

sing out sister

VARIOUS VOICES 1-4 MAY 2009

Over the early May Bank Holiday weekend more than 60 queer choirs from across Europe and North America will descend on London's South Bank for Various Voices 2009 - 'Europe's largest celebration of LGBT choirs and singers' - four days of concerts, workshops and events, all of which are open to the public. Here's our pick of the best of the 70+ events: Words: Steve Bustin



SINGING OUT

All the choirs taking part in Various Voices perform in at least one concert at the Southbank, with 11 performances showcasing three choirs at each, highlighting just how varied choir music can be.

Sweet & Power, from Bern in Switzerland, are a lesbian choir singing songs devoted to women, while The Deep C Divas from Leeds sing songs of the suffragette and protest movements. At the other end of the spectrum, Podium Paris sing pop from the Bee Gees to Madonna, and Schmaz from Zurich include a bit of yodelling in their show!

Classical fans are well served by choirs including Cantare from Berlin, singing songs of the Romantic period and Classical Lesbians, also from Berlin, singing early music.



Die Fetten Koketten Soubretten are five male and five drag singers with their own darkly humorous take on well known standards, while Hellmans Drengrar from Sweden have a policy of having 25% of the male choir made up of straight men - can you spot them?

THE BIG GAY SING

A sparky night of sing-a-long fun, The Big Gay Sing sees Lorraine Bowen and Timberlina leading a musical romp through the camp songbook. Expect Abba, Kylie, Beyonce and an awful lot of divas! (Saturday 2 May, 8pm, Queen Elizabeth Hall)

SING FOR THE CURE

One of the classical highlights of the Various Voices festival, this is the European premiere of a major piece for choir and orchestra about breast cancer. Celebrity narrators Jennie McAlpine (Fizz from Corrie) and BBC newsreader Jane Hill tell the stories, reflected in the music, of people who's lives have been affected. The concert is raising funds for Breakthrough Breast Cancer charity. (Sat 2 May, 8pm, Royal Festival Hall)



BEST IN SHOW

Bringing together a hint of X Factor, a touch of Pop Idol, a large dose of Eurovision and the wit of Amy Lami and this promises to be the talent contest to end them all. Celebrity judges including jazz legend Lea DeLaria, DJ Lucio Buffone and TV star Chico will be praising and dishing the best acts that Various Voices has to offer! (Sunday 3 May, 8pm, Queen Elizabeth Hall)

WITH ONE VOICE

Another big classical concert, this sees that perennial crowd pleaser Carrina Burana (think 'Old Spice' advert) performed by a mass choir, alongside a specially commissioned piece by gay composer Steve Martland. (Sun 3 May, 8pm, Royal Festival Hall)



CABARET

Some of the best cabaret artists around will be strutting their stuff for Various Voices. Our Lady J flies over from New York for her show Gospel for the Godless while fellow American Lea DeLaria performs her incredible jazz. Jonathan Hellyer (better known as The Dame Edna Experience) hosts and sings at a night of small ensembles called Small and Perfectly Formed while Sandi Toksvig hosts the Opening Ceremony and a concert of songs about London, Voices of Our City.

For more details of all the events visit www.variousvoices.com



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VARIOUS VOICES 09

Europe's largest ever gay and lesbian music festival takes place at Southbank Centre London on the May Bank Holiday Weekend. Over sixty lesbian and gay choirs will perform more than 70 concerts over four days. *Various Voices 2009* runs 1-4 May; www.variousvoiceslondon.org.uk; tickets on sale at www.southbankcentre.co.uk



Going for a Song



With more than 70 concerts from over 60 choir, cabaret from the biggest names on the alternative cabaret circuit, world and European premieres, public workshops, masterclasses, film and expert panels, Various Voices, run in partnership with Southbank Centre, promises to be a highlight of this year's LGBT calendar. Most events are open to the public including choir concerts, outdoor shows, ballroom dancing and performances by some high profile performers. You can listen, sing, dance, laugh, clap and thrill to the many events that are planned for this fabulous experience.

Various Voices 09: The festival takes place at London's Southbank Centre this May Bank Holiday weekend, 1-4 May www.variousvoiceslondon.org.uk



Cabaret

Starring Samantha Barks - runner-up in the BBC series *Yd Do Anything!* - as Sally Bowles and Wayne Sleep, reprising his role as Emcee, Kander and Ebb's landmark musical turns Weimar Berlin of 1931 into a dark and sexually charged haven of decadence, its extraordinary and morally ambiguous inhabitants determined to keep up appearances as the real world - outside the comfortable sanctuary of the cabaret - prepares for the nightmarish chaos of war.

