

## Virtual Recording Guide for Parish Musicians

Some notes on how to use technology to make virtual recordings of your musicians for live-streamed services or just for sharing among your parishioners via Soundcloud or Bandcamp.

NB we're talking about audio recordings only here - where you get your singers or musicians to contribute individually at home, by recording their own parts and then assembling them together into a "choir" or "music group", and producing an audio file, typically an mp3. We're specifically not talking about using Zoom to record musical performances (it's quite impossible – though see the note at the end of this document), or the production of virtual choir performances as seen all over YouTube, which is a rather more involved process.

### The basics

All audio-only productions work on more or less the same principle, whatever software you use:

- someone records a master or backing track (typically a keyboard part, or a guitar and vocal line);
- this is then distributed to the singers or musicians
- they each sing or play along to the backing track, recording into a separate device (typically a smartphone) but **while wearing headphones or earbuds** so only their own part gets recorded, without any trace of the backing track
- the individual voice parts are emailed back, and assembled into a finished performance using the app or software.

The good things about virtual music-making:

- Once you're over the technology hump, it's quite straightforward to produce convincing and listenable performances.
- It can help people's musicianship – it involves careful listening, and probably more attention to articulation, breathing and pitch than they'd normally pay!
- It keeps everyone making music when so many things are banned.

There are of course some limitations:

- People are singing or playing alone, in the absence of the visual or aural clues they'd normally get from each other or a conductor/leader, so things are never going to be exactly together.
- It's difficult to correct problems – in a real practice, you hear problems, fix them, and have another go. This feedback cycle isn't easy with home recordings – it's awkward having to ask people to do things again.
- It can be time consuming - expect to spend at least a couple of hours editing a single piece.

## Software and apps for virtual recordings

### The easy way in - Garageband (mac, ipad or iphone only).

Free, and simple to use with a nice intuitive appearance, but with lots of features built in if you want to get really creative - otherwise it's very quick to get up and running.



Although it has the look-and-feel of an app for – well, garage bands – it actually works well for church choirs, many Cathedral or robed choirs use it for their recordings.

Download it at <https://www.apple.com/uk/mac/garageband/>, or from the App Store.

Jo Boyce, of CJM music, has a very accessible video introduction to using Garageband here (and it's free as well!) - <https://www.cjmmusic.com/resources-ideas/remote-recording-tutorial/>

### Apps and software for Windows and Android (and Mac)

Unfortunately there doesn't appear to be any completely free non-Apple equivalent of Garageband, though a few of these offer 1-month freebies (perhaps enough to get you up to Christmas!) or free cut-down versions

**Mixpad** - <https://www.nch.com.au/mixpad/>. No free version, but reasonably cheap (c.£35) and a free trial period.

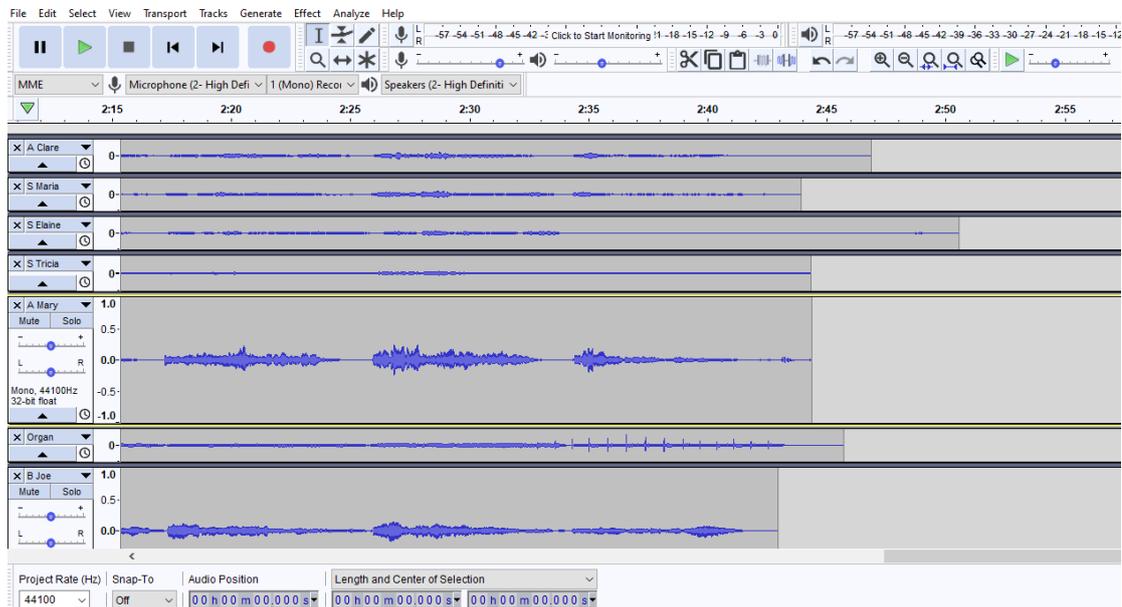
**Adobe Audition** - <https://www.adobe.com/uk/products/audition.html> High-end professional software at £20 p.m., free trial period.

**Soundtrap** - <https://www.soundtrap.com>. Again, a high-end product (includes autotune!) – but a cut-down free version available.

**Pro Tools** – [www.avid.com/pro-tools](http://www.avid.com/pro-tools) Massively powerful (and massively expensive) but there's a free cut-down version, Pro Tools First, more than adequate.

## The granddaddy of them all - Audacity

Available on both Windows and Mac platforms, and completely free open-source software. Audacity has been around for about 20 years, and is widely used for speech and music. It does look a bit daunting, as it's never needed to look nice for marketing purposes, but the underlying concepts are the same as the simpler apps.



Here's some examples of our choir (Hexham) recorded from people's homes and stitched together using Audacity, in a variety of different styles. If you listen carefully you can hear the absolute impossibility of getting people to sing absolutely together without sight of each other or a conductor:

<http://resources.stmaryshexham.org.uk/public/choir>

And a couple of recordings of our folk group also made using audacity (you can tell some fun was had making these!)

<http://resources.stmaryshexham.org.uk/public/FG>

There are plenty of YouTube tutorials on getting started with Audacity – though if there's demand, the DCMA could run an online tutorial – let us know.

Finally, if you really want a crack at online music collaboration that works (or at least works well enough to make interactive music-making just about possible), have a look at **Jamulus** – [www.jamulus.io](http://www.jamulus.io) It's open-source therefore free, and there's a growing online community of amateur musicians using it for informal ensemble playing and teaching, but be warned that you need to be confident with technology.