



Festival Fundraiser Cookbook



Fundraising RECIPE For Success!

Zulu Nyala Photo Safari



Contributor: Robin Godfrey
Renaissance City Chorus

Event Name: Zulu Nyala Photo Safari

Overview of Event: Fundraising Benefit Auction Item. Could be done at a Live Auction or Online.

Kathy Kingston, fundraising auction guru, has teamed with the owner of Zulu Nyala Game Lodge in South Africa to donate two luxury Safari Packages valued at \$3950 (airfare not included) for every GALA Choruses member chorus. There is no minimum or reserve value. Zulu Nyala receives 50% of whatever the chorus makes for each package and the chorus keeps the other 50%. In our experience this item has sold for \$1800 - \$2500.

Level of Work Needed to Produce: No Brainer **Low** Moderate High

Monetary return given the level of labor invested: Low Moderate **High**

How much lead time needed from first planning meeting to the day of event: **two weeks**

Consider: How long will the auction run? How will you publicize? How often will you do E-Blasts? Are there other ways to promote through press releases, Twitter, Facebook, etc...? Can someone donate airline miles to get to South Africa? If so, you just doubled your income!! Is there a way to make money when you announce the winner? Maximize your opportunities!

How many people would ideally be involved in planning and producing the event?

1 People on the planning committee

1 People needed to execute the event, assuming it in online where nothing is needed except someone to write copy and set up the online auction

The step-by-step instructions to produce the event:

Contact ROBIN GODFREY at the GALA Choruses office for all contact details for the trip. 412-418-7709

1. Write copy and create email blast about the online auction
2. Set up the online auction site
3. Launch your auction...maybe in conjunction with a party or an event.
4. Send out regular E-Blasts to promote the event.
5. The more creative you are with promoting the event the more money you will make.
6. Be sure to announce the winner publically.

Fundraising RECIPE For Success!

WALL of WINE RAFFLE



Contributor: Rick Fisher
Heartland Men's Chorus

Event Name: "Wall of Wine" raffle

Overview of Event: Chorus members donate a bottle or two of wine which is combined into a prize package(s). Tickets are sold at a concert performance -- \$5 ea or 5 tickets for \$20. Drawing is held following concert intermission awarding the prize (we generally say 60 bottles of fine wine – five cases) to one lucky winner. Additional items can allow additional drawings to "sweeten the pot" and make the raffle appealing to customers who may not be interested in wine. Examples of such additional drawings include: theater/event/concert tickets, weekend package at a local hotel, airline tickets, or anything else you can get donated. When having multiple drawings, typically the first winner drawn gets choice of prizes and so on until all prizes are awarded.

Level of Work Needed to Produce: No Brainer **Low** Moderate High

Monetary return given the level of labor invested: Low **Moderate** High

How much lead time needed from first planning meeting to the day of event: **two weeks**

How many people would ideally be involved in planning and producing the event?

__1__ People on the planning committee

__10-20__ People needed to execute the event

The step-by-step instructions to produce the event:

(Please be as specific as possible. Write the steps as if the person reading the instructions has never produced a fund raising event. Use as much space as you need to fully outline your project.)

1. Announce the project to your members and ask that they donate a bottle or two of wine valued at \$10.
Set a deadline for donations to be brought in.

