

MEDIA RELEASE: For immediate distribution

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**Various Voices 09:
60 Gay & Lesbian Choirs To Sing at London's Southbank Centre**

Europe's largest ever gay and lesbian choral festival: 4 days of music and events

major music event for London has been announced today with tickets going on sale for Various Voices 2009 (www.variousvoiceslondon.org.uk), Europe's largest ever celebration of lesbian and gay choirs and singers. The festival takes place at London's Southbank Centre over the early May Bank Holiday weekend, 1-4 May 2009 and tickets are now on sale at www.southbankcentre.co.uk.

With more than 70 concerts from over 60 choirs, cabaret from the biggest names on the alternative cabaret circuit, world and European premieres, public workshops, masterclasses, film and expert panels, Various Voices, run in partnership with Southbank Centre, promises to be a highlight of this year's arts calendar. Most events are open to the public including choir concerts in the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall and Purcell Room, outdoor shows, ballroom dancing and performances by some high profile performers, details of whom will be released over the next few months.

Highlights of the festival weekend include:

- **Opening Ceremony** hosted by Sandi Toksvig including hundreds of singers performing outside the Festival Hall and across Hungerford Bridge.
- **Voices of Our City:** London's three host choirs, The Pink Singers, Diversity and London Gay Men's Chorus, welcome delegates to London with a concert of songs about London and by British gay composers.
- **World premiere** of specially commissioned choral work by Steve Martland, part of 'With One Voice', a major concert in The Royal Festival Hall that also includes Orlando Gough's 'Vogel' and Orff's Carmina Burana performed by a massed festival choir including London Philharmonic Choir, conducted by Howard Moody.
- **European Premiere** of 'Sing for The Cure', a major work about people affected by breast cancer with the London Gay Symphony Orchestra and a specially formed choir in a fundraising concert aiming to raise £15,000 for UK charity Breakthrough Breast Cancer.
- **The Big Gay Sing:** Hosted by Timberlina and Lorraine Bowen, this glamorous sing-a-long is your chance to belt out Bette, Barbra and Bassey with the Various Voices singers.
- **Why We Sing:** Film screenings and a discussion panel focusing on the political and social power of LGBT singing and choirs.
- A full week's menu of **social events**, with a side-order of complimentary happenings including Ballroom Dancing with the Pink Dancers, late-night cabaret, Singing City with singers involved in various activities including walking, jogging and cycling, Flash-Mob events at train stations, and a Slow Food market and feast.
- The festival will also bring together culture and **sport** through a fun sports day on Monday to mark the 10th anniversary of the death of the first out gay footballer Justin Fashanu; contributing to the campaign to stop homophobic bullying in education, work and sport

Run by volunteers working in conjunction with Southbank Centre, Various Voices takes place in a European city every 4 years. This is the 12th festival, and the first in London since 1989. 2000 lesbian and gay singers will be arriving from across the UK, Europe and further afield. 13 choirs are from the UK, 16 from Germany, 7 from Holland and 4 from the USA with others from Switzerland, France, Ireland, Scandinavia, Belgium, Croatia and Canada. For many the festival marks their European debut.

The choirs will each give a half hour performance over the weekend with many singing in a variety of languages including English as well as their native tongue. Musical styles vary considerably, from traditional folk songs and classical favourites to pop, disco and musical theatre. Many choirs include costumes and choreography in their performances, making for a hugely varied range of concerts.

Other Highlights of the long weekend include 'Best in Show', an X-Factor style talent contest compered by Amy Lamé, and Jonathan Hellyer, better known as The D.E. Experience, hosting and singing with his band as part of Small and Perfectly Formed, a celebration of small ensemble singing. New York cabaret legend Our Lady J makes a rare London appearance with her show Gospel for the Godless, singing the songs of Nine Inch Nails, Alanis Morissette and Dolly Parton among others. The weekend will also feature a wide range of workshops covering singing, musical technique, conducting, choreography and choir management.

Southbank Centre Artistic Director Jude Kelly says the Southbank will never have seen anything quite like it:

“Southbank Centre has a long tradition of choral activity. Two years ago we launched Voicelab to develop singing and choral work for all ages, so we are delighted to host Various Voices 09. This unique festival brings into focus the major contribution that the LGBT community – in all its diversity – has upon the creative world. It demonstrates the uniting power of the voice. So come and celebrate with us – we look forward to hearing you there.”

Festival Director Martin Brophy says Various Voices will be a unique event for London:

“London has never seen a gay and lesbian arts event on quite this scale, and for it to be taking place at Southbank Centre is fantastic, putting it at the heart of the city’s arts and music scene. Many of the choirs taking part have never performed outside their homeland before, giving London audiences an amazing opportunity to hear choirs and music that promise to be unlike any they have heard before.”

Various Voices London 2009 is supported by The Mayor of London, VisitLondon, The Paul Hamlyn Foundation and The Foyle Foundation. Sponsors already onboard for the event include Hotelopia and Markson Pianos.

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For all media enquiries including images, music for broadcast, interviews and feature ideas please contact Steve Bustin at Vada Media on 01273 648339 or steve@vadamedia.co.uk.

Notes for Editors

Background: Various Voices and the lesbian and gay choral movement

Various Voices is a pan-European gay choral festival that takes places every four years with cities competing for the honour of hosting the event. Various Voices London 2009 is the 12th festival, originally known as The European Festival of Song. The host city for the event is chosen by Legato, the European umbrella organisation for lesbian and gay choirs (www.legato-choirs.com). The last Various Voices, in 2005, was held in Paris

The event has been held in London once before, in 1989, when 14 choirs took part in a weekend event at the Hackney Empire. The closing night concert was a fundraiser for The Terrance Higgins Trust at which Michael Cashman first announced the formation of gay lobbying group Stonewall.

The Growth of The Lesbian and Gay Choral Movement

10 years ago, the UK had 6 lesbian and/or gay choirs. Now there are at least 15, with more starting every year. The same is true across Europe. In 1989 when what is now Various Voices (then called The European Festival of Song) was last in London, 14 choirs attended. In 2009 more than 60 are already registered.

UK choirs registered for Various Voices 2009 include:

- A Cappella Birmingham
- Brighton Gay Men’s Chorus
- Deep C Divas (Leeds)
- Diversity (London)
- Gay Abandon (Leeds)
- London Gay Men’s Chorus
- Loud & Proud (Edinburgh)
- Manchester Lesbian & Gay Chorus
- Out Aloud! (Sheffield)
- Pink Singers (London)
- Rainbow Chorus (Brighton)
- Rainbow Voices (Birmingham)
- Sing Out Bristol

In the last year the profile of gay and lesbian choirs in the UK has been boosted by the appearance of The Brighton Gay Men's Chorus in the live semi-finals of BBC1's Last Choir Standing, which has boosted choral singing generally across the UK.