

OLYMPIAN EFFORTS

cont'd from page 1 us, schoolteacher fashion, to stop chattering when someone entered the throwing circle, but the women were watching while they talked, and gave loud cheers and claps for every improved distance or even a mighty effort. I found it less intimidating and easier to keep my focus when the noise level was more like a basketball game than a tennis match.

Although we were competing against each other, everyone was helpful to those with less experience and admiring to those with more, and all of us valued our comrades' opinions. Just as I found instant companionship with the gays and lesbians who met in Sydney, I experienced a similar bond with the women who shared my sport.

Later I got a taste of the spotlight myself, feeling a real thrill as I faced the track crowd from the medal stand while the loudspeaker announced my name, country, and winning distance. By then I was wearing the boldest Vermont tee shirt I owned, showing the crowd there was at least one from here. As I went around the rest of the day with my medals around my neck, I got many positive comments about my state along with congratulations and other conversation.

More interesting than competition details is how the Gay Games are different from other athletic contests. Ordinarily in straight sports only a rough "manly exuberance" is okay to express the joy of victory, while any trace of the homoerotic is meticulously denied. In these

games this part of us is treated in a playful, friendly, gentler manner, not as the main focus of attention but as a welcome guest, the role I would say it probably plays in our lives.

When a gold medalist kisses the silver and bronze winners, or they all stand together on the top step in a group hug, it is just fun and no big deal. This is never the attitude in the straight world, no matter how gay-positive they try to be or how much our doings are covered in the straight media. To them we are bizarre, alien, and vaguely offputting, and you know they are careful to keep their distance.

By now I no longer saw these people as a huge crowd, but thought of the individuals. Whatever event or nationality, we were all guests at the same party, free to speak to everyone with an orange identity tag around the neck and know that they were as curious about us as we were about them. The long subway rides, the many meals in restaurants and cafes, and all the parties and performances gave us opportunities to get to know each other. Though I may never see most of these people again, I will remember their conversations and personalities for the rest of my life.

The most remarkable connection I made in Australia was not with a gltba person at all, but with an aborigine woman. It came about on a train platform, when she heard me say I competed in discus, and she spun around and said, "My daughter is a discus thrower." She went on to tell me that her 13-year-old daughter

was improving with every competition and was regional champion.

The daughter was in boarding school at the coast, and the woman said she visited the girl one week a month, staying in a tent she pitched in a nearby park. The ladies of the town told her that a mad-woman lived there, and when she said, "That woman is me," they replied, "But you're not mad." "Exactly," was her response, and truly she appeared very intelligent and articulate. Her daughter's idol is Cathy Freeman, the aboriginal heroine of the Sydney Olympics. The woman I was speaking with had watched that Olympic race with Cathy Freeman's aunt, who had tickets to the stadium but was so uncomfortable with the crowds that she watched on TV instead.

The woman went on to tell me more general things: that the nearby town of Blacktown was where her people had been rounded up and given poisoned water to drink, that the survivors were given a name and a number and assigned to an outback station like livestock, and that girls were sent away to school until they were sixteen, when they were given "a cow and a convict."

Up north, she said, they still spoke their own tongue. When I asked if she had visited there, she replied, "That is outside my territory. We have our own countries, you know." She continued to talk to me with her eyes locked on mine, ignoring the guys I was with, for about fifteen minutes, until her train came. She turned on her heel without good-



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bye, and entered the train which would carry her back to her home in the Blue Mountains. I understand that it is most unusual for these ancient people to talk to outsiders. Though she gave me no reason, I believe she hoped that there was a sorority of women discus throwers worldwide who might befriend her daughter in future competitions. I will be watching for that kid two Olympics from now.

Yes, I did get to travel around Australia, and had adventures I would love to tell about if space and your patience permitted. However, I really need to say that the next Gay Games will be held four years from now right over the border,

in Montreal. Whether you are a bowler or a bodybuilder, a singer or a standup comedian, a pairs dancer or a pole-vaulter, there is a place for you to show your stuff and time enough to get yourself ready. If you insist that you absolutely have no skills or talent, know that hundreds of volunteers will be needed to help it run smoothly. The costs of attending this great event will never be cheaper, and should you meet someone truly special you could even invite them home.

So see you at Gay Games VII, summer 2006, in Montreal! ▼
Double-gold medalist Fran Moravcsik trains in Burlington.

Sydney Not Just for Jocks: Musicians Rock Gay Games

By PETER R. THOMAS

I have been playing the saxophone since the fall of 1978, and been a member of the Green Mountain Freedom Band since its founding in 1993. I also play in the Williston Town Band and often play with the wind ensemble at UVM.