- a. Base the donation request on the number of bottles you need divided by the number of members you have
 - b. 60 bottles (five cases) seems to be the magic number for audience appeal [we tried more – up to 100 bottles – and it didn't make any difference in revenue]. Remember that if you have more than one performance you'll want enough bottles to have a drawing and prize at each performance
 - c. We offer members who don't want to bring in wine or who don't have time to buy it a cash option – they donate \$10 cash and we buy the wine on their behalf. This allows for two fulfillment options depending on how many bottles we need to make up our prize package:
 - 1) buy bargain wine stretching those \$10 donations further
 - 2) buy wine of higher value that is on sale for around \$10 increasing the overall value and perception of your prize package
2. Gather your donations and round out the variety and selection of your package with the wine you purchase. If preparing prizes for multiple performances, divide and allocate wine based on value and variety equally between the days.
 3. Arrange for some sort of display of the bottles in the lobby of your performing space.
 4. Get a roll of 2-part raffle tickets. If you're doing multiple days, get different colors of ticket to prevent confusion!
 5. Prepare envelopes for the number of ticket sellers you will have with sets of 50 2-part tickets and six \$5 bills for change.
 6. Line up your volunteers to sell raffle tickets. We use 12-20 sellers for an audience of about 1,000 people.
 7. On performance day, train your sellers and assign locations for them to sell tickets (stations in the lobby, at merchandise tables, in the house, etc. – whatever it takes to allow all of your audience to have access to purchase tickets).
 - a. Each seller gets an envelope with tickets and change
 - b. They sell the tickets; one for \$5 or five for \$20
 - c. Upon sale, the customer takes the ticket part marked "keep this coupon" and the seller places the stubs marked "drop this ticket" in their envelope
 - d. At the conclusion of sales, the stubs are separated and placed in a raffle barrel or other suitable container for the drawing.
 8. At the appointed time, the raffle barrel is delivered to the stage for the drawing
 - a. House lights up!
 - b. Ask all those who purchased tickets to stand. Thank them for their support!
 - c. Reiterate what the prize(s) are (e.g. 60 bottles of fine wine – that's nearly a two month supply!) and the rules for the drawing/selection of prize (if you have multiple prizes)
 - d. Draw the winning ticket
 - 1) read the numbers s_l_o_w_l_y, stretching out the suspense
 - 2) have the audience cheer when their number is read – or groan loudly and sit down when they lose (it's always around the fourth number and is a very funny moment)
 - 3) when a winner is identified, tell them where to meet you to collect their prize (I always say "meet me at the box office after the concert and I'll help you get loaded" – another line that always gets a laugh)
 9. Count your money and take it to the bank. We've been doing this fundraiser once or twice a year for about a decade now, and we consistently raise about \$2,500 per performance with an audience of 1,000 – more if we have some sort of significant travel item to raffle, such as airline tickets or a cruise. Our concert audience has come to expect the raffle as a feature of our programs, and often expresses disappointment when we don't have a raffle!

Fundraising RECIPE For Success! Concert Basket Raffles



Contributor: Robin Godfrey
Renaissance City Chorus

Event Name: Gift Basket Raffle (or Auction)

Overview of Event: Fundraising Benefit Raffle or Auction held at a concert or an event where a crowd is expected. Each Section of the Chorus and the Board provides a basket to be raffled or silent auctioned at event.

Level of Work Needed to Produce: No Brainer **Low** Moderate High

Monetary return given the level of labor invested: Low **Moderate** High

How much lead time needed from first planning meeting to the day of event: **2 weeks**

How many people would ideally be involved in planning and producing the event?

__1__ People on the planning committee

__8-10__ People needed to execute the event

The step-by-step instructions to produce the event:

1. Make announcement to the chorus about the event timeline, when items are due, where and when to turn in items. Is there a theme? What is the monetary value of items deemed appropriate? What do you want the basket to be worth when assembled?
2. Consider having one or two people per section in charge of gathering, packaging, making look awesome.
3. Gather volunteers to sell the raffle tickets or staff the silent auction tables (chorus spouses, volunteers who get a free ticket to help, etc.)

4. If doing a raffle consider pricing your raffle tickets aggressively if the baskets are nice. \$5 per ticket or 5 ticket for \$20 is a good place to start, then go up as appropriate for the baskets. Don't give your work away!
5. Raffles require a ticket to give the purchaser and require the seller to have access to change. Consider setting up 1 or 2 stations to take credit card purchases as well. You can buy the roll of double tickets (purchaser keeps on side, seller keeps the other) or you can print tickets that need to be filled out. (This adds to your mailing list but slows down sales at intermission.)
6. If doing a silent auction put a minimum bid on your baskets. Not too high but not \$5.00 or \$10.00 either.
7. If a raffle...draw before opening of second half of concert.
8. If a silent auction a large "winners board" announcing winner may be placed at each item so winner can pay after the concert.

Note: RCC does a total of 9 baskets at a concert and generally raises approximately \$500

The variations on a theme here are endless...use your imagination. Travel, spa, restaurants, the arts, etc... Tie in the theme of your concert. Or, what holiday is coming up next. Make It Fun!!

