making music

PLANNING
A VIRTUAL PERFORMANCE

A guide for groups preparing to produce a remotely recorded performance

AUDIO FIRST

If this is the first time your group has attempted to create a remotely recorded virtual performance, we recommend breaking the project into the following parts:

Part 1: Audio

- each member independently makes an audio recording of their part

Part 2: Video

- the member then videos themselves playing along with the pieces' backing track, with no need to capture audio

Part 3: Edit

- the project's producer or editor then combines all the performance audio recordings into the final piece and then edits the video submissions to display alongside the already prepared performance audio

Advantages include:

- no pressure for members to complete a perfect take on camera
- less complex tasks for the audio and video editor
- technical tasks can be split between different team members if necessary
- allows for creative videoing and video editing whilst remaining true to the performance audio

Only Audio?

Alternatively, there's no reason why a virtual performance shouldn't only be audio and there are some great free online tools to add visuals to an audio performance should you wish to share it online

EXPLAIN THE PROJECT

It's important that all performers are aware of the entire production method before getting started

- this will be a completely different task to a standard performance and it may feel unusual playing alone
- the whole process will be somewhat experimental and should be treated as a learning process by all
- share our 'Recording audio at home' and 'Recording video at home' resources with performers
- members with limited recording experience may require additional support
- don't place too much emphasis on the final outcome
- share skills - there may be members in your group with video or audio production skills

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Many recording devices allow users to adjust quality settings. We recommend all performers prepare their devices as follows:

Audio recording settings

File Format: .wav

.wav files are usually the highest quality a device will record to

Audio Channels: Stereo

The channel refers to the number of audio signals - a stereo recording will sound the most natural

Sample Rate: 48kHz

This represents how many times per second an audio sample is recorded. Editing together recordings made at various sample rates can cause syncing issues, so ideally a group should all record at the same rate

Bit Rate: 24-bits

This represents the level of dynamic detail within the recording

Video recording settings

File Format: .mov or .mp4

These formats are both high quality and accepted by most pieces of video editing software

Video Resolution: 1080p or 4k

This represents the frame size of the video, it's worth using the highest resolution your device allows

Frame Rate: 30fps (frames per second)

These are the number of still shots captured per second, ideally all contributors should use the same rate to minimise syncing issues in the editing process

Audio Settings: match those noted in Audio Recording Settings

Even if you're not using the audio from this video in your project do match the settings recommended for audio recording if your video device allows. This will help sync video contributions to the piece when video editing

BACKING TRACK

It's often necessary to use a backing track or click track for performers to play along to. This could be:

- a specifically created recording of a member playing their part of the piece

- a previously created recording of the group (or another group) playing the piece

- a click track created using music production or audio editing software

Listen on another device

Remind all performers that they will need to play the backing track on a separate device whilst recording and must listen to this using headphones to prevent the backing track from being captured on their own recording

CLAPPING TO SYNCHRONISE

A simple trick to help synchronise audio or video from different contributors is to ask all performers to clap their hands at exactly the same moment whilst recording. To organise this:

- the person preparing the backing track should record their voice reading the following instructions (this example is in 4/4):

    'your audio or video recording device should now be recording'
    'this piece is in 4/4 and I will count you in with 4 bars of 4'
    'on the second bar of 4, please clap your hands once in front of your camera or microphone on the fourth beat'
    'I will now count you in'
    pause to allow the performer time to get ready
    '1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 clap, 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4'

- use a piece of audio editing software to edit this recording onto the start of the prepared backing or click track

- share the backing track with performers, along with an explanation of this technique

- if the group is preparing their own sheet music this instruction could also be included at the start of the score

RECEIVING EACH MEMBER'S PART

If possible, once a member has recorded their part, they should rename their file to something that makes it easily identifiable, for example 'performer's name - name of piece - name of group'

This file now needs to be sent to the project's producer. Often audio or video files will be too large to send via email. Below are a few tools to easily share large files:

Google Drive - this allows users to either add files to the group's Google Drive, or add files to their own and share that file with the producer. To use the service you will need a Google email account. Each member can share up to 15GB with the free version.

One Drive - this is the Microsoft equivalent of Google Drive. Individuals can share up to 5GB with the free version and users will need a Microsoft account.

Dropbox or Box - these services allow users to keep and share files online. Box allows 10GB of storage for free users and Dropbox gives 2GB.

WeTransfer - this service allows users to send up to 2GB of files (per transfer) to multiple recipients when using the free version.

Avoid using social media or messaging apps to share files, as these will often compress and lower the quality of the file being sent.

For further information on storing digital files please see our Digital Storage resource

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