

Rainbow Chorale of Delaware 25th Anniversary concert speeches

Kym Thompson



Hi, I'm Kym Thompson and I'm a founding member. Our 1st concert – 25 years ago... We'd practiced our music for months; we'd purchased the perfect attire. We invited our friends and family and hoped at least a few people would show up to our first concert. We held hands and formed a small circle upstairs in one of the choir rooms at 1st and Central Presbyterian. We had our moment of silence calling on any source we could connect with to get us through the program that night. We lined up and quietly walked the long walk from the second floor down to the main floor. We were nervous. but that's normal before going out on stage, right? Those of you who perform know what I mean. But this time it was different.

We anxiously stood behind the closed doors at the front of the sanctuary, fixing each other's hair, putting on lipstick (or in my case ChapStick) and straightening out ties. Our stage manager, Rod, told us that the house was packed. But with the doors closed we were clueless as to how many people were actually in the audience. Most of us had been here before waiting to perform. But this time it was different. It felt as though something was about to change.

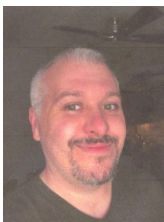
On the Friday before the show an article had been written about us and it ran in the 55 Hours section of the News Journal. Many of you remember that don't you? It was a section of the newspaper here in Wilmington that shared what events were going on from Friday to Sunday over a 55-hour period. Hence the name. We had made the front page. That was great news, wasn't it? Well, yes and no. We already had a few people who did not want their name in the program and some who had signed waivers not to have their pictures placed into any publication for fear of losing their job or being kicked out of their families—especially our teachers and bankers. But the advertising would bring in a bigger audience. Something we wanted. It was an opportunity to have our music heard by more and to raise money and awareness of our mission and cause, but it also outed a few folks who were still in the closet. You see 25 years ago the world was different. There were not as many people who were willing to stand up for our community. I remember that they posted a picture of one of our members who was not out to her family or straight friends, and it was on that cover. That shook many of us because there but by the grace of God went I. What if it were me? I asked myself. But this time it was different. Many of us had not thought about the fact that we'd be exposing ourselves to people outside of the community and thought that just friends and family would be in attendance. But there we were all lined up and ready to go on stage. There we were courageous (though nervous) standing up and out in a world of prejudice and discrimination. There we were terrified and empowered and ready to go on stage to sing for our lives. There we were standing up as a political act of resistance on stage, in a world that struggled to embrace and support us. This was different alright, but we were ready. You see, the Rainbow Chorale, even in its infancy, gave us community and unity with others who were just like us, it helped us to strengthen our pride. And so we were ready to sing for our lives on that day and we are still here 25 years later. Have a wonderful day. Kym Thompson.

Debbie McCall



Hi! I am Debbie McCall and I am a founding member of the Rainbow Chorale of Delaware. I found out about the choir while camping in Provincetown. There have been many moments over the years that were very special. The first being the first night we walked on stage as you have heard from other members tonight. The 2nd was at the victory party for Governor Ruth Anne Minner where we were asked to perform. The 3rd was when we performed in 2011 at the Queen when Governor Markell signed the Civil Union bill. The 4th was when many members of the Chorale were asked to sing as the backup chorus for Joe Trainor who was performing the music of Queen at the Queen. That was so exciting. The last one was a concert on our one year anniversary entitled "Voices of Children" A Celebration of Family! This concert had a group of children from local lgbtq families which included our daughters who were 7 and 9 at the time. These 8 young singers were called the Raindrops.

Donald Lamp



I first discovered The Rainbow Chorale of Delaware back in November of 2009. It was during the 10th anniversary season, and only a couple of weeks until the winter concert. It was too late to officially join the choir for that winter concert – however, I did join for that season's showcase performance. I had performed with many community choirs and community theaters in the past, but this was my first LGBTQ choir. I was shy and timid at first, not sure what to expect, but quickly realized how loving and welcoming everyone was. It was not too long before I started seeing this choir as an extended family. One of my favorite stand out memories of performing with the family was May 11th, 2011. The day that, then Governor Jack Markell, signed the historic Civil Unions bill into law at the Queen Theater here in Wilmington. It was a crucial steppingstone to full Marriage Equality in the State of Delaware. Having grown up in a not so gay friendly environment to then being part of that historic moment, (continued on other side...)

standing with this family singing "Uma Familia" after the signing – it was very emotional for me to say the least.

