Rehearsal Hall Etiquette

BY BRUCE ELLIS

For many, a worship team rehearsal is a wonderful experience - fun, encouraging, challenging, community-oriented and pleasing to God. For others, however, rehearsal night can represent an evening wrought with feelings of fear, inadequacy and even loneliness – clearly not all God had intended.

The Worship Team Dilemma

From a musical perspective, a worship team presents an interesting dilemma. Firstly, this is probably the only context where such a diverse group of musicians are gathered together and expected to produce a sound suitable for mass consumption. A worship team can, and often does, represent a wide mix of musical abilities and strengths – from the seasoned professional to those who have just learned a few chords. Since musicians naturally tend to gravitate toward those who share similar levels of ability, this integration can, if not kept in perspective, have some devastating effects on the worship team experience. Factor in that many pastors, too often, closely correlate church-growth with the worship team's sound and you've got a breeding ground for division and contempt. That's the bad news.

The good news is that we can have confidence in the wonderful way God has both called us to, and provided the means by which, we can interact on both a spiritual and a musical level. If this sounds a lot like the Kingdom of God to you, you can rest in knowing ... it is! One of my swan songs over this past year has been that strapping on a guitar, or stepping behind a microphone, never excuses the musician from a life that seeks after righteousness and the character of Jesus. The artistic person is accountable! After all, a rehearsal should be an environment of trust - a place to relax, let down your guard and work out music together. To this end there are a few suggestions I'd like to offer regarding rehearsal etiquette.

Rehearsal Hall Etiquette

One of the most common errors occurs when a few musicians are permitted to jam indulgently before rehearsal begins. While this can be a lot of fun, and may seem innocent enough, there can be some unfortunate implications. Consider for a moment the musician who feels as if they are musically hanging on with white knuckles. Just walking through the door can be enough to deflate them to the point of giving up. While it is true that unchecked feelings of inadequacy are not godly, our call is to encourage and embrace the afflicted with truth and love. Worship leaders can actually schedule time for interactive jamming – perhaps as the rehearsal winds down, when everyone is breathing a little more comfortably. Time should also be allotted for players and singers to interact without their instruments. While semi-annual retreats and periodic get-togethers are effective, weekly non-musical fellowship goes a long way toward building relationships that are rooted in trust and acceptance.

Another over-looked issue is the matter of allowing everyone a chance to contribute to, and grasp his or her particular role in, a song. Far too often, singers patiently put up with a band struggling to get their parts right, only to get short-changed as rehearsal draws to a close. They have had neither an opportunity to work out meaningful parts, nor a suitable sound check (i.e. "I can't hear myself!"). One simple idea is to intentionally divide the group into instruments and vocals. Rehearse the band for a controlled period of time and encourage the singers to listen, sing off-mic and basically get comfortable with the feel of the song. Then give the instrumentalists a short rest while the vocalists go over their parts. Call back the players and run the song down with everyone involved. The same exercise can be applied to the instrumentalist who is not required to play all the time. This practice does two things. Firstly, it says right up front to the singers, "you are important and we have time set aside specifically for you." Secondly, it forces a band to prioritize, and be good

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stewards of, typically limited rehearsal time.

One wonderful way of breaking down walls within a team context is the concept of inquiring of others. Rather then displaying what you know, find out what someone else knows. There is no greater gesture of musical acceptance than a seasoned drummer approaching a timid flute player and asking them about their instrument and how it works. You see, regardless of a person's ability and experience one thing is certain – we have all given ourselves to a particular instrument and would like no better than to tell someone about it. Be that someone who asks the question first.

One final thought regards the issue of tuning. I am a firm believer in the electronic tuner and personally suggest that a tuner be an integral part of a church's sound equipment budget. Why do I bring this up in this discussion of the heart? While it is true that many of you can tune perfectly "by ear," modeling the practice of using a tuner goes a long way. Firstly, others won't feel intimidated in pulling out their own tuner. Secondly, there is a unifying gesture when everyone gathers around a tuner. This may sound strange, but the point is that there should be no perception that a maverick or lone cowboy is present on the team. Thirdly, even the most gifted "tunist" can have a bad day. Finally, music just plain sounds better when everyone is sonically, and spiritually, in tune. You'll be surprised how much more effective your rehearsal will be when a few minutes are given to this important task.

Champion The Team

While our musicianship simply gives us a context in which to worship, it is our spiritual like-mindedness that enables us to worship and lead others. The heart issues that good rehearsal principles can address actually facilitate playing the notes well together – a primary goal for most worship teams.



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