Alhambra Theatre 6th Apr - 11th Apr
Bradford
Tel: 01274 752000



Dreamboats

X Factor finalist Scott Bruton and Emmerdale's Ben Freeman star in this musical trip down memory lane. Based on the successful albums of the same name, *Dreamboats and Petticoats* tells the story of two young musicians, Norman and Bobby, who back in 1961, at the beginning of the pop boom, compete to win the hearts of their fans and also the gorgeous Laura. Written by the folk who brought you *Birds of a Feather* and *Goodnight Sweetheart*, *Marks and Grans* and featuring songs of the period, guarantees a great night out.

Touring all over the UK get more info from www.kenwright.com



Want a Boy friend?

Are you searching for that special someone? Do you think that your soul mate just doesn't exist? Just what can you do to enhance your chances for netting that love of your life? GMFA's Getting a Boyfriend course is here to help. This one day course will help you approach relationships with a new understanding of yourself and what you want from your love-life. It is designed to give gay men a greater insight into the processes involved in looking for a partner and establishing a relationship. The course covers the time from preparing for and meeting a potential partner up until about three months into the relationship. It is designed to help you understand

to, and want from a relationship as well as the qualities that attract you to a man. Practical exercises will help you to have a better understanding of yourself, and of what you look for in a relationship and in a potential partner.

All of GMFA's courses and workshops are free of charge to participants but places are limited and must be booked in advance. To book a place, go to www.gmfa.org.uk/national or call 020 7738 6872.

Getting a Boyfriend is a one-day course which takes place on Saturday from 10am to 5pm. The full list of dates for the course is:

Saturday 4th April - Brighton, Leeds, Newcastle, Norwich

Saturday 18th April - Birmingham, Cardiff, Liverpool, London

Saturday 25th April - Bristol, Leicester, Manchester, Sheffield, Southampton

2 MAY

Martin Neary *Joy and Woe*
(Liturgical performance, Choir of St Stephen's Church, Bournemouth, Ian Harrison, conductor, St Stephen's Church, Bournemouth, 10.45am)

Joseph Martin, Michael Cox, Alice Gomez, Rosephanye Powell, Robert Seely, Jill Gallina, Patti Drennan, Stefania de Kennessey, David Friedman, W.T. Greer, Joseph Martin, Sing for the Cure (UK premiere, massed choir of Various Voices Festival delegates, London Gay Symphony Orchestra, Tim Seelig, conductor, Royal Festival Hall, London, 8pm)
Jonathan Dove *There was a child* (Mary Plazas, soprano, Toby Spence, tenor, City of Birmingham

Sugar-Fela Tango, **Zygmunt Krauze** *Fields and Hills* (Sounds New Festival, CoMA Residency Orchestra and Choir, Allcomers Ensemble, CoMA London Ensemble, Gregory Rose and Sarah Leonard, conductors, St Gregory's Centre for Music, Canterbury, 5.45pm)

3 MAY

Steve Martland new work (Various Voices Festival Choir, Voicelab, Howard Moody, conductor, Royal Festival Hall, London, 8pm)

Param Vir new work (Orchestra of the Swan, David Curtis, conductor, Compton Verney, Warwickshire, 3pm)



Bob Henderson / Staff Writer



Various Voices

60 Gay and Lesbian Choirs descend on the Capital Over the space of 4 days and 70 concerts, 60 Gay and Lesbian Choirs are coming to London, from 1st to 4th May, to perform at the Southbank Centre. It's going to be Europe's largest ever gay and lesbian choral festival.

That's 2000 gay singers in town. Phew! 13 choirs are from the UK, 16 from Germany, 7 from Holland and 4 from the USA with others from Switzerland, France, Ireland, Scandinavia, Belgium, Croatia and Canada. (FYI the best choir name is the Deep C Divas from Leeds - brilliant). We can't wait to check out some of the costumes and dance moves too, as between them all they take on classical, folk, pop, disco and musical theatre, so there's bound to be a bit of Razzle Dazzle in the air.

