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# A Flight To Remember

Portland Gay Men's Chorus joins effort to  
commemorate 10th anniversary of 9/11

BY RYAN J. PRADO

On September 11, 2011, New York City will commemorate the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. When it came time for New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg to plan for the many memorials marking the occasion, he was quick to contact organizers with the Pacific Northwest's Flight for Freedom, an effort heralded nationally as the first major citizens' response from another state. And now, a decade later, they'll bring even more company—the Portland Gay Men's Chorus.

Just three weeks after the attacks—the remains of the twin towers still coiling smoke into the city sky over Manhattan, a nation grieving the worst attack on its soil since Pearl Harbor, the next step toward ordinary daily life seemingly inconceivable—came a response from concerned citizens in Oregon and Southwest Washington. Organized by community leaders Sho Dozono, Jack McGowan and future Portland Commissioner Nick Fish, Flight for Freedom rallied 1,000 people from the Portland metro region to fly to New York City, at a time when almost no one wanted to fly, to a place many folks were afraid to visit. They met with victims' families, blanketed the city with "Oregon Loves NY" buttons and T-shirts, and lent a much-needed economic hand to the Big Apple.

Flight's collective show of support was recognized worldwide, be it for participants' marching in the Columbus Day Parade, their ringing of the New York Stock Exchange's opening bell, or their stops at local firehouses. Flight for Freedom signaled the beginning of the long haul of healing for New Yorkers.

Now the Portland Gay Men's Chorus hopes to help in the ongoing process with a performance at the Flight for Freedom-sponsored Peace & Unity Concert at New York's Cathedral of St. John the Divine. A major part of the audience is expected to be surviving first responders. The chorus will present "BraveSouls and Dreamers," the popular composition conceived following 9/11, and the United States' reaction to those attacks.

Bob Mensel, PGM's artistic director for the last 19 years, visualized what would become "BraveSouls and Dreamers" following the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003. After a couple of years of discussion, Mensel settled on Robert Seeley as composer for the piece, and Robert Espindola to write lyrics. "BraveSouls and Dreamers," says Mensel, was a response from the arts community acknowledging simply that the country was at war. That the statement came from a gay organization reflected PGM's long-standing practice of reaching out to the entire community, not just the LGBTQ population.

"A lot of gay organizations are in service to the gay community, which is great. The chorus is often labeled 'ambassadors for the gay community,'" Mensel explains. "We had long discussed that so much of the new music that had been composed for gay choruses was more centered at gay-centric themes. There's nothing wrong with that, but we wanted to step out and develop some new music that



"There are a lot of choruses here and for various reasons we were the ones asked to go. That says not only something nice about the Portland Gay Men's Chorus, but it says something really wonderful about the gay community here and that we're respected and held in high esteem."

—BOB MENSEL, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR,  
PORTLAND GAY MEN'S CHORUS