Jay Kawarsky's 1996 choral cantata, which will be performed twice today at the GALA choral convention at the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center. Both shows, at noon and 12:45 p.m., are

Please see **CANTATA 8A**

Cantata from 1A

sold out. Some individual tickets might be available at the door.

Bob Griffith, a retired electrician, has stayed in the background while his wife moved toward a more public life. He is not a religious man and isn't interested in being a symbol of anything.

He is just a man who lost his son and still misses him. He leaned forward in his chair as words and music swirled around him:

"Now I see no choice but dying," the 130-voice choir sang. This dialogue is his son's final debate with himself and his God, recreated largely from Bobby's diaries. "Why did you create me, your poor misfit son?"

A color photograph of Bobby and his mother was set on an easel behind him. Robert Griffith turned in his chair and stared, feeling the emotion welling in his throat. He stood up and rushed from the hall. Mary followed him.

Later, as the eight rows of male singers dispersed in single file, the Griffiths returned. Bob Griffith is thin. His legs, exposed under a pair of shorts, are so white they could be marble.

He isn't an emotional man, but the music and the pictures were too much for him. Mary put her hand on her husband's arm.

"This just brings it all back so strong," he said.

■ ■ ■

Thursday, J. A. "Jay" Kawarsky looked out over the 130 men filing into eight rows of seats in the rehearsal hall. He was the only one sweating in the air conditioned hall.

Five choirs were coming together for a performance of his new cantata. They had never worked together before.

The 11 local musicians were sitting beneath his conductor's platform, turning through the score. They had been sent the music in advance. Some had studied it, some had not. There were two soloists to coordinate and a narrator who would not arrive until the day of the performance.

A friend had given Kawarsky a pin to wear during this week. It was a replica of a Prozac tablet.

"Welcome to my nightmare," he announced as the rehearsal started.

Kawarsky is a music professor at Westminster Choir College in Princeton, N.J. In his spare time, he writes choral music and con-



Journalist Leroy Aarons wrote the book about Bobby Griffith and his mother, Mary.

ducts the New Jersey Gay Men's Chorus.

He was vacationing in San Francisco last summer when he saw a review of a new book called *Prayers for Bobby*. He drove to a bookstore and bought the book. He read it in two hours.

"This is the piece I've been waiting to write," he told himself.

It was a story that every gay man could relate to. The agony of coming out to family and friends. The battle between what your body and mind are telling you and the religious beliefs with which you were raised.

It was also a story of a mother's love.

"This is such a positive story. This is not just about Bobby. It's about Mary and her journey," he said.

Kawarsky contacted Kendel Killpack, a friend who had written some short stories he liked, and asked him if he was interested in writing a libretto. He was.

"I was raised as a Mormon," Killpack said Thursday after watching the rehearsal. "There were lots of parallels between my life and Bobby's."

Killpack and Kawarsky flew to San Francisco seeking permission to use the material for a cantata. They met with Aarons and the Griffiths at Aarons' home outside the city.

"We just hit it off from the start," Kawarsky said.

That was last fall. After that the writing went quickly.

The cantata is divided into sec-

tions inspired by Bobby's diaries. Between those sections, a female narrator takes the role of Mary, reading from her letters written after her son's death. Behind those sections, Kawarsky used traditional hymns that Mary sang in her church.

The choral sections are influenced by both Bach and the Bee Gees, with a cinematic waltz in the middle.

The New Jersey chorus raised \$12,000 to stage the concerts there and in Tampa. Kawarsky insisted that the Griffiths be flown in for both shows, along with Aarons.

The reaction has been positive. TV actor Marlo Thomas agreed to read the narration for the New Jersey premier. She also will appear on a compact disc being recorded this fall.

In Tampa, Donna Red Wing, a well-known gay activist who led the fight against Oregon's anti-gay rights amendment, will narrate.

This Tampa performance, as part of the GALA V Festival, is a showcase for other choruses. Even before it is performed, three choruses have sought the rights to perform the cantata as part of their upcoming season.

For Kawarsky, this week in Tampa has been much like the rest of his year with this project — hectic but rewarding.

Next week, he will relax. He'll travel to Oakland, Calif. Bob and Mary Griffith will meet him and take him to the cemetery where Bobby is buried.

"I'm hoping that will bring some closure for me," he said.

■ ■ ■

Outside after the rehearsal, Darrel Jaquess is regaining his composure. Singing *Prayers for Bobby* has drained him. He doesn't think Friday's performances will be any easier.

"I think the emotions are really going to bust out during the performance," he said.

Jaquess, from San Antonio's Alamo City chorus, came out to his parents five years ago. His family is Pentecostal. They were not happy with his announcement.

"My family had the same reaction Bobby's had. Five years later, we just don't talk about it at all."

He said his mother had only one question when he told her he was gay.

"She asked me, 'What did I do wrong?'"

