



SING
for
PLEASURE

SfP Pointers

#7: Christmas Concerts

Christmas is coming...

...and that means you have to think of yet another way to present a Christmas concert with your community choir. The problem with the autumn/winter term for a choir is that, no matter how much you enjoy Christmas, the subject never changes and conductors groan at the thought of how they can portray the season in song. How many versions of Silent Night and While Shepherds Watched do you know? How many times have the general public heard them? How can you attract audiences in to yet another Christmas concert when they have heard it all before?

Choral Societies will have it all mapped out in advance and know which choral work they are going to perform along with lesser known Christmas repertoire – but what if yours is a COMMUNITY choir? Are your singers getting bored with singing Christmas carols? Do you inwardly cringe every time White Christmas strikes up? Start thinking outside of the box...

Plan early

Try planning your Christmas concert in July/August or even in the new year whilst Christmas is still in your head and you are full of ideas. Leaving it until October is a recipe for disaster; that is when you end up with a few songs interspersed with the usual carols.

Decide on the type of concert you want

Is it a serious one? A religious concert? A family event? Will Father Christmas visit? Why not alternate and have a family concert one year and a more serious thought provoking one the next? Our concerts are now regularly sold out the week before the concert (more than 150 seats) with people asking for tickets for the Christmas one as early as October. So how has this happened?

Think of a theme for your concert

Perhaps you could theme your concerts and find a way to link songs to each other by telling a story, or giving a few facts, or even having a poem or reading in between. Your singers may not want to sing solo but they queue up to read something. Here are some ideas:

A Dickensian/Victorian/Edwardian Christmas

Yes, this has done before but take it a step further. Ask the choir to dress the part, invite the local school choir to join you (also dressed up). You don't have to restrict it to carols either. Set the scene with a Victorian Christmas Eve party and include songs from the era. Retell a story from a childrens book (Mary Poppins?) or a Dickens Classic and link songs and readings together.

"Seasons Greetings"

Start the concert with Auld Lang Syne - HAPPY NEW YEAR! Then move on to songs and poems about the aftermath of Christmas (The Twelve Days After Christmas is excellent) move into February, March and spring and work your way through the year. Songs like Here Comes the Sun, Seasons of Love, Sunrise Sunset can take you to Autumn and the interval. Then for the second half concentrate on Christmas and tell the Christmas story, or just focus on winter. You can easily start rehearsing for this in September as nobody will be bored with Christmas songs by half term.

❑ **A Child's Christmas**

Christmas is for the children, right? So include children in your concert, especially the first half. Present it from a child's point of view – the tree, the presents, Father Christmas, the excitement, toys! There is a very good 2 part version of the Nutcracker Suite (in 3 minutes) and a Toys on Parade medley which included children. Make the whole of the first half really upbeat and commercialised, and focus on the Christmas hype... Then in the second half concentrate on THE child at Christmas - the one who was born in a stable - and tell the original Christmas story through readings and song again. Thought provoking...

❑ **Advent Calendar theme**

Another one to include children: have a selection of things wrapped up in boxes and invite a child or children to come up and open each one with you. Of course each box will reveal an item which links to a song or story, e.g. Bell – Carol of the Bells; Russian dolls – story of Baboushka; Angel; Candle... the list is endless. You can make the songs serious or funny, and include some audience participation too. This is suitable for either a school performance or a community choir performance; just adjust your repertoire and skill level to suit.

❑ **A December Journey**

Go around the world in song – find out how Christmas is celebrated in different countries (or not) and sing songs from those countries. See if you can find someone from another country to “interview” on stage about how Christmas is celebrated in their country – talk to the audience, rather than “at” them. Link songs with information about each country – but make it interesting – why not take the point of view of Santa's journey on Christmas Eve and have a narrator linking the songs? Put him/her in charge of Air Traffic Control and, using the appropriate terminology, he can guide Santa on his journey around the world so that all the audience hear is the narrator and Santa (out of sight) through a microphone. Of course, Santa lands home safely and could pay the audience a visit at the end – you can make this as much fun as you like!

❑ **“Peace on Earth”**

Of course, your performance may take place in a church and this may mean that you want a more reflective event but you can still theme it. Think about our desire for peace on earth and how it can be brought about. Choose songs which were popular just after major wars – they often reflected the mood of the nation. Why not honour the military forces who are often away at Christmas? “I'll be Home for Christmas” is as appropriate as “Silent Night” from the famous Christmas Eve truce in the First World War. And peace on earth isn't just about not wanting world wars – family feuds are often highlighted at Christmas so you could add in some funny poems to bring home the fact that families need to call a truce too!

Extras

Think ahead - decorate the hall accordingly. Do you have a raffle? Is it full of prizes which nobody wants? Why not try theming some of your raffle prizes to the concert? A jar of Victorian style sweets, tree decorations (which link to the advent calendar theme), a few things from around the world... It all adds to the atmosphere.

Are you inspired yet?

You have to work with what your choir is capable of but you can produce a Christmas concert which is really different. Keep the audience busy – give them something to sing, they love to interact, and the applause is never louder than when it is they who have just sung something! Think outside of the box – be brave – and see the smiles on the faces of your singers, and watch the audience roll in.

Christine Hale