

# Contents

---

Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction	i
1 • GALA Choruses as Community Choirs	17
2 • “Community” and Its Significance to GALA Choristers	49
3 • Diversity and Its Discontents	80
4 • Homonormativity: GALA Choruses as Middle-Class Organizations	107
5 • Disidentifying: The Music and Performance Practices of GALA Choruses	128
6 • GALA Choruses on a Mission	157
7 • GALA Choruses as Part of the Gay Rights Movement	181
8 • Social Change: Assessing GALA Choruses’ Central Claim	200
Notes	225
Bibliography	237
Index	249

Digital materials related to this title can be found on the Fulcrum platform via the following citable URL: <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.11579619>



## Introduction

---

*Singing Out: GALA Choruses and Social Change* is a mixed methods study of LGBT-identified community choirs in the United States and Canada.<sup>1</sup> This book investigates how amateur singers participate in a particular form of music making as a way of advancing both their artistic and their political goals. The book analyzes the findings from eight years of research conducted among the people of the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA Choruses), a parent organization for more than two hundred such choirs. GALA Choruses' member groups include so-called men's choruses (in which the large majority of singers are gay men), women's choruses (in which about half of the singers are lesbian women), and mixed choruses (which include both men and women, and in which transgender singers are most likely to participate). GALA choirs are located in big cities and small towns across the continent and collectively include tens of thousands of singers. The largest of the choirs include hundreds of choristers, employ full-time artistic directors with doctorates in music, and successfully solicit millions of dollars in individual and corporate donations. They perform for large audiences in important venues, including, for example, at the inauguration of President Barack Obama. All told, the member choirs of GALA Choruses sing for tens of thousands of listeners every year. They do this because—as GALA's leaders and choristers reiterate frequently—they are committed to “changing our world through song.”

Why is this book important? Pundits often wax eloquent about the power of music, asserting that it can, in some positive way, change the world. Indeed, the mission statement of the Department of Music at the University of Dayton, where I work, refers to “the transformative power of music” and the goal of training students to deploy music to “change the world” (University of Dayton 2014). Such statements often rest on an unexamined claim

## 2 • Singing Out

that music can and does foster social change. The series to which this book belongs, *Music and Social Justice*, is dedicated to investigating this widespread notion and to tackling the premise underlying such rhetoric. *Singing Out: GALA Choruses and Social Change* contributes to the series by analyzing a salient case study, that of groups of amateur singers who are explicitly committed to an agenda of social justice. Ultimately this book asks and answers two important questions: Does public concertizing by LGBT community choirs cause a decrease in homophobic attitudes and, thereby, foster a more inclusive society? And by extension, does music making actually change the world?

The central argument of the book is that GALA Choruses' affiliated groups are best understood as belonging simultaneously to the US and Canadian community choir scene, and to the LGBT rights movement. GALA choruses sing in service of their mission—"changing our world through song"—and their commitment to this mission shapes norms of practice and understanding that constitute a unique choral singing culture. GALA's unique culture is described and analyzed throughout the book. One aspect of that culture that bears mentioning here is GALA groups' preference for the word *chorus*—rather than *choir*—to describe their constellations of singers. Both words usually refer to a group of people who sing together. However, historically, founders of GALA groups preferred *chorus* because *choir* is the word always used to describe singers in Christian churches. As I explain in chapter 4, many GALA choristers grew up singing in church choirs and experienced deep hurt and rejection by those same choirs. They therefore wanted to reserve the word *chorus* for their own groups, groups that affirmed rather than rejected LGBT singers.<sup>2</sup> Although this practice is not universal—in Canada it is much more likely that a GALA group will call itself a choir—I found it useful in writing about GALA groups, especially when distinguishing them from other constellations of singers. Throughout the rest of this book, I thus refer to GALA-affiliated groups as *choruses* and to all other community-based groups as *choirs*.

