

Gay Men's Chorus Sheds 'Light' on the Holidays

Group Premieres Musical Work About Chanukah

Review By Mary Damiano

The holiday season was welcomed in song December 1 as the Gay Men's Chorus South Florida performed their new show, "Light," at the Amature Theatre.

The Gay Men's Chorus can always be counted on for an incredible show, and this concert was no exception. Their voices were as crisp as the elegant tuxedos they wore, their harmonies boasted a naturalness that only comes from lots of practice.

The concert was historic because it marked the first time the Gay Men's Chorus and the Lambda Chorale has performed together. Each group had their moment in the spotlight, and then combined to perform several songs, including a soaring rendition of *Do You Hear What I Hear?*

Citing the events of September 11, Artistic Director Dr. William J. Adams dedicated the concert to all victims of terrorism. A moment of silence was also honored in observation of World AIDS Day.

The first act of the concert was filled with holiday favorites including *Jingle Bells*, *We Need a Little Christmas*, and *Feliz*

Navidad.

One of the brightest spots in the first half of the concert was credited to Members of the Rainbow Order of "Oh Mary, Don't Ask," who, the audience was told, had taken a vow of silence. The stage went dark, and when the lights came up, the stage was filled with individuals dressed in monk's robes, most with sparkly red pumps or sandals peeking out from beneath their hems. In one of those you-had-to-be-there moments, the group performed the *Hallelujah Chorus* from Handel's *Messiah* by accompanying the piped in voices with placards for each syllable of the piece. This performance could have put a smile on Scrooge's face and kept the Grinch from invading Whoville.

One of the nice touches during the performance by the Lambda Chorale was the two sign language interpreters signing the songs. It was a poetic accompaniment to the singers' lilting voices.

The second half of the concert was the world premiere of *Eight Candles*, a full-length musical piece about Chanukah. The 40-minute work was commissioned by the



Photos By Pompano Bill

Gay Men's Chorus and was written by Bruce Lazarus.

In addition to featuring some truly beautiful music, *Eight Candles* also had light moments (pun intended). In one rousing part, Howard M. Cohen and Michael Ciaccia rapped their way through the story and history of Chanukah. Chip Alfred, Dennis A. Spangler and Jon Snow showed

the audience their sense of humor with some gay Jewish limericks.

It was nice to see Christmas and Chanukah equally represented at a holiday concert, and it was thoughtful of the Gay Men's Chorus to give its audience the gift of *Eight Candles*. This concert was a great representation of everything the holidays are about: unity, remembrance and giving.

Terrific Cast and Catchy Tunes Highlight Musical

Review By Mary Damiano

If you like your theater nostalgic and funny and full of big song and dance numbers, *My Favorite Year* may be the show for you.

My Favorite Year is a musical adaptation of a 1982 comedy starring Peter O'Toole and

My Favorite Year Opens at Broward Stage Theatre

Mark Linn-Baker. The story takes place in 1954, and concerns Benjy Stone, a freshman writer for a hit television variety show, who must chaperone his idol, Alan Swann, a former swashbuckling movie star who drinks too much, to make sure Swann fulfills his role as guest star of the week.

On the stage, *My Favorite Year* works best when it retains the spirit and basic story of the movie. It falters when it lifts scenes and dialogue directly from the film because the stage adaptation can't help but suffer from comparison.

For this production, director Dan Kelley has assembled a talented group of actors, singers and dancers. Even though the stage is small for a musical of this size, the cast does a great job with the catchy tunes and

big dance numbers.

That said, there are some problems with *My Favorite Year*, which detract from the show.

The production is inconsistent. While the costumes and hairstyles are accurate for the period, that accuracy only makes it more jarring when other details are wrong. When newspapers are held up and the audience can see a full-page ad for a satellite dish that promises to lower cable bills, the illusion of being in 1954 is ruined.

