



# **Orange Juice, Milk, and the Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Choral Movement**

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# Counter-storying

- Replacing false or exaggerated stereotypes with positive images
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (“LGBTQ”) choruses:
  - Safe place to construct new identities
  - Countering negative stereotypes with positive messages



# Presentation Outline

1. Anita Bryant, Harvey Milk, and Jon Sims
2. The rise of LGBTQ choruses nationally
3. Impacts and legacy of LGBTQ choruses



# Mid-20<sup>th</sup> C. Queer Liberation

- Stonewall Riots (NYC, 1969)
- Local governments updated non-discrimination laws to include gay and lesbian identity
- 1975: APA removes homosexuality from the list of mental disorders



# “Save Our Children”

- Anita Bryant
- Dade County referendum, June '77
- John Briggs
- CA Proposition 6, the “Briggs Amendment”



# 1977 San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade



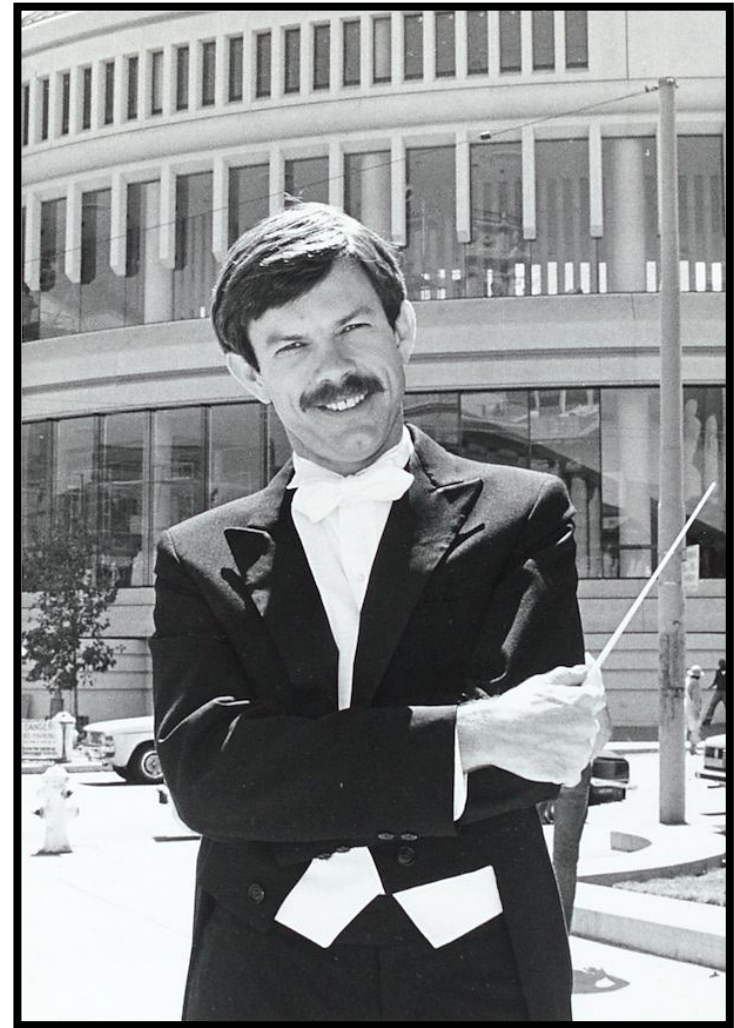
# Harvey Milk

- Local small business owner in the Castro District
- "Come Out" – The "Hope" Speech
- 1977 run for San Francisco City Council



# Jon Sims

- Band teacher from Kansas
- BME, Wichita State
- MM Conducting, Indiana University





# Harvey Milk, Gay Freedom Day, 1978



# SFLGFDMB&TC, Gay Freedom Day, 1978

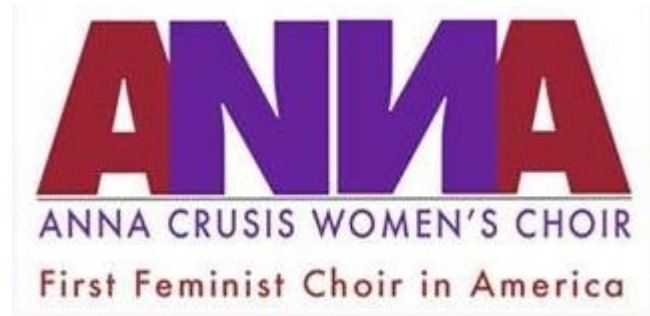


# “Group of men on balcony,” 1979



# Existing gay and lesbian choruses

- ANNA Crusis, Philadelphia  
1975
- Gotham Male Chorus, NYC  
1977 (became Stonewall  
Chorale in 1980)