### GALA Choruses: A Brief History

Gay and lesbian choruses first formed in the United States during the 1970s, and they spread across the world during the ensuing decades. What GALA choristers sometimes refer to as "our movement" began in the mid-1970s with the advent of lesbian feminist choruses; the GALA Choruses website marks the founding of the Philadelphia-based ANNA Crusis Women's

Choir in 1975 as the official beginning of this movement (GALA Choruses n.d.b.). However, the origin moment that GALA insiders often point to is the founding of the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus in 1978. This chorus emerged from a group of men who gathered to sing hymns at a vigil for Harvey Milk, a gay activist and politician, in the wake of Milk’s murder. The GALA Choruses organization was officially founded in 1982, and the “movement” grew quickly through the 1980s and 1990s with the establishment of men’s choruses, women’s choruses, and mixed choruses across the United States and Canada. Starting around 2016, some choruses began classifying themselves by voice part; today insiders sometimes say—or write—TTBB (tenor-tenor-baritone-bass) instead of men’s chorus, SSAA (soprano-soprano-alto-alto) instead of women’s chorus, or SATB (soprano-alto-tenor-bass) instead of mixed chorus. (See chapter 3 for more discussion of the associations between gender and voice parts). However, at the time of the publication of this book, the older nomenclature was still most frequently used; in this book I specify the three main types of GALA choruses as men’s choruses, women’s choruses, and mixed choruses, following the pervasive use of these terms in GALA circles.

Although GALA choruses are evolving in many important ways, including in how they name themselves, they remain true to the mission they articulated for themselves at the advent of their movement. GALA choristers continue to believe, and to act on the belief, that their concertizing contributes to progressive social change. As Diane Benjamin, an accompanist to the Calliope Women’s Chorus of Saint Paul, Minnesota, and a former GALA Choruses board member, said, “It’s easy now to forget how really revolutionary this was, just to stand up and sing as gay and lesbian people” (interview, February 10, 2012). Indeed, it was revolutionary; and to identify oneself, or one’s chorus, as LGBT still marks one as a somewhat marginal participant in the US and Canadian choral singing tradition. As this book shows, GALA choristers continue to uphold the values of that tradition, while at the same time they are expanding its boundaries and redefining its purpose.

Today, LGBT-identified choruses are most numerous in the United States and Canada, but they exist in many European countries and other English-speaking countries where choral music has been an important tradition among middle-class White people. China saw the debut of its first LGBT-identified community choirs in 2008, and in early 2018, an as-yet-unnamed LGBT choir made its debut in Yangon, Myanmar.<sup>3</sup> Importantly, not all LGBT-identified choirs count themselves members of GALA Choruses; for example, the two conductors of the Yangon-based choir told me that neither of them had any experience singing with any GALA chorus, and

#### 4 • Singing Out

they were fascinated to learn of the organization's existence.<sup>4</sup> LGBT choral singing, then, extends beyond the borders of GALA Choruses. This book focuses on GALA groups because the GALA organization still represents a majority of the world's LGBT choruses and is an appropriate frame through which to understand LGBT choral singing.

### Methodology

*Singing Out: GALA Choruses and Social Change* is the result of a mixed methods investigation. I am an ethnomusicologist by training and profession, and therefore I pursue all of my scholarly projects using ethnographic research methods—that is, by conducting observations, participant observations, and interviews. These methods underlie most of the data reported in this book; chapter 8 also reports the results of a quantitative experiment of the type usually pursued by social scientists. I engaged all these research methods because a mixed methods approach ultimately proved best suited to understanding a large musical phenomenon that, as its leaders claim, is changing the world through song. Part of this book is devoted to analyzing the songs and performance practices of GALA choruses. In addition, I seek throughout the book to understand those songs—and their singers—in context. I ask: Why do these musicians choose to sing these songs at the times and places in which they sing them? And how does their singing change the world?

During my investigation, I pursued answers to these questions by attending rehearsals, concerts, workshops, and business meetings held by GALA choruses in both the United States and Canada. I also carried out an experiment in measuring levels of homophobia (recorded before and after attending a GALA chorus concert) with students from my own university; their anonymized responses to a survey appear near the end of this book. In addition, I conducted interviews with ninety-seven GALA insiders, including singers, artistic directors, board members, accompanists, composers, guest conductors, and other supporters. All the people I interviewed are identified by their real names in this book, with two exceptions. They all signed a consent form that offered them the option of being quoted anonymously; in a handful of instances, I exercised that option on their behalf because their quoted remarks refer to sensitive information. One person (referred to in the book as Katie Eadie) asked to be identified by a pseudonym. Additionally, I include all the interviewees' titles, meaning that I cite the role they play in their GALA chorus, such as "singer in X chorus, located in Y city." Their title

reflects the position they held in GALA Choruses during the time I conducted my research, during the second decade of the twenty-first century. After I interviewed them, a number of my interlocutors moved on from the GALA chorus that they sang in, conducted, or otherwise supported (and sadly, one man, Allen Kimbrough, died).

