worshipideas.com

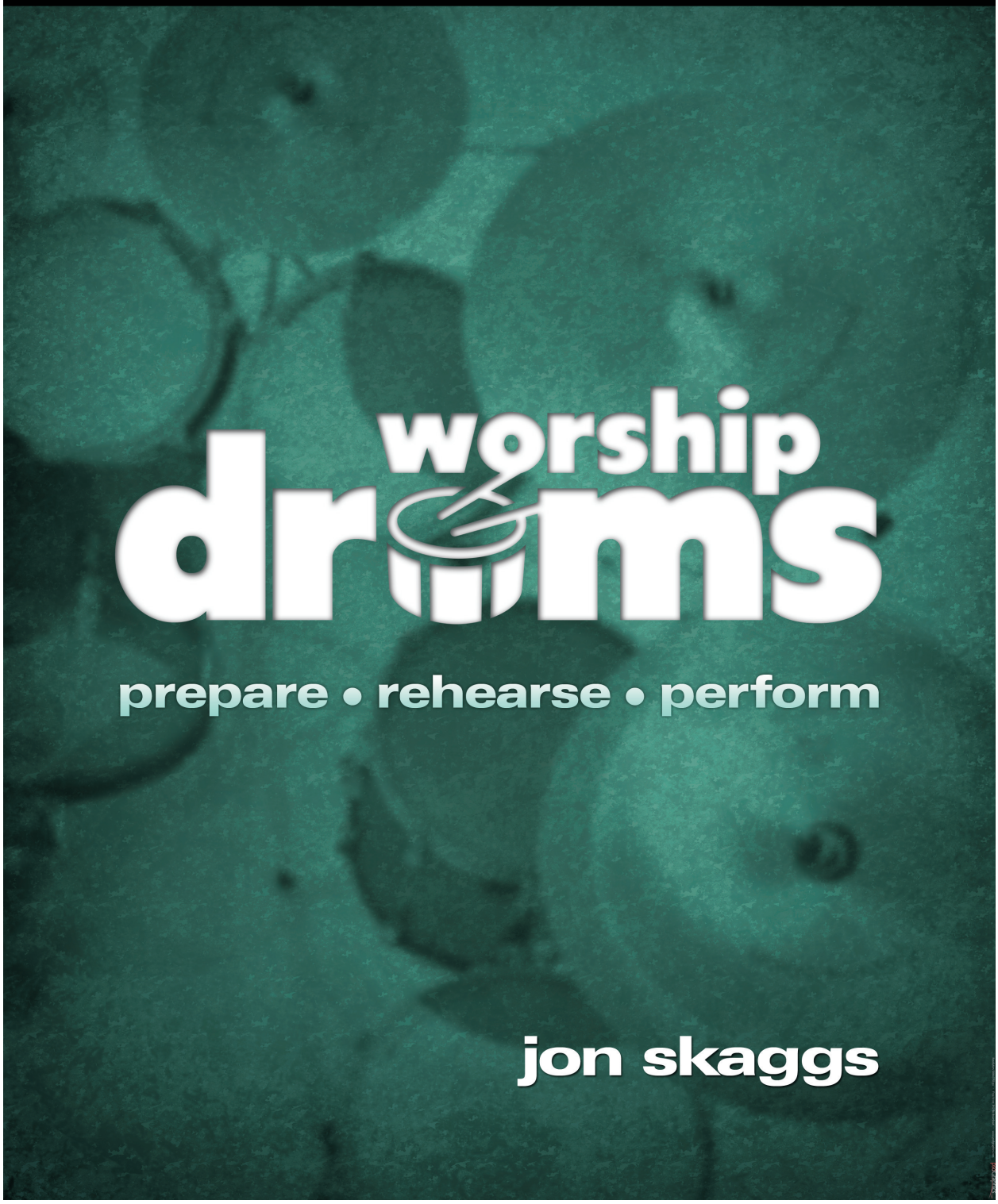


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A Word from Jon Skaggs



I grew up in a family with three brothers in a tiny town in western Oklahoma. My music career was pretty much doomed from the beginning because of my geographical location and social class. My only advantage is that I come from a long lineage of hard working farmers and preachers from southwestern Oklahoma who have survived about every circumstance that the harsh landscape can bring including the dust bowl. In fact, my grandfather was so determined to save his farm during the dust bowl that he developed a new style of farming to save his crops. This worked so well that he helped save other farmers' crops and land from withering away. He became an instant local hero. Knowing that this gutsy and enduring character is in my blood, I've learned to survive hard times by adapting new ideas within my surroundings to reach my dreams. It's not been easy. I've been immensely blessed by God to be able to do what I love.

When I was seven years old my uncle let my older brothers borrow his drum kit, which I presume was collecting dust in my Grandparent's garage. I think drums just have a natural allure for kids. They're fun to play, look cool, and of course are loud! I have to say I was really attracted to the drums. I usually snuck upstairs to my brother's room while they were gone to play with their drums. I started to beat on everything in the house with my hands or wooden spoons.

