

Bossinware Party Tips

The Bossinware Party Committee
(Bob Bossin, Cynthia Perrault, Alison Stewart)

It never ceases to amuse me that some of the most enterprising people around are not rugged capitalists, but serious artists and progressives, sometimes even socialists. Not only are such folks willing to risk their futures on culture and justice, they are often imaginative enough that the challenge is not only feasible, but also fun. Case in point: Bob Bossin, author of such favorite songs as "Daddy Was A Ballplayer," "Dief Will Be The Chief," and "Show Us The Length," and founding member of Stringband, which, in his own words, "pioneered independent record-making in Canada" during the early 70s. They did this, first, by using their imagination to create an intriguing *objet d'art*; it's a well-told tale now, how they scored a pile of antique fudgehead postcards featuring the Maple Leaf image of Canada in order to have a color cover for that first LP, appropriately titled *Canadian Sunset*. Then they took an old idea from the days of subscription and layaway: inviting people to invest in a record that had not been recorded. With his other Stringband stalwart, Marie-Lynn Hammond, Bossin was able to forge an admirable career through a vehicle which, if memory serves, he once said was able constantly to cross the continent without *being detected by radio*.

Subscription's still a good idea, and Bossin's entitled to crow in his press releases: *After 15 years, Bob Bossin has a new CD. Who cares? Well, there's James Barber, Robert Bateman, Ann Mortifee, Raffi, Svend Robinson, Clayton Ruby, Pete Seeger, David Suzuki, a cabinet minister, a Governor-General's Award winner and a big Hollywood producer—to name a few.* When he decided to go back into the studio, he sent out word, hoping for a few thousand, received \$25,000.00 from 200 people, and gave us all GABRIOLA VORIXO (reviewed Bulletin 28.4).

But musical careers aren't made entirely of recordings, and the market share available to acoustic political singer/songwriters who still have an ear for folk music is, in Bossin's words, "er, specialized." There are only so many folk clubs and festivals left, and many of those seem ever more commercially oriented. Consequently, Bossin has used his satirical imagination (which last surfaced in his antiwar medicine show, *Bossin's Home Remedy for Nuclear War*) to develop a new venue to supplement his income, the Bossinware Party. And he's willing to share his idea. Following is his handout; it offers a number of useful suggestions for anyone who's considering an artistic, fundraising, or even a large party. The document is generally accompanied by *The Bossinware Catalogue*, a listing of Bossin's currently available recordings and other items for sale.

—GWL

So you are considering a Bossinware Party. Great! Here are some observations that should help you decide whether or not to go ahead. And if you decide to go for it, the following party tips should guarantee a successful evening.

What is a Bossinware Party?

A Bossinware Party is a performance by Bob—An Evening of Songs, Lantern Slides, Stories, Video, Baseball, Pumkinabilia, Train Robbers and Diapers.

What distinguishes the *BWP* from a normal concert (apart from the unlikely combination of things emanating from the stage) is that a *BWP* is performed in a living room or a small community hall for an intimate audience of friends. As often as not, it really is a party.

The great advantage of this kind of event is that it is dirt simple to organize. It is also cheap to produce and virtually fail-safe. With a year's worth of *BWPs* under our belt, we guarantee it.

Numbers and Money

A *BWP* needs a minimum audience of 30. It is even better with 40. In fact, the more, the merrier.

If, however, there is a blizzard and only a dozen couples show, what can you do? *But please plan on an audience of 30 plus.*

(This may take less space than you think: *A BWP requires a little less than six square feet per person.*)

As for paying Bob, he should take home at least \$300—\$10 per person from 15 couples. In fact, we hope to do

better and usually do.

When it comes to dividing the spoils, various arrangements are possible. Some Bossinware hosts give Bob the full door. (Those are our favourite kind.) Some take out expenses, some like a small cut, and some want to share the money with a favourite cause. All are possible. Just let us know your intentions and we will work it out.

Technical Requirements and Set Up

We will provide everything that is needed for a living room performance with the exception of a TV and VCR; we need you to provide those. No sound equipment or special lighting is needed.

If you want to hold the show in a larger hall or public space, additional technical support (sound or lights) may be needed. This is not an onerous proposition, but please check with us to sort out the details.

Bob needs 2 hours to set up before the guests arrive. Usually he will get there in the late afternoon.