*Singing Out: GALA Choruses and Social Change* is largely focused on men's choruses and on the cisgender White men who sing in and lead these choruses. As we have already seen, the GALA Choruses organization represents many diverse individuals and groups, and this diversity encompasses both ethnic identification and gender. However, men's choruses predominate in GALA Choruses; most of the large and well-funded GALA choruses are men's choruses, and the artistic directors of those choruses (who are, again, mostly cisgender White men) are thought leaders in GALA circles. This reality shaped my research: the majority of the performances I was able to observe were presented by men's choruses, and the majority of the people I was able to interview were cisgender White men. The result is that this book is often oriented toward men and toward men's choruses; my analysis is largely based on the sung and spoken statements of the cisgender White men who constitute GALA's dominant population and who provided the majority of my data. As my research progressed, I made a special attempt to interview people of color, and eventually they became somewhat overrepresented in my interview sample. But in general, the GALA insiders I interviewed and observed represented the demographics of the organization as a whole; therefore, the voices of cisgender White men are the most frequently featured in this book, although I seek to give pride of place to the perspectives of women, people of color, and transgender singers as well.

## Scholarly Context and Contributions

Scholars have only recently developed a broad interest in GALA choruses. Through the 1990s and early 2000s, academics and practitioners contributed a handful of articles, book chapters, and dissertations to the literature. During the second decade of the millennium, while I conducted the research for this book, two more dissertations and more articles were written, and presentations at academic conferences about LGBT choruses and "the queer voice" became commonplace. In 2017, the first full-length monograph about GALA choruses appeared (Balén 2017). *Singing Out: GALA Choruses and Social Change* contributes to this small but growing body of work and, in so doing, speaks to a number of academic fields: choral music

studies, social movement studies, and gay and lesbian anthropology. Further, it utilizes an intersectional approach to make these contributions.

First, this book expands our understanding of choral music and thereby speaks to the larger field of musicology. Choral singing is a widespread community activity; numerous studies have shown that it is “the most popular public arts activity” in the United States and that more than twenty million adults engage in choral singing weekly (Bell 2004, 39). Writing about choral singing is dominated by practitioners, especially music educators sharing their own best practices with their colleagues. The few ethnographic investigations of community choral singing include insightful dissertations (Kinney 2010; Redman 2016; Rensink-Hoff 2009; Vincent 1997; Wilson 2011), monographs (Averill 2003; Duchan 2012), and edited collections (Ahlquist 2006a), all of which inform this book. Paul Attinello (1994, 325), in an important early book chapter about GALA choruses, recounted the results of the questionnaires he distributed to singers in five large GALA men’s choruses, but he noted that many fascinating aspects of such choruses remained to be studied and that his own written survey method produced insights that “pale in comparison with live conversations that can be heard in the groups studied.” In this book I recount live conversations I overheard at GALA rehearsals and workshops—see for example in chapter 1—and, most importantly, quote widely from the interviews I conducted with ninety-seven individuals associated with GALA choruses. In their conversations with each other and with me, GALA insiders revealed profound truths about the nature of their music making and the dissonances within it.

Second, this book addresses and responds to academic studies of social movements. Social movement studies is a rich field of inquiry, and social movement scholars often take the broadest of perspectives to analyze large-scale movements. As James Jasper (1997, 98, 172) argues, these scholars therefore sometimes neglect “cultural and biographical factors,” the kinds of factors that are illuminated by ethnographic research methods. While conducting research for this book, I paid great attention to such factors, asking all interviewees about their early musical training, their initial involvement in a GALA chorus, and so on. As Jasper points out, this kind of focus reveals the emotions that motivate participants in social movements, and so it does in my study. My study also reveals that singers in GALA choruses understand themselves to be agents in the gay rights movement, and therefore this book constitutes a contribution to the study of the gay rights movement writ large (Bernstein 1997; Rayside 2008; Rimmerman 2002; Vaid 1995). I devote a significant section of the book to examining the position GALA choruses occupy in the wider gay rights movement, and the ways in



which they do (or do not) advance the goals of factions within that movement. In so doing, I avoid easy claims that GALA choruses are engaging in “resistance,” a term that became fashionable, and then entirely overused, in academic circles in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Rosenthal and Flacks 2012, 192). As Ellen Lewin points out, academics often “romanticized” resistance, assuming that gay and lesbian people by their very existence somehow resisted and even subverted social norms (1996c, 108; also 1996a, 7); later, this easy resort to resistance was applied to self-identified queer people (Green 2002, 531; Taylor 2012, 198). Not one of the ninety-seven people I interviewed for this book ever used the word *resistance*, as either a noun or a verb, although they spoke in nuanced ways about how exactly their concertizing aimed to fulfill certain social goals, including the goal of celebrating same-sex love.

