

# *“Montana Christmas”*

## Concert & Singalong Benefit

*A We, Montana! project*

Saturday, 18 December 2021

7:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Lincoln Center Auditorium

Billings, MT

**GENERAL DESCRIPTION:** The event will begin with a 45-minute concert by Freedom Choir (with some participation by Glee Club and Kid’s Choir). Then we’ll have a Christmas-themed skit from our Skits Performance Troupe. Then a 15-minute intermission. After intermission, the Singalong begins and runs for about 45 minutes, with two mass-choir numbers in the middle. (Performed by the WM choirs AND a to-be-recruited Singalong Choir—who will already be on the stage during the Singalong segment.) The show ends with the unaccompanied singing of 3 or 4 standard Christmas hymns, and then the Hallelujah Chorus, accompanied by a brass quintet.

**THE NAME:** I picked “*Montana Christmas*” because I’m writing a song of the same title for the show---to be sung by the entire cast. (Freedom Choir, Glee Club, Kids’ Choir, Singalong Choir). It’s a cowboy song in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time, completely with a yodel-ish chorus. It also fits with “*We, Montana!*”, and we may well draw some audience members from across the state with such a name---as well as to reach them via the livestreaming, if we do that.

**GOALS:** There are various goals in view. Among them are these:

- To serve the community by providing a valuable event that is unlikely to be provided by anybody else.
- To collect canned-goods donations for Billings Food Bank---which we might require for entry?
- To avoid an admission fee (other than the canned goods), if possible.
- To gain much-needed public exposure for *We, Montana!* in general. (The house seats 1,636, and the show could possibly be live-streamed as well.)
- To raise funds for *We, Montana!*---through passing donation buckets later in the event?
- To build a network of singers from which Freedom Choir (and possibly, our Homeschool Program) can grow---and possibly to locate potential members for a regularly house band to accompany us from time to time.
- To put the Skits Troupe’s best act on the stage, getting them some exposure.
- To be ready to sell tickets online that night for upcoming events, such as:
  - Constitution Seminar
  - Freedom Choir Spring Concert (At the Lincoln Center?)
  - Skits Spring Performance

- To begin building a network of local businesses who will buy ads in our show programs, who will sponsor future events, who will donate to the cause, who will let us put up flyers at their locations, who will donate items for raffles in the future, etc.
- To begin building a mailing/contact list of citizens interested in attending our shows. How can we get their contact info and permission that night? Free tickets attained online, and printed for entry? (With a \$10 charge at the door for those without the tickets?)
- To test the feasibility of holding future shows at the Lincoln Center—including the Freedom Choir Spring Concert, or a July-4-week show---and if all that works, perhaps even a big local talent competition in the Spring and one in the Fall.
- Using the Missoula Children’s Theatre model, the more you have in the cast, the more tickets you’ll sell in the house. I’d like to have at least 100 singing in the Singalong Choir---which would hopefully include everyone in Freedom Choir---, but it’s not impossible that we could successfully recruit 150 or 200 altogether for this.

**LOCATION:** Lincoln Center Auditorium. See interior images here:

<https://www.filepicker.io/api/file/DXQRGlqAQ7qvK4jrMIFK> and here: <https://singmontana.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Lincoln-Center-Auditorium-House-and-Stage.jpg>

**SPONSORSHIP:** This show will cost a minimum of approximately \$2,000 (which is a rough estimate the committee needs to vet), and depending on our choices and funding, could run \$5,000 or more. I think we should aim at a more frugal show this first year, and that we need a sponsor to cover the minimal cost. And we can negotiate what they get in return. (Ads on the screen? Ad on back page of program? Ad on back of T-shirts?)

## **MASTER LIST OF TASKS AND CONSIDERATIONS**

### **1. THE LINCOLN CENTER.**

- a. The hall seats 1,636 on wooden auditorium-style folding seats.
- b. It rents for \$100/hour---but there is some wiggle room in their pricing policy.
- c. We might expect to pay no more than \$1,000 for a 14-hour day (load in at 8:00 a.m. and load out is done by 10 p.m.)
- d. They will require that we have an insurance rider to cover the event. Approximately \$200.
- e. Total rental/insurance expenses: Max at \$1,200.

