

Vintage Voices

Portland Gay Men's Chorus salutes seniors

by Tom Stevenson • Photos by Marty Davis

If you ask them, most will tell you they are just common folks. In most cases, they have led quiet lives. They were educators and business owners, members of the military

and public employees. Through the years they found themselves living in just about every corner of the country. Now, as they reach the golden years of their lives, they are all a part of Portland's sexual minorities community.

If you listen closely to their words, you can visualize periods of triumph. You will hear about moments of pain and fear. Most of all, you will hear a story of finally coming to peace with oneself.

These stories will come roaring to life as the Portland Gay Men's Chorus presents the world premiere of *Vintage Voices*, a one-of-a-kind salute to seniors. The multimedia program will explode in a whirlwind of dance, song, video and more featuring the works of local artists including composer Kate Campbell, videographer Brian Robertson, choreographer Paul Scardina and accompanist Michael Barnes. The entire show is being created and performed under the direction of PGMC artistic director Bob Mensel.

Vintage Voices is part of the yearlong "Season of Voices" series, which has included *Voices of Pride* in August, *Holiday Voices* in December and *Classical Voices* in February. The season will conclude with the *Voices of Pride* show June 12.

All of the concerts have touched a strong part of the collective gay and lesbian voice, but for those involved in *Vintage Voices* something

quite different is taking place. "This project is on the threshold," says Tony Stroh, PGMC executive director. "It is something that can really have an impact."

Both he and Mensel say there never has been a show quite like this one. Those who lives are the focal point of *Vintage Voices*—Dick Walker, Virginia "Gibby" Clarke, Walter Cole (aka Darcelle), Irv Ewen, Evelyn Hall, Mary

Beth Brindley and Hank Stack—are honored and awed by the attention.

"It is a wonderful thing,"

Ewen says. "I'm honored. And this is something that is going to honor all of those in the gay and lesbian communities who are older."

Everyone involved in the creation of the show insists it is designed not to deliver a political message or otherwise make a major statement. It is designed simply to honor those whose footsteps have created a path for younger people in the sexual minorities community.

"It is not meant to be a Pulitzer Prize-winning expository," Mensel says. "It's about honoring our elders. It will have its serious moments, but it is going to be filled with fun. It is very visual...very vibrant."

In many regards, the show will be a salute that looks at all parts of the "vintage" com-

munity members' lives. It will cover multiple decades: the 1920s, '30s, '40s and even into the '50s.

Vintage Voices will mix well-known



Tony Stroh



Virginia "Gibby" Clarke

Virginia "Gibby" Clarke might be 82, but she can teach some strong lessons about love to a whole lot of people.

She made it through an early failed marriage. She made it through a relationship with a woman who broke her heart.

And she is still able to take a chance and fall in love again. "For the first time in a long time I am very, very content," Clarke says.

Her life story is an intriguing one. She served in the U.S. Army during World War II. She married and had three children (who are totally supportive of their mother).

Clarke notes she really didn't understand the feelings she was having until much later. "Somebody finally explained it to me," she says.

"I had no idea. People just didn't talk about those things."

Clarke admits she is extremely happy about *Vintage Voices* but has no idea what to expect. She is, however, incredibly proud to be involved.

"I'm glad to be a part of it," she says. "I'm glad that someone has taken an interest in the older people."

Virginia "Gibby" Clarke, who served in the U.S. Army during World War II, has rediscovered true love



Clarke says she would encourage young gay men and lesbians to live with integrity and above all else to be kind. "You also need to have open and honest communication with your partner," she says.

Clarke is still highly active and is having the time of her life with her special new partner. She would not have it any other way.

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—Bob Mensel

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