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MUSIC

Continued from Page 1

"There is no chorus here this week that can sing better than you can," he said. "They're going to love you!"

And then it was time. The hall was almost full, and we walked onto the stage to thunderous applause. Our leader took the microphone, explained the history of "Millennium Mosaic" and introduced the composer, David York, in the audience.

And then Mensel explained how these songs about queer youth had special significance in Oregon. He informed the audience about the current Oregon Citizens Alliance initiative and how it would ban any mention or expression of homosexuality in our schools.

Suddenly, we all understood what this concert was truly about. It was about giving voice to the hopes, dreams and struggles of our younger gay generation—a voice the OCA wants to silence.

The energy in the chorus was electric as we began the first piece—and the most difficult one—"Cold Stone." Perfection! We never

sang it so well! And we knew from that point on this concert would be our best.

Song after song just flowed, and we finally came to the one piece that particularly addressed the OCA and its initiative: "Where Everyone Is Free." The song, which speaks of the hatred toward gays in society and especially in schools, starts with, "They beat us up in buses or behind the school yard gate."

We couldn't restrain our voices. We were singing for all the gay youth of today, for ourselves when we were that age and for our sons and daughters.

It was like a cyclone of energy whipping through the stage, out into the audience and back to us again. We finished the concert with the last song, "Truth Under My Wings," and the final words, "I am living free," ringing in the hall.

The audience catapulted to their feet with deafening applause. We had tears in our eyes, and our hearts were filled with joy.

Mensel gave the chorus a smile—a very special, very bright smile that said: "You did good. I told you they'd love you!"

Choral riff
Travel diary tracks the Portland Lesbian Choir as it makes a splash in California



PLC Director Terri Beemer (left) and Amanda Smith camp it up with the Ethels of Seattle

As a member of the Portland Lesbian Choir, I attended the GALA Festival 2000 last month. What a lineup: 140 choruses, 11 workshops and 169 concerts—all put together by the oldest gay and lesbian choral organization in the country.

Day One. Master of ceremonies Harvey Fierstein tells sad jokes, sings sadder songs and basically delights everyone. He and Kristin Chenoweth put a new gender-bending spin on the *Fiddler on the Roof* song "Do You Love Me?" to great applause. The highlight of the evening is the introduction of all the choirs. As each group takes its bow, its name and founding date flash on two rear-projection screens. The Melo Men of Paris win—not surprisingly—the most fashionable award of the night with their straw boaters, suspenders and rainbow ties.

Attempting to hail a cab at the nearby Hilton, Girlfriend and I see keynote speaker Kate Clinton, who bemoans her lack of fancy dress compared to Chenoweth's plunging black evening gown. I compliment the comic on her sensible shoes: well-worn black loafers.

Day Two. The Festival Women's Chorus rehearsal comes far too early for me, so I skip to sleep in. I never do go to rehearsal and wind up dropping out of the chorus. Nine other Portland Lesbian Choir singers, three from Bridges Vocal Ensemble, stick with it. I rationalize that someone has to be in the audience to hear them. As if to make up for sleeping in, Girlfriend and I attend two choral blocks (usually five choirs singing for 30 minutes each) that day.

Day Three. The Turtle Creek Chorale joins the Dallas Women's Chorus...and joins...and joins. Hundreds of them stream through the aisles to get on stage. After one song together, the women leave. The men sing a hysterical Esther Williams number complete with synchronized swimmers and pink bathing caps. Outside, we see the first religious protester. He leaves

when a woman attempts to have her picture taken with him. Two days later, he is back. This time, members of Lavender Light: The Black and People of All Colors Lesbian and Gay Gospel Choir surround him and sing "We Shall Overcome." He appears relieved when the San Jose police arrive to escort him away.

Day Four. I go through GALA Expo, where gay vendors hawk their rainbow wares. The Dallas women seem to be everywhere, easily recognizable by their big hair. My mother clues me in later that the wedding cake hairdos are to combat the fierce Texas wind.

The festival choruses fill much of the evening blocks. Portland Lesbian Choir soprano Nancy Otis starts "Pentatonic Alleluia," a five-part harmony song. Director Terri Beemer, the queen of "blend with your neighbor," is heard singing over the rest of the mixed chorus.

Day Five. Comedy night with Suzanne Westenhoefer. Her joke about taking "the hover" position when peeing in the woods is overshadowed by her sign language interpreter, who steals the show when he acts out the gag. Later, the Cincinnati Women's Chorus joins the Portland Lesbian Choir in an impromptu pool party.

Day Six. Girlfriend does her best to calm fears and nerves as two choir members, including myself, get ready. I try to find my inner diva. And my black concert socks. We head out into the 90-plus-degree heat, cursing our black concert wear. Upon arrival, we discover two of our members are stuck on the road from Santa Cruz. As we rehearse, the absence of three from the middle ranges is felt keenly. At showtime, feeling incomplete, we go on stage. Just before the second-to-last song, the lost members rush on stage. The song is the best of the set, and we finish triumphant to a standing ovation. We are met outside by a tide of well-wishing Portland Gay Men's Chorus members.