My mother is a singer, pianist, and guitarist. She did her best to foster this new obsession of mine as best as she could. With financial challenges, limited space and a large family, I had to choose a cheaper and less spacious option. My two older brothers played the trumpet in the school band. My younger brother Ryan and I always looked up to them so we followed suit and played trumpet as well. This provided me with a wealth of musical knowledge and led me further into learning the drums, piano, and guitar in that order.

There were many life changing moments in my young life. None was more life changing than my father's sudden death in December of 1990. My father was the rock of my family spiritually, emotionally, and financially. My father loved God totally with all his heart, and he loved his family. He was not the most musically talented, for that gene came from my mother's side. However, my father provided the comic relief and handed that down to my brothers and I. He also taught us the unconditional love of God, and that all things come and exist because of Him. The death of my father sent my family into a tailspin for a while, myself included. I had to learn how to keep my composure, and be a surviving force for my family throughout these hard times.

The drums became a great vehicle of distraction for me during this time. It soon became the object of my fascination. When there was no one to talk to or vent my frustrations, my drums were there. My Uncle Keith, who saw this fascination of mine, helped my mother find a drum kit for me when I was 14. He delivered my first drum kit to me from Dallas, Texas. That was the start of a loud environment for my home and neighborhood. After school I would have 3-4 hour drum sessions with my favorite records. Later, my mother moved me to the garage because of the noise. I'm forever grateful for her endurance and love.

In high school I was given the opportunity to play drums more often with my jazz band and later with some friends who formed a rock band. The turning point in my life was the time when I heard a group called The Continental Singers was accepting tape auditions. I recorded my tape audition on a karaoke machine and sent it to them.

A few weeks later, I got the phone call from them that I was chosen to go on tour to the western United States, Fiji, and New Zealand. I would be doing two weeks of rehearsal in Denver, Colorado and playing 72 shows in the summer of 1994 for 2 ½ months. It was an amazing tour. It opened my eyes to so many things in the music industry. Moreover, it initiated a passion for wanderlust in my heart.

On the tour, I met two brothers who had a rock band in Houston, Texas named Moriah. I finished a semester of college but the wanderlust in my heart was too much to contain, so I succumbed to it by joining Moriah in 1996 for a United States tour. While living in Houston, I performed my first recording session

at Rivendell Recorders. This session really started my passion for recording to take shape. I met and lived with many artists throughout 1996, and toured the west and east coast of the United States as well. I slept on many couches, bus seats, church pews, and the nice cold ground. It was both a fun and hard learning experience for me.

At the end of 1996, I had definitely seen as much as I wanted to see and experience to satisfy my wanderlust for the moment. I left Moriah for Oklahoma City to live with my mother and brother. I attended a local college and quickly met other musicians in the area. I started to be known as a musician in the community. Later on I meet other musicians in the surrounding states and cities. While living in Oklahoma City, I worked a number of jobs during the day and played gigs at night in churches, coffee shops, bars, and local hangouts. On one of my trips for a job out of state I met a musician, Matt Fuqua, who is lead singer and guitarist for The Afters. Matt encouraged me to move to Dallas, Texas where a wealth of musical opportunities awaited me. So in April of 2000, I got a job in Dallas as a worship leader in a church by night and as construction worker during the day. That summer I met Lance Beaumont, a classical guitarist, teacher and worship leader.

Meeting Lance in 2000 opened a wealth of opportunities for me. I quit my day job to stay on the road. While living in Dallas, I played with a number of worship leaders, bands, singer-songwriters and recorded on many records. In December of 2005, I was asked by Nichole Nordeman to play drums on her tour with Casting Crowns in the Spring of 2006. Through that tour I met and play with many other artists, including Brandon Heath and Chris Sligh. I had to move to Nashville in the Spring of 2008 to begin touring and session work. While living in Nashville, I got a call from a very good friend of mine, Steven Miller, about a new band he was starting with Grammy Award winning songwriter David Hodges. So, in August of 2010, I made a trip to Los Angeles, California to meet David. When I flew back to Nashville, I knew I was moving to Los Angeles soon. In November of 2010 I made the long trip with all my stuff across the country again.

Today I live and work in Los Angeles, California where I am currently playing with Arrows to Athens, the Tyler Hilton Trio and Kina Grannis. I am also playing with my friend and worship leader, Joel Johns, at Eastside Christian Church and producing records with my friend, Steven Miller.

Forward

I've had the pleasure of knowing drummer Jon Skaggs for a few years and he's the rare individual who's a top-notch musician with a great heart. Jon's played with top tier Christian musicians like Nichole Nordeman, Brandon Heath and Casting Crowns and he's one of the finest drummers I've ever heard.

