

Poly Victoros

WestFocus seminar report:

Hold that sound! Recording your amateur orchestra or choir

May 30 2006, Bertorelli, Soho, London

The second of three one-day seminars organized by CHARM within the WestFocus knowledge transfer network, this event focused on the use of recordings in amateur orchestras and choirs. Targeted primarily at representatives of amateur ensembles, this evening seminar was designed to help amateur ensembles make recordings and to share experiences with people who have already done so as well as providing the chance to gain one-to-one advice from experts. The seminar examined the following questions and issues:

- What role could recordings play in the thriving world of amateur music making?
- How can one make a quality recording of a live event on a minimal budget?
- What legal or copyright issues are involved? How can these be addressed?
- What repertory is most worth recording?
- What considerations arise if professional performers are involved?
- How important is it to have a physical object rather than a download?
- How to fundraise to make a recording
- How to market you group/recording to independent record labels
- How best to use recordings to develop choirs and orchestras

The seminar stimulated a great deal of discussion among delegates and those present found it informative and helpful. The seminar was well attended.

RICHARD PARTRIDGE (Secretary, Ealing Symphony Orchestra) spoke about his approach to recording the *Ealing Symphony Orchestra* and other ensembles. Richard opened his presentation with the question 'why do you want record?' The majority of amateur ensembles that make a recording do so primarily for internal use – that is, in order to listen back to performances or to sell amongst players, friends, family and members of the audience – as opposed to a commercial venture. As such, many ensembles adopt a 'do it yourself' approach rather than hiring a professional record producer. The resultant product will be very similar to what the audience actually heard, but may lack the 'perfection' of a commercial product. Richard supplemented his presentation by playing some examples of recordings that he had made of amateur ensembles, and brought in some of his recording equipment to show delegates.

Richard highlighted the importance of quality recording equipment; there is no substitute for a good microphone. Using quality microphones, there are three main ways to make a recording:

1. Use a DAT machine (Digital Audio Tape). The main advantage of using DAT is that a reel of tape can run on for two hours – perfect for recording a concert!
2. Use a CD recorder. The quality is the same as DAT, but a CD is limited to just 79 ½ minutes.
3. Straight onto computer.

Safety is paramount. For example, with regard to overhang microphones Richard advised having a minimum of two independent means of support, and cables should always be firmly secured to the floor. He touched upon Public Liability Insurance and the need to ensure that all electrical equipment is checked for electrical safety.

MATTHEW SWANN (Chairman, Holst Singers <http://www.holstsingers.com/>) offered a fascinating insight into his experience of making commercial recordings with the Holst Singers. Matthew made a distinction between a studio recording and a live recording. A studio recording will inevitably cost more. Recording can be a very intense; for example, one can be recording for approximately eighteen hours over a weekend – Friday night, six hours on Saturday, a further six hours on Sunday and possibly some time on Monday. Producers play a vital role in making a good recording – they have particularly ‘good ears’!

Matthew also noted that it’s worth investing in someone who knows about microphones. Again, there is no substitute for quality microphones. If a recording is being made live ‘patches’ can be made quickly after the performance. During a concert, the producer will mark any errors on the score and record ‘retakes’ when the audience have gone. Matthew also highlighted some ‘hazardous’ aspects of making a recording. For example, if recording in a church make sure you put a sign on the door saying ‘Please Do Not Knock’ as a knock on the door can ruin a recording! Similarly, be aware of flight paths and other detrimental noise!

How to get a record label interested:

1. Your choir needs to have a good sound
2. Good intonation
3. Interesting repertoire / perhaps specialise in a specific area
4. Have a conductor who has something to say
5. Independent record companies believe in getting good repertoire on disc

There is very little money to be made with a commercial recording. *The Holst Singers* record because they want to get fantastic music on record – not for the money. However, it can be very rewarding and boosts prestige.

SARAH ROGERS (Head of Membership Services, Making Music London) and **TOM HAMMOND** (Training and Development Officer, Making Music London). Making Music (<http://www.makingmusic.org.uk/html/270.shtml>) is a national organisation that supports music making. It is divided into thirteen area committees. Sarah outlined the objectives of *Making Music* with regard to membership and the services that it offers. Their areas of activity fall into five areas and include:

1. Membership Services
2. Member Support and Development
3. Lobbying and advocacy for voluntary sector music making
4. Working with and for young people
5. Advancing the cause of live music making across the UK

Further information can be found on their website.

