# Portland Gay Men's Chorus

The Portland Gay Men's Chorus (PGMC) was founded in April 1980 to perform a concert as part of that year's local Gay Pride Festival. Twenty men responded to an ad published by Gary Coleman in the local community paper, *The Fountain*. That June, the group organized and elected officers, with the entire chorus serving as the board of directors. PGMC, which was formally incorporated on June 30, 1981, is recognized as the fourth oldest LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) “affinity” chorus in the United States. Its mission is “to expand, redefine, and perfect the choral art through eclectic performances that honor and uplift the gay community and affirm the worth of all people."

PGMC quickly became an institution in the Portland area, seeking to revive and invigorate men's choral art while bridging the barriers separating sexual minority people from the population at large. Throughout its history, PGMC has presented concerts with wide appeal, including repertoire ranging from classical to contemporary to camp, supplemented by dance, staging, and multi-media. Performances also have featured professional soloists and musicians.

With the outbreak of the HIV epidemic, over 120 members died from the disease. PGMC responded by performing concerts to raise funds for AIDS services throughout the state, including raising seed money for the Cascade AIDS Project (CAP) Pal Program. Founded in 1983, CAP is the oldest and largest community-based provider of HIV services, housing, education, and advocacy in Oregon and southwest Washington. PGMC continues a partnership with CAP, participating in the annual AIDS Walk and performing for various CAP functions.

The chorus has toured throughout Oregon, benefiting local organizations at its members' own expense. PGMC also participated in seven of eight international festivals of the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA Choruses), of which it is a charter member; it hosted the association’s leadership conference in 2001.

PGMC has commissioned several compositions and arrangements, including feature-length works on subjects such as gay elders, HIV, gay youth, and peace by composers Lou Harrison, David York, Kate Campbell, Robert Seeley, Anne LeBaron, Tomas Svoboda, and Tom Simonds. The chorus has produced a full-length opera, a musical, and five recordings and has collaborated with several other local arts organizations, including the Oregon Ballet and the Oregon Symphony.

Honored many times for its musical and cultural contributions to the community, PGMC received awards from the Metropolitan Human Relations Commission, Portland State University's College of Urban Studies, and the Right to Privacy Political Action Committee (now Basic Rights Oregon). In December 1984, PGMC was the first LGBTQ chorus to sing for the inauguration of a statewide elected official, Secretary of State Barbara Roberts. It also was the first gay men's chorus in the nation to have a woman, Phylis Myles, serve as board president.

In 2011, the group’s thirty-first season, PGMC had 130 singing members, over 100 support volunteers, and five paid staff: Artistic Director Bob Mensel (18th season), Principal Accompanist Michael Barnes (13th season), Conducting Associate Mary McCarty (5th season), Administrative Coordinator Terrill Grubbs (5th season), and Production Manager David Peterson (1st season). The board of directors is elected by the performing members. Adults are included in its singing, dancing, and support memberships without regard to gender, sexual orientation, sexual identity, race, religion, heritage, or disability. PGMC includes women, transgender, and straight singers among its performers.

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