We're also looking forward to 'The Big Gay Sing' (hosted by Timberlaine and Lorraine Bowen) a sing-along where you get to belt out the likes of Sette, Barbra and Bessie and 'Best in Show', an X-factor style talent contest (with celebrity judges DJ Lucio Buffone, Lea DeLaria, Chico and the ever lovely host, Amy Lamé).

There's a smattering of more unusual events, as a complimentary side dish to the main event of gay choirs. These include Ballroom Dancing, late-night cabaret, jogging and cycling, Flash-Mob events at train stations, and a sports day to mark the 10th anniversary of the death of the first out gay footballer Justin Fashanu.

Tickets have now gone on sale for Various Voices 2009 www.variousvoices.com and tickets for all events are now available via www.southbankcentre.co.uk

More from Bob Henderson / Staff Writer

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LONDON SINGS OUT FOR GLBT CHORAL FESTIVAL

London's Various Voices Centre is to host the 12th Various Voices Festival, an annual and gay Europe's largest gay and lesbian musical event to date.

Various Voices, which takes place every four years, will run from 1 to 4 May and feature music that is gay and lesbian-themed as well as the gods.

The festival will consist of a whole variety of events, including masterclasses, concerts and workshops. The festival is open to the public, as well as an opening ceremony hosted by Sade. Talks, a range of musical styles, from classical to jazz and folk songs to the pop will be performed.

In addition, the festival programme of 'Sing to the Sun' will be conducted by the choir by soprano Orla Orla, and will feature 15,000 tickets through the event, which is sponsored by Steve Martin and will be performed at the Royal Festival Hall, in 1999, the first in the series to take

place in London (the latter the Various Voices Festival of Song), there were just six choir choirs in the UK. According to organisers there are now 100 in the UK, including a Deep Ellum choir performing from the feminist, suffragette and trade union movements, the Brighton Gay Men's Chorus (seen on the BBC's new Choir Standings) and London's three women are included on the bill.

Such diverse ensembles as vocalists of Sweet & Power (soprano), and vocal group ARCO (comprising soprano and one female couple, and soprano in many from the Cornish and tradition), as well as the more international talent performing.

Various Voices' artistic director Andrew Brown stated that, as well as raising awareness of the LGBT community, the event will provide London audiences with an amazing opportunity to hear choirs and music unlike any they have heard before.

Photo: Ian Price/PhotoLink



ELLEN KENT TO STOP TOURING THEATRES

For the past one of the most successful producers of opera and ballet in the UK - Ellen Kent - has announced that she will be the last year her productions will tour theatres. The 60-year-old producer has decided to focus her attention on doing large-scale opera productions instead.

Ellen Kent, whose productions have toured nationwide since 1970, stated that she cannot tour with her company, the Ellen Kent Festival Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus, for her law to pay a 10 per cent of her income. "It's a business that is not profitable, but only one theatre to raise them," she said, in the same of season, Kent's companies are producing other shows and around 120 opera performances.

Ellen Kent's companies are also producing other shows and around 120 opera performances. They are making an average of 100,000, according to her production in 1999, 400. The production was the Romanian National Opera's first time in the Romanian government provided a grant of funding in the early days, it also brought the company from former Soviet states such as Moldova, Ukraine and Latvia.

Ellen Kent's opera production in the grounds of Leeds in 1999, in an arena with a seating for 6,000, the set was used to make a building, with the audience sold before the performance, and the show beginning with a procession of cows, bullfighters, horses and chickens. The year also saw the formation of a new company, Ellen Kent & Co, which will be producing and touring the new production of her work.

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Sing my sisters, sing!

Breaking free from the belfry, choirs are suddenly in, Steve Bustin reports as Various Voices hits London.

Choirs are cool. There's no denying it: since *Last Choir Standing* became one of the surprise TV hits of last year, choral singing is back in vogue and the 2,000 singers expected at a forthcoming gay choir festival suggests homosexual harmonies are just as hot.

Gay choirs have been around for a good few years now – London's Pink Singers celebrated their 25th anniversary last year – and there are now at least 23 queer choirs around the UK. It's not all sequins and showtunes, either; several of the choirs sing a classical repertoire and many have performed at the UK's top concert venues.

The Various Voices festival takes place every four years in a European city and this is the first time it's been held in London since 1989. More than 60 LGBT choirs from across the UK, Europe and North America are going to descend on London's Southbank Centre over the early May Bank Holiday weekend for four days of concerts, cabaret, workshops and performance, all of which are open to the public. Here's our pick of the "don't miss" events over the long weekend.