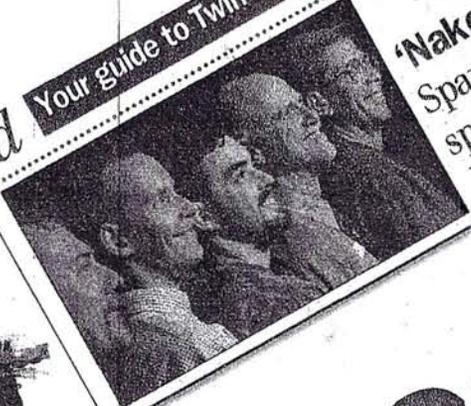
Your guide to Twin Cities entertainment

Variety Weekend



MOVIES

'Lost in Space'
★ 1/2
It's just that
E1



MUSIC

'Naked Man'
Spans gay
spectrum
E1

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B

Star Tribune

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Friday
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Friday
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Variety Weekend

E
SECTION

TODAY'S QUOTE

- "Goethe once said, 'He is happiest, king or peasant, who finds happiness at home.'
And Goethe knew — because he never found it." — *Elbert Hubbard*

StarTribune

Chorus' 'NakedMan' spans gay spectrum



Star Tribune photo by Bruce Bisping

From left, David Anderson, Christoffer Dordell, Chris Nelson, David Wells and Michael Branscom are among the choristers who confront the diversity of the gay community via music and lyrics in "NakedMan."

By Mike Steele
Star Tribune Staff Writer

David Anderson, a burly, bearded, 49-year-old state Department of Human Resources employee, favors leather vests, black shirts and a take-no-prisoners look. He has no sentimental delusions about the world. Yet when he first heard the choral song cycle "NakedMan" at a convention of gay and lesbian choruses in 1996, he was "overwhelmed, numbed, touched beyond belief," he said.

"It was an incredible connection between chorus and audience," said the baritone for the Twin Cities Gay Men's Chorus. "The crowd just wouldn't disperse. It hit everyone on some intense personal level."

So stunning was the performance in Tampa, Fla., that "NakedMan" has since been performed more than 100 times by

NakedMan

- **Who:** By Robert Seeley, words by Philip Littell, performed by Twin Cities Gay Men's Chorus, Vox and Out Loud!, conducted by Craig Carnahan.
- **Where:** Ted Mann Concert Hall, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.
- **When:** Friday and Saturday, 8 p.m.
- **Tickets:** \$9 to \$20; call 624-2345.

more than 30 choruses around the world. Today and Saturday, the Twin Cities Gay Men's Chorus will be the latest group to join in the "NakedMan" chorus.

"It's an extraordinary piece, by and about us [gay men]," said its music director, Craig Carnahan. "No piece before it has spoken so eloquently to the complexity and diversity of the gay community."

Turn to **NAKEDMAN** on E6

NAKEDMAN from E1**'NakedMan' song cycle speaks to diversity of gay community**

"It's of epic scope with music that runs from Gregorian chant, country-western and gospel to big anthems like 'Les Miz.' Sometimes it's just overwhelming. I've had any number of guys apologize for crying during [rehearsal of] certain pieces."

The work set out to make a statement about gay identity in the 1990s, a decade that has dealt with AIDS, the "outing" of closeted gay men and lesbians, the U.S. military's new "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, the battle over gay marriage, and an explosion of gay visibility in pop culture.

Philip Littell, who wrote the lyrics for Robert Seeley's music, treats gay people young and old, drag queens and muscle men, leather-clad guys and the boy next door. People who still talk about a "gay lifestyle" would have a hard time defining that term after hearing this work.

"It's a piece that forces us to confront a lot of themes, a lot of types," said Carnahan. "Some [gay] people still get uneasy around drag queens or around leather. Some aren't in favor of gay marriage. This piece forces us to confront it all, including our own internalized homophobia, and realize we're stronger because of this diversity."

You are what you wear

To dramatize the range of perspectives within the ranks of gay men, Carnahan has asked each of the 95 singers to dress in a way that represents who they are.

Some, like Anderson, will wear leather from head to toe. "I'm pushing the envelope," he said, "but it's important that a variety of people in the audience see themselves reflected on stage."

Tenor Christoffer Dordell, 27, an advertising account executive and president of the chorus, agreed that some chorus members will have to confront their own prejudices, not just those of society. "Of course, it's been troubling watching how the media represents the community — like at pride marches, focusing on only drag queens. But our community is as diverse as the population as a whole." Dordell was wearing a baseball cap, a sweat-

shirt and jeans, approximately what he'll wear for the concert.

"It's pretty much who I am."

Michael Branscom, a 38-year-old bass, is HIV-positive and

works as an AIDS educator. His partner of 10 years died of AIDS a few years ago. When he first heard "NakedMan," it was emotionally wrenching. "Having just lost my partner, the song 'Marry Us' stood out," he said. "You saw all these men onstage basically asking for recognition of something so casually given to others."

