

# Praise & Worship Band Basics 101

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No amount of sincere effort can compensate for poor musicianship.

Psalm 33:3 KJV - Sing unto him a new song; **play skilfully** with a loud noise.

God expects ALL musicians to be in tune. (Therefore, every instrument tuning to 440 Hz BEFORE the service is absolutely CRUCIAL! And don't presume that every musician will get this done on their own. This must be a planned part of every rehearsal or warm up.) There is NO EXCUSE for playing out of tune! Even musicians who don't have perfect pitch themselves can tune "electronically" with modern technology.

God expects all His singers to sing on key. Harmonizing is one thing; off-pitch is another thing altogether!

If you have pitch issues, you should NOT sing on a Praise & Worship team no matter how much you love to sing or praise God.

Perhaps you cannot tell whether or not you sing on key. Ask others to be brutally honest with you. Don't risk torturing the ears of the saints and quenching God's presence! And please, please... don't embarrass yourself behind a microphone!

If you have vocal pitch problems, they are not going to go away with voice lessons. Period! You just don't hear it. Singing is NOT your gifting; your talents lie elsewhere... maybe on an instrument, maybe not.

God expects Praise & Worship musicians to know who is supposed to be playing as the lead instrument at any given section of a song. This has to be decided ahead of time during rehearsal, or if the band is improvising in live P&W, someone must be appointed as the one to signal who will play the lead part at any given point, and the others must know to drop back and "platform" underneath for the one playing the lead. Too many players "doing their own thing" at the same time is offensive! Platforming is simply playing less notes and longer notes within chords while the other one plays the melody or improvises.

God does not like musical confusion anymore than the human ear does.

If the music feels like it is pushing and pulling at the same time, you DO have a drummer problem.

You do not even have a Praise & Worship Band until you first have a rhythm section: Drums, Bass and Guitar, or Drums, Bass and Keys, or Drums, Bass and Organ. An exception to this would be a very accomplished keyboardist or guitarist who also has personal command of rhythm, and can play a rhythmic style as well as singing lead.

The Bible says about God, "UNDERNEATH are the everlasting arms." The rhythm section is the foundation UNDERNEATH everything else happening musically in a P&W Band.

Don't even bother adding brass and woodwinds until you first have a "tight" rhythm section.

No BASSIST = No BASIS for the music. In a pinch, if you have two good keyboardists or one exceptionally creative keyboardist who can split the bass lines out with his right hand, a keyboard can play the bass parts.

An excellent "IN POCKET" drummer is the single most important ingredient of a great worship band.

There is a saying in the music industry: “An excellent drummer can make a mediocre band sound great, but a poor drummer can make a great band sound terrible!”

Certainly music can be approached with an enjoyable and relaxed attitude, but it cannot be approached as a sloppy or casual thing.

The King is not interested in sloppy music.

The King is worth more than a “mom and pop” jam session.

If you’re still fishing around for notes during the live P&W service, you didn’t finish rehearsal.

To “play skillfully” is not a suggestion, but a command from God! (See Psalm 33:3)

Skill + Anointing = Excellence.

Skill – Anointing = No Presence of God.

Anointing – Skill = No Participation of the People.

God expects the drummer to be able to play “IN THE POCKET” and to hold the tempo consistent once it’s been established.

Robert Schuller’s mother once said, “Son, the people will forgive a lot of mistakes in between, but your INTROs and your ENDINGs must be masterpieces! Practice, practice, practice, and practice some more!

If it sounds like the musicians and singers are searching around for their places in the song, they are!

A drummer who knows how to play in the pocket actually is playing a split second before or after the ¼ note. There are exceptions to this rule and some great drummers play directly on top of the ¼ note, but if so, they have to possess perfectly-perfect tempo or it makes the music sound very mechanical, cold and awkward.

A drummer cannot play uncertainly on the snare. That snare or rim-shot must be crisp, sharp and purposeful.

The bassist feeds off the drummer and the drummer feeds off the bassist. What makes music warm and natural is when these two play together “as one.” A melding occurs and suddenly there is a natural flow... the music is there but not there!

If the music feels like it is dragging you DO have a drummer problem. No doubt about it!

No amount of excitement on the part of a worship leader or singers can compensate for the musicians’ inability to play the song with matching musical excellence and excitement.

The drummer holds the whole thing together.

In one sense the drummer has to be a follower, but in another sense he MUST be the leader.

A skillful drummer knows how to hold the whole thing together, yet without sticking out unnecessarily in the mix.