Third, this book is part of the growing field of gay and lesbian anthropology. Like GALA choruses, this field of scholarly inquiry emerged in the wake of the Stonewall riots; in recent years we have seen detailed studies of various American LGBT communities, including youth in the American Bible Belt (Gray 2009; Barton 2012), cross-dressers in New York City (Valentine 2007), lesbians in a college town (Brown-Saracino 2011), and same-sex couples in suburbia (Carrington 1999). Such specific studies are extremely valuable because, as John Hollister (1999, 64) argues, there is no singular gay community and no all-encompassing LGBT scene. “The literature. . . may analyze ‘gay, lesbian and bisexual’ identities in general, and occasionally observe how they may interact with race, gender and even class, but it does little to account for how jarring the contrasts among their meanings in different settings can get. The ‘gay’ of the lesbian and gay social movement organization, the ‘gay’ of a cruising area, and the ‘gay’ of a gay bar are distinct entities. . . . What it means to be gay is site-specific” (1999, 69; see also White 1991, 279). This book traces what it means to be a gay, or lesbian, or transgender choral singer in the United States or in Canada, providing detailed accounts of rehearsals, performances, and sites such as the quadrennial GALA Festival, during which thousands of GALA choristers meet for one week. Throughout the book, I maintain an anthropological focus on the people who participate in GALA choruses because I agree with Lewin (2009, 100): “We are obliged, as anthropologists, to elucidate the meanings that real people bring to their social and cultural lives. Such obligations are matters of scholarly rigor but they are also elements of an ethical mandate—to represent people in ways that elucidate their own understandings of themselves and that enhance the clarity of their voices.” GALA singers project their own voices in a wide variety of performance venues; however, a deeper understanding of the mean-

ings they attach to their singing was revealed in the many interviews I conducted for this book, and I quote, summarize, and analyze these to the best of my ability throughout. It seemed to me important to do so in part because people in my own community or site—that is, schools and departments of music located in the universities of the Western world—are largely ignorant of LGBT choruses and the important contributions such choruses are making to local music scenes and to broader political efforts. Indeed, some are openly dismissive of GALA choruses, as I explain in chapter 1.

In claiming a place for this book in gay and lesbian anthropology, I distinguish such anthropology from queer theory. Following other scholars in these two fields, I understand them both as deeply valuable (Warner 2012) but ultimately separate endeavors (Duggan 1995). Queer theory emerged from analyses of canonical English-language texts (Turner 2000, 146), and it continues to prioritize “queer readings” of classic and mainstream literary and musical texts (Jarman-Ivens 2011; Peraino 2006). Anthropologists have rightly, in my view, critiqued queer theory for its lack of “connection to the empirical world and the sociohistorical forces that shape sexual practice and identity” (Green 2002, 533; see also Lewin and Leap 2002, 11; Leap and Lewin 2009a, 7). My book insists on connecting to the empirical world by relaying, at length, my observations derived from my attendance at events and questioning of insiders. At the same time, I agree with Lisa Duggan (1995, 205) that “it is a terrible mistake to dismiss work in queer theory as jargon-ridden, elitist claptrap, as some do.” Chapter 5 of this book in fact owes a debt to queer theory; that chapter is in essence an application of the ideas of an important queer theorist, José Esteban Muñoz. Furthermore, in that chapter I depend on other prominent queer theorists to understand how canonical choral songs “become gay,” and how GALA’s songs expand the scholarly understanding of gay culture.