### **2. MUSIC**

- a. Song selection for concert
- b. Buy/Compose/Arrange/Print
- c. Create and Post Rehearsal Aids
- d. Rehearse WM choirs
- e. Song selection for Singalong
- f. Find (free?) Sheet Music
- g. Print and put in binders
- h. Create and Post Rehearsal Aids
- i. Rehearse Singalong choir

### **3. SKIT**

- a. Write skit. (Billy, with cast. Billy explains about the birds in the first 7 days of the 12 Days of Christmas.)
- b. Rehearse skit through the semester.
- c. Props and (easy) costumes.

#### 4. SINGALONG CHOIR

- a. Ages 7 to 120. The more the better because the more there are, the more impressive it will be, and the more seats it will fill.
- b. Determine how many can fit on stage. (Lincoln Center does have choral risers and choral shells)
- c. Recruitment
- d. Rehearsals
- e. Sheet music for singalong numbers.
- f. Two mass numbers (with WM choirs) to be performed in the middle of the Singalong portion of the show.
- g. T-shirts? Or decide what else to wear. If we do T-shirts, they can help advertise the event--- as we'd give them out at the first rehearsal in September.
- h. Who pays for the T-shirts? Do the Singalong Choir members have to pay to be in it? (MCT does this---the t-shirts are covered in the tuition fee.)

#### 5. PA

- a. Determine if house PA is adequate.
- b. Rent if not. \$200 would cover the lower level. Twice that would cover balcony and lower level together.
- c. Who will run it? If we use James, we just lost a crucial singer/actor.
- d. Determine number and type of mics needed.
- e. Will play accompaniment tracks at least a couple of times, and possibly some sound effects.

#### 6. LIGHTING

- a. This is the most difficult issue we will face, I think. Lincoln Center lighting is terrible. They have house lights, and one follow-spot. The stage lights are circa 1935 vintage. They have fluorescent lights at the top of the fly space (which are horrible and completely kill the mood.) Existing stage lights are insufficient to light the stage to conventional levels.
- b. Visit and confirm the current status of lighting there.
- c. We could just use the hall as-is, knowing that it's a major detriment to our event.
- d. Or we could possibly rent professional theatrical lighting. (Which would cost us roughly \$1,000-\$2,000 just to light the stage nicely in white only.)
- e. Or we could possibly purchase (or have donated) some instruments of our own to do the same for the same or less money---and that could be put to use in the Great Room afterward.
- f. We will need a lighting crew of 2 or maybe 3 people if we use anything other than the existing lighting.
- g. Total lighting expenses would range from \$0 to \$2,000, with \$0 making for quite an aesthetically unimpressive show.

#### 7. LIVESTREAMING. If we livestream the event, we'll have to do the following:

- a. Create an "Event" at Facebook, which we should do for normal marketing purposes, anyway.

- b. Use at least two cameras---one in the balcony and one on the elevated walkway along house-right (to get the Emcee's lectern up close.)
  - c. We'll also have to have someone switching cameras in real-time.
  - d. Each camera's feed should be recorded in full for later editing and publication.
  - e. Hang condenser mics over the stage, since the choral sound is not well captured with mobile devices.
  - f. We need to use borrowed equipment/people for most of this, as buying our own equipment (to do it excellently) would cost about \$4,000. Eventually, we really need this equipment---especially if we'll be doing shows regularly---which is the plan. But this is the sort of thing we can get corporate grants for after we are 501(c)3.
  - g. Livestreaming opens us up to distant friends and family watching the show---as well as donating online.
8. **LOBBY USE?** Lobby space at Lincoln Center is insufficient just to have an event, provided the house is near capacity. (See the photo here: <https://www.filepicker.io/api/file/R7s80MveTBqwfsKI1vac> ) Any tables in the lobby create even more of a bottleneck---and most events seem to have them anyway. We must decide which of the following things are worth doing, and which must be done in the lobby, as opposed to somewhere else:
- a. Taking/selling tickets
  - b. Program distribution (and I plan to have ushers, anyway, who could do this without taking up lobby space.)
  - c. Taking canned food donations
  - d. Selling refreshments (if we want to do this)
  - e. Selling *We, Montana!* seat cushions. (The auditorium seats are made of hardwood with no cushioning.)
  - f. Selling T-shirts
  - g. Selling or giving away WM bumperstickers.
9. **ALTERNATIVES TO LOBBY USE?** We could possibly put up one or more camp tent/awnings (no walls) outside the main door. (See the entrance photo here.) <https://www.filepicker.io/api/file/mDyBchDRS68j6sCpnQJI> ) Yes, it will be mid-December---so that's a consideration. From the tents, we could *\*potentially\** do any or all of the following:
- a. Ticket taking and sales
  - b. Program distribution. (and I plan to have ushers, anyway, who could do this without taking up lobby space.)
  - c. Canned good collection (This one really makes good sense to me, as it keeps the audience from having to take their cans inside the building.)
  - d. Refreshments
  - e. Seat cushion sales
  - f. T-shirt sales
  - g. Bumper sticker sales/or giveaway.
  - h. As we think through this, we need to consider whether an audience member is likely to leave the warmth of the building during the show (or intermission),
  - i. We could also consider whether the orchestra pit at the front of the house could work for any of this---without being a distraction during the show. See the pit here:

<https://singmontana.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Lincoln-Center-Auditorium-House-and-Stage.jpg>

10. **SINGALONG LYRICS.** Lincoln Center has a video projector and screen. We need to check it out, but if it works well, it would be better to put lyrics for the audience on the screen, rather than to take up space for lyrics in our printed programs (if we have those).
11. **PRINTED PROGRAMS.** This can become quite a project if we do it. I think we should definitely head in this direction as we continue to grow, but the question will be whether to get into it now or not. Here are some pros and cons:
  - a. PRO. It's a professional touch for the show to have programs, and makes us seem more legit than a show without programs. Helps the audience to keep up with what's going on, and to know what to expect.
  - b. PRO. When little Johnny's name is in print in the program, Johnny's momma's opinion of the whole operation goes up significantly.
  - c. PRO. It's a keepsake for the audience and the cast alike. Helps them keep in touch with us--and to retain information like our name and website and such.
  - d. PRO. It makes a place for the major sponsor's ad to go on the back page.
  - e. PRO. Makes it possible for us to sell ads to local businesses and individuals, which can cover at least some of the cost of the programs---and possibly generate some revenue in excess of costs if we sell enough ads. A business-card-sized ad would pay \$25, and we could fit ten per page, for a gross of \$500 for every back-and-front ad leaf in the book. 100 such ads yields \$2,500 in gross revenue, to put it in perspective.
  - f. PRO. \*Could\* be as simple as a single page, which we can print cheaply and easily in-house at the Great Room.
  - g. CON. It's a project in its own right.
  - h. CON. Somebody's got to head this up.
  - i. CON. If we sell ads, we'll have to go with a multi-page program. The nicest ones come out in a booklet that is 8.5"x11" AFTER they are folded (and stapled).
  - j. CON. We don't have a printer or stapler for this. (Uses 11"x17" paper and requires a special printer to handle that size. We could buy one used for around \$1,000, and it costs \$600 every time you fill it with toner. And this sort of thing is definitely on our target list at some point.
  - k. CON. If we have these professionally printed, they will be very expensive. They could easily go over \$2 each (and I have no idea how much over). At 1,636 seats in a full house (and we have got to pick some number to order---whether we guess well or not), we'd be paying as much as \$3300 or more just for programs. If we want to break even on that, it means we have to sell 132 \$25 ads.
  - l. CON. If we sell ads, somebody has got to be the salespeople. (We would be wise to lean on a LOT of people to tell ads---particularly to business people they already know. But most people will not be excited about this. Some organizations give prizes for ad sales, so as to motivate those who are motivated in that way.)
  - m. **Food for thought.** As a benchmark for weighing this out, I suggest we start thinking from here: What about a single-page, printed front-and-back on the Great Room printer, where the major feature of the back side is an ad for the major sponsor? (And where we have a QR code that people can scan to get to our website where they can see the list of everybody in

