

MEN ALIVE

ORANGE COUNTY'S GAY MEN'S CHORUS

By Joseph S. Amster

Conductor Rich Cook's vision of creating a gay men's chorus in Orange County started with a vision after he came out. "Six and a half years ago, when I came out, I worked for the Cathedral of Hope in Dallas, Texas. While I was there, somebody took me to see the Turtle Creek Chorale's Christmas concert. They're two hundred fifty men, the Gay Men's Chorus of Dallas. It was an awesome concert, fun, serious, all kinds of wonderful things. I sat there and thought, 'This could happen in Orange County.'"

Cook had worked with Christian ministries in the past, including a stint as music director at Melodyland Christian Center. Now out of the closet, he decided to return to Orange County. "I thought I could start one. I'd think about it. 'Boy, there's nothing going on in Orange County. Wouldn't this be a great thing? There's so many great guys here, musicians,'" Cook remembers. "This summer, I went to the Los Angeles Gay Men's Chorus concert at the Barclay Theatre in Irvine and thought, 'You know, this should be happening.' I went home and there was a voice-mail message from Rev. Albert Ogle of St. George's Episcopal Church, where I work as musical director, saying, 'Rich, I was at the Gay men's Chorus concert today. I saw you there, but I didn't get to speak to you. It's time you should start an Orange County Gay Men's Chorus.'"

"The next day, my housemate, Eric, and his friend were out in the hallway. They came into my room and said, 'Rich, ever think about starting a gay men's chorus?' I said I actually had," says Cook. "That was the catalyst. So we began talking about it. I met some people that next week over at the house. We ended up partying, telling people about it that night. We made some posters and put them up in different establishments: bookstores and bars and restaurants and things. People started calling,



Men alive will perform their first concert "Light the World With Peace," on December 15.

just here and there, by word of mouth. We started not quite a month and a half ago, with 13 guys. We have 25 now."

Currently, Cook is busy getting Men Alive ready for their December 15 concert at the Irvine United Church of Christ, 4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine, as well as a performance at Woody's at the Beach on December 11. Cook also has concerts planned for the spring. Cook also hopes to expand someday to have a women's and a mixed chorus. "We can have a whole artistic program going in Orange County, for the gay and lesbian community. We can have

a women's chorus and we can have a mixed chorus and just see how it grows," he says.

The theme of the holiday concert is "Light the World With Peace," a musical celebration of holiday customs around the world. The concert will include a wide range of dynamic male chorus arrangements including international holiday music, traditional, classical, gospel, and original holiday music. The concert will have many unique and interesting features. The chorus will be costumed in tuxes with one costume change during the concert. Other highlights will be special effects (an onstage

blizzard), a comedic sketch on the subject of shopping, theatrical lighting, and staging the story of the composing of the Austrian Christmas carol, "Silent Night."

The concert will take place at 5 p.m. so that those attending can make a festive holiday evening for themselves by attending the concert first, then going off to parties or out for the evening. Ticket prices are \$20 (advance) and \$25 (at the door). All tickets are general admission. Tickets can be purchased in person at Different Drummer Bookstore, corner of Coast Highway and Cress St. in Laguna Beach; Irvine United Church of Christ, 4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine; St. George's Episcopal Church, 23802 Avenida de la Carlota, Laguna Hills (off 5 freeway at El Toro Rd.). Credit card purchases can be made by calling the ticket hot line, (949) 494-8167.