One recent Easter my church was in a dilemma - the worship assistant had mysteriously neglected to secure one of our drummers for our soon approaching Easter worship services - 5 over the weekend that would attract about 10,000 people. I usually compose a special Easter pop/rock orchestral piece that can't be handled by an amateur with little rehearsal time, and any other local drummers had been booked for months.

Miraculously, Jon was available and graciously agreed to come down to Greenville, SC from Nashville to save the day. I jokingly refer to him as "the drummer who saved Easter." I'll never forget the relief I had at rehearsal - Jon sat down at the drum kit and blew my mind with his talent, and nailed the pop/rock piece (watch it here: http://worshipideas.com/resurrection-overture/) And he blew the minds of everyone else at the church - even little old ladies in the choir were impressed!

This Worship Drums eBook is an exclusive glimpse into the thoughts and practices of a professional drummer. I hope it will be a valuable resource to help and encourage worship leaders and drummers across the country.

Don Chapman
WorshipIdeas.com

Chapter 1: Preparation

In December of 2005, I was living and working in Dallas, Texas. One morning, I got a call from a Nashville area code, which seldom happens when you live in Dallas, so I decided to let it go to voicemail since I didn't know who was calling. I listened to the message and was so surprised that the manager of Nichole Nordeman sought me out. She was looking for a drummer to join Nicole on tour for 48 dates in the Spring of 2006. As a sideman in Dallas, my jaw hit the floor and felt deeply honored that I was asked, especially because I loved Nichole Nordeman's music and had all her CDs.

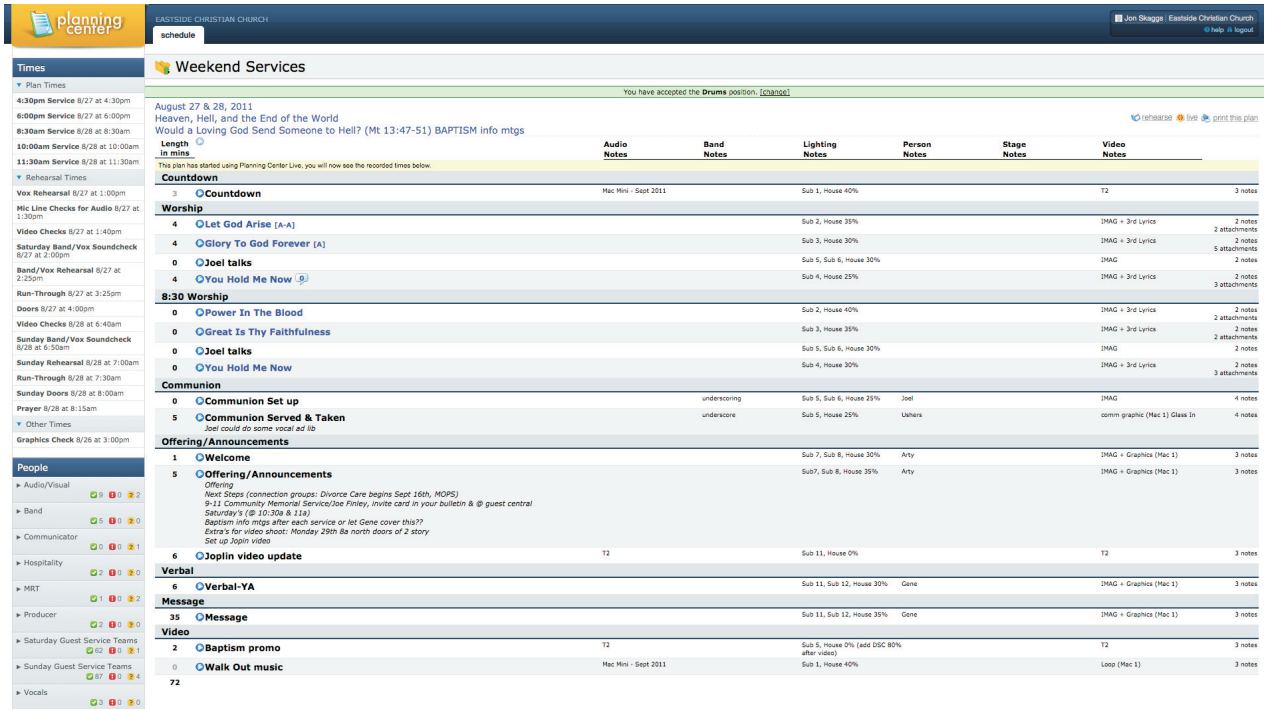
Upon accepting the tour offer, Nichole's manager said that she would be sending me songs that may be in the tour set. As soon as I received the list, I studied the songs, locked in their respective tempos, and did my best to memorize them as much as possible. When the tour rehearsal dates approached, the bass player and I decided to get together and play along to the tracks on the CD, so we could be uniform on all the parts, breaks, and patterns before the rehearsal. This proved to be very productive and helpful in preparing for the tour. When I arrived at the first rehearsal I was surprised that Nichole wanted to change the arrangements to fit a more acoustic set, instead of the more aggressive electric tone of how her current record sounded at the time.