Catherine Roma

# Milk / Moscone Vigil, 1978



# Queer liberation lacked group singing

- Movement culture – the articulable signs and rituals which define a movement's identity
- Music of gay culture came from solo traditions: cabaret, disco, and Broadway
- Choruses had to rely on traditional, white European-style classical choral music
- Choruses made composition and commissions a priority to establish new repertoire



# Spreading the message

- SFGMC's 1981 National Tour: NYC, Boston, Washington DC, Lincoln, Detroit, Minneapolis, Dallas, and Seattle
- New choruses formed quickly:
  - 1979: LA, Seattle and Chicago
  - 1980: NYC Gay Men's Chorus
  - 1981: Washington, DC and Boston



# Creating a national organization

- 1981: Directors and Managers meeting, Chicago
- Needed a national organization to coordinate chorus festivals and share resources
- “Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses,” now rebranded as GALA Choruses





# Other queer chorus organizations

- LEGATO: continental Europe
- SING OUT!: UK and Ireland
- Sister Singers: US Feminist Choruses



# Program from Jon Sim's Memorial



## **If My Friends Could See Me Now**

### **If they could see me now**

That little gang of mine  
I'm eating fancy chow & drinking fancy wine.  
I'd like those stumble bums to see for a fact  
The kind of top draw first rate chums I attract.  
All I can say is wow, just look at where I'm at  
Tonight I landed pow right in a pot of jam.  
What a set up holy cow, they'd never believe it  
If my friends could see me now.

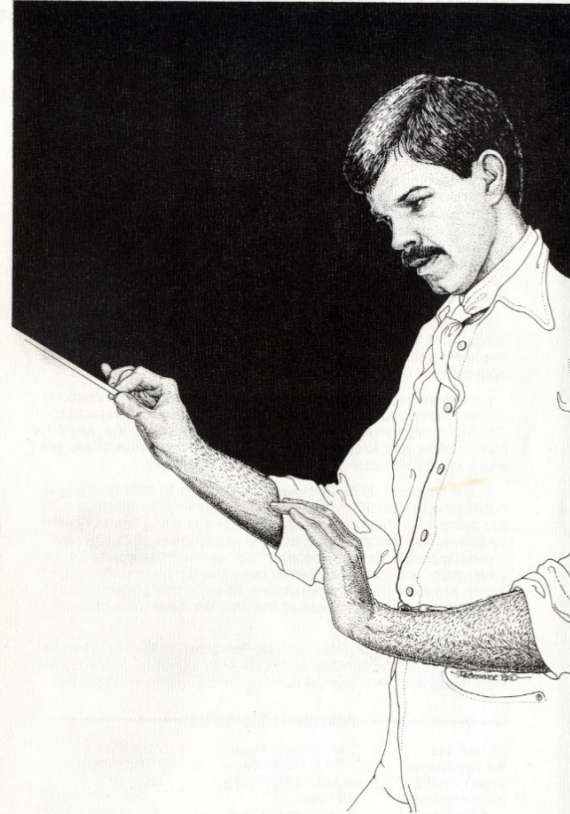
*(Original Version)*

### **If they could see me now**

That little hometown clan  
We're singing & we're playing with this all gay band.  
I'd like for all the world to see for a fact,  
That we're a source of pow'r they'll never send back.  
The closet's empty now, just like it ought to be,  
The time is right for us just look around and see  
What a set up holy cow, they'd never believe it  
If my friends could see me now.

*(Revised Version)*

Jon's family has asked that donations be made to the:  
San Francisco Band Foundation, 540 Castro, San Francisco, CA 94114,  
or Shanti Project, 890 Hayes Street, San Francisco, CA 94117.



**JON REED SIMS • 6 MAY 1947 — 16 July 1984**  
MEMORIAL SERVICE • GRACE CATHEDRAL • 3 AUGUST 1984

# Sociopolitical Impact of LGBTQ Choruses

- Advocacy and activism for queer people
- Expression of identity in safe space
- Increasing awareness of LGBTQ community
- Presenting a positive image of LGBTQ people



# San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus, 2017



# Choruses and Intersectionality

- Choral musicians are highly trained, but mostly in white, European “canon” music
- Choral music is complicated and hard to write quickly -- early choruses relied on existing repertoire
- Today, GALA Choruses has made equity and access a strategic focus



# Conclusion

- LGBTQ people have more legal protections than ever, but bigotry and stereotypes continue
- Successes of the LGBTQ choral movement:
  - Production of successful counter-storying
  - Safe place for movement participants
  - Provide platform for non-political participants to produce political agency



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# Thank you!

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