

Oral Memoirs

of

Joel Strack

An Interview Conducted by

Tyler Campbell

September 26, 2016

Regional Initiative for Collecting the History, Experiences, and Stories

(RICHS) of Central Florida

University of Central Florida RICHS of Central Florida

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Interview Histories

Interviewer: Tyler Campbell

Transcriber: Geoffrey Cravero

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of RICHES of Central Florida, History Department, University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida.

Project Detail

RICHES of Central Florida is an umbrella program housing interdisciplinary public history projects that bring together different departments at UCF with profit and non-profit sectors of the community. Central Florida has often been associated with large-scale, commercial tourism and housing development. While those aspects of Central Florida are important to the economic growth of the region, much of its history has remained unnoticed and under researched. The Public History program at UCF links many projects under one initiative to promote the collection and preservation of Central Florida history. By facilitating research that records and presents the stories of communities, businesses, and institutions in Central Florida, RICHES seeks to provide the region with a deeper sense of its heritage. At the same time, the initiative connects the UCF students and faculty with the community and creates a foundation on which Central Floridians can build a better sense of their history.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Joel Strack is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on September 26, 2016.

Abstract

An oral history interview of Joel Strack, one of the founding members of the Orlando Gay Chorus. The interview was conducted by Tyler Campbell in the conference room at the Center for Humanities and Digital Research (CHDR) at the University of Central Florida (UCF) in Orlando, Florida, on September 26th, 2016. Some of the topics covered include founding the Orlando Gay Chorus, naming the chorus, the initial community reaction, women in the chorus, the evolving relationship with the community, becoming a mixed vocal group, hearing about the shooting at Pulse nightclub, vigils, outreach events and fundraisers, coping and seeking counseling, the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA) Festival, the Orlando community's response to the Pulse tragedy, the long-term impact on the Gay Chorus and the Orlando community, and an increase in membership.

Joel Strack

Oral History Memoir
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Tyler Campbell
September 26, 2016
Orlando, Florida

0:00:00

Founding the Orlando Gay Chorus

Campbell It's September 26th, 2016. My name is Tyler Campbell and I am conducting an oral history with Joel Strack of the Orlando Gay Chorus. The interview's being conducted in the conference room at the Center for Humanities and Digital Research at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Florida. Um, can you start by, uh, telling us your name and how you came to be associated with the Orlando Gay Chorus?

Strack Yeah, my name is Joel Strack, and, um, I actually have the distinct position of being one of the founding members of the [Orlando] Gay Chorus, and even sort of, um, uh, before the Gay Chorus, when it was still in its, uh, idea state, I had a—I had a gay cousin—still have a gay cousin, Nardy, and Nardy sang with the Boston Gay Men's Chorus, and the Boston Gay Men's Chorus was going to a GALA Festival. GALA is the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses, and they do a—they did at that point a festival about every three years, and so they were doing their GALA Festival in Seattle, and Nardy asked if I wanted to join him so he had somebody to hang out with while they were in Seattle, and I said, "Sure," um, got set up, um, with tickets and everything, and as I sat there watching these choruses from throughout the U.S. perform, I said, "We've got to have this in Orlando. This would be something"—and I started saying that out loud to people, you know? "O—Orlando's gotta have something like this," and, um, along the way, someone said, "Oh, you need to talk to David Schuler. David Schuler sings with the River City Gay Chorus—or Mixed Chorus—and, um, he's moving to Orlando, and he wants, you know—it's one of his dreams, because he was an executive with the River City Chorus—to be, um—to have a chorus here in Orlando." So David and I met on the steps outside of one of the concert halls. I remember standing there in my overalls, 'cause that was fashionable of—at the time, and, um, chatting with David about, you know, how this might work out.

I was sitting on the Board of Directors here in town for what was then, uh, GCS—the Gay Community Services. Now it's The Center,¹ and so I was sitting on the board at GCS, and I went to the board, um, when I got home and said, "Wo—would the board be willing to set aside a certain amount of money as seed

¹ GLBT Community Center of Central Florida.

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money for this organization – this new organization to get its legs under itself?” And the board, um, did set aside \$500, which was a pretty big chunk of money back then, for the group, um – for us to be able to do a seed concert, and David sort of took over the helm, because he’d been part of the GALA choruses already, contacted the South Florida Gay Men’s Chorus and the Gay Men’s Chorus of Tampa, who came in and actually did the f – initial concert at Valencia College, and, um, so we had our – our first, uh, concert, and everybody who came was given the opportunity to sing up if they were interested in getting more information about the potential of starting a gay chorus here in Orlando. We ended up with about 65 people that signed the list. When we had our first gathering and contacted the people, about 30 people showed up, which was a pretty good ratio considering, and, um, – and that’s sort of when it started happening, um, and that’s how I became involved, um...

