

Drums, the Holy Spirit, and Congregational Response

Have you ever been frustrated, confused, or saddened by a lack of response from the congregation that you're leading in worship?

What can you do about it? And how do you know you're even working on what's really causing it? Well, let's talk about two of the dynamics.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

First, there are those unexplainable moments when we as worshipers (on and off the stage) are compelled by God's Spirit in our encounter with Him. It has little to do with the music and much to do with either His divine moving or (very often) our own choice in drinking from the Well and experiencing the spring that's described in John 4. There's this spiritual dynamic that when our hearts are engaged, our spirits are activated, and our bodies choose to express this sense of God among us, Emmanuel. Sometimes we so deeply resonate with a truth we're singing or we have a moment of intimacy and vulnerability with the Father or we share this joy of being with fellow believers singing to our Creator. It's more than magical, beautiful or delightful in such a way as to seem removed from everyday life!

From a leadership perspective, what we can do to enable those transcendent moments is to listen to what God is saying and then obey. I think this almost always results in us *activating* people - calling them to make a draw on the faith and Spirit in them. The only formula in this, in the words of my friend Daniel Hazelwood: "I'm peering into heaven, looking at that model of worship, singing to a God who's not far off. The God that I sing to is hovering in this room and He's giving me windows, so I know when to sing, what to sing, and why." (You can listen to a podcast that goes more in depth [here](#)) This is the core of our calling as worship leaders.

Okay, so that's one side.

ART

The other dynamic is art. Beauty. Things that take our breath away and cause an emotional response. There is a power in music that touches us where other things can't. Don't dismiss a conversation about engaging our emotions because you want to avoid emotionalism. Clearly, manipulating people (through any of our senses) is wrong. Creating a culture where worshipers "can't worship" unless they feel something is not helpful or healthy. So what does it look like to healthily engage and celebrate our souls, our emotions, as part of our entire beings?

I believe God has given us the power of music, the language of the soul, to engage that part of us. So let's talk a little about how music works, how it does things to our emotions that are beyond reason. I'll focus this conversation on the rhythm section of our band: the drums and bass. What role do the drums have in the music we worship with at church? They signal sections and dynamics, they help phrase the melody, they establish subtleties of rhythm and tempo intensity, and reinforce the root rhythm/accent patterns. That got a bit complex, but the bottom line is that they function as the railroad tracks (along with the bass guitar) for the rest of the band to ride on.

IMPLICATIONS

That implies several things:

1. They're hugely essential and play a core role, not a support role
2. They need to be mixed that way for the songs written in modern worship to sound right and to have the groove they're written and recorded with
3. The rest of the band needs to fit around them, playing primarily melodic and harmonic roles - that's why the acoustic guitar plays an accent role, not a primary role, and why the piano shines as a melodic instrument rather than a rhythm instrument in a band setting

THE DREADED RESISTANCE

It's worth spelling out some of the resistance we each feel in trying to implement this:

1. Sometimes our rhythm sections are weak and we don't feel like they can carry it (or they really can't carry it), so out of need we carry it (read: overplay). If your rhythm section is weak, I'm a big fan of starting with one song each week and learning new ways of playing for that one song. Take small steps, but take steps in this direction.
2. The feedback we've gotten from certain members of the congregation makes it seem that they don't want to hear the bass and drums (I contend that if we play the music well, they will love it, or it's more a commentary on the song rather than our arrangement)
3. The sound engineer doesn't like the drums or too much bass (don't look at me that way) :-D
4. The drums don't sound good...they're not tuned, they're not quality instruments, they're over-muffled, they're not the right kind or size for the room, etc.
5. The drummer hasn't realized that he or she has elbows and wrists, and plays completely from the shoulder...whack! (They need to learn a combination of sensitivity and assertiveness)
6. The bass player thinks that if he or she plays the right notes in the same tempo (or precisely what the kick drum is playing), then they've done their job. (This is not true)
7. We're just plain scared to change the way we play to be more musical. I won't lie, it's risky and can be downright hard...until you crest the hill...then you'll wonder why you ever played like that
8. Part of why the drummers play "safe" is that they haven't been given the requirement or space to play their "railroad tracks" role - there's not been a need for anything else (our overplaying actions speak louder than our "please play out" words). Once the rhythm section has taken its place, you may find yourself removing the muffles and storing the drum shield. (No, I didn't just say that)

THE EFFECTS OF OUR CHOICES

These are not hard and fast rules, but as musicians creating art, we need to know what the effects of our choices are. We can each play three things: melody, harmony, or rhythm, each in different priority. For example, if I pound the guitar or piano, though I am playing melody and harmony, I'm primarily playing rhythm. This effect is accentuated on the big, fast, or medium tempo songs. And of course there are songs or parts of songs where things other than the rhythm section will take center stage, like the beginnings of some songs or the slower ballads.

I realize I'm on a bit of a soapbox here, but you can ask any pro musician and they'll tell you that what separates the amateurs from the pros is their ability to when and what to play, and primarily what not to play. Restraint is king. There is no subtlety and eloquence if you just say everything you know. Neither is there art if you play everything you can.

How does this challenge you? How does it encourage you? How does it give you language to take to your team and develop the band and techs? What further questions do you have?

We hope you're encouraged by the Worship Fertilizer, a free resource from Ad Lib Music, *"in simple love and pure devotion to Jesus, we are eradicating isolation and burnout so that leaders bear much fruit!"*

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