Another song includes the lyrics: "True to your memory, I will be brave and dance on your grave." It was too much for Branscom. "I had to tune it out then. Now, I find it empowering to sing, something that resonates in a deep place."

Learning other perspectives

Chris Nelson, 27, a secretary and artist who has been out as a gay man only a few years, said when he first heard "NakedMan" on CD, he didn't relate to it.

"There was a lot about violence and discrimination, things that had not been part of my experience," he said. "But it hit me hard when I began singing it. There's a song called 'Disturbing Boy' ['Soft of skin. Large of hand. Girl and boy. Unfinished man.'] that's about confused sexuality, the fear that there is nobody else like you anywhere, about biological mystery. I think this song and some others could be seen as objectionable if they weren't so frank, so honest.

"Still," said Nelson, "some songs are so strong they still make me uncomfortable, like 'Dishonorable Discharge' [about a gay man kicked out of the Army who becomes a homeless drunk]."

Branscom is a soloist on that song "and I'm as far removed from the military as you can get," he said. "But the idea that you could end up homeless, well, you wonder how many guys have fallen through the cracks. You wonder if gay culture needs to look after older gay people, whether it isn't just the military but whether some people get discharged from

Sound sampler

To hear songs from "NakedMan" performed by the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus, dial 673-9050 and press the four-digit numbers:

"O Disturbing Boy"5085
 "Dance on Your Grave"5086
 "Never Ever"5087

life and we let it happen."

'Anyone can relate'

Baritone David Wells, 51, a manufacturer's representative given to suits and ties — he'll probably wear Armani for the concert — agreed that "NakedMan" creates a community within its 16 parts. "It's poignant the way it touches on the notion of singing under a high sky, so alone, wondering why you feel this way. It's a metaphor for those who feel disenfranchised.

"Most of my friends are straight, but they can relate to the idea of a naked man, of being accepted for being who you are. There are a lot of people struggling with identity. This work offers real encouragement. The message is: 'We love you, you're not a freak.'"

"NakedMan" is ultimately an affirmation of the gay world. Would it be a good concert to bring parents to, especially if you were just coming out?

"It would be challenging," said Dordell. "It would be good for my parents to see what gay is, the diversity, and to see how hard it was for me to get them to understand how lonely I was."

Nelson almost came out at 20, but it was too scary. At 23, he told his mom and she said, "No problem." "She would have been comfortable with it," he said. "I'm not sure I would have been prepared."

Wells is insisting that his straight friends come to the concert. "They need to see it. . . . It's a spiritual work to me. We're taking the role churches should be taking: loving, not denouncing, not preaching hate."

Branscom, a former seminarian, will wear clerical vestments for the concert. "I'm wearing them as a symbol that there are gay people in churches all over the world," he said. "But the fact is we all wear drag, whether leather or three-piece suits. We all buy into stereotypes and roles. It's only when we stand naked that we can live honestly."

Star Tribune Editorial

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Our perspective

Musical outreach

Chorus sings, shatters stereotypes

If pretty much any group of people were to discuss personal growth in their lives, they'd probably conclude that they grew the most when they took on a challenge or put themselves into an unfamiliar, uncomfortable or even frightening environment — a time when they were forced to "stretch." That's why many would identify military service or college years as periods of growth. Using such analysis, the 21-year-old Twin Cities Gay Men's Chorus has recently embarked on an outreach effort that has the effect of working both sides of the stretch equation — in other words, both performers and listeners grow.

In consciously placing themselves into challenging environments and singing for audiences who may be uncomfortable with homosexuality, chorus members find that everyone benefits. Through the medium of music, stereotypes are shattered, connections are made and a positive flow of dialogue begins.

If music is a medium of communication, a choir is a form of community. Indeed, this chorus' mission statement reads, "Gay men building community through music." But it hasn't been easy to build community that way; in fact it took the men's chorus several years to publicly self-identify as a gay organization by adding the word "gay" to its formal name. It took the step, de-

spite concerns about myriad possible consequences, to emphasize the group's commitment to outreach and social change.

That commitment has endured and evolved. This weekend, for example, the chorus of 125 to 140 singers will perform in Grand Rapids and Brainerd. For a group that has performed mostly in the Twin Cities, it's new territory — and not just in geographical terms. Earlier this week, enough discomfort over the upcoming concert had been expressed in Grand Rapids that the leadership of the church where the performance will take place felt compelled to write a letter to the local Herald-Review.

"As a Christian congregation in this community, our policy is to open our doors to others as we follow our mission statement, 'To serve Christ by Sharing God's Love,'" the letter from two pastors and the congregation's president said. "While many of us are struggling with how we can live in harmony with those who live in a lifestyle that we perhaps don't agree with, we feel compelled by Christ's admonition to 'Love one another' and allow this group to use our building for their concert."

This is a good start. In opening its doors, the church is allowing a dialogue to open as well. And that, as the chorus has found over the years, invariably leads to good things.