Tom Hammond works both as a professional musician and in the voluntary sector. It is fairly common practice for amateur ensembles to engage professional performers for a concert. To this end, Tom noted that professional musicians are often more than happy to take part in a recording, but highlighted the importance of asking them in advance.

Tom also spoke about the importance of marketing and imaging in classical music. One needs to think about the reasons for selling a product – is the recording a commercial venture or an artistic venture? Similarly, it is important to think about when to sell a recording – for example, to celebrate occasions such as Christmas. Tom highlighted the innovative packaging of a recording by The Dufay Collective. The cover design for *Miracles: 13th century Spanish songs in Praise of the Virgin Mary* on the Chandos label opens into a cross, and was designed by a member of *The Dufay Collective* – Peter Skuce. The Internet can be valuable in sourcing imagery for CD artwork. With regard to repertoire, it can be a double-edged sword: one needs to strike a balance between performing and / or recording obscure repertoire and keeping an audience. It was suggested that a good solution would be to slip in an obscure work next to a popular one. Tom touched upon copyright issues.

Useful websites include:

- The Performance Right Society: www.prs.co.uk
- The Performing Artists' Media Rights Association: www.pamra.org.uk
- Examples of photography for purchase: www.axiomphoto.co.uk or www.shutterpoint.com
- Using professional musicians – Musicians Union: www.musiciansunion.org.uk
- Incorporated Society of Musicians: www.ism.org

PAUL TYACK (Head of Fundraising and Development, Anne Frank Trust) spoke about ways of fundraising in order to make a recording. Once again, the question of 'why make a recording?' formed the focus of Paul's presentation. One needs to have a good reason to ask someone for funding towards a recording, as amateur ensembles will be competing against an array of other charitable organisations. The key word is 'involvement'. Paul explained that the majority of funding is linked to some form of social benefit. Funding bodies are looking for evidence of involvement and inclusion; thinking about ways of incorporating involvement can add value to a funding application. This idea of 'broadening out' and challenging the boundaries of what an amateur group would normally do received a mixed reception: some thought it was a compromise and others thought it was a fresh idea that hadn't been thought of before.

How to Fundraise: Involvement

How do you design a project that builds on involvement and participation? Examples include:

- Get children involved with artwork for the recording
- Get children involved with performing some of the music
- Include minority groups
- Include the elderly
- Include people with disability
- Education / outreach projects e.g. inner city schools
- Local hospice
- Local care home

Always think about the 'W' questions:

- Who?
- What?
- Why?
- Where?
- When?

The key is to look at a recording in a wider, accessible sense. Amateur groups should look at examples of funded projects by the Arts Council and borrow their ideas. There is an array of charitable organisations – some more appropriate than others. Keep funding applications simple – talk to the layman! Go to people who are likely to give you money! Some suggestions included:

1. Local Authority: Arts / Cultural Development Officer
2. Charitable Trusts: browse through the *Directory of Social Change: Guide to the top 200 UK Trusts* or look at the Directory of Social Change at <http://www.dsc.org.uk/>
3. Lottery: good chance of success. <http://www.lotteryfunding.org.uk/>
 - a. Heritage Lottery Fund <http://www.lotteryfunding.org.uk/uk/heritage-lottery-fund>
 - b. Arts Council England <http://www.lotteryfunding.org.uk/uk/arts-council-england-2> and <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/>
 - c. Awards for All <http://www.lotteryfunding.org.uk/uk/awards-for-all>

How to Fundraise: Sponsorship

Amateur Groups should also look at corporate sponsorship – perhaps try to think of any personal contacts?

How to Fundraise: Making Money Yourself

1. Make money out of concerts: think of ways of attracting a large audience. Play what people want to hear e.g. Christmas music at Christmas / popular repertoire
2. Register your amateur group as a charity: reclaim gift aid etc.
3. Ask friends and family!

For further information, please see Paul's PowerPoint presentation:

<http://www.charm.rhul.ac.uk/content/events/wf2Tyack.pdf>