Fundraising RECIPE For Success! Cake Auction



Contributor: Eve Campbell

Event Name: "Holiday" Cake Auction

Overview of Event: Pick a holiday, invite guests to a rehearsal to see you "behind the scenes" and end with a cake auction and tea/coffee party.

Level of Work Needed to Produce: No Brainer **Low** Moderate High

Monetary return given the level of labor invested: **Low** to **Moderate** High

How much lead time needed from first planning meeting to the day of event: **3 months**

How many people would ideally be involved in planning and producing the event?

__1-2__ People on the planning committee

__4-6__ People needed to execute the event day of auction plus auctioneer

The step-by-step instructions to produce the event:

1. Pick a holiday, any holiday, to create your theme. Sunday afternoon is a great time to do this if you can pull off a rehearsal on a Sunday. If not, invite your guest for an evening rehearsal/cake auction and do your auction midway through rehearsal so your guest can go home and you can continue rehearsal.
2. Identify local bakeries, restaurants with good desserts and cake decorating stores. Drop by or send letter requesting a cake.

3. Announce to membership, and publicize weekly, that you need cake donations from members or member's family/friends. Encourage creativity and deliciousness!
4. One month before the event start a bi-weekly email, Facebook, twitter and website campaign inviting your supporters. You can do this without paying for marketing or invitations if you plan your campaign digitally. Create a simple but colorful announcement. You can keep it low key but focused.
5. Prepare to serve very simple cookies and tea/coffee at your rehearsal for your guest. Seat up chairs "theater style" for your guest if you can. Or, have the chorus stand in performance formation and seat your guests.
6. Have a fun auctioneer.

We did this with the Turtle Creek Chorale and raised a total of 4K on a Sunday afternoon with very little work. Issues to consider are rehearsal space and time and the logistics of not interrupting your rehearsal too much. This can also be a "stand alone" event on a Sunday afternoon with a small group performance, etc.

Fundraising RECIPE For Success!



Eve Campbell
evcampbell@att.net

Event Name: Dining For Dollars

Overview of Event:

A “third party” outside of the chorus agrees to host a dinner party in honor of the chorus. The host pays for the dinner and invites their friends as guests who either “pay” for their dinner as a gift to the chorus or an appeal is made to raise money for the chorus.

Level of Work Needed to Produce: No Brainer **Low** Moderate High

Monetary return given the level of labor invested: Low **Moderate** High

How much lead time needed from first planning meeting to the day of event: 6 weeks

How many people would ideally be involved in planning and producing the event?

___1-2___ people on the planning committee

___2-3___ people needed to execute the event

The step-by-step instructions to produce the event:

1. Identify potential third parties who would host a dinner for the chorus.
2. Make the “ask” to the potential hosts and set the date, style of dinner and price. A fancy dinner party may command \$50 (or more) per plate. A back yard bar-b-que may command \$15. Be creative and don’t sell yourselves short!
3. Work with the host to decide how to price the dinner or how to make the appeal.
 - Is it a fancy party? Do you want to ask singers to serve as waiters?
 - Is it an outdoor event such as a picnic or bar-b-que where you can charge less but invite more people?

- Do you need a board member present to make a fund raising appeal and ask?
- Do you want to have several dinners the same night and meet in a central location to share dessert and listen to the chorus sing?

This event can be as simple as one dinner in someone's home or you can coordinate multiple dinners in one evening or over a course of a few months. The trick is to let someone else do the work for you!

Fundraising RECIPE For Success!



**From: Robin Godfrey
Renaissance City Chorus**

Event Name: DREAM VACATION RAFFLE

Overview of Event:

Raffle a Travel Agency Gift Certificate giving the winner ultimate flexibility to take the vacation of THEIR dreams!

Level of Work Needed to Produce: No Brainer Low **Moderate** High

Monetary return given the level of labor invested: Low **Moderate** High

How much lead time needed from first planning meeting to the day of event:
2 months

How many people would ideally be involved in planning and producing the event?

 2 people on the planning committee

 people needed to execute the event **As many as possible to sell the raffle tickets.**

The step-by-step instructions to produce the event:

Dollar amount can be adapted to meet each chorus' needs. RCC set the price at \$2500 and sold 250 tickets at \$20 each. Each singer and board member was asked to sell 5 tickets each.

