

Tenor notes **The perils of parties before concerts**



© Complot / Shutterstock

Ever wondered why that carol was interrupted by snoring, or why the big bass disappeared beneath the choir stalls? Christmas parties are an occupational hazard for fun-loving singers, says tenor Christopher Gillett.



Chances are you're reading this after a night when you've drunk far, far too much, danced the conga with your co-workers, and photocopied your bottom on the office copier. In case you hadn't noticed, Christmas is coming. It's party season.

It's also one of the busiest times of the year for professional musicians. There are more *Messiahs* and carol concerts in the musical diary than fainting grannies at an André Rieu concert.

Christmas poses a dilemma for the sociable singer - and by and large we are a fun-loving bunch: how to mix all that work with the desire to have fun? Booze, talking over noise, and lack of sleep are a singer's worst enemies. The vocal cords, delicate at the best of times, are under bombardment at Christmas parties. Alcohol dehydrates the delicate membranes, thickening the vocal cords, and staying up late, glugging a glass too many of Bulgarian merlot while yacking loudly over Slade's 'Merry Xmas Everybody' will shift your voice from having the agility of Olga Korbut to the grace of Nellie The Elephant.

I nodded off during *Messiah* Part 3, in full view of the audience, waking with a start as my score started to slide off my lap

My *Messiah* days are probably over - it's not a piece that they generally ask an old lag like me to sing - but when I was young I did loads of them. I'd like to use this organ to apologise to the good people of Hartford for my part in their 1978 performance. After a friend's 21st birthday party, followed by a drive from Guildford in the back seat of a car that didn't actually have a back seat, I was very tired. Which is why I

nodded off in the concert during Part 3, in full view of the audience, waking with a start as my vocal score started to slide off my lap. I've always hoped I got away with it but as the choral society never asked me back, I can't be too sure.

A few weeks later it was Christmas Eve. I was in my last year as a tenor in the King's College Choir, and after the famous Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols the men of the choir had to sing Midnight Mass. It was always a lovely service, made all the lovelier by a good dinner the College threw on for us beforehand. We were in a celebratory mood, with the stress of the broadcast carol service behind us, and to add to the jollity there was a long tradition of playing balloon netball - 'The Balloon Game' as it was called - in the College Hall after dinner. If you've had a few glasses of claret, running around, whacking a balloon over a high net is destined to help the wine circulate in a particularly perky way.

This particular Christmas Eve it was one of the basses who felt the effects, acutely, mid-way through the Mass. In a quiet moment he suddenly blurted out something utterly incomprehensible ('blaurgh di flafa madderlic' is a close reconstruction) and keeled over in a neat arc, before slumping open-mouthed into his stall, thus proving effectively, once and for all, that celebrating Christmas and celebrating Christmas don't always go well together.

Christopher Gillett's account of an operatic tenor's life on the road, *Scraping the Bottom*, has just been published.

[christophergillett.co.uk \(http://www.christophergillett.co.uk/index.htm\)](http://www.christophergillett.co.uk/index.htm)

[saddoabroad.blogspot.com \(http://saddoabroad.blogspot.com/\)](http://saddoabroad.blogspot.com/)