

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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CONCERT PREVIEW

Michael Feinstein Joins Men Alive for Fifth Anniversary Show

BY PAUL FINDLAY

Almost five years ago, a little chorus was born in Orange County. Men Alive – The Orange County Gay Men's Chorus was conceived by artistic director Rich Cook in summer 2001, and staged its first show that December with 24 singers in a small church in Irvine.

Times have certainly changed. Today, that little chorus has grown into more than 100 singers and supporters, performing to several thousand people every year. Making a home and selling out concerts at the Irvine Barclay Theatre, Men Alive has quickly grown up and become a bea-





con for both the arts and gay communities in Orange County. On Saturday, July 15, the chorus has planned its most ambitious show yet: a fifth anniversary concert/celebration with a special guest, Broadway crooner Michael Feinstein.

Surprisingly, "Curtain Up! Light The Lights!" is Men Alive's first show of all Broadway songs.

"For our Fifth Anniversary show, we knew the time was right for a Broadway show," Cook said. "The music of Broadway has become 'America's music,' expressing our moods, the emotions and needs. It contains some of the most beautiful melodies, harmonies and rhythms composed for the masses over the past century. And so we thought, what better gift could we give our audience?"

With a mix of songs from such Broadway classics as "Oklahoma," "The Sound of Music and My Fair Lady," to such current blockbusters as "The Producers," "The Lion King" and "Wicked," the show promises to have something for everyone.

Adding to the excitement is special guest Feinstein. A four-time Grammy nominee, Feinstein has been called "America's Ambassador of Song" for capturing the essence and richness of popular music like no other contemporary artist. And his blend of classic big band with pop music has made him a star on Broadway and around the world.

"[Feinstein] has created a niche for him-

self of singing love songs and ballads from an earlier day, including many Broadway favorites," Cook said. "We saw him as a natural with whom to collaborate to make our first Broadway spectacular—not only unique but authentic."

In addition to being an accomplished singer and arranger, Feinstein has spent his entire adult life chronicling, preserving and recording the work of various masters of music. In

his recordings (more than 20 albums), Feinstein combines hits and rarities to create the equivalent of a musical biography of great composers. His many subjects have included Jule Styne, Jerry Herman, Burton Lane, Harry Morgan, and George and Ira Gershwin, his mentor.

Although Men Alive has not had major celebrity performers at prior concerts, Feinstein seemed a natural choice for guest artist when planning the fifth anniversary show.

"We have never had big guest stars in the past," explained Stewart Hall, chief executive officer of Men Alive. "We always felt the main focus should be on the chorus and its artistry. But this was a Broadway show, and there are so many great Broadway stars that we would love to share the stage with. We thought, what better time than our big anniversary to go all out and have such a wonderful star join us?"

"Curtain Up! Light the Lights!" will have two performances on Saturday, July 15, at 3 p.m. and 8 p.m. at the Irvine Barclay Theatre in Irvine. Tickets are \$45/\$35/\$25, and are available through the Barclay box office and online at www.TheBarclay.org. For more information about the show and Men Alive, visit www.MenAliveChorus.org.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MEN ALIVE