7, 12PM, RIVERFRONT, ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL

The festival's opening ceremony will see funny woman Sarah Tuskovig kicking off proceedings with a big outdoor show on the banks of the Thames. As it's May Day, 40 international choirs will be singing traditional songs to welcome the Spring, plus all 2,000 delegates will be performing the festival song, *Here's Where I Stand*.

Voices of Our City
1 MAY, 4PM AND 7PM, QUEEN ELIZABETH HALL

The three London host choirs (Diversity, Pink Singers and London Gay Men's Chorus) welcome the world to London with a concert celebrating the capital through songs about London, music by gay composers and some camp favourites.

Small and Perfectly Formed
1 MAY, 9PM, PURCELL ROOM

A showcase for small choirs, groups and ensembles, this is also a rare opportunity to see host Jonathan Hellyer, better known as The Dame Edna Experience, out of sequins. Hellyer will be singing with his band as well as introducing groups such as Manchester's *Cocquettes*, London's *Far From Kansas*, *Synergy* from Vancouver and the group with possibly the best name in the festival – *Les's Deep C Divas*.

Sing for the Cure
2 MAY, 8PM, ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL

One of the centrepieces of the festival, *Sing For the Cure* is described as "a glorious and uplifting musical event chronicling stories of breast cancer survivors through songs in a variety of musical styles". Originally commissioned and performed by gay uber-choir The Turtle Creek Chorale from Dallas, Texas, *Sing for the Cure* tells the stories of women affected by the disease and the people around them.

A fundraiser for *Breakthrough Breast Cancer* charity, the show features celebrity narrators Jennie McAlpine (Pixie from *Corrie*) and BBC newswoman Jane Hill. They'll be joined by The London Gay Symphony Orchestra and US conductor Tim Seelig, who's flying in especially for this European premiere.

The Big Gay Sing
2 MAY, 8PM, QUEEN ELIZABETH HALL

If listening to all that singing has whetted your appetite, this glittering camp fest is your chance to exercise those lungs. Join 900 other people and sing your heart out to some of those all-time gay faves, hosted by the deeply glamorous Timberline and the rakishly kitsch Laraine Bowen. Expect Abba, Madonna, Kiki, Judy, Barbra, Beyoncé, Bette and more with the words projected on the big screen and The Big Gay Singers to lead the way. Warning – if you've got an aversion to camp, this probably isn't the show for you.

Why We Sing
3 MAY, 7.30PM, PURCELL ROOM

Can singing be a political act? This event features a showing of the US documentary *Why We Sing*, an award-winning film exploring the power of queer singing in the campaign for visibility and equality and also the fight against HIV. The film will be followed by a panel discussion on the topics raised by the film, then rounded off with a rare big-screen showing of the Judy Garland classic *I Could Go On Singing*.

With One Voice
3 MAY, 8PM, ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL

Another of the major events of the festival, *With One Voice* is a big classical concert with an exciting line-up including a world premiere! The evening sees the first ever performance of a brand new piece written especially for Various Voices by composer Steve Martland. Pair that with a massed choir performance of *Carmina Burana* (think

Old Spice advert) and this is likely to raise the roof of the venerable Festival Hall.

Best in Show
2 MAY, 8PM, QUEEN ELIZABETH HALL

A hint of *X Factor*, a touch of *Pop Idol* and a large dash of television make up this light-hearted talent contest. Acts from across Europe will be giving it their all to impress celebrity judges including singer Les DéLaris, DJ Lucia Buffone and TV's *Chico*. Host and *Duckie* favourite Amy Lane will hope to keep the lid on the seething eggs.

Remember, Justin
2 MAY, 9PM, CLOVE BALLROOM AT ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL

Naturday 2 May is the 10th anniversary of the death of Justin Fashanu, still the only out gay professional footballer. To mark the anniversary, Various Voices is looking at singing and sport, from chanting on the terraces to a workshop to develop a new song for gay soccer fans. Stomach-PC and helping to tackle homophobia in sport.

Workshops

A programme of more than 25 workshops takes place alongside the concerts over the weekend. Open to all, they include the serious (from conducting and running a choir to dealing with nerves and keeping your voice healthy) to the slightly more esoteric such as a discussion on *How Can Music Be Gay?*, satire in Bulgarian singing and beatboxing and even choreography for choirs! ■ For details of all the events taking place at Various Voices, including concerts by all 60 choirs, and to book tickets, visit variousvoices.com.



