A remote session using all MXL Microphones

Discovering the right microphone combination for a reasonable price

PART ONE: Choral Recording

Huntington's Men's Chorus 2008

(Tenors 1st, Tenors 2nd, Baritone & Basses) and a Steinway 9 foot grand piano

By: Stephen Palmer

For the last five seasons I've been recording these gentlemen that always have some interesting material lined up to test my recording skills on a fixed budget. These remote recordings always have a wide variety of sonic layering. The choral director has remarkable ears and has a passion for testing my mixing skills after each concert. My tracking methods involve a combination of Focusrite pre-amps and Fostex standalone digital multi-track recorders. Every concert I push myself to get more details from the mixes. I love Steinberg's products, in my option I think their product's a designed for musicians as well as for programmers. Cubase 4 is a great alternative to Digidesign's Pro Tool. The mixer section alone looks like vintage Neve console with state of the art automation. The Choral set up is 3 rows high on the platforms with a arrangement of the Tenors 1st, Tenors 2nd, Baritone & Basses from Left to Right. The stage looks to be about one hundred feet across. In the front center of stage sits a 9 feet Steinway grand piano with the top remove. Every concert the director shims to pull the chorus closer to edge of the stage. This could create a serious problem with Early reflection (pre-delay). This would be kind of cool if we were recording "**Kiss: Creatures Of The Night** LP/CD". This takes out the standard miking techniques of setting up room microphones in the middle of the room. Depending on the venue there could be acoustical problems such as the room being to alive "to much bounce or too dead". A simple test will give you an idea of the acoustics of the room. If you clap your hands in the center of the room, that should give you a idea of how much bounce the room has. If you hear a long echo/slap back in the room, this indicates that there's probably not a lot of carpeting . So how do we sort out this problem? Close miking was the answer. The standard Decca Tree consist of three matched Omni directional microphones. This microphone configuration has been the standard miking technique for over fifty years. When you read about the big studios recording large Orchestras and Chorus, the standard microphones usually used are 3 AKG 414's ($1050,00) 3 Neumann TLM 147 ($1500.00) or the true weapon of choice 3 Neumann vintage M-50's (priceless) with a distance of about 5 or 10 feet behind the conductor and about 15 feet above the highest chorus member's head. But in this case a close Decca Tree about two feet in front of the middle row seem to capture the chorus without any unwanted early reflections. With this type of microphone placement ensures a accurate recording. Also take note, we always record everything with flat EQ's settings and no signal or effect real time processing.

The Decca tree is three matched cardioid condensers microphone with multiple polar patterns set up on a triangle boom stand. The center microphone this mounted in the front on the non perfect triangle custom made boom stand. The center microphone is facing front out. The other 2 microphones are facing hard Left and hard Right. The back end of the triangle is about 2 meters (about 6 feet /6 plus inches) and the front center boom arm shoots out about 1.5 meters (3 feet /3 inches). Stage 2 is setting up the wide stereo cardioid microphones far left to far right set on Figure 8 polar pattern. I also set up a single solo microphone preferably a Tube microphone here are some MXL choices: the Genesis, V69,V76,or the 9000. The 9000 is available only through *Musicians Friend* and an unbelievable price. I A/B this microphone with my Neumann TLM 103 and to my amazement found them to be a perfect match. They have a nice cut and of course a warm tone that allows me to automate volume. panning. eq's and effects. Here's a important bit of information; when purchasing your DAW software, try to set up your budget to buy the top version. For example Cubase 4 instead of Cubase Studio 4.

The professional versions of most of the eminent brands usually have phase switches, better EQ's, plug - ins and automation functions. The phase switch is the most important feature. Phasing control functions usually don't come with the LE versions. So far I've discussed 6 microphones. The Decca Tree (set up for omni 360 degrees) , two wide microphones for stereo imaging (set up for figure 8 pattern), and a tube microphone as a solos (set up for Cardioid pattern). For a well rounded recording, lets add two pencil condensers. Place the microphones over the sound board of the Steinway grand piano.

When you're finished with all 8 microphone input levels, cable connections and monitor levels perform a few test passes at different input levels and mic placements. Always bring a tape measure and take notes of all your stands distances and highs. This will guarantee you will learn from your set ups that succeed and the ones that don't. My final comments about this remote recording, I think that MXL/Marshall Electronics sells themselves short. The large diaphragm condenses/cardioid microphones, tube condenses and pencil condenses microphones price point are so low, you have to question the quality and durability of their product. But I was ecstatic to discover these microphone were incredible and are a fantastic price point. You can pretty much built a impressive microphone closet for the same price as a single Neumann U87 microphone.

MXL Microphones : Race Production Recording

Stephen Palmer : Race Production Records

Marketing Packaging :Choral and Orchestral Microphone Packages
Microphones, Adaptors, Cases, Mogami Cables
and Software packages

Example's:
DECCA TREE AND WIDE STEREO Microphone combinations

Orchestral / Choral Silver Package #1

5 Microphones: 3 Omni/Cardioids and 2 Studio Condenses
(3-Multi Pattern MXL 2010's or 9090 and 2- 909's or 990's)

Orchestral / Choral Green Package #2

5 Microphones: 3 Omni/Cardioids and 2 Studio Condenses
(3-Multi Pattern MXL V67I's and 2- MXL V67G's)

Full Orchestral Set up
8 Track's / 8 Microphone's

Any combination of three Multiple polar pattern condensers,
a Stereo microphone
a pair of Tube microphones and a pair of Large capsule condensers

DECCA TREE AND WIDE STEREO SET UP
Tube Soloist microphones (Stage Right & Left)
Back and Center
Condensers and a stereo microphone
set up inside center stage 4 or 5 rows back

MXL Microphone : Marshall Products
@ www.MXLmics.com