

# Making the Band

(Notes from 2008 Worship Symposium at Calvin College)

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## General Ideas for Everyone:

- VARY IT UP**
  - We all like to “chunk”, which is playing the same thing at the same time at the same speed at the same volume. We need to vary it up
  - Create “pockets” before intros so that the congregation can’t *help* but enter at the right time
  - Fill up the boring spaces (rests, etc.) with instrumental solos, fills, riffs, etc.
- SERVANT ATTITUDE**
  - Everyone should approach worship team ready to make concessions for the good of the team, from the people with the most talent to the least
- REACT TO ONE ANOTHER**
  - Don’t get caught up in your own world – pay very close attention to the other instruments. The best bands don’t have one leader and four followers, they have five members of a band.
- ELIMINATE MUD**
  - Piano, guitar, bass and other instruments such as viola often end up in the same range and thus cover over the same notes and ranges. To get out of each other’s way, bass can focus lower and pianos and other instruments can play higher or a whole octave up. As an example, pianos should *not* play the lowest left hand notes to free up the bass to hold that range alone.
- USE REHEARSALS WISELY**
  - Often, its better to play through a song once in preparation and then simply work on trouble spots rather than play through the song multiple times just to work on a few measures.
- PRACTICE AND ADD SKILLS**
  - Bands are only as good as their members. Practicing your music, especially at points that are tricky, is *very* important. Also, try to get better or add more skills. If you’re a vocalist who can’t read music, take some time to learn. If you’re a bass player who’s always wanted to play drums, try it out. We are even willing to help you pay for voice lessons or instrumental lessons if you are interested.

☐ **LISTEN TO YOURSELF**

- While sometimes its painful, listen to a recording of yourself and your band. Get a feel for how you sing/play. Preachers get better by listening to and watching themselves preach and musicians are the same way. Listen to a recording....if you can't hear yourself, adjust or tell the sound tech...if you sound like you need more practice in a certain area, do it....if you don't feel the balance is good, tell your leader or the sound tech. If you didn't purchase a 2007 Worship Teams CD, ask Pastor Mark for MP3's of your team from a given Sunday.

## **Worship Leaders:**

☐ **KNOW YOUR MUSIC**

- *Before* the first practice, worship leaders should know their music front to back and know exactly what *kind* of sound they're looking for – fast/slow, straight/twangy, etc. The better the leader knows what they want, the more efficient the practice will go. Unpreparation is the kiss of death.

☐ **FEATURE EVERYONE**

- Try to make sure one instrument or one vocalist isn't dominating all the time – this is an issue of servant leadership. Use different instruments for intros, feature different instruments/voices in transitions, dropout some instruments/voices for different verses, etc.

☐ **KNOW YOUR BAND**

- Know where the strengths and weaknesses lie in your band. Find ways to emphasize your band's strength and minimize their weaknesses in the music you choose, the way you play the songs, who you have on what instrument, etc.

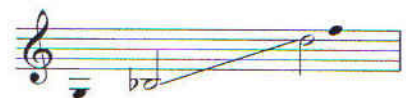
## **Vocalists:**

☐ **VOCALISTS ARE MUSICIANS, TOO!**

- Often, we think of instrumentalists as musicians and vocalists as just singers. However, vocalists are musicians, too. They *should* be good music readers. They *should* practice, just like instrumentalists, especially on areas that give them trouble or songs they don't know as well. If you need an instrument to guide you (piano, guitar) – call up another team member and practice together!

☐ **BE THE LEAD WORSHIPPER**

- This is the congregation's songs, not ours. If *you* become the focus by singing too well or too poorly, you're hindering the congregation's worship. Worship is about *us* and God – not *me* and God.
- Vocalists, especially when standing in front, are the inviters and the enablers for the rest of the congregation to worship. Be inviting, make eye contact, smile!
- Congregation becomes disinterested when vocalists sing poorly (not enough skill *or* not enough practice) – it's a bigger deal than singing from the pew
- Unique vocal stylings (such as vibratos, scooping, warbles, things you hear on the radio, etc.) detract from the overall sound and focus on *you* instead of worship
- Harmony can *really* help make the sound better, but it can be overused, too
- Songs that are too high or too low are hard to sing (normal range: B-flat to D)



□ **ENTRANCES MAKE OR BREAK THE SONG**

- Imprecise entrances at any point in the song lead to lagging in the congregation's singing
- *The most* important thing is to hit your entrances. Often times, you can just hit your entrances and pull the mic away – the louder the congregation is, the less they need your help.