So when I got a chance to represent the Green Mountain Freedom Band at the Lesbian and Gay Bands of America (LGBA) conference in Melbourne this fall and play at the Gay Games, I jumped at the opportunity! I had joined LGBA for their trip to Amsterdam for the Games in 1998. It was wonderful to travel and perform with other gay and lesbian musicians, so I knew I wouldn't want to miss the trip to Australia.

On this trip, I was reminded that traveling with an instrument can be difficult. In addition to the usual jacket, backpack, large camera bag, really big suitcase and another bag for what didn't fit in the suitcase, I had to bring my saxophone. Thank goodness for those airport luggage carts!

Then there's the big decision. Should I check the instrument with the airline or take it onto the plane as a carry-on? Technically, my alto saxophone is too big for carry-on, but checking anything delicate like a musical instrument can be risky.

Once, I was traveling with my much larger and heavier baritone saxophone. The airline refused to allow me to treat it as a carry-on. As I was waiting to check it, a woman in front of me told me about the time that she checked a guitar with an airline only to see it later fall off

of a luggage cart onto the tarmac and then get run over and crushed by a truck. That was the last thing I wanted to hear, but my bar sax survived the trip. On the way to Australia, I decided to carry-on my alto.

LGBA conferences usually have workshops on topics like fundraising, diversity issues, leadership, and nonprofit status, as well as music clinics, but due to the tight rehearsal and performance schedule, the Melbourne conference was limited to two board meetings and an assembly of delegates meeting. There was really only one meeting I had to attend: the assembly of delegates where I represented the Green Mountain Freedom Band. Representatives of each member band (there were about 20 represented) stand and speak about the accomplishments and plans of their bands. It's a great opportunity to share ideas and get to know people from all over the U.S., Australia and Canada.

As part of the Melbourne Festival, we performed as a massed LGBA band of about 100 (we called ourselves "Team Band" - 59 US musicians, 39 Melbourne Rainbow Band musicians, and one musician from Amsterdam, Netherlands) along with 20 of the cheerleaders of Cheer San Francisco (an affiliate of LGBA). We took part in two outdoor noontime concerts and an evening concert in Melbourne's beautiful Victorian Town Hall. The noontime performances attracted large crowds of lunch-hour listeners, and we were very pleased to have an audience of 700 at the evening Town Hall concert.

While in the Melbourne area, we also went to Healesville Sanctuary to see native Australian animals, to a winery, and to Phillip Island to watch the penguins return from the ocean at nightfall.

We arrived in Sydney on November 1, the day before the Gay Games Opening Ceremonies. We checked into our hotel and immediately left for the site of the ceremonies to begin rehearsing with an additional 18 musicians from the Sydney Homotones for about six hours (the Melbourne Rainbow Band and the Sydney Homotones bands are members of Lesbian and Gay Bands of America). The next day, we arrived at the stadium about four hours early to rehearse some more.

For the opening ceremonies, we marched onto the field just before the contingents of athletes and played a medley of Village People music, including the gay classics "Y.M.C.A.," "In the Navy" and "Go West." We wore all-black uniforms with lengthwise rows wearing either green, orange, pink or yellow fluorescent cowboy hats. To fill the stadium with sound, miniature wireless microphones were clipped to some of the musicians' hats. It was a bit scary knowing that there were thousands of people watching and hearing us play, but it was also exhilarating. Afterwards it was nice to hear that we looked and sounded great.

Throughout the rest of our time in Sydney, we went on to perform at a Federation of Gay Games reception on the North Foyer of the Sydney Opera House, at Darling Harbour, at the Olympic Park, Fox Studios, in Sydney Town Hall, at the Gay Games basketball finals and at the Gay Games Closing Ceremonies.

In my free time, I went to the ice hockey finals, the diving competition, some volleyball games, the Royal Botanical Gardens and Bondi Beach. I also took a day trip to the Blue Mountains, which at the time were very dry and are now experiencing forest fires.

On the way back to the US, I decided to check the sax because it was just too difficult trying to keep track of everything, find space for it and negotiate the narrow aisles getting on and off the plane. Fortunately, it was fine.

Upon entering and departing Australia, immigration officials asked us why we had traveled to Australia. They didn't give us any reaction, positive or negative, when we answered that we were there for the Gay Games. Generally, I think that Sydney was glad to have so many visitors filling its hotels, restaurants, stores and attractions.

Many registered participants wore their Gay Games credentials everywhere, so we were very visible all over town. I didn't hear that anyone wearing their credentials was harassed.

The best part of the Gay Games is the way gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender persons from all over the world can come together in a spirit of respect and celebration. At the opening ceremonies, it didn't matter where the team was from. Every country's team was applauded and made to feel welcome.

For LGBA's Team Band, it was really great for the American and Australian musicians to get to know each other better. We don't get to see each other very often, as our yearly conferences are usually in the U.S. But I think that the wonderful performances and experiences that we had together in Australia will mean that we will be seeing a lot of them again in Montreal in 2006 if not before. ▼

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