Anthropology insists that researchers divulge their own positionality in relation to the people among whom they conduct their research (see an excellent example in E. Hayes 2010, 10). This action is especially important in gay and lesbian anthropology because, as Lewin and William Leap point out (2002, 12), “conducting lesbian/gay research is tantamount to coming out—whether one is actually lesbian/gay or not.” I myself am a straight (heterosexual), cisgender woman, married to a straight, cisgender man. Prefacing other important themes in this book, I make clear here that I also identify as Canadian, White, middle class, and Christian. While I am a supporter of GALA choristers’ ideals—for example, the idea that human beings of all sexual orientations and gender identifications are fundamentally equal and ought to be treated as such—I am not an activist on LGBT issues. Specifically, I am not aiming in this book to make a contribution to gay or queer

activism, unlike some other scholars of gay and queer studies (Bronski 1984; Butler 1999, xvii; Cohen 2001, 202; D’Emilio 1992, xix). Most importantly, I have never sung in a GALA chorus, although I have sung in and conducted other school and community choirs. For my GALA interlocutors, therefore, I was fundamentally an outsider to their experience. It is a measure of their tremendous graciousness that they so freely shared with me their thoughts and expertise.

This project depends on an intersectional mode of analysis. Given that cisgender White men constitute the dominant majority of the population in GALA choruses, characterizing the book as an intersectional study requires an explanation. Intersectionality is an analytical frame that emerged from Black feminism and was codified through sociological methodology; its central insight is that subjects are often multiply marginalized, and that they experience distinct forms of oppression at the intersections of their identities. Black women, for example, are discriminated against on the basis of their gender (as women) *and* on the basis of their racial identification (as African Americans). Therefore scholarly studies, legal briefs, or activist agendas that focus only on gender discrimination, or only on racism, fail to address the full range of marginalization experienced by women of color. Scholars in a wide variety of fields have found intersectionality to be “a productive concept” because it continually exposes the paucity of “single-axis thinking.” Today intersectionality is defined as “a gathering place for open-ended investigations of the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality and other inequalities” (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 787–88).

With the tremendous growth in the number of intersectional studies, writers have, perhaps predictably, queried the nature of the field. Some have worried that as “‘intersectionality’ has become a scholarly buzzword” (Nash 2008, 3), the field has narrowed, or has been misconstrued, to focus only on subjects who can be reliably portrayed as marginalized. In particular, that literature has neglected the study of White men, overlooking the fact that they—like all people everywhere—may experience multiple forms of dominance and subordination not only on the basis of their race and gender, but also on the basis of their social class, their nationality, their sexual orientation, and other nodes of inequality (Nash 2008, 10). As intersectionality has matured, scholars have clarified that its inquiry is directed not toward identity—or toward particular identities—but rather toward power (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 797). Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw—who coined the term *intersectionality*—and her coauthors sum it up thusly: “If intersectionality is an analytic disposition, a way of thinking about and conducting analyses, then what makes an analysis intersectional is not its use of the term ‘intersec-

tionality,' nor its being situated in a familiar genealogy, nor its drawing on lists of standard citations. Rather, what makes an analysis intersectional—whatever terms it deploys, whatever its iteration, whatever its field or discipline—is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power” (2013, 795).

This book examines the people who sing in, conduct, and administrate GALA choruses, with a focus on how their subject positions influence their relationships to mainstream society in Canada and the United States. GALA singers overwhelmingly identify as LGBT (mostly as gay or lesbian), and they have experienced stigmatization and discrimination on that basis (see chapter 1). As chapter 2 explains, one reason for the vitality of GALA choruses is that those who participate in them view them as their families; as LGBT persons they have a tremendous appreciation for “family” because so many of them have been rejected by their families of origin and by their faith communities. At the same time, most GALA choristers are White and middle class. This positionality gives them a considerable degree of privilege; one marker of that privilege, of course, is that they have the income and leisure time to participate in a community choir. Most importantly, their racial and class positions go a long way toward explaining why the GALA organization—so consistently committed to progressive social change—uses an integrationist rather than a liberationist approach. Its members, White middle-class people pursuing activism, focus on the few institutions closed to them by virtue of their status as sexual and gender minorities (marriage and the military) and on a diffuse notion of “changing hearts and minds” (see chapter 6). The GALA organization is marked by internal divisions that are often glossed as identity politics but that are better understood as differential relationships to power; for example, the amount of money and attention received by men’s choruses far outweighs that received by choruses that include women (i.e., mixed choruses and women’s choruses; see chapter 2). Moreover, as groups populated overwhelmingly by cisgender people who love the gender-binary-confirming Western choral music tradition, GALA choruses have struggled to welcome transgender singers (see chapter 3). Throughout this book, as the reader will discover, I attend to all these dynamics of gender, race, and social class.

