

Organizing a Campaign Choirs 'Big Choir' Event

On several occasions when members of various Campaign Choirs have travelled to London to participate in national demonstrations, Raised Voices has taken steps to coordinate the gathering of a 'big choir' for the occasion.

We've learned from experience some of the things it's useful to think about in advance in facilitating such an event. Though every choir might do this differently and better, at the Campaign Choirs recent meeting in Kendal, Raised Voices was asked to prepare a checklist in case others find it useful. Here it is. Let's all use our experiences to keep improving on it.

1. Foresee well in advance (five or six weeks ahead if possible) any forthcoming demonstration in your city on which other CC choirs might wish to join you.
2. Check out among your own choir first, to be very clear whether they wish offer to organize a 'big choir' (fully understanding the extra tasks involved).
3. Remember there are alternatives:
 - You might simply inform Campaign Choirs that your choir will be present and singing at the event but do not feel they have the capacity to organize a 'big choir' on this occasion.
 - You might wish to inform them where and when you will be singing, and that individuals from other choirs will be welcome to join up and sing along with you.
 - If your own choir agrees that they would be up for co-ordinating a 'big choir', write to the CC e-mail list offering this, and asking for choirs to let you know by a certain date whether any would like to participate and what numbers might be involved.
4. If any choirs respond positively, confirm clearly (to the whole CC e-list) that you will be coordinating a 'big choir'. Do this as early as you can.
5. Choose a co-ordinator (we advise having two) with the necessary time, energy and skills for what we have found is quite a demanding job.
6. Ask the website manager to put a notice of the forthcoming 'big choir' on the CC website, with the name and contact details of the coordinator/s. If your choir has a website put it there too.
7. Next, e-mail the CC e-list with a list of six or eight songs your choir would like to propose singing on the occasion, with links to their lyrics, notation and music files on your own or another website.
8. Ask other participating CCs to vote for or against each of these songs being included on the shared songsheet.

9. Ask them at the same time to put forward their own suggestions of other songs they would like to be included on the songsheet.
10. Note that any choir proposing a song should be ready to provide a leader on the day who knows all the parts and is ready to lead it.
11. From these preferences, decide, not later than three or four weeks before the event, on not more than six or eight songs for the day. We find it best that they are to wellknown tunes, or of which the main part is easy to pick up.
12. Prepare a final songsheet and circulate it as early as possible, as an e-mail attachment to the CC e-mail list. Indicate the name of the leader against each song.
13. Arrange songs on the songsheet clustered by leader, and sing them in that order on the day, to avoid too much switching about during performance.
14. Simultaneously, send the songsheet to the CC website manager and ask for it to be put on the site, with link to and from the existing notice of the forthcoming event.
15. Simultaneously, three or four weeks ahead of the event, consult the website of the group organizing the demonstration for information and if appropriate contact them to inform them of our participation.
16. Find out from the organizers of the demonstration/event, or from their website:
 - where and when out of town coaches will drop demonstrators;
 - the assembly point and time for the demo/event;
 - the route and start time of the march;
 - the location and time of the final rally.
17. Ask whether there would be a possibility of the choir singing from the organizers' platform at start or finish of the demonstration, and determine place, time and length of performance.
18. Ask the organizers to be sensitive to the presence of the choir during the event, and our need to be heard – not drowned by continual bands, chants etc.
19. The hosting coordinator/s should now walk the proposed route and make decisions concerning:
 - the initial meeting place for the choirs;
 - the initial performance place (if different);
 - subsequent spots along the route to sing again;

- convenient means of moving from one singing spot to the next (on foot with the march? taking a short cut? using public transport?)
20. In making these choices, take account of convenience for demonstrators coming to the city by coach.
21. Anticipate disruption to public transport. Make clear whether or not you wish the singers to stick together en route.
22. It may be helpful to map underground stations, bus routes, public toilets etc. near the singing spots and along the route.
23. Once your choir has made its decisions on these logistics, and not later than two weeks before the event, e-mail the plan to other choirs and put appropriate instruction on your own and the CC websites.
24. Prepare and circulate in advance a list of the various choir contacts' mobile phone numbers, and particularly your own as host coordinator/choir.
25. It can be useful to create a Whatsapp group of key people in the choirs so that they can be in touch as a group on the journey and on the demonstration.
26. Consider best use of social media to advertise the choir's involvement in the demonstration, e.g. Facebook and Twitter.
27. Prepare and take to the event:
- A large (A1-size) placard announcing us as Campaign Choirs (with website details) and making clear our particular political message for the occasion. It is helpful to mount this on a tall and sturdy pole so that a strategically placed singer can hold it upright, resting it on the ground, while singing. This singer should aim to be fully visible to the approaching marchers so that they know who we are by the time they begin to hear us. Encourage visiting choirs to bring Campaign Choirs and individual choir banners to increase our visibility.
 - Take plenty of spare songsheets.
 - Take flip-over song-numbers on a pole so the song leader can confirm to singers from the front what is the next song to be sung.
 - Take small but visible "sop, alto, tenor and bass" cards to hold up and help the singers of different parts locate each other.
 - It may be helpful for the coordinators to make themselves easily identifiable by their T-shirts or other signage.
 - Consider a megaphone, if it is going to be a very big choir.
28. The day before the event, consult the local transport website for closures and route changes on the morrow.

29. The coordinators' role on the day will be to:

- take materials and equipment to the event;
- be at the meeting point half an hour early;
- be alert to out of town choirs arriving;
- gather singers into appropriate order;
- distribute tasks;
- liaise with and between song leaders to keep the songs flowing;
- decide when singing should start and end;
- remind participants of next steps in the programme.

30. The song leaders' role during the performances will be:

- to bring a note finder;
- to keep the singers of parts in place and hold their attention;
- to indicate each next song to be sung and keep them flowing;
- to give start notes for tune and parts clearly;
- to make sure that sufficient singers sing the main tune, so that the parts add interest without dominating.

31. At the end, the coordinator should make it clear at what moment the singers are dispersing and the 'big choir' is over. (Be aware that the host choir and perhaps other participating choirs too, may wish to go on and sing alone. Some may feel it important to hear the speeches at the rally.)

Ask for, and offer, some feedback and evaluation between and among participants in retrospect, so as to learn as much as possible from each occasion. We should be able to update and improve the above checklist as we progress. If you wish RV to assist in this please communicate with:

**Raised Voices Choir
Cynthia Cockburn
c.cockburn@ktown.demon.co.uk**

or through the Campaign Choirs e-list. We look forward to seeing you at the next event!

5 August 2017