1. Sarah Tuskovig, London Singers, *Voices of Our City*; 2. Headliners, *Voices of Our City*; 3. Jonathan Hellyer; 4. *Small and Perfectly Formed*; 5. Jane Hill, *Sing for the Cure*; 6. Jennie McAlpine; 7. *Sing for the Cure*; 8. Laraine Bowen, *The Big Gay Sing*; 9. Timberline, *The Big Gay Sing*; and 10. Amy Lane, *Best in Show*.

SCHOOL'S A
KILLER



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KILLER CHECKS JAIL TIME BEFORE HE DOES CRIME

"How long will I get in prison if I kill someone?" was the question Abdomera Fathi asked police just two days before allegedly killing landlord Romano Taddi in a row over Fathi's sexuality.

Details of the crime emerged at the recent murder trial at Towside Crown Court.

The court heard that Fathi, 22, had begun to live as a lodger with fellow Iranian Taddi, 56, after moving from County Durham to Hartlepool in 2008. Taddi helped him find a job and even paid the head on Fathi's own home. But Fathi was eventually asked to leave Taddi's house on Kimberley Street, after the two argued about Fathi being gay.

Fathi, having a failed suicide attempt, Fathi was admitted to hospital, although he then discharged himself and turned up at Taddi's home in his hospital gown.

It was then that Fathi asked police how long he would spend in prison for murder. When told he would face a life sentence, he allegedly replied: "Good, because I am going to kill someone, or myself."

The court heard that Fathi displayed a masculine fascination with knives and "erotic behaviour". Former employer David Bagshaw described how Fathi kept knives in his bedroom and regularly argued with his workmates.

Fathi stole a delivery van from outside the takeaway and drove back to Hartlepool, where he entered Taddi's house and lay in wait for him.

When Taddi returned, Fathi stabbed him

in the back with a seven-inch carving knife. Although Taddi initially survived, Fathi waited until morning and stabbed him again. He then fled in the stolen car, which he crashed near Newcastle Airport.

Speaking for the prosecution, Franz Mader explained neighbours had heard "high pitched screams" and that Fathi had told police he had murdered someone but it would not be proved. Neighbour Alan Chapman said he heard "a really loud scream, like someone screaming for help". He then heard sobbing and talking in another language.

It has also been revealed that Fathi left a voicemail message on his former lease telephone admitting to the killing and begging for help to leave the country before he was arrested. Fathi said: "The deed that should have been done is done. I killed the guy. I stabbed him in his heart three, four times."

"I want to get out of the country. I don't want your money from you. Give me your help. Do you listen?"

"He destroyed my life, he destroyed my life. Goodbye."

The post-mortem revealed a litany of 67 injuries inflicted upon Taddi, including gay marks and 14 separate stab wounds to his neck, chest and abdomen.

Fathi has admitted killing Taddi but denied murder. He is claiming the defence of diminished responsibility due to mental health problems. The defence called psychiatric experts who said Fathi has a personality disorder and was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of serious sexual assaults in Iran when he was a child.

The jury is considering its verdict.

Pink Paper



The Sopranos

Operatic soprano Lesley Garrett joined Sandi Toksvig to open the Various Voices festival on 1 May. For the opening, Garrett sang 'You'll Never Walk Alone' while several choirs sang on the South Bank. The festival showcased 2,000 singers and 160 events across at London's Southbank Centre, in Europe's largest ever celebration of gay and lesbian voices. Various Voices ran for four days over the Bank Holiday weekend, and saw over 70 concerts, a multitude of events and music on offer, many of them free. The festival takes place internationally every four years and was last held in the UK 20 years ago. Photo by Scott Kings.

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The Deaf Blog

Various Voices '09 to offer BSL-interpreted events



Tickets have now gone on sale for [Various Voices 2009](#), Europe's largest ever celebration of lesbian and gay choirs and singers, with many events being British Sign Language (BSL) interpreted.

The festival takes place at London's Southbank Centre over the early May Bank Holiday weekend, 1-4 May 2009 and tickets for all events are now available.

With more than 70 concerts from over 60 choirs, cabaret from the biggest names on the alternative cabaret circuit, world and European premieres, public workshops, masterclasses, film and expert panels, Various Voices, run in partnership with Southbank Centre, promises to be a highlight of this year's arts calendar.