CONSULT THE RAFFLE RULES FOR YOUR STATE BEFORE BEGINNING ANY RAFFLE.

Fundraising RECIPE For Success!



Contributor: Peter Elliott
Rochester Men's Chorus

Event Name: Individual Solicitation Letter

Overview of Event: Send a Letter to your friends and family and ask for support

Level of Work Needed to Produce: **No Brainer** Low Moderate High

Monetary return given the level of labor invested: Low **Moderate** High

How much lead time needed from first planning meeting to the day of event: 1 week

How many people would ideally be involved in planning and producing the event?

__0__ people on the planning committee

__1__ people needed to execute the event

The step-by-step instructions to produce the event:

Compile a list of people who wish you well and know how much the chorus means to you. Send them a letter or email the letter. IMPORTANT: Don't forget to send a THANK YOU note to your donors!!

Dear _____,

As you know, I've been a member of the _____ Chorus for the past ____ years. Singing with the chorus has enriched my life in many ways. _____ (list your personal reasons for being a member).

In July 2012, the _____ Chorus will be going to a festival sponsored by the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA) in Denver, Colorado. GALA represents over 170 international gay and lesbian choruses. This event will give me the opportunity to perform with my chorus, with members of other choruses, listen to new repertoire and to experience the magic of music from others. We will be true ambassadors for the City of _____. (List other reasons in addition to these.)

And so I'm asking you to help "Get Me to Gala - 2012."

I'm setting aside \$10 a week toward my goal of \$1250.00. Won't you consider matching my weekly donation with a **single** donation of \$10 or more? I'll be grateful for whatever help you can provide.

I can't wait to share my experiences of Gala 2012 with you and thanks for helping me "Get to GALA – 2012"

My address is:

For more information visit www.galachoruses.org

Sincerely,

Fundraising RECIPE For Success!



JoAnn Usher

GALA Choruses Board of Directors

Event Name: Heads or Tails

Overview of Event: Strands of beads are sold which represent chances at winning a prize. Players bet on a coin toss by placing their hands on their heads or their “tails.” If you lose you give up a strand of beads. The last person left standing with a strand of beads wins.

Level of Work Needed to Produce: No Brainer Low **Moderate** High

Monetary return given the level of labor invested: Low **Moderate** High

How much lead time needed from first planning meeting to the day of event: 4 weeks

How many people would ideally be involved in planning and producing the event?

__4__ people on the planning committee

__4__ people needed to execute the event

The step-by-step instructions to produce the event:

1. You must obtain a prize of sufficient value to encourage people to want to participate. Using the “Heads or Tails” game to convert the prize to cash rather than a live auction allows even those with a small amount of cash to participate.
2. Strands of beads may be obtained inexpensively from Oriental Trading Company (online) and may be collected and used again. (Think Mardi Gras beads!)
3. The price of the strand of beads may be adjusted based on the value of the prize.
4. You will need to have sufficient BEAD SALES PEOPLE working the crowd before the game in order to maximize sales.

5. You usually set an upper limit on the number of beads any one individual may buy so the game remains competitive and fun.
6. The Caller doing the coin toss should be outgoing and gregarious enough to make it fun!
7. To Play The Game: Those who have purchased strands of beads are asked to stand. The Caller instructs the players to place their "bet" by placing their hands on either their head or their "tail." The Caller then tosses a coin and calls out the results when the coin lands. Those who did not guess correctly remove a strand of beads or they sit down if it is their last strand (they are out of the game when they lose all their beads). Those who guess correctly remain standing and play another round.
8. Rounds continue until only one player remains standing.
9. Rounds move quickly! Even with 100 players the game can be completed in 15 minutes or so.

nycgaymen'schorus

Devising a 'Big Gay Sing'

Brief for Artistic Directors and Chorus Managers – June 2013

Many thanks for your interest in doing a 'Big Gay Sing'. We at New York City Gay Men's Chorus have entertained literally thousands of people since we started our Big Gay Sings in March 2009, and our members have had huge fun too. The idea has re-invigorated our artistic program, got new audiences interested in us, improved our outreach and in some ways the Big Gay Sing idea saved our organization at a time of deep financial pressure, which, we are glad to say is long since past! We believe that the concept aligns with every part of our mission (and that of other GALA choruses), and we want to offer it to others to use wisely.

