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## HARMONIC CONVERGENCE

The men and women of Bridges celebrate  
their musical collaboration with a June concert

by Will O'Bryan

One, and a two, and a—"Seven? Apparently so. Bridges Vocal Ensemble, a local choral group composed of 18 lesbians and gay men is choosing to mark its seventh year of existence with an anniversary concert.

"We never got around to having a fifth anniversary concert," explains Cathryn Heron, a founding member of Bridges. "So we decided now was the time to celebrate our seven years of singing together."

### Music

Bridges will present its concert, "Seven-Year Itch," at the Main Auditorium in downtown Portland on June 6 and 7 at 8 pm.

Despite the itch, when Bridges members began this journey seven years ago, they didn't start from scratch. Bridges was the hybrid baby of the Portland Gay Men's Chorus and the Portland Lesbian Choir.

Some members of both groups wanted to bridge the gaps that divide lesbians and gay men. That was how they found a name and started an ensemble that was originally a subgroup of both PLC and PGMC. Together, they found a voice.

"Bridges isn't just a choir, but more like indi-

viduals speaking directly to the audience," said Bridges newcomer Marc Weaver, describing the intimate nature of Bridges' performances. "We share an experience together."

For seven years, Bridges has shared those experiences near and far. In 1992, while as far away as Denver for an international festival of gay and lesbian choruses, GALA IV, Bridges members took a giant leap in their growth as an ensemble. For Bridges to secure a performance spot on the GALA program, the rules governing the festival required them to declare themselves an independent choir.

Although circumstance demanded that the group loosen its ties to the parent choruses, it didn't burn its bridges. For the May 3, 1997, concerts celebrating the release of the Portland Lesbian Choir's first CD, Bridges appeared as a performing guest.

There's also some talk that June 1998 might see a joint concert with PGMC, PLC, Bridges and

the Canberra (Australia) Qwire. Reid Vanderburgh of Bridges proposed playing host to the Australian singers after reading an Internet posting from the Canberra group. Plans are still tentative.

But just as everyone has a unique fingerprint, Bridges' particular qualities seem to shine most brightly when it has a stage to itself. While the 1996 GALA V festival in Tampa was bittersweet for Bridges, it was also a signature event. Members made a quilt panel that traveled with them to Tampa to commemorate Trent Gagnon's and Ron Hale's history with Bridges. Commonly, visiting participants have adorned GALA events with quilt panels to remember fallen comrades. Gagnon's and Hale's spirit, members agree, infused the ensemble's singing at the festival.

Bridges found itself scheduled to sing on opening night at GALA V between gay men's choruses from Seattle and New York, impressive choruses themselves, with a combined membership of more than 200 singers. Bridges filled the space between these two giants with 17 singers—and brought down the house.

"We basically blew 'em away," Heron recalls, adding that Bridges earned repeated standing ovations during the festival. "We were the darlings [of GALA V]."

Perhaps the most heartfelt praise Bridges earned in Tampa arrived a month after the festival in an anonymous letter from a Florida man with AIDS. He wrote that hearing Bridges helped him



Members of Bridges Vocal Ensemble

realize that he wasn't alone, that he was part of a caring community and that life was worth living.

Through the years, Bridges has honed its style with a string of concerts that has tied its history together. It began with "LesBiGay—Out of the Closet and Into the Fray." Other concert titles that stand out are "Myth America," "Searching for Signs of Home," and "Faerie Home Companion."

Continuing the intimate tradition of the group, "Seven-Year Itch" will be peppered with stories, vignettes and introductions by Bridges members who intend to "share [their] lives with the audience."

Bridges will perform "Seven-Year Itch" on Saturday and Sunday, June 6 and 7, at 8 pm at the Main Auditorium, 1211 SW Main St.

Tickets are \$12 and are available from It's My Pleasure and Bridges members.

For information call 242-1675. Sylvan Rainwater contributed to this article.



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