Campbell And w – what year was that?

Strack This would have been 1991 or ‘90. ‘90 would have been the seed concert and the meeting. Um, and then we actually incorporated, um, on February 14th – on Valentine’s Day in 1991 – was the incorporation of the Orlando Gay Chorus, and I remember those first meetings as we were m – moving towards incorporation, w – what’s – what’s your name gonna be? What’s our name gonna be? And we – is it gonna be “Gay” first or is it gonna be “Orlando” first? ‘Cause there was lots of, you know, “The Gay Chorus of New York” and the “Gay Chorus of Boston,” uh, and – and are we gonna use the word “Men’s” in our title or is it just gonna stand alone, “Gay?” And it got pretty, um, um, intense as people were talking about why they thought a different placement of words, what words – are we “The Gay Chorus of Central Florida?” Are we “Greater Orlando?” Are we just “Orlando?” All of those things were part of the discussion, and, um, one of the founding members was Penny [Jo] Chessmen, and so having a woman singing a tenor part with us led a number of us to say, “Well, we can’t disqualify her by choosing ‘Men’ as part of our name,” and, um – and she was pushing – or not pushing. She’s – the suggestion came up that it would be the “Gay and Lesbian Chorus of – of Orlando” or “Central Florida” or whatever. Anyway, that was – that was a – a[sic] interesting lead-in to actually becoming incorporated.

0:05:27

Directors and accompanists

Strack And David, uh, became the first president of the chorus. Um, through a sort of a behind-the-scenes search, Charlie Callahan, who was the, um, uh, Composer-in-Residence at Rollins College, was contacted, and he became our first, uh, director, which was a coup for us. Um, his – he was a classic music person, uh, that was world-renowned for his organ music. He – he would go and travel through Europe playing organ concerts. Um, interestingly enough, because of that and not working with vocals so much, his style of directing [*laughs*] was a little bit different than what we currently got[sic] and what we had since then. Um, the first, uh, accompanist was Terry Thomas, and he then became our –

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when Charlie left, I believe he became our second, um, director, and then he also – Terry came back and became our emergency director at one point. Um, uh, one of the directors had decided, “I’m done” or they had to move or whatever reason. We were – we needed, uh, a director on the fly, and Terry came back to us and actually – and so he’s sort of our little angel savior, uh, director, and over the course we’ve probably had 9 to 12 different directors over our 27 year history. Um, a – a broad variety of individuals with m – m – many different skill sets that they brought to the table, and I think it’s one of the things that made the chorus really strong – was that this person, um, uh, Aubrey [Connelly-Candelario] – Aubrey, um, focused on production. He came from a musical theater background. So suddenly we were doing costumes and sets and – and surprise moments, and not just standing and singing. Um, Absalon, uh, Figueroa came to us, and he was an accompanist, but he was sort of a New Age-y, um, uh, guru-type guy from Canada. Uh, he was living here, um, with his – later to be his husband. Uh, they m – moved to Canada because he – his husband couldn’t stay here, or he couldn’t stay here. So they both moved to Canada. Now they live in Hawaii...

Campbell [laughs].

Strack Happily married. I love how things change in the world, um – but Absalon brought, uh, a healing, um, and a – an empowerment sort of spirit to the chorus that was needed at that time because we’d had a[sic] unfortunate experience with a director just prior to Absalon. So every – every director sort of brought in their own gift and made the chorus that much better.

0:08:17

Initial community reaction

Campbell Um, how was the – the chorus received in the community in the first – in that early period?

Strack [laughs] Um, initially, we were sort of, uh, th – th – the arts community didn’t want to have anything to do with us. We actually, um, uh – there was an arts magazine that was published quarterly, and we, um, contacted them to get an advertisement put in about our next – our upcoming holiday concert, and, uh, they refused it because it was too controversial. That – it wasn’t the name of the holiday concert. It was that it was a gay chorus, and they just didn’t want us – anything to do with it. Uh, Valencia College, where we did our first seed concert – we went back to them to try to rent out that same auditorium for our concerts and they refused us, because we weren’t a student organization – was their reasoning, or – or, uh, representing the students of Valencia, and so, uh, we’ve had a number of, um, eh, prickly, uh, unwelcoming experiences during those early years.