We rolled through the songs one by one at a fast pace. Even with the arrangement and dynamic changes, we still played the songs at an accelerated rate. Nichole was very pleased with how everything went and decided not to go on with the planned extra day of rehearsal. It seemed that our individual rehearsal time paid off in a very big way. We had a very excited artist who couldn’t wait to play her songs in a new and fresh way. This was very gratifying to me as well, that I respected her and everyone else’s time by preparing for the set of songs in advance. Thus, everyone had an extra day to spend with their families, rest and pack before hitting the road. Preparedness definitely pays off!

Preparation comes first when I receive a request to play with an artist or for a worship service. With the assurance and confidence of the worship leader/bandleader, I will be fully prepared even on long or short notice. I owe it to myself and my career to be prepared, as well to the person who hired me and to the audience. When emails no longer arrive or the phone stops ringing, then that

is how much a bandleader/worship leader values preparedness as well.

Have you experienced being hired or asked to volunteer your time and talents for a worship service or performance? You, like myself, might have a smart phone or a device that you carry around at all times to access your email or stay connected with the world. So it's safe to say a bandleader or worship leader will contact you via email with a planning center availability request or through a simple text asking if you are around for the weekend. Whatever mode, email or text, you will receive it almost immediately. In this particular scenario, if you are available and looking forward to volunteering your time, your reply to the email is a resounding Yes, or an emphatic 'Yes!' via a text message.



PlanningCenterOnline.com

Below are some points to help you prepare for a performance. These are basically the ways I prepare for any performance or worship service that I play.

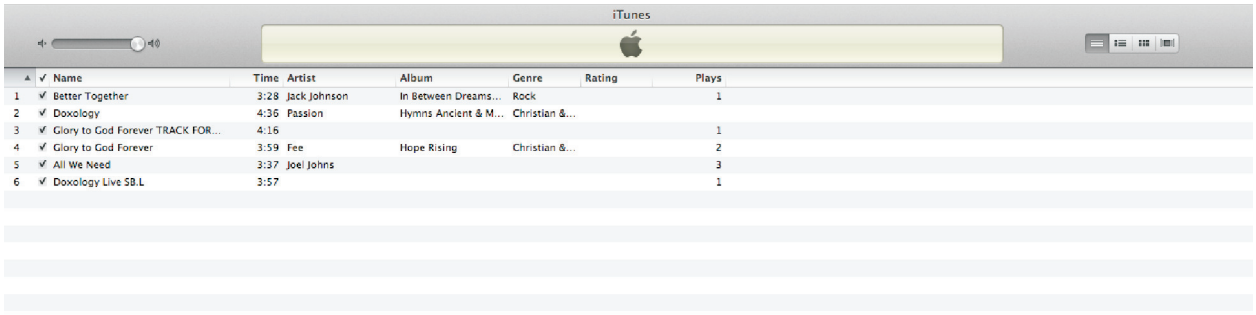
Gathering: I go about gathering as much information as possible about the service or gig. How many songs? Is there already a set list? Are there MP3s and charts available?

Gathering this information is essentially my guide of how much preparation

I have to do for the service or performance. You will have either a lot or very little information. I have definitely had both at one time or another. We are all musicians; so how organized do you possibly expect to be? Nonetheless, spend as much time as possible on gathering the information first. It will help you on scheduling how much "prep" time you need, in terms of days, prior to your service or performance.

