Recording for Choirs

From Brainstorm to Budget to the Double Bar: Audio Production Considerations for Choirs

PRE-PRODUCTION CHECKLIST

Big picture priorities: (In order of priority)
1. Find the best musicians you can
2. Find and utilize the best possible sounding space
3. Put musicians in front of great-sounding microphones that are thoughtfully chosen and carefully placed to support the sonic goals
4. Do a great mix (which will be very easy if the previous steps have been followed)

PRE-PRODUCTION, PRE-PRODUCTION, PRE-PRODUCTION!!!

- Great recordings have their footing in thorough planning
- Consider the following factors (and possible work-arounds):
  o Session or live performance
  o Production schedule
  o Personnel
  o Instrument rental
  o Have clear sonic goals
    ▪ Stereo image
    ▪ Depth of field (detail vs. distance)
    ▪ Balance/role of individual instruments
    ▪ Natural reverb vs. post-production reverb
    ▪ Overall timbre/equalization
  o Location (local, or out of city/state?)
  o Transportation
  o Meals
  o Acoustics
    ▪ Appropriate for the musical period/style?
    ▪ Support the production goals or hinder?
  o Production personnel
    ▪ Recording engineer
      • An experienced engineer that is familiar with the period/style of the material
      • Should help discover and prevent pitfalls due to:
        o Acoustics
        o Logistics
Noises that will be costly or impossible to fix:
- HVAC, bathrooms, sump-pumps, etc.
- Flooring
- Traffic from above and below
- Building noise caused by humans, wind, thermal changes and other weather

Budget for engineering
- Engineer: $50 to $150/hr
- Time for: session, edit, mix, master
- Equipment: from few hundred dollars to several thousand/day

Consideration/budget for a producer
- Are they necessary?
- Duty shared between engineer, composer, conductor, etc.
- Session only: in the $100s
- If making editing decisions, this can go up to around $2,000
- If producing the whole of the project this can run $5,000 to $15,000

Venue selection considerations:
- Repertoire and desired sound of ensemble/mix
- Reverb length and character
- Logistics: Availability (schedule) and stage plot (floor plan)
- Control over HVAC, sump-pumps, bathrooms, neighboring rehearsal spaces, traffic noise from above and below
- Cost and relationship

Release:
- Format: Physical vs. electronic
- Registering ISRC (International Standard Recording Code)
  - Application at www.usisrc.org
- Distribution: iTunes, Amazon, Pandora, Spotify, Bandcamp, CD Baby, your ensemble's website

Production schedule: (working backward)
- Release date, distribution, and duplication deadlines
- Post-production: mastering, mixing, editing and proofing
- Recording session:
  - Data backup, strike, and load-out: 30 minutes to 3 hours
  - Recording: usually a factor of 5-10x the minutes of music
    - Schedule work with largest forces at the beginning of the session
      - Ensures consistency of location and presentation of mix throughout
      - Allows dismissal of as many musicians as possible as early as possible to reduce cost
    - Schedule harder works early in the session when musicians will be most focused and energetic
    - Schedule breaks at strategic points throughout the session
  - Sound check/warm-up: 15-90 minutes
  - Load-in and setup: 30 minutes to 5 hours