Now, th – the – the gay community, the G – GLBT community, was, uh – we were – when we went onstage the first – for our first concert in, um, June of ’91 –

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would have been—yeah—June of '91, we went onto the stage at the [Orlando] Museum of Art in Orlando—Orlando Museum of Art in their theater, and all of us were like, “W—how is this gonna play in Orlando?” You know? Y—we couldn't have been more loved. It was—it was just a really, really intense—almost like—almost like the audience had been waiting for something that was that uniquely geared to them that was public and accessible, and it was—the—the energy in the room w—we're—we're singing and the energy is flowing off the stage, and the audience is there sending it all back at us. It was just—it was really cool, and we still get a lot of that feeling today, but that first one, because we didn't know—you know, there were people onstage that thought that, you know, somebody's gonna, uh, do a false alarm or a bomb threat or—and, you know, that, uh—to make sure that this concert didn't happen, and there—so there was a lot of fear, and there were individuals in the chorus that would not put their names into the program. Even though they were standing there publicly, to have it written down somewhere that somebody could pass onto a boss or onto a principal of a school, eh, or, you know—they just didn't have their names printed or they used aliases.

Campbell Mmhmm.

0:11:16 **Women in the chorus**

Strack So those were the early years. Um, it was, uh—we all sang, uh, men's voice parts even though there were always females in the chorus. From Penny on, we never did a concert without a female or several females onstage with us, but we sang, um, tenor one, tenor two, baritone and bass, and so, most of the women that joined us would sing senior one. Sometimes they'd sing it up an octave. Ironically, um, in our last concert—no, not the last one—the one before, um—one of our bass twos—the low bass parts—was a female—Linda—Linda Knutson. Yeah, I was a section leader at the time and sitting next to her during, uh, rehearsal, and, um, I—I took a bass two part because they—we were just shorthanded, and so I said—and I'm sitting next to Linda and I'm like, *[laughs]* “You hit those notes way better than I do. Have you ever considered joining the bass two section?” She's like—she's like, “Well—well, okay.” So she became our—our low bass—one of our low basses.

0:12:23 **Evolving relationship with the community**

Campbell Um, how have you, uh, kind of—if you can kind of describe the—the—the change—maybe the reception of the community over the course—from when you first started to maybe this year. Um, has that relationship with the community changed and kind of in what ways?

Strack Yeah, um, definitely changed, and part of it was that, um, as the gay and lesbian community in Orlando came out, um, the arts community started recognizing us not as a key element or a gem within, but part of a tapestry of art organizations

here in Florida. Um, the audiences—interestingly enough, our audiences are—uh, when they do the demographics studies, um, our largest segment of audience members are straight women over the age of 60, and in—again, I think it’s due to the outreach and then the changing nature of how people perceive the gay and lesbian community.

Um, we’ve gone through—depending on who the director is— we’ve gone through different phases of being a little more campy or a little more serious, um, and I—I think that that adds to the totality of what people perceive us to be, and that’s not just, you know—we—we will do the number of “Men in Tights” with—with the sugar plum fairies being the big ol’ bears coming across the stage, dancing th—in their tutus, but it’s one piece within the whole concert. So we’ll—we’ll be self-defacing and joke and be campy, but it’s not all we have to offer, and—and I think the—the community’s responded.

0:14:11

Becoming a mixed vocal group

Strack

Probably the biggest change we had during that time was going from being a men’s vocal, uh, group to a mixed vocal group, which we are now. It’s, um, soprano, alto, tenor, bass, and, um, because we kept promoting females joining the chorus, um, one of our presidents, Rob Noll—it became his mission to have more women in the chorus, and so he did a lot of artreach[sic]—outreach and effort to try to get more women, but at certain point[sic], I mean, how can you have women that normally sing soprano having to sing tenor? You know, it’s—it’s hard. It’s not enjoyable for them, and so, w—the—the chorus leadership after Rob, very—uh, I—I won’t say strategically, but very carefully—we started having more and more music where the women starting singing soprano and alto, and, you know, it was two pieces in this concert and there was[sic] four pieces in the next concert, and then pretty soon, it was all the pieces in the concert, and it was never like any—nobody put a stake in the ground and said, “We’re becoming an SATB chorus”—and that’s soprano, alto, tenor, bass. It just—the leadership knew that’s where they wanted to end up and they slowly brought this massive group of unique individuals into that reality, and by the time it happened, anybody[?] who[?] went, “All the music’s SATB?” You know, it’s like, “Yeah, it is.” [laughs] You know, it’s just—it’s sort of a matter of fact now, and p—and there were people that left. There were men that left because that went against their reason for wanting to sing, um, but few—few and far between, and it expanded the number of women that we had, so—because suddenly they were a—a—actually able to sing soprano and alto.

