

In Search Of The Mighty Electric

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God has created such amazing diversity. No two guitarists would play exactly the same thing, given any particular musical context. As I start this article, I want to encourage all guitarists, no matter what your level of ability is:

As long as what you're playing is appropriate for the context, it doesn't have to be the same as what anyone else would do.

Them Fleshy Things On Your Head

If you're wondering what is appropriate to play in a particular context, them fleshy things sticking out of either side of your head can come in pretty handy. We call them "ears."

Firstly, listen to the music that the other band members are playing. Consider how you can embellish, and complement, what is going on without hijacking it (this can be difficult for some guitarists). Also, listen to what your worship leader says when you ask him or her, "What kind of stuff do you want me to play on this one?" You may find that your worship leader really likes the guitar style of a particular band, in which case you can listen to some of their music and see how you can bring it in to your playing.

Complementing The Band

When I talk about complementing what the rest of the band is doing, this can vary greatly depending on what other instruments are being played. Worship bands can get really crowded in the mid-range – i.e. 3 vocals, acoustic guitar, keyboard, piano, electric guitar, and the occasional bass player venturing up the dusty end of the fret board! All are playing at once.

To counter this in a large band, you as an electric guitar player may only need to play 3 note chords, just hitting each chord once at the front of each bar and letting the notes ring. You may want to resist playing during the verses of a song. On another song, you could be driving it on the electric and the other musicians will need to hold back.

What's Right For The Arrangement?

Choose what's right for the arrangement. It can be very difficult to minimize what you play, especially when you've been working so hard on running up and down the fret board at life threatening speeds! But we're not in worship bands to impress or gain attention for ourselves – we're here to serve, and that's a great privilege.

If you are in a power trio or a band, where it's really down to you to fill out the mid-range, then you're going to need to play fuller chords more of the time and ensure that there is some harmonic backing to the vocals. A reasonable array of sounds will also enable you to prevent things from becoming too sonically boring.



On Sound Effects

This leads us on to a few points about *sounds*. If you use a few different sounds, try and maintain similar volume levels and general tone levels between each sound. By tone levels, I mean the balance of bass, mids and treble. When you're setting up your sounds, try to do so with the amp pointing at your head rather than your knees – the sound is very different! Again, you may want to check in with your worship leader about which of your sounds he or she prefers.

On Practicing

Be realistic about where you're at as a guitarist. Aim to achieve *just the next step*. Make sure you are competent at each step before moving on.

Listen to CDs and copy their guitar parts. I learned most of my skills from playing with CDs, and most of my practice time now is just spent jamming along with CDs. It's a great way of making sure you are keeping time and sounding fluid. In most contexts, you will spend the vast majority of your time playing rhythm guitar, so make sure you don't neglect your chords and timing if your preference is to play leads.

Simple is often best for lead playing. If there is a bit of musical space in which you can do some lead playing, just playing the vocal melody can be great. This is also something you can learn in advance if you're not comfortable with improvising. If you're confident enough, you can also drift in and out of playing the vocal melody by just using certain phrases from it.

Always remember that our job isn't to impress people with our latest trick, but to help people engage in worshiping our great and wonderful God.

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