

The Emperor's new clothes

The Chorus stands at the crossroads of its musical career. In discarding the mantle of cult heroes to search for a wider artistic acceptance, the PGMC must now live up to the demands that such a role requires.

BY DR. TANTALUS

The appearance of the Portland Gay Men's Chorus as a permanent tenant in the new Intermediate Theater at the Portland Center for the Performing Arts marked a milestone for both the Chorus and the gay and lesbian community. That achievement is the result of years of hard work by the Chorus, its conductor, David York, and by the community's continu-

Music

ing support. The PGMC concert was the only single event performance to sell out the Theater during its opening celebration and congratulations are due all around.

As usual, the Chorus provided an entertaining evening and conveyed its obvious enthusiasm for performance to its audience. However, this was not the perfect concert reported in the following day's *Oregonian* by critic, David Stabler.

The first half of the concert, comprised mostly of Broadway show tunes, was inconsistent and musically uneven. "A Jubilant Song" provided evidence of the Chorus' improving artistry while "It's Hot Up Here," from *Sunday in the Park with George*, was the evening's humorous highlight.

However, the Chorus then beat a musical retreat with a lukewarm version of "Steam Heat," complete with an uninspired arrangement and dancing that seemed obligatory at best. Nothing about the dance routine indicated why it was connected to this song rather than some other: was it just time to wake the audience up? It takes more than a hammer clanging on a pipe to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

Later in "Broadway, My Street," the dancing returned, with Mr. York, himself, taking a twirl around the stage for inexplicable reasons, having crossed the line between conductor and performer. Again the hats and canes could not hide a song that was in other respects simply ordinary. With Fred Astaire turning over in his grave, the first half came to a conclusion.

At this point more than a few members of the audience rose to give a standing ovation, although half a performance lay ahead. We hope the Chorus understands that the standing ovation, once reserved for unique and stellar performances, has become as commonplace as popcorn at the movies. Perhaps in the future we can agree to give it prior to the start of the show, and thus dispense with this usually unwarranted nonsense.

After intermission the Chorus proceeded to go flat in the first sixteen bars of "Sail Away," until the piano entered and everyone adjusted by half a step. Lack of performance time in the



Intermediate Theater may have contributed to this problem. However, the new hall has a remarkable clarity of sound and will not easily forgive errors of pitch or lack of precision.

The performance continued to improve and the second half was far more musically coherent and satisfying. Of particular note was the amusing falsetto chorus in "Old Cape Cod." For an encore that old warhorse, "The Rose" competed with yet another tepid version of "Steam Heat." Running out of material, guys?

While "The Rose" has become the Chorus' signature song, it now deserves a long overdue rest. Surely these talented boys are not so devoid of musical inspiration that they cannot find other worthy songs to conclude their evenings. Never underestimate the power of surprise, nor the audience's ability to appreciate new directions.

In short, the Chorus stands at the crossroads of its musical career. It has risen from humble

beginnings to find itself now cloaked within the confines of the city's newest showcase for the arts. In discarding the mantle of cult heroes to search for a wider artistic acceptance, the PGMC must now live up to the demands that such a role requires.

The acoustics of the Intermediate Theater will not mask imprecision; choral performances will be won or lost on their own merits. And for their \$12 tickets, the audience has a right to expect more than endless repetitions of our favorite songs. The Chorus must lead and not simply follow what it assumes is the taste of its audience. Otherwise stagnation will be the inevitable result.

Was the evening enjoyable? Yes. Was it perfect? No, not even close. And patronizing reviews do more of a disservice to the Chorus at this juncture in its career than at any other time. They have the raw talent. Now let's see them use it.

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A HEALTHY TASTE OF PORTLAND

On a recent visit to Portland I sampled the fare at **Cascades**, a popular new purveyor of healthy meals located in the heart of the city's Northwest business district at 323 N.W. 23rd. It offers diners a sophisticated, eclectic menu that is undoubtedly new culinary territory for many.

Dinner entrees are primarily fish and fowl, with a few vegetarian and red meat offerings. Because Cascades' servings are large, many diners order from the "small plates" category. I chose a beautifully presented small plate of grilled Anaheim chiles stuffed with jack cheese, accompanied by coriander-heavy fresh salsa and slightly spicy guacamole. Other appealing choices for light appetites include goat cheese with fire-roasted red peppers and basil, pepper and onion shortcake, and chicken brochettes marinated with orange, fennel and pernod.

Salad choices are imaginative, too. The Produce Market salad, a meal in itself, is a beautifully-arranged plate of mixed greens (no iceberg lettuce here, but limestone lettuce, radicchio and

other seasonal greens); steamed potatoes, broccoli and carrot chunks; marinated green beans, red and yellow pepper slices; fresh tomatoes; regular and enoki mushrooms; grilled zucchini wedges and halved ears of fresh corn.

The breakfast menu caters of all persuasions. Traditionalists can order omelets and nitrite-free sausage or bacon. Morning adventurers can choose such dishes as blue corn waffles with lingonberry salsa, salmon hash, or sauteed tofu with fire-roasted tomatoes and onions.

Organic produce, hormone-free meats, free-range poultry, non-stick pans, minimal use of oil and salt, and no canned ingredients are part of the Cascades philosophy. The philosophy is not rigid, however. Dessert lovers need not fear deprivation. Dessert tray choices range from a burgundy poached pear to a chocolate hazelnut torte in fresh raspberry sauce.

Decor is simple but attractive, the atmosphere casual. There's a no smoking policy. The price range is \$5 to \$8 for a light lunch or dinner; dinner entrees are \$7.50 to \$13.95.

Martha Wagner, July 1987
WHAT'S HAPPENING, Eugene

Cascades

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