Most events are open to the public, including choir concerts in the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall and Purcell Room, outdoor shows, ballroom dancing and appearances by high profile performers including Lea DeLaria, Sandi Toksvig, Amy Lamé and award winning choir Chantage. The BSL interpreting team is being lead by Russell Aldersson.

Some of the major events that will be BSL interpreted include:

- Opening Ceremony hosted by Sandi Toksvig including hundreds of singers performing madrigals to mark May Day outside the Festival Hall and across Hungerford Bridge. (1 May, 12 noon, Southbank Riverfront)
- Voices of Our City: London's three host choirs, The Pink Singers, Diversity and London Gay Men's Chorus, welcome delegates to London with a concert of songs about London and by British gay composers. (1 May, 4pm & 7pm, Queen Elizabeth Hall)
- Small and Perfectly Formed, a celebration of small ensemble singing. (1 May, 9pm, Purcell Room)
- European Premiere of "Sing for The Cure", a major work about people affected by breast cancer, with the London Gay Symphony Orchestra and a specially formed choir, in a fundraising concert aiming to raise £15,000 for UK charity Breakthrough Breast Cancer. (2 May, 8pm, Royal Festival Hall)
- The Big Gay Sing: Hosted by Timberlina and Lorraine Bowen, this glamorous sing-a-long is your chance to belt out the likes of Bette, Barbra and Bassey with the Various Voices singers. (2 May, 8pm, Queen Elizabeth Hall)
- Chantage: Award winning chamber choir, winners of the Radio 3 Choir of the Year competition in 2006, performing a range of contemporary music. (4 May, 7.30pm, Queen Elizabeth Hall)

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**SOUTHBANK
CENTRE**

Sing, if you're glad to be gay

As 60 gay choirs from around the world arrive in the UK for a special festival, Tom Whipple discovers what changed their tune from political anger and mourning to celebration and joy

In the late evening sunshine, in a cappella version of *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* rises over the warm Camden air. Inside a 1930s redbrick community hall, 200 singers are warming up for their Monday practice. And, sitting in the garden beyond, Martin Brophy is explaining his choir's particular difficulties in finding a venue.

"A few years back, we were forced to try lots of places. I know that the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception had a hall, and in desperation asked if we could book it," he says. "This little Irish lady said I've put on a Mrs Doyle account! You're called LGMC. Now what does that stand for?" I replied: "We're the London Gay Men's Chorus." She made me repeat it a few times and said: "I think I'm going to have to check this with the reverend mother." They eventually let us sing, as long as we signed an agreement that we wouldn't have sex in the toilets."

Luckily for his choir, and the 59 other choirs who will join him next weekend for Europe's largest gay and lesbian choral festival, the Southbank Centre is lenient. Various Voices, in the South Bank Centre, is a four-yearly, four-day celebration of some of the more unlikely byproducts of the gay rights campaign: homosexual choirs. From Out'n'Lead in Finland to Male/Men in France, the movement that began as a novelty act in 1980s bebop ensembles choirs who sing to professional standard, and more than 10,000 members.

The spread is geographical, but it is also temporal — a slice through the social history of the gay rights movement. The Brighton Gay Men's Chorus, who last year reached the semi-finals of *Last Choir Standing*, are unlikely to face homophobia on a daily basis. But for Le Zhor, from Croatia, every practice is an act of defiance. The newly formed choir is all-female, not through choice but because Zagreb's male homosexuals do not yet feel ready to stand up and be counted. Short of funds, they are able to attend the festival only after various

voices waived a registration fee and helped to raise money for their travel.

Even if most choirs function as social clubs as much as campaigning groups, almost all started like Le Zhor — small, poor and with a mission to bring about social change through the power of music. The movement began in the United States in 1978 Harvey Milk, the openly gay supervisor of San Francisco, and the city's mayor

music. There is a power in just standing up and saying: "I am gay, get over it."

His choir is now 200 strong, but at their first concert, busking in Angel Tube station, they had nine members. "There was a debate about what we should call ourselves. *Rainbow Singers* was too coy," O'Ford says. "I pointed the words *Gay Men's Chorus* on a sheet of paper. The name described what we were: nothing more was necessary, and nothing less acceptable. People's jaws just dropped," he recalls.

“

The rains let us sing in their hall as long as we signed an agreement that we wouldn't have sex in the toilets

”

George Moscone, who was assassinated. Their deaths became the rallying point for an appalled city, and inspired the first performance of a newly formed group: the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus.