0:16:16

Mass shooting at Pulse nightclub and its aftermath

Strack

Um, one of the other—eh, back to the question about the community and how the community responded, um, huge, huge, um—the Pulse massacre was probably one of the biggest, um, or—the most impactful moments for the chorus to take its position within not just the arts community, but the whole...

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Campbell I—I—I kind of want to get into that a little bit more. Um, just you on a personal level, um. How did you—how did you hear about the shooting happen[sic]?

Strack Mm, um, I am retired, and so I was sleeping in on that Sunday morning, and it was probably 10:30 or so, and, um, I turned off my phone when I went to bed, because my friends have a habit of deciding to send pictures and comments at, you know, 12 at night and one in the morning, and so I had the phone off, and I turned my phone on and there was just a rolodex of—of folks that had sent text messages to me, and, you know—“Are you okay?” “Are you there?” “Is there”—and I—*This is really odd. Why in the world?*

And then, as I started, um—some of ‘em started getting a little more specific. “I just wanted to check to make sure you weren’t, uh, at—at Pulse last night or, um, d—eh, that you weren’t injured.” “I just want to hear from you,” and I went, *What?* Eh—eh, and then I did, um, my Google search and went, *Holy mackerel*, and I became part of the web of—“I haven’t heard from you. Is”—my friend Rob, that[sic] I mentioned that was the president, I—I called an, uh, he—nobody answered at his house, and he’s the type of person that might go out to that, uh—Pulse on a whim. Um, me—it’s—it’s not a club I normally would go to. Um, it’s—the crowd is way younger than the people I would be hanging with, but Rob might do that just on a whim, and we couldn’t get a hold of him. He wasn’t answering his cell phone and he wasn’t answering the house phone, but I had his roommate, Sherry[sp]—so I called Sherry’s phone, and she was out walking the dog. I said, “Sherry, I just want to check to make sure Rob’s at home. Is Rob—Rob there?” She goes, “Well, yeah. He was sleeping this morning when I got up.” I’m like, “Okay, just—just wanted to check,” but that was happening everywhere, and to—to spend an hour, hour and a half, two hours checking to see if your friends are alive was really mind blowing. It was so, um—what’s the w—a word that I wanna use for it? It was, eh, eh—it was just unimaginable that—that this could be part of my world now, so—but that’s how I found out—was through people checking in to make sure I was okay, and then I’d reached out to people that might be concerned about me—my parents, family and friends outside of the Orlando area—to make sure they knew I was okay.

Campbell Hm, um, when was the first time that you got in touch with—that the chorus, uh, decided to maybe have a meeting or anything about th—the actual shooting? Did you guys get together that day, or...

Strack Um...

Campbell Any time soon?

Strack The Sounds of Freedom Band [and Color Guard] by chance was doing their concert, um, i—in Loch Haven Park at the theater there, eh—The REP,² and so a

² Orlando Repertory Theatre.

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number of us got together to go and be with the community, and then the next night, um, we did our first vigil, as I recall. Eh, it was at the Joy Metropolitan Community Church, and the word just spread to the chorus. It wasn't—there was, you know—"Alright, we're gonna meet. Here's what we're gonna wear," and we'd done outreaches before, but nothing on this short of a notice. So, uh, we got together and did the—that vigil, and, uh, some of the—some of the tapes went international from that night, and then we've probably done an average of three to five a week ever since.

Campbell And can you just explain a little bit, like, uh, how those experiences were and anything that sticks out to you in particular?