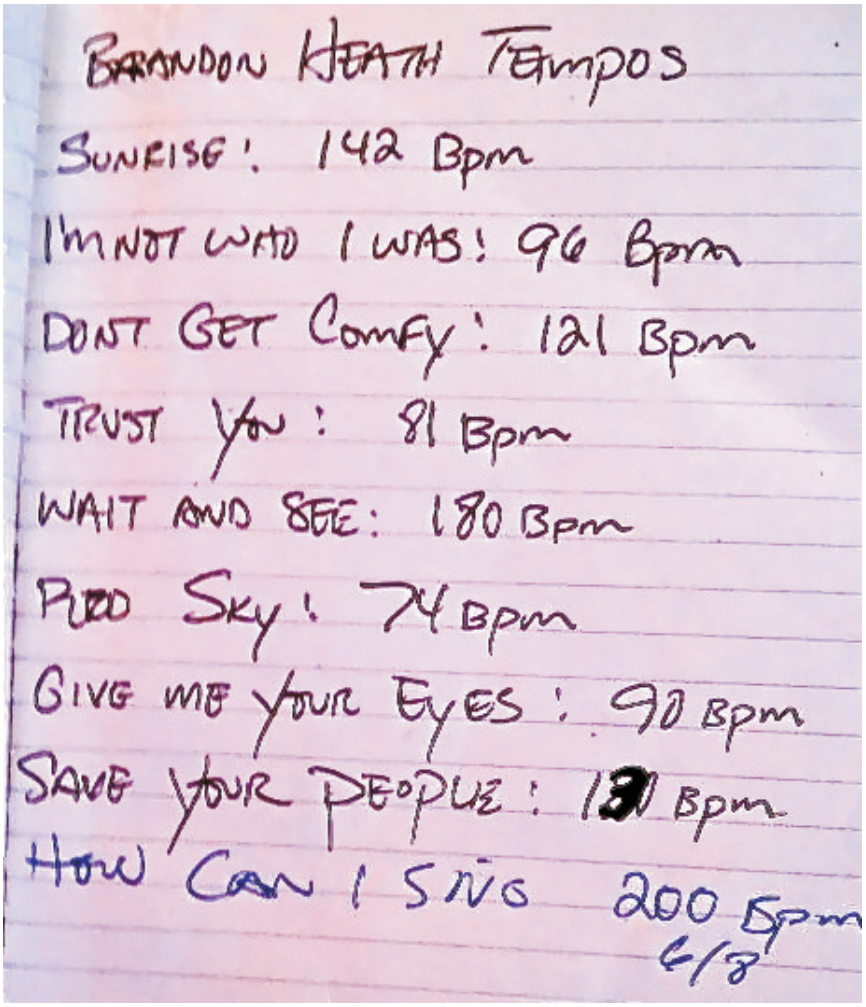
Organization: After gathering, I spend a little time organizing the information. For many of us in the music industry, organization does not happen naturally. I had to "learn" this skill and it really paid off for me. For instance, finding out a set list was a huge time saver. It helped me memorize songs; lock in and program tempos on a metronome; program tracks or loops; feel the dynamics of a set and find the grooves or percussive instruments to use, and charting the songs. All these will be a huge factor in saving time for your rehearsals.

You will not always have everything you need, and not every situation will always be optimal. This organization process will simply help you see what you have to work with and do your best with what you have gathered. Keep in mind that set lists have a habit of changing. So always keep a bit of "Murphy's Law" in mind while organizing your information. The best thing to do is forge ahead with what you have to work with. Be aware that changes may happen, and be flexible, and have a good attitude at all times!



	✓	Name	Time	Artist	Album	Genre	Rating	Plays
1	✓	Better Together	3:28	Jack Johnson	In Between Dreams...	Rock		1
2	✓	Doxology	4:36	Passion	Hymns Ancient & M...	Christian &...		
3	✓	Glory to God Forever TRACK FOR...	4:16					1
4	✓	Glory to God Forever	3:59	Fee	Hope Rising	Christian &...		2
5	✓	All We Need	3:37	Joel Johns				3
6	✓	Doxology Live SB.L	3:57					1

