

# Glendale News-Press

## Chorus belts out 'Holiday Spectacular'



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The spirit of the holidays came in with a rush of wonderful music, dance and humor at the “Holiday Spectacular” performance by the Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles last weekend at the Alex Theatre in Glendale.

The show featured students from the Creative Planet School of the Arts, who joined chorus members on stage in singing and dancing classic holiday songs like “Joy to the World” and “Chanukah, O Chanukah,” and songs from around the world such as “Betelehemu,” a traditional Nigerian Christmas carol.

Artistic director and conductor Jason Armstrong in a pre-show interview said the show would be a West Coast equivalent of a Radio City Music Hall show, with a little bit of something for everybody. And that there was, including a comical and entertaining performance featuring soloist David Knebel in “I Wanna Be a Rockette” and “Parade of the Wooden Soldiers” with chorus members and Creative Planet students.

The students and chorus performed humorous excerpts from the “Nutcracker Suite” in dance and music, including “Waltz of the Flowers,” during which the little dreaming Clara character is played by a young boy. He is dressed in a tutu to dance along with ballerinas.

The performance of “Lux Aurumque,” a composition by Eric Whiteacre based on a Latin poem of the same name, by the Gay Men's Chorus with soloists Bobby Buchanan, David Marenberg and Justin Yu was serenely magical, and set the overall tone of peace and beauty for the show.

The wonderful performance of “Betelehemu,” featuring Creative Planet alumni and current students, carried on this theme later in the show.

Armstrong, who has been with the chorus for two years, said of working with the students: “They are the epitome of professionalism. They can do a change in 20 seconds. Their comportment on stage is nothing less than stellar. They are a role model for my singers. It is a tribute to their principal and their choreographers, and to the comprehensive arts school.”

Choreographers Billy Rugh and Michelle Benton founded and artistically direct Creative Planet School of the Arts, and regularly choreograph and direct for the Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles. Rugh is also the school's principal. Their work on this show was excellent — especially notable was the creative and meticulous performance of the “Parade of the Wooden Soldiers.”

The costumes by Philip Hayman were notable as well, including the hilarious dancing Santas who wore bell-shaped coats that comically swung out and sideways like bells.

The Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles was founded in 1979 during the emergence of the gay civil rights movement. Their mission is to advance “social change through music.”

The chorus will perform the outreach program “It Gets Better” Feb. 1 at the Wilshire Ebell Theatre. The program addresses the problem of bullying, and a six-member cast will tour the country, working with students, local performers, citizens, and educational and government institutions. The outreach program is a collaboration between the chorus, Speak Theatre Arts and the It Gets Better Project.

**LAURA TATE** is a frequent contributor to *Marquee*.