New York City Gay Men's Chorus owns the name 'Big Gay Sing'. We decided to copyright it not to make money ourselves, but because we did invent the concept, and we wanted to ensure that it was done well. Our intention is that any GALA chorus who does a Big Gay Sing gets in touch with us, so we can help you, and you do the best show you can. That will reflect well both on your chorus and on NYCGMC too, and then everyone benefits.

If you'd like to a Big Gay Sing, all you have to do is:

- 1) Pay us \$50 before the date of the performance, by sending a check payable to 'Big Apple Performing Arts' to our offices, the address of which is on our website, at www.nycgmc.org.
- 2) Let us know in writing at least 60 days before the performance that you are doing a 'Big Gay Sing'.
- 3) Ensure that the following words appear in your program underneath the title: *'Based on an original concept devised by Charles Beale and Jeff Lettiere, and first performed by New York City Gay Men's Chorus in March 2009'*
- 4) Allow us to support you in any way you like, both to understand the concept and then to adapt it to fit your context.

Finally, we should stress that nothing is required - the advice that follows is not prescriptive. As you will see, your audience is key and your own Big Gay Sing's programming and style will depend on what your audience's needs are. What follows are some general principles, along with illustrations of what has worked well for us in New York. Feel free to adapt them as you need to.

Good luck, and please do get in touch!

Dr Charles Beale (Artistic Director, NYCGMC)
Peter Criswell (Executive Director, BAPA)

Key elements in NYCGMC's 'Big Gay Sing' concept:

The Main Goal: connecting with the audience

Our evening is focused almost exclusively on the main goal of connecting - of breaking down the barriers between audience/community and chorus members by being **interactive** in every way possible. Get the audience involved as singers, but also as speakers, soloists, dancers, participants, wearing costumes etc. Get your audience on stage, and your chorus out in the audience singing with them. In our first one, for example, we even questionnaired our audience via our website about which songs to include.

Aesthetic: Extremely over the top, i.e. BIG and GAY

Don't be afraid of being over the top, going too far, having too much fun, being 'too' whatever you decide to be. The performance should have elements of spectacle, i.e. it should be BIG. And it should also be sooo gay that audience eyes are rolling, they are cringing in slight embarrassment and at the same time laughing in recognition. So don't be understated in your programming or staging, and go to town. Instead of one torch song, do five! Instead of one drag queen, have ten. The feeling of 'That's sooo gay' or 'OMG, they are not doing THAT as well are they?!' should be appropriate. It should be clear that we are not being entirely serious here, and that we are simultaneously celebrating the 'gay' and being ironic in our overkill. Not just gay, but TOO gay...

The Sing-along element:

This part needs the most careful artistic planning, and some of these principles can seem surprising, because go against what you would brief an arranger to do elsewhere:

PROGRAMMING

- **Balance of sing-along and chorus-only singing:** We try to program a balance of well sung set-piece NON-sing-along performances with sing-along material. 50-50 is a good starting point, and the rest will depend on your group's skills and the rehearsal time you have. The sing-along elements are simpler, and will allow your group to focus in rehearsal on some really entertaining vocal set pieces too. But you do need to rehearse the sing-alongs too as there are pitfalls.
- **Song Choices:** Choose the **really** obvious and familiar songs and hits of the past. As Artistic Director, we often do songs in our Big Gay Sings that I don't care for or find too easy, too familiar, old hat, clichés, 'over'. But those cliché songs are *exactly* the ones you need in the show, because your primary criterion is not moving forward the art form in any way (!), but simply that the audience will know them, and that they will love to sing along with them.
- **What sections does your audience really know?:** Every audience is different. Research carefully at planning stage the sections of songs, verses, choruses etc. that your audience knows **before** you commission arrangements. You may be surprised what you find – how many people know the words to the *bridge* of 'Somewhere over the Rainbow?' or Madonna's 'Vogue'? Research your particular audience carefully, to ensure they do know the songs concerned. How old are they – what was their era? Or are you trying to be contemporary, get the younger crowd? Do they know the bridge and verse 2 too? If not, just cut them, or get your chorus to sing those parts. Try your arrangements out on people on the street and random representative members of your chorus, by asking them to sing along in the chosen key. See how far they can get, with just the words and the starting note. Again, the art and hard work here is in enabling **them** to have a good time, and not for you to show them the repertoire you love.
- **Medleys:** Medleys should be carefully written to flow, to keep the audience singing, and keep tempos rising, so tension builds. Choose sequences of songs a bit like a DJ does with dance music programming, or a big band director would keep an audience on the dance floor. Transitions are key. Once audience members stop singing, they may not restart. So avoid long introductions, musically complex key and tempo changes etc., and other long periods of instrumental. Instead, get straight to the next song or point of involvement fast. A surprise tempo change can re-invigorate the singing too, so choose a change of character, from up-tempo to ballad at a key moment, or vice-versa. Introducing a brief solo suddenly can also work well to break things up, as long as we go back to the sing-along shortly. But don't mix times when your chorus sings with sing-along in the