A New York rival soon formed and rapidly reached a standard that allowed it to play Carnegie Hall. A gay choir producing such world-class music was a more powerful symbol for homosexual rights than a busked rally. But the rise of gay choirs coincided with the rise of HIV, and many found themselves performing at benefit gigs and at funerals, often for fellow members.

Britain took longer to join the movement. Robert O'Ford was one of the founder members of LGMC. "When we started in 1992 there was a lot of hostility to gay culture," he says. "There was the debate over Clause 28 and AIDS was well established — along with the suggestion that gay people were somehow responsible for its spread. There was work to be done and the best way we saw to do that was through

Precise

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**SOUTHBANK
CENTRE**

first night

Concert With One Voice

[Festival Hall](#)

★★★★☆

Hilary Finch

Everyone suddenly burst out singing Steffied Sassoon's poem came to mind (possibly at the weekend when the South Bank was alive with 2,000 singing voices, 60 lesbian and gay choirs from 14 countries, a handful of what appeared to be at least partially heterosexual choirs, too — and all in 50 concerts and 96 hours of music).

Even more than that, I'm sure. For what did I hear on arrival but the good old international being belted out near the bar by an ensemble of feisty Latin women. Meanwhile, upstairs in the Festival Hall itself, the mixed voices of the Various Voices Festival Choir (including, I assume, delegates from such ensembles as Den Norske Fløisofonien, Vox Rossa, The Carmen Carles, and so on), Mary King's Vocolab, the London Philharmonic Choir and the New London Children's Choir were assembled for a performance of Orff's *Carmen Burana* — with no orchestra.

What we had instead was an ensemble of pitched and unpitched percussion, called Chris Brauerick and his Favoured Few, and two grand pianos played very well by Andrew Ball and Michael Toranzo. Far more women's than men's voices and, apart from Mark Holland's splendid baritone, somewhat underpowered soloists. It all made for a light, spring-like, almost madrigalesque performance, conducted with precision and energy by Howard Moody.

Communication was very much the thing: the hunch Nigel Robson all but acted out his rousing swan song, removing pink, lime and yellow banners, though not much more, thank goodness. But, this being the case, why on earth deprive this audience of notes and text? Did everyone know the work inside out? Was everyone a scholar of Latin or medieval German?

No information, either, about the evening's starter, Orlando Gough's *Vigil*, performed by Vocolab in a language nobody knew, with robust homophony fragmenting into casually syncopated part-writing and jazzy rhythms. I caught the single word "riverflow".

The new Steve Martland work, which I'd been looking forward to, just didn't materialise. No explanation. Down the stairs again, and out into a moonlit May evening. And all those various voices were still carolling away, in bar and foyer, on and on into the night.

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**SOUTHBANK
CENTRE**

Critics' choice

Various Voices

Food/veg. 75-80p

An international gathering of gay and lesbian choirs at the Southbank Centre. A melodious long weekend featuring more than 2,000 voices in 60 choirs will encompass concerts, masterclasses and opportunities to sing along.

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[VARIOUS VOICES - THE ULTIMATE GAY SINGALONG - AT LONDON'S SOUTHBANK CENTRE THIS WEEKEND!](#)

Posted on 01 May 2009 by Serge



This May bank holiday (1st May - 4th May) will see London's Southbank Centre on the banks of the river Thames host Various Voices, Europe's biggest LGBT festival of song and singing. More than 60 international lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender choirs from 14 countries (2000+ singers in all) will perform 50 concerts over 96 hours, in a programme that has something for everyone - and everyone's invited!

Various Voices encompasses everything from small, intimate vocal ensembles to huge concerts of massed voices, professional performances, ballroom dancing and late-night cabaret, but also workshops, masterclasses, parties, meetings and other social activities. From Friday's London Sings Out! opening ceremony featuring a selection of visiting choirs and special guest soloist Lesley Garrett singing You'll Never Walk Alone (from Carousel), to Waterloo Sunset, the finale event including the world No1 same-sex ballroom dancers Caro and Petra, nothing comes close for music lovers in Europe this weekend.

London's hosting of Various Voices will be the 12th pan-European gay choral festival, which takes place every four years with cities competing for the honour, awarded by Legato, the European umbrella organisation for lesbian and gay choirs. The last Various Voices, in 2005, was staged in Paris.

www.variousvoices.com

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