A sure sign of a mediocre drummer is overplaying on the turnarounds between musical sections or those turnarounds being played awkwardly.

A good drummer has the ability to match the style of percussion to the feel of the song being played.

In no other context but church, does anyone tolerate mismatched skill sets. In sports you have minor and major leagues, 1<sup>st</sup> string, 2<sup>nd</sup> string, starters, bench, intramural sports, varsity sports, A, AA, AAAA, etc., etc.

Unfortunately, nothing is more common than churches with P&W bands containing mismatched skill levels.

The fastest way for a church to lose great musicians is to require them to play with lesser ones.

You can have some variance of skill sets among musicians, but the lesser must know that they are mentoring under the greater and yield to that dynamic, being teachable, grateful and respectful of the greater. A greater musician can work with a lesser one as long as they sense humility on the part of the lesser. When this dynamic is in place, musicians can improve themselves drastically by the principle of mentorship.

*HUMOR: A father asked his little boy, "Son, what do you want to be when you grow up?" "A musician," quipped the son. The father hesitated for a moment then replied, "Well, son, you can't have it both ways!"*

Nothing is worse than a good musician that makes you feel like you have to "beg" them to show up or do something. In so doing they show themselves to be mature in their talents but infantile in their manhood. Stuck up sticks out! Insecurity shows!

Talent - Faithfulness = Disqualified.

Faithfulness - Talent = Disqualified.

Talent + Faithfulness = Qualified.

The P&W Leader cannot leave the congregation behind by getting into a private worship session all to themselves while on stage.

The P&W Leader cannot prophesy or sing spontaneous "Songs of the Lord" too long or they will lose the people. And when you lose the people, the felt presence of God (the glory) is lost.

The P&W Leader must have in mind where he or she wants to take the people and then either get them there, or drop back and meet the people where they really are. But don't leave them behind.

There is a difference between being a great worshipper and being a great worship leader.

The P&W Leader must be able to discern and sense where the people are and then gently move them towards the goal. People are like strings, they cannot be pushed, only led.

Ruth Heflin: "Praise until the spirit of worship comes. Then worship until the glory comes. Then stand in the glory."

Ruth Heflin: "Once the glory comes, don't sing songs with complicated lyrics. Keep it very simple."

If the glory doesn't come, don't pretend like it has, or try to force it after the window of opportunity has passed.

John the Baptist prepared 30 years for a ministry that would last less than one year. Jesus prepared 30 years for a ministry that would last but 3 years.

Know your craft! Invest in quality instruments, equipment, and accessories.

Floor Monitors without 15" woofers make singers strain to hear themselves. This is because they're accidentally trying to compensate, with volume, for what is actually missing frequency ranges in the monitors.

Main Speakers sound "tinny" or "distorted" without at least 15 inch woofers; 18 inch woofers or subs are necessary for larger venues.

If it doesn't have at least a "15 incher" in it, scrap it, no matter the brand or cost.

A band's audio mixer must be one proven to possess plenty of "HEADROOM."

Always have present extra "instrument cables" for they are notorious for breaking down.

Speaker cables must be Non-Shielded; Instrument cables Shielded.

Never ever use "Radio Shack" grade of gear and cables.

*Mis-speyled wurds on ovurhead lyrik sheetz or par-point churts smack of medocrity!*

The P& W Leader and the soundman must roam about often during rehearsal to listen carefully to the mix that the people are likely to hear. Piercing volume levels must be avoided. Offensive frequency ranges must be notched down.

All instruments should be "direct-boxed" into the main mix even if the musician is playing directly into their own amplifier and speaker. In this manner a good sound man has some control over the levels, even if only to create some "ambience."

All team members must arrive before service or rehearsal at the designated time for tune up and warm up. Punctuality is still part of Spirituality!

Running the vocals through an effects processor is recommended and CAN compensate for some vocal deficiencies on your team, but not major ones. Too much effects causes feedback or "muddies" the sound.

The P&W leader may be louder in the mix than the other vocalists but not to the point their voice is overpowering, hurts people's ears, or cannot be blended with the others should a song suggest it.

The P&W Leader must know both when to cut a musician loose and when to keep a "hotdogger" from "overplaying."

It is the responsibility of the P&W Leader to not allow a musician or singer to consistently hit wrong notes. The P&W Leader must lean into leadership by speaking up and correcting without fear. If a P&W Leader doesn't even hear those bad notes, or is not concerned about them, then they should not be the P&W Leader.

A P&W Leader must have developed consistent hand and face signals with his or her team for communication.