same arrangement too much or the audience will get confused and just sit back.

- **A host/MC:** A host, perhaps a local or national celebrity actor or comedian is key for us, more important than a guest star. They should be known to the audience, warm and funny and explain the concept at the beginning. Their role is to get the audience singing at the start; to be 'on their side', to introduce items, and to do their own party piece(s) at one point. They facilitate the connection between stage and audience. They can also do banter with the conductor, chat with audience members from the stage, and generally function to bring everyone together socially, by relaxing them and making them laugh.
- **Guest star:** A guest singer who can really sing well is very useful. The brand is BOTH about audience connection AND about good singing, in whatever style will suit your crowd. We have had opera, theater and pop singers and all have gone down well. Your holy grail is a warm funny host, who also sings like an angel.
- **Your moment of serious:** We are activist organizations too. So program a moment of seriousness, around an LGBT advocacy issue, with a song attached. The audience needs that and so does your organization. And it will be more all the more touching and dramatic because it comes as contrast in a generally lighter show.

ARRANGING

- **Vocal textures:** We have found it works best if sing-along material is mostly arranged in unison/2 parts. This makes the show quicker to learn, and allows the chorus to lead the audience on the melody. It also facilitates choreography, which does not often fit well with contrapuntal or chorally complex textures. Use four parts at big moments only – otherwise keep the texture really simple.
- **Keys:** Songs should be arranged in audience-friendly keys and tessituras (i.e. the melody should sit in the 12th from treble clef bottom Bb to D, like a church hymn), **and not necessarily in the key that suits your ensemble or singers best.** It will feel low for guys at times, so other Tenor and Baritone/Bass elements than the melody in the arrangement will often go above it. In an SATB group, as a general rule if your altos are comfortable on the melody, so will your audience be.

CHORAL-OGRAHY

NYCGMC is by no means a show choir and we do not audition for dance skills. But for us simple choreography for singers is a key element in this kind of show, because any means to connect with an audience is worthwhile. Some general advice would be:

- Choose your amount of choreography carefully, both across the whole show, and within each song. Less is more, and small amount of really tight movement is better than too much that is less confident. Many songs need none at all, and some are enhanced with 2-3 short, powerful moves at the ends of songs, at the final button, or just on the chorus of a song.
- There will be people in your chorus who are good movers and others who will just do their best (!). Two strategies we have found helpful are:
 - a. Appoint dance captains section by section, who rehearse the moves with their section by standing in front of them, either facing them and mirroring, or with their backs to them. In performance, they then perform the moves or similar ones directly in front of each section during the performance as a dance team; even in performance, that visual reminder from a dancer to the less experienced member can add confidence.
 - b. Check that those in the front row of the chorus are confident movers AND know the words to the songs.
- For us, many moves seem to work best from the waist up. Focus on hands, face and shoulders, as much of what goes on lower down is not visible, even on good risers.
- That said, you can cover a lot of different song styles with a group if they can do a simple step-touch in 3-4 different ways - perhaps fast and slow versions and versions with big and small movements side to side. We always step touch to the same side (the right) first.
- Find a choreographer who is experienced at working with singers rather than dancers, and understands the issues of singing and dancing at the same time. Good moves fit with the singer's breathing and with the gesture of the music.

