Virtual Choir Primer

a 2020 Survival Guide for the Choral Director

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Introduction

- What virtual choirs AREN'T
  - Real-time live performances
  - Rewarding ensemble performance experiences

- What virtual choirs ARE
  - The best substitute for real performances / music in worship.
  - A way to *keep your program alive* in 2020

Introduction

- Why can't we rehearse and perform with Zoom?
  - Latency prohibits live ensemble music-making over the internet
  - Managing balance is difficult to impossible

Introduction

- So what are our options?

    - *Acapella* iPhone/Android app
        - All-in-one eas—to-use solution for simple projects.

    - Using professional audio and video editing software for more complex projects.

Software

- *Acapella* iPhone/Android App
  - Easiest solution for you, the director.
  - All-in-one easy-to-use
  - Low audio quality
  - Not ideal for use with organ
  - Limited balance management and other functionality
  - Best for simple projects
  - Costs $$ for each user
  - Not the easiest solution for the chorister

Software

- GarageBand
  - My preferred solution for audio editing/mixing
  - Free for Mac users
  - Only available on Mac

- Alternatives
  - Audacity (free)
  - Bandlab (free)
  - SoundTrap (inexpensive)

Software

- Adobe Premiere Pro
  - My preferred solution for video editing
  - $15/month license

- Alternatives
  - ProTools (very expensive)
  - iMovie (free)
  - Windows Movie Maker (free)

The Process

1. Create or obtain "scratch tracks."
2. Deliver instructions to choristers.
3. Collect chorister videos.
4. Mix audio
5. Edit video

Step 1: Scratch Tracks

- Choristers MUST have a track to sing along to.
- Simplest solution is a recorded piano accompaniment.
  - Piano is great for scratch tracks – aids in rhythmic alignment
  - Works even for a capella rep – piano will not be heard in final product.

- Part-predominant vocal "learning tracks" can be very helpful for a choir that is unable to rehearse in person.
  - These can be found online, sometimes for free.
  - Or you can produce your own using the methods I am discussing today.

- Video scratch tracks with a conductor are the most effective but most complicated and time-comsuming solution.

Step 2: Deliver Instructions

- Choristers will need very specific instructions.

  - Record with your cell phone is horizontal (landscape) orientation.
  - Be mindful of lighting.
  - Try to have the camera at your eye level or higher.
  - Use headphones so that the scratch track is not audible in your video.
  - Wait silently for several minutes at the beginning and end of your video.
  - Submission instructions.

Step 3: Collect Submissions

- Devote some time and thought to the submission process.
- Email will NOT work.
- Whatsapp is a good solution, but not everyone has it.
- Dropbox or Google Drive are the best solution.
  - Using your own account, you can request files using a link that anyone can access. You can include this link in your instructions email.

Step 4: Mix Audio

- This is the most important step, and where you'll spend the most time.

- Primary objective is BALANCE
  - I recommend mixing each voice part separately first, then balancing all voice parts together.

- Optional objective: aligning consonants, entrances, etc.

- Optional objective: add reverb, remove background noise, etc.

Step 5: Video Editing

- This is the step with the highest learning curve.

- Two primary objectives:
  - Arrange videos geographically on the screen
  - Align videos temporally with the audio

- Use your mixed audio file, discard the individual audio from each video.

- Optional objectives: fade in/out, animation, add text/titles
  - For these advanced tasks, YouTube tutorials abound!

Conclusion

- You can do this! But it may require a large investment of your time.

- The end result is very rewarding.

- This can help to keep your choir going until we are able to regather for real music-making.
  - Keeps choristers engaged
  - Keeps your program visible to administrators/congregation/vestry/public