

# At Home for the Holidays

With memories of season's past and hopes for years to come, Boston's LGBTQ holiday events go virtual

Every year, local LGBTQ-associated organizations throw some of the best holiday parties around. (What can we say? We have a knack for making things merry and gay.) In the social-distancing days of 2020, alas, that won't be possible. But a few are refusing to totally give up on the spirit of the season—rather, they're committed to their mission of spreading joy and charity, and they've found some interesting,

exciting ways to repackage their approach. In fact, they've even found ways to partner with big names—from a Boston television station to a supermarket chain to a major booze brand—to amplify their work and reach even more people.

Here are their stories, and how you can help.

## Boston Gay Men's Chorus: 'Home for the Holidays'

For the first time in its nearly 40-year history, the Boston Gay Men's Chorus will not be performing a live holiday concert in December. And yet, believe it or not, this year the BGMC will actually wind up with its biggest stage yet.

On December 12, Boston's WCVB-TV Channel 5 will air "Home for the Holidays," a half-hour television special featuring highlights from the BGMC's winter concerts throughout the years. Sure, most of us would still prefer to be taking a seat in Jordan Hall before the 200 festively

attired members of the chorus, listening to those balls jingle in the flesh. But it's hugely exciting that the BGMC will now have the platform of WCVB, the Boston area's most-watched station—because with it comes the opportunity to reach thousands of viewers who may never have considered buying a ticket.

"It's such a joy to share this with people who might not otherwise come to a chorus concert," says BGMC music director Reuben M. Reynolds III. After a year filled with so much political divisiveness and rising right-wing fervor, there's something uniquely powerful about seeing (and hearing!) a gay men's chorus broadcast into living rooms all across Massachusetts. "We certainly don't hide who we are," says Reynolds. "I love the idea that people might just stumble upon it, turn it on in the middle of a number, be enjoying it, and

then suddenly discover it's a gay men's chorus."

"Home for the Holidays" will air from 7:30 to 8 p.m., and receive a special introduction from veteran newsman Randy Price, the country's first openly gay TV news anchor, who signed off from the station earlier this year.

In terms of the program, Reynolds says he focused on finding the most truly "uplifting" performances that are inclusive of all holiday traditions, including those that represent the African-American and Jewish experience. Expect moving interpretations of classics like "Here We Come A Wassailing" and "Silent Night," the latter accompanied with sign language, as well as playful performances of modern music like "Sparklejollyt-winklejingley" (from the movie "Elf") and "Pink Christmas," a particularly colorful

number that features trees awash in rosy lights.

Clearly, it's a lucky thing that the BGMC has long been in the habit of taping its concerts. Besides supplying plenty of material for "Home for the Holidays," prerecorded performances have also allowed the chorus to keep audiences engaged in isolating times by sharing content on social media. Already, the BGMC has been promoting a "Celebrity Series" of clips with guest stars like "Glee" actor-singer Alex Newell, a native of Lynn, Massachusetts.

Of course, virtual solutions are just holding us over until it's safe to go back inside theaters. When will that happen? BGMC executive director Craig Coogan isn't sure, but he knows one thing: The chorus will not perform live again until there is a vaccine, he says. This hardline stance was not an easy one to take—it's cost the nonprofit

Boston Gay Men's Chorus won't perform its traditional live holiday extravaganza this year, but they're swapping in a half-hour TV special featuring concerts like the one shown here from years' past. PHOTO Gretjen Helene



One big difference for Pie in the Sky's volunteers this year will be the masks they'll wear as they bake and distribute the goodies in a unique 2020 partnership with Whole Foods and directly from Community Servings. PHOTO Community Servings, 2019



arts org about \$350,000 this year, says Coogan, though he adds that generous donors have positioned the chorus to weather the storm.

And when it finally passes, the BGMC will be back, louder and prouder than ever. Reynolds already has his 2021 holiday program decided, and he's raring to rehearse. Coogan, meanwhile, is confident that audiences are equally eager to experience the emotional release only the live arts can provide.

"There's a lot of hand-wringing in the arts industry about whether audiences will come back," says Coogan. "But we know that people are missing and hungry for the shared experience. That's what

people come back for—and we've always delivered on that."

[bgmc.org](http://bgmc.org)

### Pie in the Sky

Every November since 1993, the Boston-based, statewide nonprofit Community Servings has hosted its annual Pie in the Sky campaign. Normally, that means the organization will partner with dozens of area restaurants and bakeries to sell thousands of delicious baked treats, supplying time-pressed Thanksgiving hosts with a ready-to-reheat final course while simultaneously fundraising for Community Servings' vital mission: providing medically tailored foods to chronically

ill individuals and their families, most of whom are low income.

This year, though, it'll be even easier to support that goal—because Community Servings has partnered with Whole Foods to sell in its stores pies that put five dollars apiece toward the organization. That means customers all across Massachusetts will be able to nourish their most vulnerable neighbors at a time when they need it most.

"It's a scary time for everybody, but imagine being immunocompromised and food insecure during this," says Ryan Levasseur, director of communications for Community Servings. He adds that in a significant number of cases, Community Servings meals actually provide for entire

families. "The more people we can help, the better."

In addition to the apple and pumpkin pies that will be sold at Whole Foods locations throughout November, Community Servings will continue to sell pies directly. This year, though, out of safety and streamlining considerations amid COVID-19, only Community Servings' own kitchen and a single local baker will be responsible for producing Pie in the Sky's two top-selling flavors, apple and pecan. And there will only be 7,000 pies baked, a steep drop-off from the 25,000 sold last year. To make up the difference, it'll be even more important that Community Servings supporters make "Pie for a Client" donations; each \$30 contribution feeds a critically ill patient for one week.

Indeed, Community Servings' work is important every year, but especially in the middle of a pandemic. Now is certainly not the time for folks with underlying conditions to expose themselves to unnecessary risks at restaurants or grocery stores, and that makes Community Servings' home-delivered meals service a literal lifeline. Plus, most of the organization's clients are also low-income; the economic fallout from COVID-19 has stretched everyone thinner, but these folks especially.

Although it's certainly a very different situation, it's worth noting that Community Servings originated as a response to an epidemic: The organization was founded in 1990 to bring meals to those who were living with HIV/AIDS, and

what started as a small network to feed 30 people has since grown to a multifaceted nonprofit that made its nine-millionth meal this year.

It's not slowing down anytime soon, and in fact, Levasseur says that Community Servings is continuing to accept volunteers during the pandemic. So after you've bought your pie, you can donate time to help out with safe, socially distanced kitchen tasks and other work. At a time when we're all struggling to find ways to live out the charitable spirit of the holidays, buying pies and pitching in also offers a welcome slice of normalcy.

[servings.org/events/pie-in-the-sky](http://servings.org/events/pie-in-the-sky)