And while the cast oozes talent and appeal, things are off there too. Shawn Kilgore, who plays Benjy Stone, is enthusiastic and has a great voice, but he just looks too old to be playing a kid one step above gopher. He looks more like a veteran producer than a freshman writer. The opposite is true for Vicki White. She looks younger than Kilgore yet she plays Benjy's Aunt Sadie.

The set design also has problems. In one scene, the awkward placement of a television onstage obscures the audience's view of the actors. And the NBC Studio 6B

sign is a nice touch, but it shouldn't be hanging over Benjy's mother's Brooklyn living room. Set changes are obtrusive. Instead of stagehands dressed in black moving props, that job is left to costumed actors, leaving audiences to wonder why men in clean white sailor uniforms are moving things around in semi-dimness behind two characters performing a song. The curtain should be utilized more when changing sets, such as at intermission.

My Favorite Year has a lot going for it. The things that are amiss can be easily remedied. A little fine-tuning is all that's needed to fulfill this production's potential and give both the cast and audience the show they deserve.

My Favorite Year runs through January 20 at the Stage Door Theatre, 8036 W. Sample Rd. in Coral Springs. Showtimes are Thursday, Friday and Saturdays at 8pm, Sunday at 7pm. Matinees are Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday at 2pm. Tickets are \$27. For more info, call 954.344.7765.



Falling in Love Again

New Dietrich Documentary to Air on TCM

By Ian Drew

To help celebrate what would now be Marlene Dietrich's 100th birthday, the Turner Classic Movies cable channel will present the exclusive premiere of *Marlene Dietrich: Her Own Song* on Thursday, December 27. Her grandson, J. David Riva, directs this new documentary about the German-born cabaret singer and acclaimed actress, and it will air at 8pm, with an encore showing at 11:30pm.

Unlike previous documentaries released on the legendary star, this documentary barely touches on her film career, and it doesn't mention at all her numerous relationships with such historic figures as Erich Maria Remarque, Ernest Hemingway, Edith Piaf and John F. Kennedy. It also fails to mention her numerous lesbian affairs, particularly with writer Mercedes D'Acosta.

Her tempestuous love life here boils down to just two relationships: her open marriage with German actor Rudolf Sieber, and her brief romance with French actor Jean Gabin.

What this film does center on is Dietrich's jingoism and political involvements, initially as a German and later as an American Citizen. It uses extensive film clips, rare photos and letters and interviews with her family, friends and historians to show how she lived life according to her own personal convictions.

Collaborators Rosemary Clooney and Burt Bacharach, daughter Maria Riva, Nazi Hunter Beate Klarsfeld and historian Felix Mollerare are all tapped here to give perspective on the internal struggles Dietrich grappled with as a German who was forced to abandon her country upon Nazi occupation. "America took me into her bosom when I no longer had a native country worthy of the name, but in my heart I am German - German in my soul," Dietrich states in the film.

It is obvious that a member of Dietrich's family filmed this one-and-a-half-hour long documentary because it entirely centers on



A photo from Marlene Dietrich, a TCM Original documentary that focuses on the actress's patriotic side during World War II. It premieres on TCM on Thursday, December 27 at 8 pm

role as an American hero and recipient of its Medal of Freedom.

Of particular interest are rare tapes of Dietrich telephoning her mother upon the Allied invasion of Berlin, and stories about her role as the first American civilian to enter German territory. Exclusive footage also shows Dietrich looking after displaced members of the European arts community at her Los Angeles home and in her Paris hotel room before she directly entered the war effort.

All of this allows the film to demonstrate that her life was ultimately lived to serve others and not to be remembered by what she called the "prostitution" that was her film career.

Check local listings for channel information and encore presentations. Questions and inquiries about the film can be sent directly to the film's director at dietrichdoc@aol.com.

the two things she held most dear - her family and her involvement with the United States military on the front lines of World War II.

Mentioned are the numerous attempts by the Nazis to woo Dietrich into returning to Germany, Germany's later denouncement of her that led her never to return and her