### A Further Word about a Word

The word *queer* appears in this book infrequently, usually only when I am referencing the proper name of a group or quoting another scholar. The

reason for this scarcity is that I endeavor throughout to faithfully reflect the words of my GALA interlocutors. The middle-aged, middle-class White people who constitute the majority of the singers in GALA choruses and who dominated my interview sample almost never use the word *queer* to describe themselves, their choruses, or their music. (From my total interview sample of ninety-seven people, only four singers and one artistic director described themselves as queer when asked about their sexual orientation). It is true, as Julia Balén (2017, 180) reports, that queer is increasingly coming into common usage among LGBT people; indeed, this uptick is one of Balén’s justifications for using the term in the title and throughout the text of her own book about GALA Choruses. However, the word has a long and varied history. In the early twentieth century in New York City, middle-class gay men used it to describe themselves and to distinguish their own experience of homosexuality from that of the working-class effeminate “fairies” whom they largely disliked (Chauncey 1994, 106). At the same time, mainstream English speakers began using the word to insultingly refer to all homosexual men, and queer became a form of hate speech. In the early 1970s, gay activists reappropriated the word as a name for their protest movements, and it remained associated with radical liberationists through the early twenty-first century (Faderman 2015, 528). A small minority of queer activists publicly supported what is now referred to as pedophilia (White 1991, 308–10; Bawer 1993, 157), and that stance, more than any other, has made gay integrationists decline to use the word queer. They understand queer to be an insult deployed by homophobes (Jagose 1996, 103; Leap 1996, 106). To the extent that queer is now “a catch-all term” to refer to LGBT people (Taylor 2012, 14), GALA insiders do recognize it and—infrequently—use it. But they are aware that queer is also “a term of resistance” that “opposes hegemonic identificatory and behavioral norms, including liberal lesbian and gay identity politics” (Taylor 2012, 14), and therefore, they generally agree with the founder of two different GALA choruses who said to me, “I’m offended by the word queer!”<sup>5</sup>

## Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1, “GALA Choruses as Community Choirs,” begins with an ethnographic description of a representative GALA chorus rehearsal. The central argument of the chapter is that GALA choruses are part of the community choral music scene, and they both resemble and differ from other community choirs in significant ways. After exploring other scholars’ defi-

nitions of community choirs, I delineate commonalities that GALA choruses share with other community choirs: commitment to fundraising, choristers' previous musical experience, and valorization of a particular understanding of artistic excellence. GALA choruses, however, are remarkably successful at their fundraising when compared to other community choirs, and they are also criticized by choral music gatekeepers as musically inferior. The discussion of excellence leads to an explanation of GALA's relationship to the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), a leading professional music society and gatekeeping organization that has had a contentious relationship with GALA choruses in the past. GALA's marginalization within the ACDA is but one example of the discrimination various choruses have experienced as a result of identifying as LGBT. GALA choruses' experience with (and continuing fear of) discrimination is an important way in which they differ from other community choirs. Chapter 1 concludes with an extended analysis of the quadrennial GALA Festival. Again, like other community choirs, GALA choruses prioritize attendance at choral festivals, but their own festival is unique, and it is uniquely important to GALA choristers. It is at this festival that GALA choristers learn that they are participants in a movement. Moments of Durkheimian effervescence foster in the choristers a deeply emotional conviction that together they are changing the world through song.

Chapter 2, "Community' and Its Significance to GALA Choristers," argues that local GALA choruses are of overriding importance to the choristers who sing in them because they are communities of friendship, which are immensely valuable to LGBT people and which are increasingly rare in US and Canadian society at large. However, the GALA organization, understood as one overarching community, displays significant divisions along gender lines. I begin by explaining choristers' varying motivations to join their local choruses, noting that desire to find a supportive community is by far their most common motivation. Correspondingly, GALA choruses are marked by a strong commitment to the ideal of "community." Following Kay Kaufman Shelemay's (2011) analysis of three types of musical communities and the processes that lead to their formations, I show that various GALA choristers and leaders exemplify all three; however, most GALA insiders see their choruses as communities of descent—that is, groups that come together on the basis of a shared identity. And it is this shared LGBT identity—and the life experience it implies—that explains why GALA choruses are so deeply important to their members. Participation in voluntary face-to-face communities has plummeted in recent decades in the United States and Canada; LGBT persons are especially in need of such communities because

they are often excluded from their families of origin and from their churches. The chapter continues by exploring divisions within the GALA Choruses organization, arguing that men's (TTBB) choruses are much more prominent, and seemingly more valued, in GALA circles than are mixed (SATB) choruses or women's (SSAA) choruses. GALA insiders often discuss the gender division within their organization by pointing to differences in chorus governance, claiming that men prefer hierarchy and women prefer consensus. I argue that the overwhelming majority of GALA choruses do not adhere to the purest form of either of these modes of governance; rather, power is shared between choristers and their leaders in a variety of ways.

