



What's in a Name?

Gender can be an especially complex topic within GALA choruses given that **the structure of our choruses has historically rested on the gender binary**--with women's choruses, men's choruses, and mixed choruses (implicitly invoking the gay/straight binary).

Some GALA choruses are considering the option of selecting a new name to more accurately reflect their membership and to create a more welcoming invitation to people across the gender and sexuality spectrum. These conversations can sometimes lead to generational tensions, for instance around terms like queer, that may be loved by some and hated by others. **So it is important to balance needs for change with respect for the histories of GALA choruses, which were revolutionary in their founding missions and have transformed the lives of their members over decades.**

While it is important that our choruses reflect contemporary understandings of gender and sexuality, there are many ways that this can happen. Many gay men's choruses, for instance, now welcome heterosexual men, transgender people, and even cisgender women--however, they retain the specific culture of a gay men's chorus (perhaps even the name) and wish to continue doing so.

GALA's SSAA choruses were historically founded as a place for women to gather for support and community. In some cases, it may be important to retain the word "women" in a name or mission. The important step is then to ensure that *all* women are welcome in that space either as singers or volunteers.

The Portland Gay Men's Chorus is clear about their mission but they are also clear that you don't need to be from Portland, be gay, or identify as a man in order to sing with the chorus. Auditions are based on voice quality and range.

Phoenix, Colorado's Trans Community Choir is a trans-centric organization, run according to trans-specific sensibilities, but you do not need to be trans-identified in order to sing with Phoenix. Phoenix is home to numerous partners, parents, friends, and allies--as core to the mission of Phoenix is to be a space where everyone touched by trans issues can gather in one place--and the experiences of loved ones are reflected in the programming of Phoenix, but the name doesn't necessarily reflect the expansiveness of the vision of the organization.

One Voice Mixed Chorus: Minnesota's LGBTQA chorus includes "allies" in its chorus name tag line in terms of who is welcome in the community, but is clear that the mission of the chorus focuses on LBGTQ justice.

Given the history of our "women's choruses, men's choruses, and mixed choruses" it will be interesting to see how GALA as an organization transforms and updates itself to reflect evolving understandings of the lived complexities of both gender and sexuality. Such conversations are crucial since we can't create what we can't imagine. **Updating our thinking is an important first step to ensuring that GALA choruses remain on the cutting edge.**

- Sam Bullington, Phoenix: Colorado's Trans Community Choir

More resources at: www.GalaChoruses.org/NewHarmony