iTunes Set List



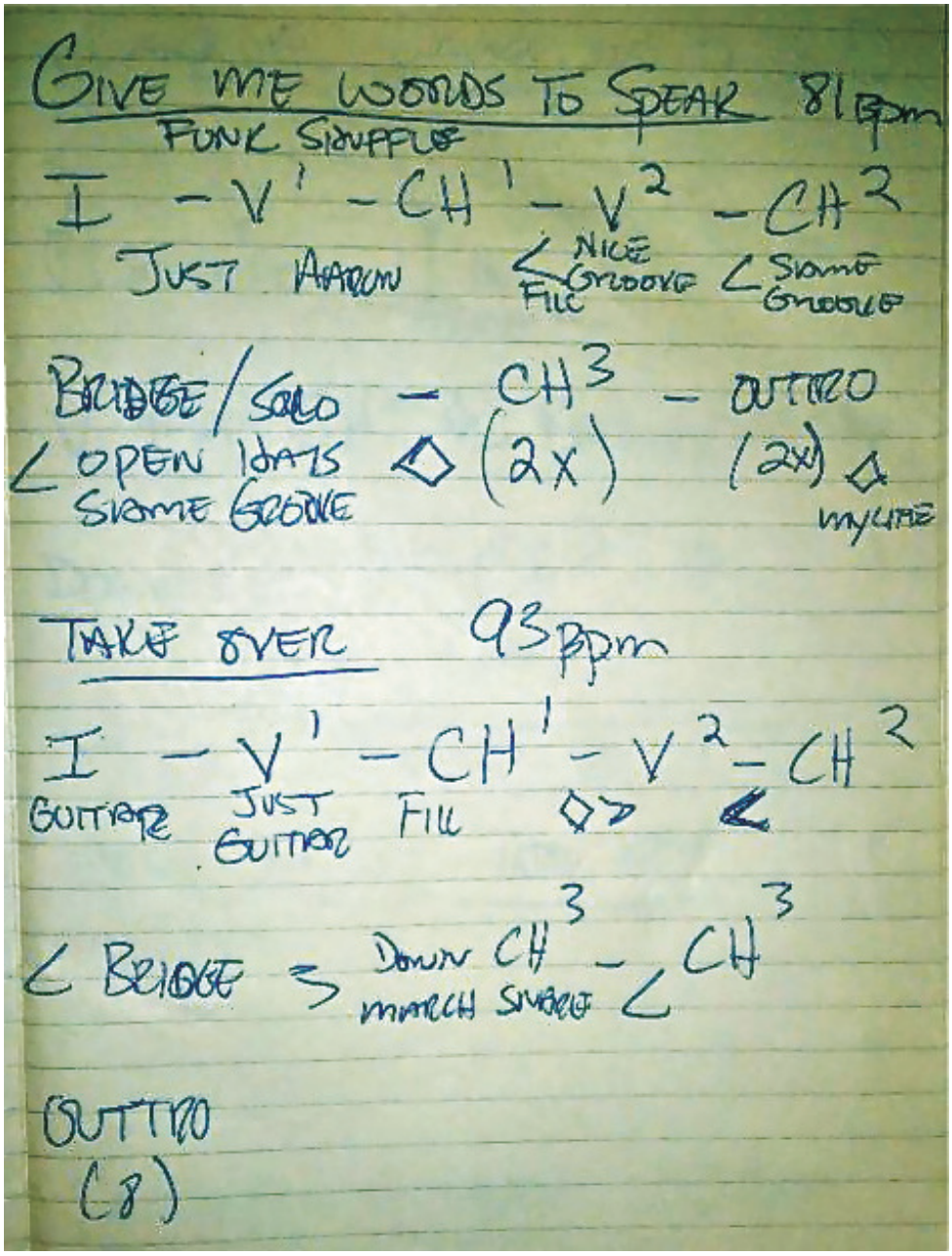
Brandon Heath Set List

Chapter 2: Listening and Charting

Listen to the given songs as much as you can. If possible, you need to memorize the material. In today's world of mobile technology, you're given the opportunity to listen to your music anywhere and any time. You can download the songs from email on your iPhone, Android, or Blackberry and listen to them at work, on the road, or at home. Use whatever method of listening is best for you. It should be in a manner where you recognize the nuances of the drum part, song arrangement, and obvious drum hits and pushes in each song. Most importantly, **key in on time signature, groove, tempo, hits, stops, pushes, and starts.** A great way to memorize these nuances, if a chart is not provided, is for you to make your own chart.

Two of the most challenging listening and charting gigs of my life were the mega churches where I played very often in Dallas, Texas. The challenge was that they were both very different in format and chart styles. Prestonwood Baptist Church was more of an adult, contemporary choir, and track heavy format. I would always have a music stand full of charts falling all over the place; a full plate of keeping a large orchestra, band, and choir all in sync, all while playing with tracks and charts. **Memorization was the key because of the amount of music with tracks.** Charts were provided and I marked them to remind me of the stops, tempo changes, as well as the beginnings and endings. It was an interesting gig that always kept me on my toes for three years.

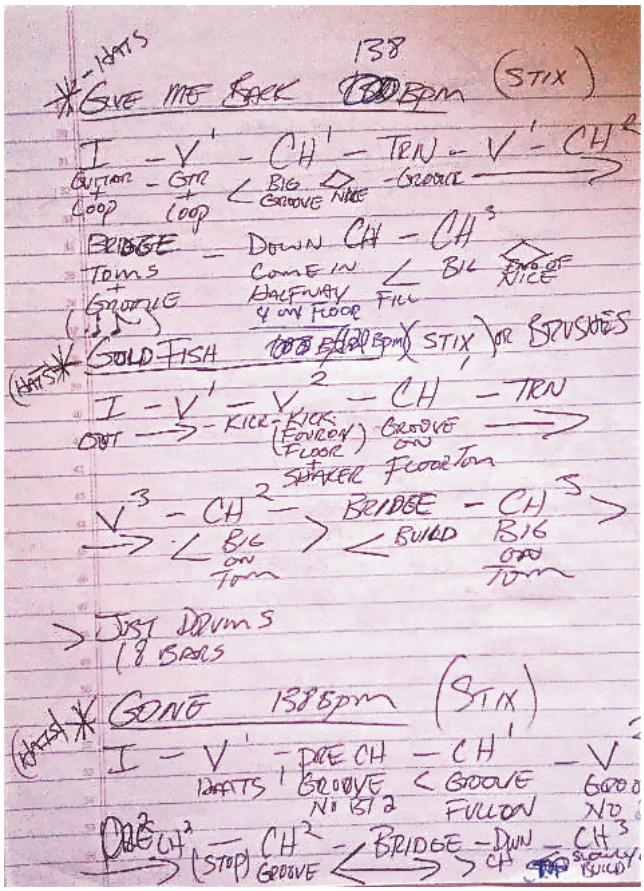
Charting: The memorization process is greatly enhanced by hand charting out the songs in a way I'll illustrate here. If you have charts provided then use them as a guide and feel free to mark. You are not always given the luxury of charts. I believe charts help considerably in memorizing music in your set list. Take a look at the following chart I created for an Aaron Shust song:



Aaron Shust Chart

The chart below is for an artist, Kina Grannis, that I had a call to play for at the last minute. There were three rehearsals for two sold out shows at The Highline Ballroom in New York City. I had to learn about 15 to 16 songs in the midst of producing a record. Knowing I had little time to prepare and there was so much material, I charted out the songs in the order of how I downloaded them because there wasn't a set list available. I would spend a solid day with the artist I was producing and after finishing with them I'd spend the rest of the evening studying and charting the songs.

In my gathering process I found out from the bass player that the former drummer had no sense of time and did not even come prepared for the gig. I knew this information would come in handy as I prepared and charted. When I walked into the first rehearsal, everyone was very impressed with how I knew the tempos and arrangements so well. The performance commenced in New York City, and it was a success! I programmed and memorized the set, resulting in a happy artist and a successful show.



Kina Grannis Chart / KinaGrannis.com

Dissecting the Charts

Let’s now dissect the charts. What did I key in to help me memorize the songs and guide me through the preparation process and upcoming rehearsal?

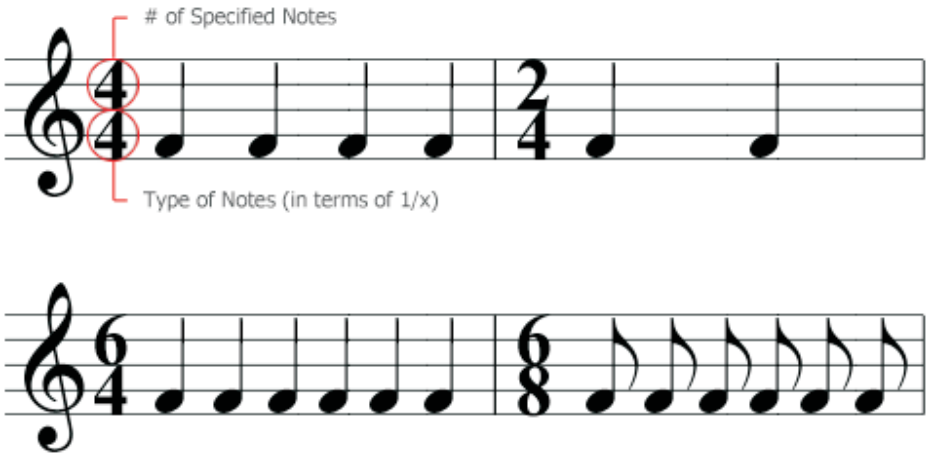
Tempos: The tempo is commonly known as beats per minute (BPM). We measure our heart rates in the same way. Tempo is a very central part of music. Quite frankly, **it's the drummer's job to maintain tempo for the whole band.** I almost always play with a metronome or a click track live. One of the first things I ask a new artist I am playing with is if he or she is comfortable playing with a metronome or a click track. When I listen to a new song, I lock in a tempo with my metronome and make the marking of the BPM on my chart for reference.



BOSS Metronome

Time Signature: The time signature of a song is how it's counted in each bar or measure and what distinguishes the note value. The most common time signature in modern music is known as common time or 4/4 time. The 4/4 time is four beats per measure, and the quarter note value is one beat. When you count 1, 2, 3, 4, this means you are counting in quarter notes, which is the note value of 1 beat. In 4/4 time, four-quarter notes equal 1 bar or measure. Two bars equal 8 beats or quarter notes. You also have sixty-fourth notes, thirty-second notes,

sixteenth notes, eighth notes, half notes, and whole notes. All of them have different note values. In 4/4 time, it cannot exceed four beats to equal a bar or measure. The same thing applies to another very common time signature in modern music, that is the 6/8 time. The eighth note gets the beat because of the bottom number being 8 and there are six eighth notes to make up a full measure.



Arrangements: Memorizing an arrangement is a key to learning any song. Within each arrangement, **we also memorize entrances, grooves, stops, holds, pushes, and endings in any given song arrangement.** Every song may or may not have the same structure but it's pretty safe to always listen to a modern song and know there are the same parameters involved. It's up to me to know what to fill in those given parameters. But for your future reference, key in to the pretty typical song structure described in the next chapter. I use this formula often when I have little time to prepare. It's a pretty typical popular song arrangement.

