

GMCSF BRINGS TRIUMPHANT END TO PRIDE MONTH

John Hayden

Joy. There have been a lot of emotions around Pride month this year, but joy has been the most fleeting. Over the weekend of June 24-25, the Gay Men's Chorus of South Florida (GMCSF) raised their voices and our spirits with their landmark Disney Pride In Concert at The Parker.

In what could go down as their best and most memorable performance, the chorus tackled the Disney songbook brilliantly. The show weaved sing-along favorites with some Disney deep cuts, and interspersed moving personal stories from GMCSF members.

Bringing this show to South Florida has been a passion project of chorus music director Gabe Salazar, a project that took years to bring to fruition.

"This concert was special to me for numerous reasons," he said. "Disney is such a force that so many loves and enjoy, and I knew that this concert would be extremely meaningful for everyone involved."

Indeed, the show was a hit, with Saturday's audience bordering on raucous. They sang the songs they know, chair-danced to the ones they didn't, and were quick to clap along to the beat. At one point it felt like "the wave" would break out at any moment. Yes, people were joyful.

As fun as the upbeat material was, the most poignant moments came from a pair of slower songs. In act one, God Help the Outcasts, from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, struck a chord with an audience of outcasts. In act two, Remember Me, from *Coco*, brought me to tears. With every note, soloist Jorge Bernal-Geschier made a personal connection with the audience. (Jonathan Sanz was the soloist in Saturday's show.)



Photo by JR Davis.

Other musical highlights include the first note from act two, when Zulo soloist Johann Torres nailed the opening notes to *Circle of Life* and, later, *Shadowland*, both of which come from *The Lion King*.

"The music from Disney has a unique way of really leaving an imprint on people's hearts, and I knew it would spark memories of the old, and also create new and meaningful memories during the process," Salazar said.

MULTIMEDIA AMAZEMENT

Producing a show like this requires more than a spoonful of cooperation. Disney is very guarded with its legacy music catalog.

In addition to premium licensing fees, they also worked very closely with GMCSF to make sure both organizations shined at the moment.

The chorus and their orchestra performed under a large screen that played clips or displayed artwork to compliment the music. From the Disney castle logo to open the show to *Someday* (*Hunchback*) for the show's close, every note and every frame of video was coordinated to perfection.

POLITICAL UNDERTONES

While planning for this show was in the works before Gov. Ron DeSantis escalated his attacks on the LGBT community and Disney itself, the politics of the moment were in the room. The governor's presence lurked like Scar waiting to pounce on Simba. DeSantis has worked to strip Disney of its power to govern itself in Orange County and has gone so far as to threaten to build a competing theme park nearby. The governor is angry because Disney vocally stood up for its LGBT employees.

"I think the timing of this concert could not have come at a better time for our community, and I am so proud of the members of the chorus for trusting my vision and beautifully executing such a challenging and demanding work of music." OUTSFL



Photo by JR Davis.

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