Strack Um, for me personally, I think, uh, it was so, um, fulfilling and, um, comforting to have a task, so that I couldn't go into my own head. I, you know—there was this to get done. We were gonna go perform at the, um, uh, [AIGA Orlando's] Love by Design today. Tomorrow, we're doing this. Um, th—there were people in the chorus that started carrying their chorus wardrobe in their cars in case an event—an outreach event or a vigil or something—a fundraiser came up during that they that they could jump into their clothes—drive straight to the event and—and have their clothes with them, um, but it—i—it was—I—I—I went through probably, um, three days of just totally numb, sort of zombielike experience. Um, anything could make me cry. I al—I wear my emotions on my sleeve anyway [laughs]. So this just was like, "Oh, good. I'm brushing my teeth and just sobbing," you know, um, but, uh, those three days went by and I took advantage of The [LGBT] Center [of Central Florida]'s, um, counseling that they were offering—free counseling to people, and so I went in and talked to a—a woman for about 15 minute[sic], and I think—well, I'll share with you what I shared with her.

Eh, my—my big internal issue was that I'm—by nature, I'm a Pollyanna. I—I like making people happy. I like—I like keeping things i—in a positive space, and it was hard for me—whenever there was even an inkling of—like looking at the chorus and going, *This is gonna bring us closer together. This is gonna be such a good emotional, um, outcome for us as a—as a[sic] organization*, and then I'd—and then I'd go into my, *How can you say there's something good that comes out of this?* And so that's what I had to talk with her—with the counselor about—is I feel guilty trying to find the silver linings, and, um, she—she did a nice job, and by the time I walked out, I—my head was back on square again and I was able to move on—still numb, but much more myself again. So that was—that was pretty big. Probably, um, continued to have that, um, out-of-body sort of feeling for about three weeks, and then it—then it subsided and I started getting my legs under me.

0:24:12

Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses Festival

Strack

And we—we traveled to the, um—the festival in Denver in, uh, first part of July. So we went to the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses big festival, and, um, we as a chorus [laughs]—you know, the 6,000 people—singers—and they’d been sending us videos for the last like week and a half, three weeks. “W—We Stand with Orlando.” Singing songs that were significant to them, reflecting ‘em on the Pulse ex—um, tragedy, and they would s—you know, “We’re with you, Orlando,” and a lot of it, because it was chorus-to-chorus, was directed right at us—not just the community, but to our singers—and so when we got there to Denver, the outpouring of affection and, um—I made the joke. I said, “At this point we could go onstage and all of us burp in unison [laughs] and the crowd’s gonna go crazy,” [laughs] you know, ‘cause w—we just—we could do no wrong at this point, um, and that wasn’t necessary in the end, uh, but to be there was so healing to so many of us I think, ‘cause it—it was—it was such a, um, uh, clear program that had been put out for us. You know, you can ten—attend this block of s—concerts or this block, and—and this is where we’re gonna get together for this party, and—and every—you—you got to focus on that instead of on doing another vigil.

We did get our wonderful moment onstage, and it was amazing. It was amazing, yeah—and, uh, our director, James [A.] Rode, uh, did a little speech in the mid—in—towards the end of it, um, that described sort of what our experience was as a chorus, and, uh, then wrapped it up with inviting the—the—theaters weren’t big enough to hold everybody, so there was—you’d have concerts running simultaneously, but we had probably three thousand people in the theater we were in, and James invited ‘em to join us. Um, our final piece was, uh, “You’ll Never Walk Alone” from *Man of La Mancha*, and so, you know, three thousand other singers—and even they—some of them wrote on—on the webpage for the GALA Choruses their experience, and—and shaking and feeling weak in the knees, and, um, the emotional—that if they hadn’t been there with their brothers and sisters in song, help and hold them up, they would’ve crumbled.

0:27:20

Community response to Pulse tragedy

Campbell

Um, how do you feel that the—did you feel that the shooting has changed th—the—the group’s relation to the community in Orlando?

Strack

Tremendously, yeah, um, and I—because of our exposure, I think as any—as much as anything else—I mean, we—we went and sang at the, um, Orlando City Soccer [Club] game and the, um, organizers contacted the, uh, ticketholders and invited them—if you’re sitting in sections 17 through 29, wear green, and so we ended up with this rainbow around the stadium, um, and these are people that probably had never—many of them probably never even knew the Orlando Gay Chorus existed in Orlando, and yet, because of the tragedy, um, they—they

stepped up as members of Orlando's community, supporting, um, the gay community as well.

Um, one of the other things I—I found really exciting during this—is I think the Latin community, um, stepped up in a way, connecting with the gay community that hadn't been as, um, easygoing or as—as generous, and, um—and likewise. I think the gay community felt for the Latin community—not just those people that got killed, but the—the hurt and the pain wasn't just ours, and which—to me, I think that's what's made—that's the silv—that's the big silver lining, you know, that the Orlando—the City of Orlando, um, proved itself to be a community that could face some really wicked tragedy without the response being anger or hatred, um, or scapegoating—that, uh, from the city leaders all the way down to grandma and grandpa in their house, you know, on my street that put out their "Orlando United" sign in front. It was such a wonderful thing to see that this is—this is where I live.