Promotion

In our experience, people will come to a Bossinware Party for these reasons, in this order:

1. They are happy to accept an invitation from you.
2. It sounds like a good party and a chance to see friends.
3. It is an odd and intriguing thing to do.
4. It is for a good cause (if it is for a cause).
5. They want to hear Bob sing.

Which is to say, *it is essential to "promote" the event in*

the same personal way you would any celebration you have decided to host at your home. Whether you phone people or send written invitations, the personal contact is crucial.

If, in addition, you want to advertise (whether by a poster at the office, a note in a newsletter, or an announcement in the press), that is the icing; the friends are the cake.

Attached you will find a write-up that you might want to send out or draw from. Also a sample poster. We can send more. We can also provide you with a few copies of GABRIOLA VORIXO (on CD or cassette) and a copy of the Sulphur Passage music video, if you think passing them around is a good idea.

To add to the party atmosphere, we suggest you encourage people to bring a plate of finger food and/or a bottle.

Additional Guests

Bob has old friends and fans (old in both senses), most everywhere. Should we let them know about your gathering? Give you their names? They are the sort of people with whom the silverware is undoubtedly safe, but you might prefer to limit the party to your own gang.

Tickets

Should you issue tickets? Keep a reservation list? Ask for RSVPs? This is a judgement call. *We strongly recommend the advance ticket route* (or pre-paid reservations), for several reasons:

1. People who have already bought tickets don't change their minds at the last minute. We have seen an RSVPed (but unticketed) full house evaporate because the weather turned.

2. The best advertising is someone who has already bought a ticket.

Price

You know what price is suitable for your friends. It should be at least \$10 per person (perhaps with a special poor person's rate for anyone who needs it). One house concert series Bob played asked for "a donation, minimum \$10."

We recommend you have a special "early bird" price, expiring a week before the show. Say \$10 for the early bird, \$14 after that. The purpose is, of course, to encourage advance purchase. There are several other ways to skin this cat, but *the important thing is to know well in advance how many people are coming.* Then you will know, for instance,

The Friday night dances held either in Teepee Creek or the Bad Heart were an event every kid looked forward to. A babysitter was a thing unheard of when we were small, and I can clearly remember, after not being able to keep my peepers open for one more minute, going to sleep on a big table in the kitchen snuggled under many coats. Any outsiders that came to our dances were truly amazed at how well the youngsters could dance. If we didn't learn to dance at home, we did at school. In the winter time there was hardly a noon hour would go by that we didn't push the desks back and crank up the record player, and teachers and students would square dance the noon hour away. I don't think there was a kid from grade one up that didn't know how to dance.

Linda Rollins, *Wagon Trails Grown Over* (Sexsmith, Alberta)

My father used to play guitar for square dances, and in his younger days he liked to dance as well. Sometimes, before a dance he would file one of his guitar strings partway through. If at some time during the evening he wanted to dance rather than playing, he would hit a particularly hard chord. The string would snap, and, of course, it being in the Depression, he couldn't afford to carry spare strings around. So he'd get to dance for the rest of the night.

John Leeder

whether to say yes or no to last minute callers.

Seating

There are several ways to seat 40 people in a living room.

1. Ask everyone to bring a folding chair or a cushion.
2. Borrow stacking chairs from a union or church hall.

In our experience, as old as we are, we can still sit on the floor in relative comfort. In fact, it can feel kind of good, psychologically.

Going Public

Yes, you can hold a Bossinware Party in a hall and invite the general public. Many have done this successfully—although you should be aware that the expenses can mount quickly.

However, though the event is now "public," *it is still crucial that you promote it in the personal way.* Some strangers will undoubtedly buy tickets, but the bedrock of the evening are the friends who buy the advance seats because you suggested it.

Note, please: the more public the event, the more likely Bob is to ask for a guaranteed minimum fee.

A Bossinware Fundraiser

Fundraising by holding a Bossinware Party (or any public event) can work out well, but it demands careful arranging. The same gathering of 40 people can raise less than \$100 or over \$1000. It is, in fact, not a lot harder to raise the larger amount, but the event must be planned with the fundraising goal firmly in mind.

There are a number of sure-fire tricks of the fundraiser's trade, like coupling Bob's show with a Goods and Services Auction. And so on. We once produced a 12 page pamphlet called *How to Put On a Fundraiser and Actually Raise Funds.* One of these days we must update it.

In the meantime, if you would like to use Bob's performance as a fundraiser, please talk to us about it early. We can help.

We hope this does not make the evening sound daunting or difficult. In fact, the shows have been anything but.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.