

songs of the era with compositions created just for the show by Campbell. Adding to the mixture will be dance numbers of the era choreographed by Scardina as well as moving video footage put together by Robertson.

How the show was pulled together is a story in itself. Mensel first hatched the idea, and in meetings with others a more specific outline came to life. The hardest part, at least in the beginning, was convincing seniors to let their stories be told.

Irv Ewen

For years, Irv Ewen has been a quiet force behind the scenes, not only for the Portland Gay Men's Chorus but also local opera productions. He is one of those people you never will see onstage, but his work has graced the performances of endless shows in the area.

Ewen lived a mostly closeted life. He was raised in Portland and spent his professional career working for Multnomah County.

The longtime planner says he kept his personal life quiet until he faced his biggest tragedy in 1980. That was the year his longtime partner, John Swarmer, was killed in an accident.

The grief overwhelmed Ewen, and he found relief by finally breaking the binds and coming out. "I think people knew," he says, "but before that I wasn't open."

Ewen is moved to tears as he describes *Vintage Voices*, not because he was selected to be a part but because of what it means to the older population. "This is so important...you need to honor the senior members of the community," he says.

Of course, Ewen is thrilled about the recognition he is receiving by having his story told. Because he is actively involved with the chorus, he is the only participant who has heard his special song, and the tears flow again as he talks about his initial reaction. "It meant so much to me," he says.

It took Ewen a long time to heal after the death of Swarmer, but he found love again and has been with Marlo Dean since 1996. He definitely keeps active in his retirement, and being a backstage member of Portland performances suits him perfectly. "I like to be a part of it," he says simply.

"There were a lot of people who were referred to us," Mensel says. "But there were very few who said OK. Many people felt they just didn't want to have their lives become so public."

That is not to say anyone is disappointed

with the final project. In fact, Mensel says the mixture of stories turned out to be "perfect."

Among the issues and eras addressed during the performance are women's suffrage, the Depression, World War II, civil rights, the dance craze and more. They are told through the songs and dances gleaned from those times but also through the memories of the people being honored.

Part of the reason for keeping the show's message "upbeat and fun" is because during the eras represented, those feelings were representative of the culture.

"The '20s, '30s and '40s were very vibrant times," Stroh says. "The culture at the time—the dances, the fashion, the music—it was all so exciting. Even the common folks' art forms were high-energy. It was a fun time."

Still, to be gay or lesbian in that era was not an easy task. Several of those being honored took the "traditional" lifestyle path—getting married, starting families and dealing with a great amount of shame and fear before finally coming out.

Those messages became clear to Robertson, who videotaped interviews with the honorees. He has worked in the broadcast journalism field for more than two decades and has been at KGW-TV for the past 17 years.

The cameraman has traveled the world and seen a great deal but admits he was touched by this project. "They are such an incredible resource to our community," Robertson says. "There are so many things they have to offer,



Videographer Brian Robertson consults with composer Kate Campbell



Irv Ewen spent most of his life in the closet but now is thrilled to be recognized by the Portland Gay Men's Chorus

"The older gay people survived a lot. They went through a great deal. We need to remember that."

—Irv Ewen

and we haven't even started to tap into it."

Robertson says he noticed a connection shared by each of those profiled. "We have focused on only six people and there are millions of stories, but one common thread that connects all of the elders is fear...fear of losing their job, fear of family rejection and fear of violence in their communities," he says. "I do feel the six we have chosen reflect a diversity within our community."

Robertson, who is also a member of the chorus and will be performing, has the difficult task of taking the hour-long interviews and editing them down to a short clip, something he says has not been easy.

Campbell was commissioned by the chorus to compose the original music for *Vintage Voices*, and her task was equally daunting. She says she has been a "closeted songwriter" for years and has written a number of pieces, but nothing quite as big as this show.

To compose the songs, she acquired the videotaped interviews from Robertson and says she simply sat back and watched them as a casual observer. Then she watched them again, only this time she took notes. Her creative process was under way.

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