

# NURTURING NATURE: OUT LOUD CHORUS'S LATEST CONCERT IS A FAMILY-FRIENDLY COLLECTION OF SONGS ABOUT THE EARTH AND ELEMENTS

by [Garrett Schumann](#)

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Out Loud board member Tim Hamann (left); graphic for the Let's Talk About Nature concert (bottom right); and director Saleel Menon (top right). Images courtesy of Out Loud Chorus.

"Inclusion" is a key word for the [Out Loud Chorus](#).

"We're definitely geared toward being a non-audition chorus where anyone, regardless of ability, can sing," says Out Loud board member Tim Hamann. "I've watched people who joined the choir really struggle, and then two years later sing a solo. That flowering is really wonderful, and we are a safe space where it is OK for them to be who they are."

But Hamann uses another word to describe the two concerts the Out Loud Chorus will perform on May 19 and 20 at the University of Michigan's Arthur Miller Theatre.

"The first word that comes to mind is that it will be 'fun,'" Hamann says.

The family-friendly program is titled "[Let's Talk About Nature](#)" and will mix music and storytelling. Saleel Menon directs the show, and the choir will be joined by instrumentalists Casey Baker (piano), CJ Jacobsen (bass), and Tamara Perkuhn (drums).

"It's going to be like a children's educational show about nature," Hamann says, "so 'the teacher' will walk the audience through the performance, and we have different segments: 'The Circle Of Life,' 'The Water Cycle,' and 'The Spheres.'"

Some of the songs include *The Muppet Movie* classic "Rainbow Connection," the Ashford-and-Simpson-penned "Ain't No Mountain High Enough"—a hit for Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell as well as Diana Ross—and The Weather Girls' smash "It's Raining Men," among other many other nature-themed tunes.

But this isn't a standard chorus concert; there are costumes, stagings, and visual presentations that accompany the singing.

"We have a real focus on entertainment," Hamann says. "We definitely target the repertoire so there is light, popular music that people will recognize, and then we'll mix in some traditional choral numbers."

Founded in 1995, the Out Loud Chorus has been a cultural cornerstone in Washtenaw County and across the region, earning accolades from Governor Gretchen Whitmer, Senator Gary Peters, and a host of other state and local officials. Hamann has worked with the mixed LGBTQ+ choir—which means everyone is welcome, no matter how they identify—since 2009 and takes pride in the way the organization uses fun programming to engage its community.

Over the last decade, the chorus' membership has increased dramatically, possibly because local LGBTQ+ culture has become more fragmented in recent years and people are looking for a more centralized social experience.

"Our numbers were probably 30 to 50 about 10 years ago, and now we're upward of 100," Hamann says. "I assume that one of the reasons for this surge is that people

are looking for something to do socially with other LGBTQ+ people, and there is no bar anymore, so we are one of those options.”

It also helps that nobody needs to be a music expert to join the Out Loud Chorus.

"We have these tools we offer up, like MP3s of individual parts, so that everyone can be successful," Hamann says. "Our hope is that someone doesn't need to be able to read music to sing in the choir."

That sounds like the definition of inclusion.

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Garrett Schumann is a composer and music scholar who teaches in the University of Michigan's College of Literature, Sciences & the Arts. His other writings have been published in *The New York Times*, *Grove Music*, and *VAN Magazine*.