



SING  
*for*  
PLEASURE

# SfP Pointers

## #13: Setting up a community choir

There are probably as many ways of setting up a successful community choir as there are community choirs in existence. It is quite situation specific and depends upon a number of factors... location, time of day, financial viability, other local choirs, personalities involved, repertoire, advertising, a good committee and a certain degree of luck!

I started a choir in 2009 which is still well regarded and successful within our community. The following steps track the procedure that I followed and worked very well for me.

- Think about it a lot and talk to reliable friends to gather some idea of local interest. A nucleus of supporters will help you with the initial start-up; unless you are very lucky you will have to pay for a venue in which to meet.**
- Think about location; is it in an accessible part of the community, does it offer the facilities you require and will you be able to pay for that venue on a regular and sustained basis?**
- Will you be singing a cappella or will you need to hire an accompanist (cost implications) or direct from the keyboard?**

I eventually decided to approach a local church that had an ideal starter size room at a reasonable price, a very supportive Vicar, and an Organist and Choirmaster who ran both the Church Choir and another choral group at that venue.

The element of luck at this point was the very positive support from the Vicar and the Choirmaster and about half a dozen friends willing to cough up £3.00 per head x 3 to ensure that we could hire the venue for three weeks.

### **Initial advertising of the project**

The who, why, what, where, when and how. Be clear in your own mind exactly who you want to attract, why you want to target that group, what you are planning to achieve, where this will take place, when it will operate: weekly/monthly, daytime/evening and how you will disseminate this information... posters around the community, local press and local radio and TV.

My target group was for ladies (as initially I did not want to manage a significant imbalance of voice parts), who for whatever reason thought that they couldn't really sing but would like to give it a go.

I then hung my initial advertising on the premise that Christmas Carols are quite popular in season, and that many people will have a degree of confidence when it comes to joining with others to sing them. The advertising was very low key, a few posters in local churches, libraries and schools and word of mouth. At this level, many more people attended than were expected. I have known multi-media advertising bring in even more potential choir members in other groups.

Three weeks of carolling together enthused a couple of dozen ladies to sign up for a ten-week term of singing at the beginning of January 2010, on the condition that they were never made to sing in public!

### **And so to singing in public...**

With numbers sometimes over 50, we have an ever increasing list of events organised by us to improve our musical skills, such as workshops and singing days; regular bookings at local events, e.g. a Michaelmas

Community Concert when we perform a set of songs and lead the community singing at the end; the opening of a Christmas Tree Festival; occasional performances in local church services; and Summer Fetes.

We often link with other choirs, instrumental groups and drama groups to perform concerts (usually for charity) and we run a small 'in house' group which visits local day-care centres and care homes. We attend festivals near and far, to listen to the repertoire of other choirs and to receive helpful pointers for improvement from the adjudicators. In 2015 two of us were invited to a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in recognition of our choir's charity fundraising... perhaps our next target should be to sing there!!

A significant number of the original membership have moved on to sing in other choirs where reading music is an essential skill for a more challenging repertoire; success with a sting in its tail, as we do miss their presence. The scope for development within our community and further afield should keep us busy for years to come.

## Useful pointers for keeping singers motivated

- Establish a routine of prompt starts and enjoyable warm up activities.
- Don't be afraid to use 'silly and childish' activities to relax your singers... have fun and laugh a lot.
- Always bear in mind that simple and well sung music supersedes that which is complex and poorly sung.
- Build up complexity gradually, extend your singers but not to breaking point!
- Drip feed music theory, especially if you intend to use printed music, it will help your choir to gain confidence and make the most of the music in front of them.
- Always end on a positive note by singing a well-known song, upbeat or reflective depending upon the mood of the rehearsal, even if it means abandoning something sooner than you would like. Singers need to leave a rehearsal feeling good about their singing rather than overwhelmed by something that is taking a lot of time and effort to learn.
- As your choir develops confidence and skill grasp any performance opportunities that come your way, especially those that are relatively stress free to begin with. (Even if there was initial reluctance to sing in public, confidence changes attitudes and singers are always delighted to have performed successfully).
- An 'in-house' supper concert with only close friends or family in the audience works well if food is the focus which distracts the choir from worrying about the singing.
- Build on this by singing one or two songs at someone else's event e.g. local church service, Christmas or Summer Fair or other Community event. This will raise awareness locally.
- Enter Festivals... either competitively or just to showcase your work.
- Consider making your first big concert a joint one with another group of musicians, instrumentalists, a choir with a contrasting style, a children's choir, etc.
- Travel to and stay overnight for a choral event, spending time together and having fun is a great bonding opportunity for your choir.
- Ensure that your choir belongs to a body that will provide insurance and help with things like copyright and PRS, hiring an accompanist or soloists, fees for conductors etc. It is too late after something has gone wrong!

## And finally:

Gather together an enthusiastic and supportive committee. This will enable you to provide all sorts of extras for your choir that you couldn't do alone, e.g. Singing Days, Theory Workshops, Newsletters, a Website, Facebook, Twitter, charity events, visits to day-care centres and care homes and any number of social activities if you wish to build a sense of community.

Make use of SfP repertoire, expertise, training and events which will support both you and your choir and enhance your singing. Check out SfP Pointers – Programming and Sourcing Music; it gives tips on how to access music legally and reasonably cheaply. We have our own music library, but we also encourage our singers to purchase their own copies of certain items.

The only challenging part of the whole process is choosing a **Name** for your **Choir** and settling on **Concert Dress**; everything else is simple by comparison so enjoy yourself and start your journey towards running a very happy and successful Community Choir. Best of luck, you will be delighted with what you achieve!

**Angie Jones**