This choir, this family, has been with me through many good times and many bad times. I was forced to leave the choir for a time, as sadly I was involved in a toxic relationship. That relationship ended and it was definitely one of those "bad times." I returned to this family earlier this year, who welcomed me back with open arms, open hearts, and as before... helped support and lift me up in my time of need. With the uncertainty that exists in this country after recent events, I have to say, there is no place else I'd rather be right now than with this group, this family.



El Clauss

“No, your mom don’t get it, and your dad don’t get it.”

With just those few lines of The Village sung, the already charged energy in the room amped up. As I stepped up to the mic, took a breath, and began to speak, I knew this time would be different. We were all open, raw with emotion, sharing our truths and ourselves with an audience that not only understood, but met us where we were sharing the journey with us. As the final notes rang out, echoing around the room, there was a beat. A single moment of silence settled before the audience jumped to their feet in raucous applause. I was overwhelmed by sound, by emotion, by a transcendent feeling. Knowing that this moment was special. Our unforgettable GALA performance last summer was something I will never be able to recreate exactly, but I get a small piece of it every week with RCD.

Renna Van Oot



It’s hard to believe that it was 25 years ago that we were waiting in the wings for our first concert to start. We stood together, fidgeting, hearts pounding away, electricity in the air. A bass tugged nervously at his collar; an alto helped straighten his bowtie. We waited in nerve-wracking anticipation for the doors to open. “Looks like we’ve got a full house!” A loud whisper passed through the crowd. “People are still filing in....!” Finally, the doors were opened and rows of us started proceeding into the sanctuary, onto the stage. Almost immediately thunderous applause broke out; clapping, whistles and shouts. Now I could see my heart pounding through my shirt.

When it was my turn to head out and step upon the riser, I saw them all. The audience was on their feet, their faces lit up, a swell of emotions burst from them to us, and from us to them. Here we were. Despite being told most of our lives to be invisible. Here we were. Despite the constant message drilled into us over the years to hide our true selves away. Here we were. Despite the message we should stay isolated, alone and *silent*. Here we all stood to raise our voices together ... with a sanctuary full of people bearing witness to it. The audience finally settled. We took a deep collective breath. And we SANG.

Over the last ten years members have come and gone. Some have been here since the beginning. Others have only recently joined. We’ve become friends, lovers and ex-lovers. We’ve helped one another come out. We’ve helped one another through illnesses, job situations, and hard times. We’ve celebrated together and mourned together. We’ve bickered and fought... but have forgiven and been forgiven. And we have changed, individually and collectively – but the community remains.

Mary Reppy

My segment is on how we survived the Covid pandemic and learned to love live-stream. The arrival of Covid struck the choral community right where we lived. March 2020 we were cruising through our 20th season and were all ready to put on our “Celebrate” Showcase, when we realized that we need to close down rehearsing and performing immediately and for the indefinite future. This was a big blow, but it was obvious from the experience of the chorus in Skagit Washington – which bravely publicized how Covid spread at their rehearsal rather than hiding it – that stopping rehearsing and performing was necessary. But we weren’t going to give up on our group! We figured out very quickly that you cannot sing together over Zoom but you can play musical games, hold trivia contests have workshops and use the internet to keep community alive. In Fall 2020 we joined a virtual semester hosted by the New York City Gay Men’s Chorus. We all learned how to record ourselves – check out our YouTube channel for the remote concerts we put on and see us singing and wiggling in squares. We met outside a few times, masked and keeping a careful distance. It wasn’t easy – singing together is the essence of being in a chorus and for a while there it was considered one of the most dangerous things you could do. And we wondered just when we would be able to return. So how did we come to love live stream? When we finally came back to in person in fall 2021, we were able to use live-stream broadcast of our rehearsals to let those who needed to be remote for whatever reason to experience the activity, and ease our traumatized members back into singing and performing. The tools we developed because of the pandemic, we are using today – like the rest of the world we still hold meetings on Zoom, and we still live-stream our rehearsals and our concerts, including this one, letting people all over who can’t make in person enjoy our music. The Covid pandemic was a great tragedy – we lost friends, we lost family, but we have learned as well and grown stronger.

