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DIVERSIONS

Always coming home

The voices of more than 100 women soar to crescendo. Even from the audience, you can see the strong individual character of each choir member: One woman sings with her arms straight at her sides, another sways gently back and forth during the chorus, a third forms a perfect "o" with her mouth for every note.

This is *Aurora Chorus*, part of the Portland vocal community since 1992. With participants young and old, lesbian, bi and straight, Aurora personifies diversity. It exists to demonstrate the uplifting power of music and the strength of women's lives. Choral performances range widely in theme and content but share one constant: Aurora Chorus sings for peace, choosing songs that inspire the feeling in the singers and the audience.

Aurora's annual December concert is not meant to be about one particular holiday. Often the show focuses on winter and the darkness, but this year the theme is *Always Coming Home*. Lesbian director Joan Szymko says, "The holidays are very much about homecoming, and being at home, whatever that home is, be it the family that you make or your blood family."

Szymko named the concert after a poem by Oregon literary doyenne Ursula K. Le Guin. The poem, found in Le Guin's book *Always Coming Home*, is about leaving comfort behind in order to go out and explore, and returning safely from the journey. Szymko composed an original piece for the show, setting Le Guin's poem to music.

This song will be performed for the first time during concerts scheduled for 4 and 7 p.m. Dec. 19 at Catlin Gabel School's Cabell Hall, 8825 S.W. Barnes Road. Tickets are \$18 at the door or \$15 in advance from 503-AURORA-1 or www.aurorachorus.org.

Other show highlights include "Seasons of Love," from the musical *Rent*, and "Life Is a Song," which was originally composed for a children's chorus. The kids themselves wrote the lyrics. Szymko observes, "It's really amazing how profound children can be."

Humorous skits by storyteller Anne Rutherford and Portland actor Tobin Golihar lighten the mood. In one skit, Golihar's gay character retreats to the attic to escape the family hoo-ha. According to Szymko, "The concert is going to be a combination of very warm, authentic, poignant music, with this really fun time as well."

Frosty frolics

Get ready to shiver. Just in time for winter, **Stark Raving Theatre** presents *The Cold Comedy Concoction*.

The show consists of four world premiere one-act plays, each with a cold or wintry set-



Lesbian Joan Szymko leads Aurora Chorus

ting. "Expedition" is an Oscar Wilde-style comedy that takes place at the South Pole, while "Mixed Messages" concerns a group of high schoolers stranded on the side of the road in the middle of winter.

In "Principal and the Pee," a principal who resembles President Bush cancels winter vacation and locks up the school, leaving his students to freeze on the playground. Finally, "Spud Toppers" is an office comedy wherein one character complains about her cold office, and a maintenance man hits on a gay office temp.

All of the acting duties rest on the shoulders of four people. The token homo is Joseph Bolembaugh, a tall, amiable Montana native who moved to Portland after graduating from college three years ago. His acting credits include *It's a Wonderful Life* with Oregon Children's Theatre and *The Hennessy with Triangle Productions*.

If you read his conduct reports from grade school, you'd never guess that Bolembaugh was a future actor. "I was a horribly shy kid," he says.

"I would barely even speak in class to answer questions."

All that changed at Willamette University in Salem, where he landed a nonspeaking role in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. "It was so great," he recalls. "There was a huge round of applause."

Of his four roles in *Concoction*, Bolembaugh favors the British explorer in "Expedition." But there's one drawback. "The British accent has leaked into some of my other characters, which frustrates the director," he says.

When he's not on stage, the 25-year-old works at Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children. Off the clock, he's a self-described "homebody."

From left, Chris Murray, Paige Jones, Joseph Bolembaugh and Saren Nofs-Snyder bundle up for *The Cold Comedy Concoction*