can't Stop the beat

Gleeks Rejoice!

Alex Newell to Perform with Boston Gay Men's Chorus

Courtesy of Boston Gay Men's Chorus

Just in time for Pride, Boston Gay Men's Chorus will perform "Can't Stop the Beat," the biggest production in its 32-year history, on June 12, 13, and 15 at New England Conservatory's Jordan Hall. The concerts feature Alex Newell who stars as the show-stopping transgender teen Wade "Unique" Adams on FOX's hit series Glee.

Newell will also share the stage with the Chorus June 7 in his hometown of Lynn for a special Outreach Concert at Lynn Auditorium, part of the Chorus's mission of community engagement. Proceeds from the concert will be donated to 13 LGBT-related and North Shore nonprofits (AIDS Action Committee, Children's Law Center of MA, Boys and Girls Club of Lynn, Cerebral Palsy of Eastern MA, Family & Children's Services, Girls, Inc., YMCA of Metro North, Gregg Neighborhood House, Straight Ahead Ministries, Mass. Coalition for the Homeless, RAW Artworks, Catholic Charities North, and Camp Fire of the North Shore).

In this Q&A, Boston Gay Men's Chorus Music Director Reuben M. Reynolds III takes us through the show!

Q: Collaborating with Alex Newell sounds pretty exciting. What can audiences expect?
A: Alex has such an amazing story. He's from Lynn and he competed on a TV show called *The Glee Project*. As one of the winners he was cast in an episode of *Glee*. Well, everyone loved him so much he's now a regular cast member. I just think it's an incredible tribute to all of those people who fought for so long for our equality that here is this young, black gay man who's playing a transgender person on TV, and making it in Hollywood being perfectly honest about who he is. I think that is the greatest praise or honor that we can give to all the people who fought in the Civil Rights Movement and the LGBT rights fight for so long is to see how far we've come. Alex is a great example of that. And he's a blast to work with!

Q: Have you been practicing with him?
A: No, that's the hard part. We do a lot of emailing back and forth and chatting on the phone but he won't actually be here until the week of the concert. So we work on stuff over the phone. It's pretty standard.

Q: Your Pride concert is called "Can't Stop the Beat." Is that just a reference to the musical *Hairspray*, or is there a deeper meaning there?
A: It's an allusion to what I think about LGBT rights right now in our country. You watch law after law after law against same-sex marriages being knocked down, and we wanted to talk about how much things have changed and how quickly in the last just 20 years. We talk about the movement by talking about some of our heroes in it—the people who have supported it and pushed us along. What we're trying to do here is look at all the different parts that have made us what we are today.

Q: Can you tell us about some of the music you've chosen, and how the songs reflect the theme of the concert?
A: "Holding Out for a Hero," from *Footloose* is a big dance number to open the show, and the idea is basically we're talking about our heroes. Then we do a set, basically about civil rights and coming out: "We Will Know," "Hello Young Lovers," "We Kiss in the Shadows," "We Shall Overcome," and Garth Brook's song, "We Shall Be Free."

We'll also do selections from pop stars who were really big proponents for gay rights early on: Ricky Martin's song "Safe," Cyndi Lauper's "True Colors," which I just love singing; Bette Midler's "The Rose," which makes me cry every time; and "I'm Coming Out," by Diana Ross. We will also do "That's What Friends Are For," which was written for the American Foundation for AIDS Research, or AMFAR, and recorded by Gladys Knight, Dionne Warwick, and Elton John. We're putting that with Whitney Houston's "The Greatest Love of All." And we have to sing some Lady Gaga, so we're doing "Edge of Glory."

After intermission we pay wonderful homage to things like the marriage movement. There's a piece called "Marry Us" that we sang for years and years and years all over the country. We were lucky enough to sing it at one of the very first gay marriages at Arlington Street Church in 2004. We end up with two songs from Hairspray, "I know Where I've Been," and of course, "You Can't Stop the Beat."

One of the interesting things that we're doing that we've never done before is instead of a lot of dancing and movement onstage, we're using a lot of video projections in this concert. There will actually be a huge movie screen hung over the big organ pipes and we'll show images of seminal moments in the LGBT rights movement.

Q: How are you incorporating the images with the songs?
A: Some of these images are just thrilling. We include everything from pictures of our families in a section honoring our mothers and fathers—those people who taught us to be what we are today. We have images from the beginning of the gay rights movement—the fight and what it was like in all of those early moments.

In the "tear jerker" section of the show we have, "You Raise Me Up," which is a song about mothers and fathers and those who were very important in our lives. We're actually projecting pictures of chorus members with one or both of their parents when they were young to honor these people who made us what we are today. We also have pictures of chorus members who are now parents honoring their own kids in the same way.

There is a wonderful song called "We Will Know," by Omar Thomas, who teaches jazz at Berklee School of Music. He's just done a cantata called "We Will Know," an LGBT civil rights piece in four movements, and this is the first movement of it. The song is about the beginning of this march to equality. It's set to images of Stonewall, of Harvey Milk in San Francisco, and other events that started our movement. "Marry Us," of course will include pictures of different people from the chorus community actually being married, wonderful wedding pictures that are just incredible to look at. There will probably be an AIDS segment but I'm not sure on that one yet, because I'm still writing it.

We'll have a fabulous piece by John Grant called "Glacier." John is an openly gay, HIV positive singer working in Europe who actually created this video work himself. Glacier is about how people hurt you when they call you derogatory names, but it's really like a glacier going through you because it digs deep in you and makes you stronger all the time. He created stunning video images that he's given us permission to use, so we're very excited about that.

"Can't Stop the Beat" is June 12 and 13 at 8pm, and June 15 at 3pm at New England Conservatory's Jordan Hall, 30 Gainsborough St., Boston. Tickets $20 - $60 (Before ticket fees, $5 additional walk-up). Tickets available at www.bgmc.org or 617-542-SING (7464). The "Can't Stop the Beat" outreach concert in Lynn is June 7 at 8pm at Lynn Auditorium, 3 City Hall Square, Lynn.