

## How to organize a concert

Mary Davis Little

*Congratulations! You've agreed to take on one of the most interesting tasks your choir can give you—choir manager. It is challenging and takes time, but the results will more than justify your efforts!*

*This “How To” guide is intended to be a general list of the basic jobs preparing for a concert entails. A handy checklist is provided in each section which summarizes the preceding narrative. You may want to modify these lists for your own choir and community. If there are special characteristics of your choir, such as costumes and props, or age and mobility of your choristers, you will need to account for them in your plans.*

*As manager of your choir, you should draw together a small committee of committed choristers, board members, and friendly citizens willing to help you mount your concerts. Many hands really do make light work. Furnish each member with a checklist of tasks which, when completed, can ensure the successful production of each event.*

### First things first

We will assume that you have a great conductor who has prepared your programme (see *How To Plan a Programme* available in this series), and taken responsibility, with or without a librarian, for acquiring and rehearsing the music. Never photocopy music without the express permission of the author or publisher. Copyright laws apply, and fines for doing so may be imposed.

Alert the choir to all rehearsal dates well in advance, including potential “extra” rehearsals for polishing!

Decide when your concert will take place and book a local hall with the best possible acoustics for the dress rehearsal and the concert nights. Unless you are singing *a cappella*, or have hired instrumentalists (your local musicians' union will be helpful), make sure the hall comes with organ or piano. (If your hall has an upright in questionable condition, you may wish to make friends with a local piano dealer to obtain a beautiful grand.)

Obtain music, if necessary
Confirm and distribute rehearsal schedule
Book hall
Book instrumentalists
Rent piano, if necessary

### Publicity

Since you hope to have an audience, you need to tell everyone about your concert. Basic information includes who you are, who your conductor is, programme highlights, the concert venue, time and date, and the ticket prices and where to purchase them. Ask a volunteer to arrange for posters—original art or computer-generated on colourful paper. Volunteers should place them all over town, **especially in high-traffic areas**. Tip: make a list and distribute these locations among your volunteers (let them choose).

Your choir may have a website. Do ensure that information in it is up-to-date and accurate. Make it easy for your fans and potential audience to learn when and where you are singing,

ticket information, etc. Your town will likely have local websites whose webmasters encourage you to email your information to them regularly. You may also find that your town's own website will have arts links. Ask a web-savvy board member to take on the increasingly important task of keeping your choir visible on the internet.

The publicity chair should arrange contact with the media. Brief radio, TV, and newspaper ads can often be run as public service notices, and/or you can purchase space. Word ads in the “classified” are often as effective and cheaper than display ads. Media professionals will know the best times and places to run your concert information. Special concerts inspire press interviews with conductor, manager, soloists, choristers, or composer.

Make a list of all media resources and potential contact people, and use it regularly. Include CBC-FM and FM Stereo (Choral Concert). It is helpful when preparing a radio or TV announcement to type or print your information, and to include a pronunciation guide for those difficult composer names and composition titles (e.g. Bay-toe-ven). Do not forget to send a notice of your concert to Choirs Ontario for inclusion in the newsletter. Board members in your area and staff will be delighted to come when they can.

Your choristers are often your best advertisements. Encourage them to invite neighbours, friends, and family.

Print posters
Distribute posters
Speak and/or send notices to: radio, tv, newspaper, Choirs Ontario
Update your website frequently, and send information to local arts internet sites and links.

## Tickets

Establish the capacity of the hall. Print tickets with event, time, date, venue, and cost. Give some tickets to each chorister, and request that stores etc. sell them for you. If there is a central arts ticket agency in your town, be sure that it has an ample supply and keeps records for you! Pick up the unsold tickets and money after the concert and ask for an accounting from each person who sold them.

Offer a few complimentary tickets as advertising for your group, to ensure influential people attend the event. Newspaper reviewers are always given complimentary tickets.

Print tickets
Distribute tickets to choristers to sell to everyone they know
Deliver tickets to local distribution outlets
Send complimentary tickets where appropriate
Collect unsold tickets/cash after the concert

## Programmes

Programmes are an informative addition to any concert. Advertising space can be sold to defray printing costs, or a local printing firm might be persuaded to produce them free-of-charge as a public service. Be sure to give them credit in the programme! Include as much information as space permits, including the name of your choir; the name(s) of the conductor, choristers, soloists and instrumentalists; date, time and location of the concert; the programme, listing titles of the works, lyrics if there is space, and the composer/arranger. Other information could include programme notes, a letter from the board chair, your future concert dates, and a note about your affiliation with Choirs Ontario.

Colour co-ordinate the programmes with the posters and tickets. Keep a programme for posterity!

