

Orange County Exposed

The Anti-Diva Diva



Bernadette Peters discusses her illustrious career and her upcoming concert with Men Alive

BY BRANTLEY BARDIN

Orange alert! On May 31, the only place any self-respecting show queen will be is deep in the heart of the O.C. — specifically the O.C. Performing Arts Center. The premier Broadway baby of our day, two-time Tony Award-winning singer/actress, Bernadette Peters appears with the Orange County gay men's chorus, Men Alive, in their "New York City Rhythm!" season finale.

"I'm so excited," says the just-turned-60-but-still-looking-40 vision in rotini curls. "It's just so much fun to sing with a chorus of 120 men behind you!" We hear ya, Bernadette. She recently added to her 50-years-in-the-biz string of credits (including the original productions of Sondheim's *Sunday In the Park with George* and *Into the Woods*) with a self-penned children's book, "Broadway Barks," the proceeds of which will go to her like-named, NYC pet shelter charity. Now, Miss P. dishes about gays, diva-dom, and getting older with élan.

FRONTIERS: So, you're singing with the O.C.'S Men Alive?

It's funny, I just sang with Cleveland's North Coast Men's Chorus and they were joking about how they couldn't call it a 'gay men's chorus', because (ironically) "Of course, there's no gay people in Ohio." [Laughs] But, yeah, Men Alive is gonna be great—I picked "There Is Nothing Like a Dame" and "You Could Drive a Person Crazy" for them to sing with me 'cause that'll be so funny, right?

Yep. But give us your spin on why gay men have a disproportionate-to-the-population love of musical theater.

I've been asked that a lot so my answer keeps sifting down to more and more specific: See, music is so healing—and this kind of music is so complex—that I think it's that when one feels they don't quite fit in, they're drawn to emotional, extra-sensitive things. And, of course, I always just say that they have good taste, too!

You're still a knockout at 60. Was your birthday a freakout?

No, because I realized that that thing about 'age is just a number' is really true—especially if you're healthy and everything's working great and you're doing everything you did since you were 40. So I didn't think, 'Oh my God... 60!' I realized, "Nah, that's not really now—60's down the road."

What's your response to being called a "legend" or a "diva?" Honestly, even though you are those things, your renowned, real-life sweetness makes you seem more like the "anti-diva diva."

Yeah, when I hear someone call me a legend, it's weird. I get taken aback, like, "What?! Eeeww!" [Laughs]

You started in the biz at 3 years old and now it's 57 years later. Has it gone by fast?

So fast. I mean, I started performing at 3 and joined Actor's Equity when I was 9 so it's been 51 years—I've surpassed Sammy Davis Jr.'s record!" [Laughs] But still, you know, you're sort of right about me being 'the anti-diva diva.' [Laughs] That's me.

Bernadette Peters will perform New York City Rhythm! with Men Alive May 31. For more information, visit www.menalivechorus.org.