

Girls and boys of summer

It's time for baseball, movies, all-stars and music

by Dr. Tantalus

The Chicago Gay Men's Chorus, Manner-Minne of Berlin, Germany, and the Portland Gay Men's Chorus delivered one of the better chorus performances in recent memory on June 27 at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall.

Chicago opened the evening with the night's strongest performance. Beginning with some great dancing in "Jitterbug" from *The Wiz*, the chorus grabbed the audience by the throat and didn't let go until it was time to leave the stage. Regular readers of this column know that it takes more than a couple of flashy dance steps to impress Dr. Tantalus and his

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scalpel-wielding assistant, Nurse Consuelo. Fortunately the chorus also put on a fine display of musicality throughout their set.

Chicago's chorus and small ensemble, Encore, also enjoy the benefit of accompanist Patrick Sinozich, whose stellar play at the keyboard was impossible to miss. Encore's enthusiastic performance also reflected well on Mr. Sinozich, as he serves as their director. Their best performance came in a rousing version of "Chicago, Illinois." (Not the schmaltzy "Wind beneath My Wings," which was well performed, but which deserves to be retired by all gay choruses for about three years.)

The costs of travel limited Manner-Minne to only 14 of its members, which makes an evaluation of their chorus a somewhat difficult job. Nevertheless, festooned in berets and colorful scarves, they easily charmed the crowd. Nurse Consuelo was impressed with their simple but ingenious costume changes, obviously designed for the rigors of travel.

Their drag version of "Bruderchen" from *Hansel and Gretel*, with chorus members dressed as trees, mushrooms and a bunny, was the audience favorite. A '60s medley, including a version of "Downtown" in German, was also a success. And not to be out-schmaltzed, the chorus performed "Somewhere Out There."

After intermission, Portland and its small ensemble, Cascade, performed. Of particular note during Cascade's performance was Jeff Prather's clear and high tenor voice, which stayed within the overall blend of the group and gave it an upper end of great clarity.

A commissioned work, "In Solemn Defiance" by John David Earnest, based on a poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay, provided the most interest during Portland's performance. Mr. Earnest's program notes indicate his attempt to produce a work that reflects the conflicting emotions inherent in Millay's work, and by and large he succeeded. The contrast between oboist Fred Korman's solitary and sad musical voice and the chorus's was particularly effective. Good job, Fred!

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It's summertime, and the girls and boys of summer are stepping up to the plate to see if they can match last season's success or surpass last year's performance.

Like baseball and the movies, summer brings out the heavyweights of the music business to capture an audience—generally youthful—that has extra time on its hands. Unlike the major leagues, however, one successful performance in every three tries is not a guarantee of an invitation to spring training the following year.

This summer we follow three all-stars in their attempts to duplicate past feats of glory.

Annie Lennox: Diva

She's been in the senior circuit for more than 10 years. Her former team, the Eurythmics, had some problems in recent years and slipped badly in the standings. Despite that fact, the Doctor and Nurse Consuelo have remained two of her biggest fans, staying to cheer when others have rudely discarded her into the recycling bins.

While we won't pretend that the diva on this recording is Maria Callas or that the effort is perfect, it comes a lot closer to living up to its namesake than we had any right to expect. Lennox's voice is its usual great self, all strength and clarity, but the world is full of good singers stuck with bad material. It is the quality of the songs that makes her first solo effort worth hearing.

Soul II Soul: Vol. III, Just Right

Another record, another title that dares you to contradict it.

Like some sluggers, Soul II Soul has found life at the plate either feast or famine, hit or miss. On its first two efforts, this collection of soul-pop-jazz-fusion artists hit a couple over the centerfield fence with soaring tunes like "Keep on Movin'," "Back to Life" and "A Dream's a Dream." Otherwise, it engaged in the quasi-rap dialogue of its spiritual-musical leader, Jazze B., which no amount of sincerity could lift into the first row of bleachers.

Given the fact that members of Soul II Soul were in a bad auto accident some time ago, one wonders whether they pulled songs out of their musical closet to keep their name in the public eye. From this box set, buy "Keep on Movin'," the remix of "Back to Life," Vol. II for its consistency and wait until next year to buy your season ticket with Soul II Soul.

k.d.lang: Ingenue

Wow. Three out of three. Calling yourself an ingenue is even worse than being a diva. At least divas get to be sarcastic, bitchy, unreasonable and intolerant because they are talented (a theory popularized by many unreasonable and intolerant people who are short in the talent department to explain their unbearable behavior).

In contrast, my faithful, if outdated, Webster's defines an ingenue as a "naive girl or young woman." It must lose something in the translation. But really, k.d. lang, an "ingenue"? Give me a break. Whatever happened to that "big-boned gal" she used to sing about? Maybe she is not getting enough protein in her diet these days.

Make no mistake, lang's vocal talents are tremendous, a veritable vocal clean-up hitter. (Sings right, bats left.) But as we said earlier, if you get stuck with poor material, you can sing your guts out and only sound so good. (Just look at what happened to that poor Roseanne Barr when she tried to sing the national anthem. It made her—ahem—cough.)

On this recording, lang and her longtime songwriting partner, Ben Mink, bear the brunt of this blunt assessment. The songs are all languid and dreamy, and indeed, the listener is sorely tempted to fall asleep. One longs for the days of songs that she could belt to hell and back without stopping for a breath of air.

But lang ain't no ingenue, whether she likes it or not. And that's what we say about *Ingenue*: Not!

What I'm doing to fight the OCA:

I try to talk to people outside of the gay community about the impact of the OCA's initiative. I speak to people who might not be aware of the seriousness of amending the state constitution in this manner. I talk to people so that they see me as a real person who will be hurt if this initiative passes.

Dr. Tantalus



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Kristine L. Falco, Psy.D.

Licensed Clinical Psychologist

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