



FIXING THE MIX AT THE SOURCE



by Doug Gould, Worship MD

HOW MANY TIMES HAS A DISGRUNTLED WORSHIP leader, pastor or even the drummer's significant other placed the blame for a terrible-sounding mix squarely on the shoulders of the front-of-house sound tech? While that person may be responsible in some cases, it is also important to remember that most sound techs are volunteers. As we explored in our previous guide, *Attract, Train and Retain Volunteers*, they do not mix sound daily and do not have the training, experience or time required to hone their skills. Additionally, they have not developed the ears or people skills that come from the experience of dealing with musicians and singers. As a worship leader or music director, you are ultimately responsible for making the mix as good as it can be.



SECURE THE SOURCE

To yield its best possible mix, sound sources must be as good as they can be — free from impurities, interference and corruption. So make sure everything is ready to go for each service: instruments are in tune, drum heads have been replaced, guitars and basses are outfitted with new strings, vocalists are warmed up and using proper microphone handling techniques, cables are connected, etc. These critical details include your entire team.

In addition to those daily preparations, the music director should meet with the sound techs regularly to discuss how to continue improving sound quality.

LEAD! GUIDE! ENCOURAGE! TEACH!

Choose people who are ministry-minded, dedicated and happy to be available rather than relying solely on talent. Do not misunderstand — skill and talent are always important, but not at the expense of commitment to the team. Once you have established an esprit de corps, you might have fewer people than you started with but you will have created a fertile ground for them to develop into excellence. Nobody really wants to be on a “not bad” team.

CHOOSE NEW SONGS WISELY

Song selection is a critical component in creating a better mix and is also key in promoting congregational participation. The more your musicians and congregation know the songs, the more confident they will become, which will help them to worship freely.

The Christian music licensing service CCLI includes more than 500,000 songs and the standard hymnal has 400. If you want to learn a new song, take the time to know it well. Once you have added it to your song rotation, take the time to teach it to your congregation. Repeat it for four or five consecutive Sundays so that it becomes well known. You cannot debut a song one week then “go dark” for a month or two and expect everyone to know it when you play it again; it becomes new once more.

Determine if your band can skillfully perform a song. If they play accordion, clarinet, ukulele and stump fiddle, it may be hard to pull off a modern worship tune. But if the musicians are talented, why not develop your own version? Taking ownership of the arrangement is perfectly acceptable; you do not have to be a Christian cover band to make it your own!

Some churches restrict their repertoire to around 40 songs per year and ask their musicians to memorize each one. By memorizing, the band becomes focused on worship instead of reading charts. It gets everyone on the same page, especially churches with revolving teams and rotating musicians within those teams. It allows



you to be spontaneous, so that even the lyric projectionist can keep up. Anyone who has been in a cover band knows this is a requirement and not an impossible task.

Sound operators should also learn a core set of songs and know them inside and out. I'm not saying that you can't introduce new songs, but you must allot time to teach that group as well as the band members. They should all practice together before you release the songs to the church.

EVERYBODY HAS A PART TO PLAY

If you are a sound engineer reading this, you know that when mixing a band that has been together for several years, there is not a lot you have to do to make them sound good. The band is well-rehearsed and tight. They know the songs thoroughly and, most importantly, listen to each other. They are "self-mixing," presenting a unified sound to their audience. Every note seems to have a place and the silence or the space between the notes makes beautiful music. Pro musicians know that it is not just about playing but also about providing space and listening. (Rests are placed intentionally in musical scores.)

When a band practices for a few minutes before worship, or an hour or two mid-week, or maybe just every other week, there is simply not enough time to gel as a group. Consequently, they are not "singing as with one voice," and sound operators will have difficulty trying to make all the pieces fit. But it's not the responsibility of the tech to fit the musical pieces together — that belongs to the band.

Music directors and worship leaders who do not have the luxury of daily practice with their groups must make compromises. One of the best ways to get your band to play as one is to write out arrangements for the songs. There are worship bands that I have seen with three guitar players, all playing on the same fret in the same rhythm. It does not work, does it? Create different parts and tones and include complete rests in parts of the song. Get ready — you will get push back.

If asked to rest, one person might say: "What, you don't like what I'm playing?" Your response might be: "You know I love how you play, just not at this point in the song!"

Work with keyboard and bass players so you do not have instruments playing the same bassline. Having the bass guitar and kick drum synced up and playing together supports the entire rhythm section of the song. If you have several background vocalists, coordinate them into parts: tenor, alto, soprano, etc. You can spice this up with harmony and a *capella* breakdowns for the kick and bass.

