

# Annual Choral Festival was a 'Magical Evening'

## Four Choral Groups Unite for Unique Performance at Sunshine Cathedral

### Review By Kris Cooper

Independent Entertainment Writer

On Feb. 16, over 175 voices joined together as part of the 3rd Annual Choral Festival held on the campus of The Sunshine Cathedral MCC in Fort Lauderdale. Comprised of members of The Fort Lauderdale Gay Men's Chorus, The South Florida Lambda Chorale, The Miami Gay Men's Chorus, and the Sunshine Cathedral Choir, the event was designed to bring together a variety of musical styles and traditions and to expose the audience to the leading GLBT choruses in the area. The evening was magical.

The performance was the result, but the work going in to it took months to prepare as each Chorus was invited to present those pieces they felt highlighted their group, as well as be a part of the mass choral pieces. The day began with the Choruses rehearsing for several hours in the afternoon, blending voices and styles for the mass pieces, under the direction of Peggy Joyce Barber, guest director for the event.

Barber is founder and director of the Nova Singers, a voluntary community chorus of over 140 voices serving as musical ambassadors for Nova Southeastern University. An inductee into the Florida Music Educator's Association Hall of Fame, Ms. Barber has left her musical mark on Florida for more than 45 years. This performance had to be a highlight for her.

Under Barber's direction, the mass chorus displayed versatility in style moving easily from Louis Lewandowski's Psalm 150 to John David's beautiful anthem, "You Are the New Day." Anthony Suggs' solo, backed by the mass chorus, of "City Called Heaven" was solid and beautiful. Hitting on one of the most popular Broadway and cinematic hits of to-

day, Barber led the chorus in a moving medley of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera*. Rounding out the mass piece was Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor from *Miss Liberty* which was one of the most moving moments of the night. Chip Clapp's reading of the poetic setting prior to the piece pulled it all together. Outstanding is the best word to describe it.

Hosted by The Fort Lauderdale Gay Men's Chorus, the festival has featured two primary performance styles. The first year was a blend of female and male voices, as this year, and last year was an evening of all male voices. The beauty of such an event is that it permits the audience members to experience each Chorus doing what it does best.

Todd Wiley, artistic director of the Fort Lauderdale Chorus and the Sunshine Cathedral Choir noted, "It is a great opportunity to let not only the members of the overall community experience each Chorus, but also gives the members themselves a chance to learn from each other, to get to know each other, and to encourage each other."

The south Florida area is fortunate to have such talent performing on a regular basis, and each Chorus showcased their selections and let the audience know of upcoming concert opportunities. "Each of the directors encourages their respective groups to support each other. It is part of the community, and we are strengthened by being there for each other," said Wiley.



friendly and supportive. One of the most enjoyable moments in this section was when Four Guys of SFLC performed Standing on the Corner from the musical *The Most Happy Fella*. It was a perfect addition to the evening and enjoyed tremendously by the audience.

The Miami Gay Men's Chorus was next

The evening, culminating in the mass pieces, began on a high note as the Fort Lauderdale Gay Men's Chorus opened the concert with "Come Travel With Me," inspired by Walt Whitman's *Song of the Open Road*, which was quickly followed by Do You Feel the Rhythm? which Wiley said was about as close as the Chorus could get to rap music. Well done guys! Ross Carson led the audience in a fun and entertaining number called "Sahayta," which had the audience laughing and getting into the swing of things. Closing out their part of the concert, Joel Johnson, James Perkowski, and Mason Wagoner led the Chorus in "Let Freedom Ring" which brought many in the audience to their feet at its conclusion.

After a set rearrangement, The South Florida Lambda Chorale took the stage with a more Broadway themed presentation which ranged from Irv Rothenberg's We Can Build a Bridge of Peace and Harmony to Not While I'm Around from the musical Sweeney Todd. In his comments from stage, artistic director Randall Leonard celebrated the diversity of The South Florida Lambda Chorale and how it encourages all aspects of the community and is a wonderful outlet for those who are not only GLBT, but GLBT-

and in what was a difference in style from their previous performances, they presented a magnificent Celtic Laud with Brian Shaw on the flute and Eric Jiji and Craig Badinger as soloists. Under the direction of Mark Spencer, the Chorus really excelled at R. Vaughan Williams' The Turtle Dove and Craig Courtney's Communion Invitation. This Chorus is always a delight to hear and this time was no different.

Closing out the first half, emcee Keith Riddle, from The Fort Lauderdale Gay Men's Chorus warned the audience, "It's time for church now!" and the Sunshine Cathedral MCC's choir took the stage. It would have been impossible to stay still for that. The Cathedral Choir exudes energy, excitement and can make anyone feel good about life. From This is the Day the Lord Has Made to Holy is He the choir soared. But there is always that special moment with this choir, and that came at the very end when Alex Crofts and Renee Ryan led the choir in I Have Seen the Light. Simply amazing!

Planning for next year's Festival is already under way, and this writer can only say, "Get your tickets early." as great things are ahead. On this night, the musical talent of our area lit up the community as few can do.