- the choirs, and they can see how to donate, etc.) Ultimately, this is unsatisfying to me, but if I think of it as the first-year iteration of a project that will get more and more sophisticated over time, it does have its appeal. I don't know how much it would cost, exactly, but I can tell you that to print on the cardstock we used at the FC Spring Concert, 1,700 copies (which means the cast can each have a keepsake copy, too) would run \$140 in paper stock, plus toner. Depending on the graphic design, we might expect to run (very rough figures here) 900 programs per the 4-cartridge toner supply. So we'd need two full loads of toner, at about \$300 each, for \$600. Add in the paper, that that puts us at \$740 per 1,700 programs--single-sheet on heavy card stock, double-sided, in color. That's \$0.44 per copy.
- n. **More Food for Thought.** If we used the same single-sheet cardstock for a COVER, and turned it to landscape orientation and folded it in half (finished size of 5.5"x8.5"), then we could insert inner sheets (regular paper stock) so that we could include paid ads at about 16 per extra leaf of paper. (At \$25 each, that's \$400 revenue per leaf. 5 such pages yields \$2,000 in revenue, and adds about \$0.50 in cost (paper and ink) per program---for a total of \$0.94 per program x 1,700 programs = \$1,598 total (not counting the following expenses): We'd have to buy a book stapler. (\$26) And a paper folding machine (\$283). And a manual book press to mash them flat (\$150) TOTAL CAPITAL OUTLAY: \$2,057. At 80 ads sold, it would create \$2,000 in revenue, for a net gain of -\$57. This would not be worth the trouble as a fundraiser, but again, there are many OTHER reasons to want a program, and this would at least pay for itself (roughly). If we doubled the ads to 160 ads, we add another \$850 in expenses (which would come to \$2,907), but gain another \$2,000 in revenue, for a net gain of \$1,093, plus the non-monetary values of having the program.
- o. **The best idea of all?** We could avoid almost all of this hassle by simply posting the program on a website, so that people could access it via their cell phones during the show. Something to think about.
12. **DEDICATED WEBSITE.** We could buy montanachristmas.org and put up a dedicated website for this event (and its annual recurrence), where we post sponsor's ads, lyrics, rehearsal aids, choir member names, a virtual program, etc. To host the website through Zee Creative (a local company) along with 3 email addresses would cost us just over \$200 a year. I have built over 30 WordPress websites, and this would actually be quite a simple project---though I'd want someone to be in charge of webmastering the site once it's built. (It would take me 4-8 hours to build the whole thing from scratch.) The website could also be where people register for tickets, register for notifications of future events (rehearsals, shows, etc.), buy raffle tickets (if we ever do that), etc.
13. **ADVERTISING/PROMOTION**
- a. We need a promotions manager to oversee all this.
  - b. Social Media
  - c. WM members pitching in through social media.
  - d. Local news shows TV
  - e. Local radio shows
  - f. Flyers in stores/businesses
  - g. T-shirts for cast members?
  - h. Bumper stickers: *"Sing Along at MontanaChristmas.org!"* (Or similar)
14. **USHERS.** I'm planning to start a beginning skits class, and part of their training would be in ushering. They'd be expected to be at this event to help out with this. They would guide people to

their seats. Take head counts. Pass out programs. Give directions to bathrooms and such. Clean the house, lobby, and sidewalk of trash after the show. They would report to the House Manager.

**15. HOUSE MANAGER.** I need a house manager to report directly to me. He or she would help coordinate with various team leaders over such areas as the following. The HM would be the chief problem solver, and would relieve Jack of that burden:

- a. Ticket-taking and sales
- b. Ushers
- c. Concessions
- d. Merchandise sales
- e. General order and safety
- f. Canned-good collection
- g. Program distribution
- h. Head counts
- i. Record keeping for our learning:
  - i. How many were at the door when the house opened?
  - ii. How long did they keep coming in?
  - iii. How many had pre-printed tickets, versus how many paid at the door?
  - iv. What could be done better next year?
  - v. Any safety issues?
  - vi. Etc.

**16. STAGE MANAGER.** We need somebody to be a stage manager. They would handle things like:

- a. Directing traffic in transitions between segments of the show.
- b. Seeing that props for the skit (minimal though they may be) are squared away.
- c. Seeing that any costume changes go smoothly.
- d. Helping manage load-in, setup, teardown, and load-out.

**17. REFRESHMENTS?** Should we do it? What does it add? What does the show lose without it?

- a. What to serve?
- b. From where to serve it?
- c. Where do the menu items come from?
- d. How much space will it take?
- e. How much money will it make?
- f. How simple can it get and still be worth doing? Bottled water and individually-wrapped Rice Krispy bars?

**18. RAFFLE?** I hate to mention it in such a big operation already, but a raffle can raise a lot of money.

People could buy tickets online during the show (and before, mind you). And we give away some number of items as part of the show---after Intermission. The gifts, if we're lucky, would be donated by corporate sponsors. (If not, we'd have to buy them---hopefully at wholesale prices, splitting the load with the sponsor.) A rifle, for example, could gain considerable interest. 1,000 \$5 tickets raises a lot of money. (\$5,000). And nonprofits in Montana can sell raffle tickets online. It's also another way to develop a contact list, since they have to give their info when they sign up. They have a good "excuse to buy" as it's "for charity" and "for the kids", etc. Also, it's a chance at getting a close-to-free unexpected Christmas present.

**19. SURELY, THERE'S MORE!** This is all I've thought of in this one sitting. Surely I've left something out, but at least with all this you can get a handle of the general scope of the project.