PRODUCTION

- **Projecting the words:** Project all words clearly and in large font on a screen above and behind audience using PowerPoint. Think carefully about how much text to put on one slide and how big the font should be. After experimenting, we tend to keep the font very big, and have a lot of slides with small amounts of text on each. Think about how to present punctuation and sections with 'la-la-la' etc., carefully, as they can be hard to read can put audience singers off their stride. Also experiment with the colors of projected words against the background you are using. Add funny pictures, captions and gay-friendly images between songs to keep them looking up.
- **Gotta have a gimmick:** Plan audience involvement song by song, as you would plan the lighting or mike placement. Think of an audience gimmick with almost every song, even if it's only 'stand up-sit down', 'wave your light here', 'clap on 2 and 4 on the chorus' etc. Be as artistically creative here as you are with the song choices.
- **Party atmosphere:** if possible, book a DJ and put them on stage before it starts, playing familiar dance music, show tunes, stuff the audience knows. The right audience may start to sing along before you have even got on stage. Then as the audience members come in, they are already feeling some energy and relaxing. There should be an animated buzz to the conversation, like a good party, not respectful awestruck auditorium whispering.
- **Audience costume and goodies:** Ask your audience to come in costume as e.g. Sound of Music characters, Monsters, Broadway show characters, etc. Put this on the tickets if possible. If you have the cash or a sponsor, give them cheap goodies, things to do stuff with, i.e. party hats, goody bags, key rings with lights, masks to wear, pom-poms.
- **Chorus and 'celebrities' in the foyer:** We like having the chorus members in the foyer and audience, chatting in costume as people come in. They break down barriers, and are briefed to say, for example, "Hi, I'm x, I am a T2 and [something silly about themselves, e.g. 'I have a poodle'. Then a question, 'Have you been before ...?']. Audience members report that this one-on-one interaction before the show breaks down barriers. When in the performance they are confronted with a sea of faces, but they feel they 'know' at least one person. A couple of years back, we also had a 'step and repeat' in the foyer, with drag queens dressed as celebrities, who appeared later on stage too. Audience members could pay to have their photos taken with 'Cher' and 'Madonna'. We raised money and got our pictures in the local gay magazines and websites.

COMMUNITY

- **Community Connections:** Who do you know in your local community who can help you? Are there local firemen, or a gay volleyball team? Invite them to come and join in, to appear on stage, to add color, spread the word and add audience. Make it about *them*, not about you, as it will all reflect on your brand in the end anyway. Then find songs that fit around what they do.
- **Big Gay Idol Competition:** We started this singing competition as another excuse to connect with the singing community and our audience members. The idea was to run a web-based entry system, and then have the winning singer(s) sing with us as soloists on stage. We began by finding out about the singing networks in our area – theater groups, opera, conservatoires, colleges etc., We then sent out an eblast, ran YouTube auditions, and briefed entrants to sing a 30 second extract of a chosen song in the key required a cappella on video or audio, and to post the video or audio to our 'Big Gay Idol' channel by a certain date. We then chose winners, and the prize was to sing at the show. You can also publicize the channel by email in your show marketing, so potential audience members can see who has entered and decide who they want to win.

OTHER ADMIN ITEMS

- **The Date:** We used to avoid doing concerts on Friday and Saturday nights, because we discovered we were perceived as highbrow. Now, although we also do highbrow work, we actively program our Big Gay Sings on Friday and Saturday nights, because we find audiences want a party, and see them as an alternative to clubbing.
- **The look:** Reflect the club/bar feel in your marketing, to make it look subliminally like a fun club or bar night out.
- **Licensing Budget:** Licensing can be an unexpected cost, as some of the most familiar songs are also the most expensive. So start early, be flexible in your choices, and plan

more songs than you need as some may be refused or be impractical.

- **Marketing:** We have become unashamedly lowbrow in language, and just say essentially we are going to have big fun. As a result, our Big Gay Sings now include large numbers of straight-(acting?!) Friday night office workers, who have been coming for years, so we market to their local venues and friends too.
- **Bar:** A performance venue with a bar really helps, so the audience can drink as they go along, especially if it can be open before the show starts. Get them to put on more staff than normal if possible.

We hope you find this useful. Please do email questions, and we'll do our best to answer them!

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