

On a rising note

Continued from page 17



Top: PLC in 1987 with director Juliette Wyers (far left); above: in 1988 with director Casey Chaney (far left, standing); below: in 1995 with director Lynda Garner (far right, front row); at right: marquee for the 1991 Lesbian and Gay Pride concert



She half-jokingly admits PLC has provided opportunities to meet potential partners.

"There are lots of choir couples. Let's face it, there's a good chance you'll meet someone in a group of 60 or 70 suspected lesbians," says Larsen, who met her partner Kristan Burkert via the choir. "But if that's all someone was there for, well, I don't think she'd stay very long, because it's a lot of work." (More specifically, weekly three-and-a-half-hour rehearsals for much of the year, not to mention performances and tours.)

Clearly, however, PLC members are in the choir for the music and the camaraderie. And over the years the feeling of strength through numbers has manifested itself in myriad ways.

When anti-gay initiative campaigns were waged in Oregon in 1992 and 1994, PLC, along with the Portland Gay Men's Chorus, banded together to sing for justice.

During Ballot Measure 9, PLC and PGMC embarked on a joint tour entitled "We Sing Out," and visited places like Klamath Falls and Coos Bay.

Anyone living in Oregon during that time knows how intense the climate was—and how dangerous being out could be.

"There was definitely some apprehension," says Larsen, "but we discussed ways to diffuse hostility, and learned ways to stay safe."

And every once in a while there was a meeting of hearts.

"After one of those performances this woman threw herself into our arms," says Heron.

Apparently that woman had a daughter who was a lesbian—a fact that spawned angst and separation between the two.

"She said to us, 'I'm going to call my daughter right now.' It was pretty incredible," says Heron.

"It was a dark time and fear was afoot," adds Garner, "but we did this because of the strength of the group. There was a resolve."

Indeed, Larsen says when the choir was scheduled to appear at a church in Southern Oregon, PLC was asked to alter its name, i.e., remove 'Lesbian.' She says the church also wanted to review the choir's musical selections prior to the performance.

"The church was trying to be supportive of the gay and lesbian community in the face of Measure 9, yet at the same time they were essentially telling us to stay in the closet," she says. "Needless to say, they didn't acknowledge the irony of

the situation, and we elected to go someplace else."

According to Larsen, PLC was the first choir in the nation to use the word "lesbian" in its primary name. It is now one of only two.

"It takes a great deal of courage to stand up before the public and say 'I'm a lesbian,'" she says.

During the past decade, PLC has performed in an assortment of venues and for a variety of causes.

The choir has appeared at numerous benefits, at annual International Women's Day events, Pride celebrations, and at the Gay Games III in 1990 in Vancouver, B.C.

It has performed at gatherings of the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA), an international association of more than 200 choirs. During the spring of 1995, the choir also participated in the Pacific Northwest Women's Choral Tour presenting "Under One Sky."

Last July the choir, along with PGMC and Bridges Vocal Ensemble, participated in GALA Festival V in Tampa, Fla., which is being hailed as the biggest convention ever in Tampa and the

largest gay and lesbian arts festival ever worldwide. (President Clinton sent a letter; Maya Angelou was the keynote speaker; Harvey Fierstein hosted the opening ceremonies. National media including the Cable News Network and the Public Broadcasting Service covered the event.)

The choir has also performed in Seattle, Cincinnati, San Diego and Denver.

PLC even got a public welcome during a recent Portland Power game at Memorial Coliseum. The mention spurred a spirited round of applause and gleeful looks on the faces of the copious dykes in attendance.

In other words, PLC has been around, and according to its members, the choir is recognized nationwide.

Despite that, Heron notes the biggest misperception about PLC—at least locally—is that "we're not very good musically."

Yet she says when the group went to a GALA gathering in Denver in 1992, it received three standing ovations after its performance.

"That did not happen for anyone else," she says.

So why did it happen for PLC?

"Well, we brought unusual music," she speculates, "but I more think it had to do with the heart we put into it."

Larsen adds that 1992 marked the year Colorado was embroiled in the Amendment 2 campaign.

"We sang a Swedish song. It's translation was 'Live Your Life,'" she says. "It was a moment of clarity...a collective moment of clarity."

Garner, meanwhile, believes some of the choir's public-relations obstacles may stem from the inclusion of 'lesbian' in the title.

"I think we are prejudged because of that. People assume we're only performing women's spirituality songs or political music," she says. "But we do a lot of different things. We've added theatrical aspects, lighting, things that make for a much more entertaining concert."

She adds, "One of my pet peeves is that people underrate us, and these may be people who have never seen us or saw us eight years ago. It's a whole different show now."

Heron's father purchased daughter Cathryn a Peter, Paul and Mary album when she was about 13.

"I first thought it was so uncool," she laughs, "but then I listened to it—over and over and over again. It became one of the most influential pieces of music for me," she says.

Eight years later, her father died unexpectedly of a cerebral hemorrhage. He never got a chance to hear her perform with PLC.

Heron's 69-year-old mother, meanwhile, has recently gone deaf. "She has never heard me perform with the choir. She's heard tapes, but she never got a chance to hear us live. That really hurts," she says.

Says Garner, "Anything that is truly beautiful knows pain. Our music is born of pain but many other things as well. We sing our own version of Toni Tennille's 'The Way That I Want to Touch You,' you know, where she sings, 'I never wanted to touch a man the way that I want to touch you.' So much of what we sing is about life—about the urge to love and connect and laugh."

As it enters its second decade, PLC is honoring its own past by producing its first compact disc, entitled *Making Light*, which will include 16 tracks of works performed during the first 10 years of the choir.

According to Garner, it will cost an estimated \$20,000 to \$25,000 to produce the CD. The project is funded in part by sponsorships and an Equity Foundation grant.

"It's a chance to celebrate," she says.

A concert of the same name is scheduled for Jan. 25 at 8 pm at the Scottish Rite Temple in Portland. It will be recorded for the CD.

For more information about the concert, to make a tax-deductible contribution, or to place an advance order for the *Making Light* CD, write PLC, PO Box 8212, Portland, OR 97207, or call 241-8994.