

The Program

(This year you can do it right! (now it's everyone else that you have to worry about))

12 Steps, Preparing for the Choir Music Presentation

by Bob Applegate

The choir music specials often happen a few times over the course of the year: normally Christmas, Easter etc. These specials are sometimes a major portion of a service or they can be a full choir presentation with narrators and accompanying orchestras that may provide the entire worship experience as a “stand alone” event. Regardless, the keys to successful presentation remain the same. Our role as system operators requires us to understand and implement as many of these concepts as possible to assure the best possible worship experience.



1. Go over music to be performed with song leader, music minister etc. Determine if the existing system can provide all needed inputs, outputs, adequate sound levels and frequency response to effectively reproduce the requirements of the service. If not, contact equipment suppliers or sound system rental houses to determine costs and availability for either a portable system or a system upgrade.
2. Determine microphones needed (wired and wireless) plus all cables, stands, direct boxes. If the choir special occurs within a regular service, it becomes imperative to remember that not all microphones and/or mixing channels may be available for use by the choir. Check all cables no later than one week before the event – give yourself time to react if there are cables to solder, stands to repair, etc.
3. If rental of additional wireless microphones is necessary, call early (at least two months before event to schedule rentals, particularly if the plans call for a large number (more than six) as there are often frequency compatibility concerns which must be addressed early.
4. Gather all source music that is to be used as accompaniment or sound effects. Record all sources - **IN ORDER OF OCCURRENCE** – on a single CD or Minidisk. Assign Track numbers and title each track. During the recording process, verify recording levels to assure consistency upon playback. Make a backup copy and store in a safe location.
5. Load in of rental or purchased equipment, test for operation. Tune and calibrate system as needed. Gather and organize all existing equipment in one space. Make lists and drawings to represent what equipment goes where in terms of the signal flow and physical time/space requirements. It is nearly impossible to remember everything in the heat of the moment, so plan it out and draw it or write it out. A spreadsheet and flow chart of all needed items and location requirements can be a last minute lifesaver. Keep the plan handy.
6. Tech Rehearsal – This is where the theater people really have it figured out. This rehearsal is **not** for the benefit of the singers and players although some of them might need to be there to allow a “walk through” of all equipment changes, lighting requirements, etc. It is at this time that a stage oriented person (backstage director) needs to assign someone (not the sound operator) the task of audio helper. This person checks batteries, assures the wireless mics are on the correct person, places the monitor speakers and microphones if movement is required. The tech rehearsal is the time to verify support personnel for the mix operator (determine who moves microphones into position, monitor changes etc.) The tech rehearsal is also **not** a Sound Check.

7. Sound Check – **“The sound check is not a rehearsal for the musicians”** - The Sound Check is probably the least understood element of worship logistics in most music-oriented services. Organists, Bands, Orchestras, Choirs and soloists all benefit from the time they have to rehearse – individually and collectively and yet the Sound System operator who must mix those diverse inputs into a seamless performance rarely has the opportunity for a real Sound Check. Remember: **“The sound check is not a rehearsal for the musicians”**

Real Sound Checks are run by the sound person and revolve around the needs of the sound crew. Sound Checks are better described as a Sound System/Operator Oriented Rehearsal. Songs may be started and stopped at will as microphones are moved and channel trim and EQ controls are set. Monitor levels and balance of instruments/vocals will be adjusted and require staring and stopping the songs as those adjustments are made. It is not uncommon for a typical single performance event to require 20-30 starts and stops to songs and require up to three times the amount of sound check time as actual music performance time. Obviously most churches do not allocate the time (effort, money) for this requirement, as extra “rehearsal” time is required. This is a legitimate problem in terms of volunteer schedules as well as paid soloists and/or orchestra members. However, if the best results are to be achieved and a sound system is to be used, then a real Sound Check is required.

8. Sound with Music Rehearsal - This rehearsal normally should occur a day or two before the dress rehearsal, however sometimes it becomes the dress rehearsal. It is a performance rehearsal for the sound crew to mix and familiarize the musicians with the scene timing and sound from the sanctuary. This rehearsal should be the last time the songs can be stopped and discussions occur concerning the event. Review Integrated Audio Systems web site item “The Living Christmas Tree” and “When to stop Trying”
9. Dress Rehearsal – Actors involved dress for the parts, microphones are final positioned in costumes. All lighting and sound in place, just as in performance. No stops or starts.
10. Service – Before service verify positions of all devices (mics, monitors, etc) have not changed since dress rehearsal. Reposition if necessary. Replace all batteries. Have spare mics, cables and recording media in close proximity to mix position. Relax and Mix performance to the best of your ability.
11. Edits of Recorded Media for reproduction as Cassette Tape or CD – After service is complete and the dust has settled (1-2 days later) it is time to review and edit or remix the performance. If this task is to be performed by recording studio personnel then the responsibility for the recording shifts to the choir director and/or duplication ministry personnel.
12. Relax till next time.

[More Help Files](#)

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