## Acoustic Guitar:

□ **OPTIMIZE OPEN STRINGS**

- Often, this is best done with using capos instead of using barre chords

□ **TRY DIFFERENT THINGS**

- Strumming above the sound hole creates a brighter sound
- Using finger picking is great for slower songs.....but it often gets lost in a loud worship song
- Personal Note: Using the cut capo is a great way to free up open strings.....ask Mark or Craig to show you

## Electric Guitar:

□ **A WHOLE NEW INSTRUMENT**

- Acoustic guitars and electric guitars can't simply be interchanged: they're different instruments
- Electric guitars can often be used as a "sustaining" sound, like putting a pedal down on the piano versus just playing the piano
- Using distortion can often be a great sound enhancer with a "punchier" sound – but it can often be too much

## Piano:

□ **A NEW SERVANT ROLE – PLAY LESS**

- In the past, organs and pianos were often the "only" instrument or the "feature" instrument – they played melody, harmony, provided the rhythm and the cues
- In a worship band, pianos can still play this "solo" role, but more often have to take a lesser role than they're used to – interchanging leadership with guitars and other instruments
- As said above, every instrument should be reactionary to the other instruments – this is hardest for piano players – one way to start is to try to be reactionary to the lead guitar – playing fills and textures that *enhance* sound....not make it all
- However, this isn't all bad news for piano players – you're not being shelved....you're being given more *freedom* instead of having to maintain melody, harmony, rhythm & cues

□ **REDUCE OVERLAPPING – LESS LEFT HAND OR BUMP UP**

- As said earlier on, pianos, guitars and bass guitars (as well as some woodwind/brass instruments) all cover relatively the same range. If you think about this on the piano keyboard, the left hand is the biggest culprit
- Avoid the *left-hand claw* – often, just eliminating your bass line notes can be the first step to allowing other instruments to sound. Avoid the temptation to try to be everything below middle C

- One option is to play an octave up to clear up some of the “muddled” space
- **EXPAND THE PIANO’S HIGH RANGE**
  - When playing with guitars, often the best technique is using higher fills, but again – be careful not to double up a violin or a flute
  - Use *variety*. Often, playing something different on different verses can enhance the song wonderfully
- **USE CHORDS AS YOUR GUIDE**
  - The easiest way to take the “backseat” in a worship band is to just play chords, however you can vary it up quite a bit
  - Try making chords into arpeggios (play the notes of the chords in sequence rather than together)
  - Improvise based on the chords
- **SUSTAINING INSTEAD OF CHUNKING**
  - Often times, a sustaining sound on the piano adds as much to the overall sound as playing all the notes on the page, especially if the song is well known. If you’re concerned the melody isn’t being heard, bring it up to your leader
- **TRY SOME OF THESE PIANO TEXTURES FOR EXAMPLES**
  - Written for “Be Exalted, O God”. See attached song sheet.

Pop Arpeggio

Musical notation for Pop Arpeggio texture, showing a piano accompaniment with arpeggiated chords in the right hand and a steady bass line in the left hand.

← With No Guitar

Hymn Voicing

Musical notation for Hymn Voicing texture, featuring a clear melody in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand.

← With Bass + Violin (leave them room to breathe)

Right Hand Clump

Musical notation for Right Hand Clump texture, where the right hand plays chords in a clumped, block-like fashion.

Two Hand Clump

Musical notation for Two Hand Clump texture, with both hands playing chords in a clumped, block-like fashion.

Bright, highrange  
Good 3rd or 4th  
Verse Variation

Upper Register

Musical notation for Upper Register texture, featuring a melody in the upper register of the piano.

Color,  
Rhythm,  
Pattern

## Bass:

- **YOU ARE THE FOUNDATION**
  - The bass is the most important piece in a band – it provides the musical foundation
  - Synchronize your beat with the bass drum if a drumset is playing
  - Hear the beat's subdivisions
  - Don't let the pianist play your notes!!!!
- **PRACTICAL TIPS**
  - Don't play with your thumb...use your fingers
  - Using a pick on a bass guitar can allow for faster playing (sixteenth notes, etc.)
  - Advanced techniques (thirds, fourths, slides) take practice and writing out music, but sound great
  - Use “pedal points” – using riffs, pickup, or lead-in notes
  - 12 inch amps are usually
  - Use rests purposely – to create “space”
  - Feeling the groove is of utmost importance
  - Don't overplay

## Drums:

- **PRACTICAL TIPS:**
  - Align the bass drum beat with the bass guitar
  - Create the base beat
  - Use fills in pickup note spots and “dead” spaces
  - Use hits to propel the song forward
  - Using hand percussion (djembe, cajon, shaker, etc.) is better for smaller spaces and slower, reflective songs
  - Using hot rods instead of regular sticks can often reduce overwhelming sounds on acoustic sets
  - Know when and when not to play and when to switch to hand percussion to lessen the aggressiveness of the sound
- **EXAMPLE**
  - *For use with “Be Exalted, O God”. See attached song sheet.*

The image shows a musical score titled "Basic Drum Beat" in 4/4 time. It features four staves: 1. Melody (treble clef, G major key signature): A sequence of eighth and quarter notes. 2. High Hat: A steady eighth-note pattern with a "+" (closed) symbol above it. 3. Bass Drum and Snare: A pattern of quarter notes on the bass line and quarter notes on the snare line. 4. Crash Cymbal: A single note on the fourth beat with an "o (open)" symbol above it. A "Fill on Toms" is indicated at the end of the piece.