Approach sponsors for photoready ads
Compile programme information and ads
Type programme copy
Finalize programme layout
Arrange for printing and delivery of programmes

## Check the choir arrangements

The choir will perform better if it is well-prepared and comfortable on stage.

Confirm concert attire
Arrange for warm-up space
Establish call time for warm-ups, dress rehearsal and concert
Decide necessity of music folders
Rehearse entrance to/exit from the stage with a volunteer marshal from the choir
Practice acknowledgement of applause
Confirm venue/refreshments if you are organizing a post-concert party

## Check the physical arrangements

Ensure the lighting is appropriate and adequate
Check concert hall temperature
Prepare the washrooms
Ensure barrier-free access to concert hall
Arrange for secure change rooms
Order and set up risers where necessary
Arrange for water
Arrange for piano tuning if necessary
Ensure the programmes arrive well before the concert
Set up the box office area and find personnel to collect/sell, keep cash float and distribute programmes
Investigate legalities and obtain permission to sell refreshments during intermission; arrange for members of your board or a community group to assist
Make arrangements to pay the soloists or instrumentalists the day of the concert
Arrange for any necessary decorations (candles are a fire hazard) and flowers for the stage, soloists, and conductor (donated if possible)
<b>Set up:</b>
podium
music stands
piano
chairs for choir, soloists, instrumentalists
microphones/recording equipment
decorations/flowers

## Tape recording and copyright

If your choir tapes its concerts to sell or to include in grant applications to, for example, the Ontario Arts Council, beg, borrow, or hire the best technician and equipment you can afford. It is money well invested. Be sure that you check with your musicians' union if union members are involved in your concert: there may be restrictions on the use or sale of the tape. You do not buy performance rights when you purchase a piece of music. Any public performance in a non-church setting of music not in the public domain is subject to performance royalties—a modest fee that guarantees composers will receive monetary recognition for their work. For further information, contact: SOCAN (Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada: 866.944.6223) (see *How To Make a Recording* available in this series).

Hire a sound technician
Obtain release form from musicians' union, if necessary
Contact SOCAN regarding licensing fees

## The big night

Arrive early, check that volunteers are ready to seat the audience, manage the box office, and hand out programmes.

Although you may have to deal with some backstage emergencies, you will still be the calmest person there! Put your music in order, smile at everyone, and sing!

## Final checklist

<b>First Things First</b>	
Obtain music, if necessary	
Confirm and distribute rehearsal schedule	
Book hall	
Book instrumentalists	
Rent piano, if necessary	
<b>Publicity</b>	
Print posters	
Distribute posters	
Update your website	
Speak and/or send notices to: radio, newspaper, tv/Cable, Choirs Ontario, local "What's on in my community" websites	
<b>Tickets</b>	
Print regular and complimentary tickets as needed	
Distribute tickets to choristers to sell to everyone they know	
Deliver tickets to local distribution outlets	
Send complimentary tickets where appropriate	
Collect unsold tickets/cash after the concert	
<b>Programmes</b>	
Approach sponsors for print ads	
Compile programme information and ads	
Type/typeset programme copy	
Arrange for printing and delivery of programmes	
<b>Prepare the Choir</b>	
Confirm concert attire	
Confirm time for call for: dress rehearsal, concert	
Arrange for warm-up space for concert, dress rehearsal	
Decide necessity of music folders	
Ask a volunteer marshal to help you practise getting on and off stage	
Practice acknowledgement of applause	
Confirm venue/refreshments if you are organizing a post-concert party	

<b>Check the Physical Arrangements</b>	
Ensure the lighting is appropriate and adequate	
Check concert hall temperature	
Prepare the washrooms	
Ensure barrier-free access to concert hall	
Arrange for secure change rooms	
Order and set up risers where necessary	
Arrange for water	
Arrange for piano tuning if necessary	
Ensure the programmes arrive well before the concert	
Set up the box office area and find personnel to collect/sell, keep cash float and distribute programmes	
Investigate legalities and obtain permission to sell refreshments during intermission; arrange for volunteers to assist	
Make arrangements to pay the soloists or instrumentalists the day of the concert	
Arrange for any necessary decorations (candles are a fire hazard) and flowers for the stage, soloists, and conductor (donated if possible)	
<b>Set up:</b>	
Podium	
Microphone	
Recording equipment	
Music stands	
Piano	
Chairs for the choir/soloists/instrumentalists	
Microphones/recording equipment	
Decorations/flowers	
<b>Tape Recording and Copyright</b>	
Hire a sound technician	
Obtain release form from musician's union, if necessary	
Contact SOCAN regarding license fees (866.944.6223)	

*Mary Davis Little, a life-long chorister, was a founding member and manager of the Pro Arte Singers of Kingston. She served on the Board of the Ontario Choral Federation for five years. She now sings with the Cantabile Women's Choir of Kingston.*