0:30:12

Long-term impact on the Gay Chorus and the Orlando community

Campbell

Um, and that kind of brings me to my next question. Where do kind of see the relationship between, uh, the Orlando Gay Chorus and the community going moving forward?

Strack

Um, we're already seeing it, I think, to a degree. We are—we're getting invited to be a part of events that normally, um—that wouldn't reach out as far as the Gay Chorus. It would have been these church choirs and that high school choir and th—the community chorus of Orlando—that'd be the group they'd put together for this event, and now, we're on that list. Now we're a—a prominent piece of that invitation, um, to a point where I think there's consciousness of, uh—"And we can't leave them out," you know? "They're—they're such a significant part of our community," and because of the exposure we've had—excuse me—uh, the exposure we've had over the last few months, um, we've—people know that we're pretty good, you know, [laughs]—that, uh, as a musical group, we're not a flash in the pan, and you—i—if you want to give them money for your ticket, but you don't go, "You're not missing anything." It's not that way, you know, um, and like to—yesterday, which would have been the 25th of September, we, um, worked with the Second Harvest Food Bank [of Central Florida]. They provided the food, we provided all the entertainment—atmospheric as well as a concert—at the Second Harvest Food Bank to raise funds for these two very disparate non-profit organizations, and I—that never would have happened, I don't believe. You know, maybe—maybe I'm—maybe I just have my blinders on, but I think that that's one of the things that, as we move forward, we're getting those opportunities, um, and bringing our story to the, you know—the general public in a way that we never had a chance to do before.

Campbell

And, uh, what did—did your membership change any a—after you started g—getting more, um, uh—I don't want to say screen time—but more—more

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visibility in the community? Did people want to communicate with you all and—
and maybe join the chorus? Or have your numbers kind of stayed the same
throughout?

Strack Um, we definitely saw a bump. I know that the interest—again, it's probably
twice the number of people that actually came to audition, um, but we're over a
hundred, and we were down to about 80, um, prior to, um, the Pulse massacre,
be—and partly I think it's because people just didn't even know we were there,
and partly I think it was because, um, some people wanted to step up and say,
"I—I need to be a part of this forward motion that's happening in Orlando," and
so—yeah. It, um—the demographics are about the same as far as age and, um,
sexuality. We've—we've got[sic] a lot of, uh, straight allies that are part of our—
our, uh—to[?] women's section. We got our first male straight guy that's gonna
be—hopefully, he'll be singing with us if—he just joined the chorus, um, but the
general population percentages are about the same as they were before.

0:33:50

Closing remarks

Campbell Um, is there anything else, uh, about the chorus or about, um, the chorus'
response to the—to the shooting that you'd like to talk about today?

Strack Hm, I think—well, this is gonna—I, uh, was at a point in my history with the
chorus after having sung with them in every concert for 26 years, I was ready to
quit. Um, I just—you know, I s—there were things going on that I didn't
necessarily all[sic] agree with, um, and I just had decided to myself, you know,
sometimes, you just need to move on for your own—and for the organization's,
you know, benefit, but when—and th—there was another person in the chorus I
know for a fact was in that same space, um, and after becoming such a valuable
entity in the community as a chorus, and doing the vigils and doing the
fundraisers, and, um, help—we—we started using that—the, um—"Love, Hope,
and Healing"—"the Ambassadors of Love, Hope, and Healing," and so, as that
transpired and I got to watch that in re—in real time, I said, *Uh, maybe—maybe I
need to stick around*, because this—this has really refocused us back to what I feel
the chorus was supposed to be about, you know? It was—it's more than just
doing a concert and standing onstage. It's—it's building people's pride. It's
being—yeah—more than a musical group. I was—I've said it's three things. It's
music, it's socialization, and it's, um, political. Just the fact that we gave "gay" in
the name makes us a political organization, and the socialization within the
chorus members is so significant to my happiness, and then, of course, the music.
You have to do—have musical excellence to be able to get an audience in the
seats, um, and—and it's really—it's brought me back to the chorus again ever
since, so another silver lining.

Campbell Well, thank you so much for talking with us today and—and for participating in
this program.

Strack It's my pleasure.

End of Interview