## Other Instruments (Strings/Woodwinds/Brass):

- **SERVANT ATTITUDE**
  - Approach playing on worship team as a way to serve others, not perform. This can be hard for some classically-trained musicians
  - Sometimes instruments must take a back seat to help overall sound

- **KNOW WHEN (& WHEN NOT) TO PLAY**
  - It has been said, “Something playing all the time is the same as it not playing at all.”
  - On a hymn or a repeated song, pick verses to play, verses to not play, verses to play alternate parts, verses to play descants, etc. – even if your leader doesn’t specifically tell you to
  - Create an *edge* by powerfully playing pickup notes to verses or choruses and then dropping out completely
- **OPTIONS FOR PLAYING WITH A BAND**
  - **SUSTAIN:** Hold notes that are harmonious throughout a section. The easiest way to do this is to play part of the guitar chord and switch notes when the guitar chords change. Instruments don’t have to repeat repeated notes like singers do.
  - **CONNECT THE DOTS:** Another form of sustaining is *connecting the dots*. If you know your chords, write out the three notes in each of the chords (all simple chords have 3 notes) and then connect dots to find an alternative sustaining harmony.
  - **DOUBLE THE MELODY:** Use this sparingly – for an intro or an interlude or a chorus, but not all the time.
  - **DOUBLE THE HARMONY:** This is especially easy with hymns, when the voice parts are obvious. If you are good at hearing harmonies, you can write them out, as well.
  - **DESCANT:** When descants are used the best, they fill in gaps in the melody, especially when there are rests or held notes, etc. If you want examples of descants, check a hymnal. When the melody moves, the descant doesn’t – when the melody stops, the descant moves. It creates a *dialogue* with the melody.
  - **IMPROVISING:** This can be a great addition if you can hear or understand harmonies, but be careful not to make yourself the focus of the sound.
- **OPTIONS FOR PLAYING WHEN THERE’S MORE THAN ONE INSTRUMENT**
  - Team up on the same line to create a cool texture – work it out before practice, if possible
  - Create a third or play different parts of a harmony
- **PRACTICAL TIPS FOR STRINGS:**
  - In closed voicing (typical hymn), violins play soprano or alto lines and violas play alto or tenor lines
  - In open voicing, violins play soprano or tenor an octave up and violas play alto or tenor an octave up
  - In Hollywood voicing, strings play in their upper registers in unison or in stacked thirds
  - String harmonies use the same principles as vocal harmonies

## Sound Tech:

- **USE AMPS**
  - Using amps to increase bass sound is preferred – feed lines out of amps to system for recording, house sound, etc.

- **RULE OF THE LOUDEST INSTRUMENT**
  - All instruments and voices will automatically adjust to the volume of the loudest instrument
  - Sound should be based around the loudest instrument
- **PRACTICAL TIPS**
  - You can enhance the sound of the acoustic guitar sometimes by cutting out the low end sounds of that instrument – plus it frees up the range for other instruments

## **Media Tech:**

- **WHAT'S MEDIA IN WORSHIP?**
  - Everything is media, from the décor to the furniture to the screen – all of it communicates a message
- **WHAT CAN THE SCREEN BE (& WHAT DO YOU WANT IT TO BE)?**
  - A hymnal for this particular church (instead of a book for all churches)
  - A visual Bible
  - A bulletin board
  - A service book (what to do and when)
  - A television or a movie screen
  - A stained glass window (decoration that teaches)
  - A banner (decoration)
- **KINDS OF IMAGES**
  - Ones where the meaning is obvious (picture of Jesus) – megachurch style
  - Ones where the meaning is unclear and requires the person to wonder (abstract) – emerging church style
  - *Be intentional with which images you use*
- **PRACTICAL TIPS**
  - Use media to *support* worship, not become the main attraction
  - Use media to create *active* participation
  - Don't let the media be a *distraction*
  - Don't separate phrases or complete thoughts on different screens

### ***Information Courtesy of:***

Greg Scheer, Church of the Servant/Calvin Institute of Christian Worship

<http://www.gregscheer.com>

*The Art of Worship: A Musician's Guide to Leading Modern Worship* (Baker Books, 2006)

Paul Ryan, Calvin College/Calvin Institute of Christian Worship

<http://www.calvin.edu/worship>

Andrew Holmes, United Methodist Church of the United Kingdom