Chapter 3, "Diversity and Its Discontents," pursues one of the central arguments of the book, that GALA's commitment to promoting broad-based support for various dimensions of diversity is tested in its own backyard. I begin with an ethnographic description of a performance by a GALA chorus, a performance that sought to promote diversity. The chapter explores the lack of ethnic diversity among GALA choruses, which are overwhelmingly White organizations. GALA Choruses and its various member choruses are not exceptional in this way; Whiteness predominates in the Canadian and American choral music scenes. I offer four possible reasons why GALA choruses include so few singers (and even fewer artistic directors) of color. Chief among these reasons—as numerous other scholars have argued—is that LGBT identities are often understood to be incompatible with various ethnic identities. GALA's leaders have spearheaded various diversity initiatives during the four decades of the organization's existence, both at the international and local levels. Beginning in 2016, they focused on greater inclusion and visibility for transgender singers. However, as I argue, transgender singers' greatest desires cannot always be accommodated by GALA choruses, which have a continuing commitment to the norms of the Western choral music tradition, a tradition that prizes homogeneity of sound and appearance.

Chapter 4, "Homonormativity: GALA Choruses as Middle-Class Organizations," argues that GALA choruses are homonormative organizations—that is, they are marked by a cisgender, White, middle-class, US/Canadian ethos. Having explored the dominance of Whiteness and of traditional gender norms in GALA in the previous chapter, here I turn to socioeconomic class as a powerful determinant of GALA insiders' preferences and values, as revealed by their offstage behavior and their onstage performances. GALA's homonormative ethos is most tellingly revealed in its valorization of monogamy and same-sex marriage, a cause for which its choruses have composed and performed a number of songs. (I note that

during the GALA Festival, a quadrennial event at which thousands of GALA choristers assemble, hooking up is common, or is perceived as common. However, GALA insiders insist that their choruses are not venues for hooking up, and “dating” is sometimes explicitly forbidden in chorus bylaws.) GALA choristers frequently talk about and even sing about how their choruses are *not* like gay bars—that is, places where “excessive appetites” (Lynch 1992) may be indulged, and where people are ruthlessly judged according to their “erotic capital” (Green 2011). GALA artistic directors more frequently compare their choruses to churches, venues that (supposedly) welcome all kinds of people, and that are also dedicated to proclaiming a persuasive message. The discussion of the church analogy leads to GALA choruses’ complicated relationship with the performance of sacred music, or songs that reference Christian beliefs. I explain that GALA’s artistic directors pursue four different strategies when programming sacred music. One increasingly common choice is to program songs that affirm both Christian dogma and same-sex love.

Chapter 5, “Disidentifying: The Music and Performance Practices of GALA Choruses,” argues that what GALA choruses do with their performances—as evident in both the songs they sing and the ways they present those songs—is disidentifying, a concept first advanced by scholar José Esteban Muñoz (1999). GALA singers and artistic directors disidentify with the Western choral music tradition by upholding its heteronormative values while simultaneously proclaiming their own narrative within it. GALA choristers disidentify in two primary ways: by singing so-called gay songs, and by developing innovative performance practices. The chapter begins by analyzing a number of gay songs. Some of GALA’s gay songs are unabashedly campy, but others are deeply serious and are presented with sincerity. Because of this multiplicity, I argue that scholars of LGBT life, who have focused largely on camp, should expand their understanding of gay culture. I then turn to an analysis of GALA’s performance practices; I explain that GALA performances exist on a spectrum marked by two poles (the choral recital and the show). Following detailed descriptions of a variety of chorus performances, I claim that most fall somewhere along the middle of the spectrum. Importantly, the large majority of GALA performances demonstrate some form of innovation, transcending the norms of the traditional choral recital. As other scholars have argued, artistic innovation—especially in the area of stage performance—is something of a gay male specialization, and is linked to early life experiences that are common to members of sexual and gender minorities who grow up in heteronormative society. Returning to Muñoz, I affirm his claim that the kinds of disidentifications that GALA choruses



engage in have political implications. In the following chapters, I explore those political implications, which GALA insiders most often gloss as “our mission.”