Most worship teams will get a chart that looks something like this:

Your Name (1 of 2)

Paul Baloche & Glenn Packiam

Capo 3 (G)

INTRO

(Keys) **B \flat /D** **E \flat (add9)** **F/A** **B \flat 5** **B \flat /D** **E \flat (add9)** **F/A** **B \flat 5**
 (Gtr) G/B C(add9) D/F# G5 G/B C(add9) D/F# G5

VERSE 1

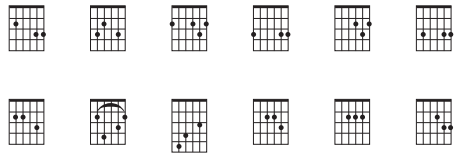
B \flat /D **E \flat (add9)** **F** **B \flat 5**
 G/B C(add9) D G5
 As morn'g dawns and evening fades
B \flat /D **E \flat (add9)** **F** **B \flat 5**
 G/B C(add9) D G5
 You in- spire songs of praise
B \flat /D **E \flat (add9)** **F** **Gm7** **E \flat (add9)** **F** **B \flat 5**
 G/B C(add9) D Em7 C(add9) D G5
 That rise from earth to touch Your heart and glorify Your name

CHORUS

Dm7 **Gm7** **B \flat 5** **E \flat 2**
 Bm7 Em7 G5 C2
 Your Name is a strong and mighty tow-er
F **Gm7** **B \flat 5** **E \flat 2**
 D Em7 G5 C2
 Your Name is a shelter like no oth-er
F **Gm7** **B \flat 5** **E \flat 2**
 D Em7 G5 C2
 Your Name let the nations sing it loud-er
B \flat /D **E \flat 2** **Fsus** **F**
 D Em7 C2 Dsus D
 'Cause nothing has the pow-er to save
B \flat /D **E \flat (add9)** **F/A** **B \flat 5** **B \flat /D** **E \flat (add9)** **F/A** **B \flat 5**
 G/B C(add9) D/F# G5 G/B C(add9) D/F# G5
 But Your Name

VERSE 2

B \flat /D **E \flat 2(add9)** **F** **B \flat 5**
 G/B C(add9) D G5
 Jesus, in Your Name we pray



Chords and lyrics — that is all it is! If you had the luxury of unlimited rehearsal time, you could flesh these parts out, but time is something volunteers do not have. If you take the time beforehand to arrange the songs so that every player knows what to do in each part of the song, it will help to form a more cohesive, coordinated group of musicians. Everybody has their part to play — maintaining tempo and dynamic changes, rhythmic elements, modulations — and they play as with one voice.

CREATE A SIMPLE ARRANGEMENT

Intro: Acoustic guitar only

Verse 1: Acoustic guitar, lead vocal

Verse 2: Acoustic guitar with pad and vocals

Chorus: Acoustic guitar, pad, light percussion, arpeggiated guitar

2: Full Band

Interlude between Chorus 1 and Verse

Verse 3: Drums thinned out / snare on 4 instead of 2 & 4 / long whole notes on bass matching kick / acoustic guitar strumming / sustained open chords on the piano

Chorus 2: Full band, the guitar plays the same repeating lick as the previous chorus

Bridge/Chorus 4: Full band with a more aggressive feel - bigger/louder

Chorus 3: Breakdown to simple driving groove, bass and drums tightly synced, and acoustic guitar

Chorus 4&5: Full band: BGVs with delay fading into the sunset at the end

Everyone now knows what to do in every part of the song. This saves rehearsal time and helps to get the band playing together and tighter in less time. This will take more effort up front but it is time well spent.

Make sure the sound tech receives the arrangement. This will help them know where and when to mute microphones, preventing feedback and other miscues. A written arrangement is a roadmap for your musicians and sound crew, helping you achieve the mix you want.

RECORD AND REVIEW

The front-of-house sound tech and worship leader should meet as often as possible to discuss and break down ongoing issues as well as develop a plan to resolve them. Recording the worship services and rehearsals can help establish a baseline for the group. By listening to the recordings together, you can determine what is working and what is not and then take steps to improve.



Most digital consoles allow you to record a stereo version of everything going through the board. If you have an analog mixer, a portable hand-held recorder with built-in microphones can also capture the sound of the band in the room. The recordings will quickly reveal any issues, for instance: the guitars are too loud, drums and bass are too busy and not playing together, vocals are pitchy or not heard or too much on top of the mix. Listen with the team and ask the question: “What do you hear and what can we do to make this better?”

Additionally, listen to your live stream services and provide constructive criticism to the band and the sound team. Before you know it, your mixes will improve.

I would love to hear from you if you employ some of these techniques. Or let me know of things I may not have thought of — I love learning from you, as well! My contact information is on the next page.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Doug Gould is the CEO and Founder of Worship MD and has been a veteran of the Pro Audio and Music Technology industry for nearly 30 years, serving in management roles at Shure, Tascam and E-Mu Systems. Doug has served as a worship leader, musician and sound tech at various churches throughout his career.

Over the last 18 years, Doug has been a very effective presenter at hundreds of worship conferences all over North America and beyond, focusing his experience on consulting and teaching.

LEARN MORE

Doug can be reached at worshipmd.com or by email: doug@worshipmd.com.
You can also find him on Facebook at facebook.com/officialworshipmd.

For more about Yamaha, please visit usa.yamaha.com/house-of-worship.
Keep up on what's happening by following our Facebook group:
facebook.com/groups/YamahaWorship.