Chapter 6, “GALA Choruses on a Mission,” argues that GALA choruses are mission-driven groups. The choruses’ mission is to foster a particular kind of social change through their singing—that is, “to change hearts and minds.” Importantly, the change they seek is in the attitudes of their (potentially homophobic) listeners, and not usually in the laws or institutions that structure mainstream society. Chapter 6 illuminates the ways in which the choruses’ commitment to their social change mission drives both shared norms and disagreements across the GALA organization. I begin by analyzing GALA choruses’ various mission statements, showing that most emphasize both musicking and social change. Artistic directors work hard to foster a sense of commitment to the mission, and my interviews with dozens of choristers show that they do identify strongly with the mission. However, both leaders and singers from across GALA disagree about whether choruses should be characterized as doing political work. This disagreement is linked, I argue, to diverging opinions on how choruses ought to pursue their mission. Most commonly, insiders link their social change work to concertizing, claiming that by conveying a transformational message they can persuade listeners to respect LGBT people. Therefore, programming decisions are of utmost importance to GALA singers. In addition, GALA choristers believe that by identifying as LGBT people onstage and in public, they embody their mission. The stakes surrounding that identification are correspondingly high, and GALA insiders have debated for decades what exactly their choruses ought to be named. I conclude by citing some of GALA’s most influential thought leaders, who openly speculate whether hearing an LGBT-identified chorus sing can, in fact, change the hearts and minds of listeners. This central question—does GALA choruses’ pursuit of their mission actually lead to social change?—animates the last two chapters of the book.

Chapter 7, “GALA Choruses as Part of the Gay Rights Movement,” examines GALA choruses’ musicking through the lens of social movement theory. I begin by outlining social movement theorists’ definitions of social movements, explaining how GALA choruses can be thus characterized as belonging to the gay rights movement. One of the most important findings from studies of social movements is that all of them are marked by an internal divide, and the gay rights movement is no exception. I delineate the arguments of the liberationist and integrationist wings of the gay rights movement and argue that GALA choruses are best understood as belonging to the integrationist wing. The integrationist ethos of GALA is revealed both in

many statements that interviewees made to me (emphasizing their desire to present themselves as “normal”) and in directives issued by GALA leaders. Most tellingly, however, GALA choruses’ integrationist commitment is evident in their choice of tactic, the choral concert. Following Don Handelman’s (1998) theory of public events, I analyze a number of performances by GALA choruses as “events-that-re-present” and as “events-that-model,” arguing that these performances are indeed intended to “act upon and change the ordering of” the social world.

Finally, chapter 8, “Social Change: Assessing GALA Choruses’ Central Claim,” begins by acknowledging what social movement scholars have long claimed, that it is very difficult to gauge the success of a social movement. I explain that GALA choristers have a widespread belief that their efforts are leading to the social change they pursue—to the changing of hearts and minds—and they provide anecdotal evidence for their belief, both in interviews and in their organization’s public statements. Scholars have long engaged with the question of how such social change is effected, conducting decades of research on the contact hypothesis, which investigates how contact with members of minority groups affects the way that majority group members think. I describe in detail an empirical experiment I conducted with students from my own university, using Gregory Herek’s (1994) ATLG questionnaire to assess their reported levels of homophobia before and after a GALA men’s chorus concert. After the concert, the students generally demonstrated no change in their attitudes toward gay men, although intriguingly, they more profoundly disagreed with a negative statement about gay men. I point out that GALA’s artistic directors and singers could rightly choose to interpret this study as buttressing their claim that their concertizing changes hearts and minds. Much previous scholarship has shown that coming out is a powerful way to foster increased tolerance of LGBT people. I therefore argue that GALA choruses’ best claim to advancing a social change agenda rests on the fact that they have provided a way for thousands of choristers to come out as LGBT. GALA performances allow listeners to experience positive interpersonal experiences with groups of people (not just scattered individuals) who self-identify as LGBT; as previous social science research has shown, such experiences are central to reducing the stigma attached to LGBT people.