Chapter 3: Song Structure

I started to pay more attention to song structure when I was working for the Drummers for Jesus celebration and clinic as co-founder in 2003. In said event, I had the honor of being a drum tech for my drum hero Vinnie Colaiuta. It was amazing how much attention he gave to his charts and made notes of certain sections that had a different emphasis. In fact, I went back to all of his recordings with Sting and it became even clearer how well he emphasized a groove for certain sections and re-introduced them in choruses from an intro. I had a paradigm shift at that point. I watched one of the greatest drummers alive with some of the greatest chops ever play the simplest grooves and complete a song. It felt right. It was a turning point for me. In fact, I had a gig the very next day and implemented what I learned into my charts and memory. It has truly revolutionized my playing. So thanks Vinnie!

In many of these charts I have lots of scribble markings like "I" for Intro and "v1" for verse 1 and so on. This indicates the song structure. It's like getting directions to someone's house. It shows you the way to your destination - in this case, the end of the song. This music road map I am teaching will be very useful to you as a musician.

Let’s study the different parts of a song. I’ll give you my best examples of how I would play a particular section.

Intro - 4 bars
Verse1 - 8 bars
Pre-Chorus1 - 4 bars
Chorus - 8 bars
Turnaround - 4 bars
Verse2 - 8 bars
Pre-Chorus2 - 4 bars
Chorus2 - 8 bars
Bridge - 8 Bars
Down Chorus - 4 bars
Chorus3 - 8 bars
Outro - 4 bars

Below is a common way I play or think of a drum part for each part of a song.

Intros: Usually a song introduces itself with instruments only and no vocals. Sometimes a song starts with all instruments and sometimes with only an acoustic guitar. The intro of a song is typically your entrance to the song.

In an Intro, I like to let everyone know I am there and that I am about to lay down the groove of the song. And by that I usually play a nice and tasty fill to begin with, then establish a groove you will more than likely hear again in the chorus, turnarounds, and outro.

- **MP3 1: Intro Example (all MP3s are in the MP3 folder you downloaded)**

Verses: The verse of the song is the part where the vocals are first introduced. By most standards in music dynamics, a drummer will typically come down in volume or possibly drop out completely.

I am varying my groove a bit in a verse from the groove in the intro. I am almost always playing a closed high hat since a verse tends to be quieter in volume. There are many options you can do with the snare in the verse. **Try using a cross stick pattern on 2 and 4, or cross stick on 2 and snare on 4.** Maybe the verse is only keeping time with a hi-hat, or could also be just hi-hat and kick drum. It should be the best drum part to support the vocal. It's also the part that gives you room to be louder or to vary in a chorus.

- **MP3 2: Verse Example**

Pre-Choruses: This is an optional part of a song structure. Most songwriters use it to give listeners a preview of the coming chorus. When it does happen it will often be short and either dip in volume or slowly ramp up to a bigger chorus.

Since a pre-chorus is usually brief I will do a variation of whatever groove I have been doing in a verse. Sometimes it involves just opening my hat a bit more with a different kick pattern than the verse, leading to a tasty fill into the chorus. Or it might be a groove involving my toms with a building fill into the chorus.

- **MP3 3: PreChorus Example**

Chorus: The chorus or refrain means to repeat. The parts previously mentioned usually support it. A chorus might sound and feel a lot like the intro and may usually be louder than the other parts of the song. It usually is the only part of a song that's repeated.

In a chorus I like to build upon the part I have already used in the intro. If there is not a drum part in the intro then I will build upon a drum part I have used in a verse. **More than likely I will be louder and more aggressive with a groove pattern.** If my intro pattern was a 4 on the floor groove then I will more than likely use the same pattern and only vary a little. Sometimes a chorus is nothing but cymbal swells along with keeping time on a ride cymbal for a softer and more dramatic song. But more than likely I will be at my loudest in a chorus.

MP3 4: Chorus Example

Turnarounds: Sometimes called a "connector" or "turn," a turnaround is also like the intro and a continuation of a chorus typically without vocals. In modern music it's usually instrumental, very brief, and is a bit of what I like to call a "lead in" to the next verse or a bridge. Just what it says, you are basically turning back around to the front of the song and going back into a verse. It's one of the most unnoticed parts of a song.

Turnarounds usually follow a chorus. I usually continue the same groove pattern I have been using in the chorus. Sometimes there is a stop at the end of the chorus before the turnaround or the chorus will seamlessly tie the two together. So I will usually be at the same intensity level that you heard in the previous MP3 example or I will be using a drum fill out of the chorus in a slower song to connect the chorus to the verse.

MP3 5: Turnaround Example

Bridges: The bridge of a song usually happens once and dynamically can be the loudest part of a song. It typically occurs after a second chorus. Sometimes called "The Payoff," it’s often where you are the loudest or making the song's point as much musically as you are lyrically. The bridge is a good prelude to how the rest of the song will be in volume. More than likely you will keep the same intensity from the bridge into the final chorus of the song.

I have an instinctual presupposition towards riding a crash cymbal or playing my high hats as open and as "sloshy" as possible for an up-tempo song in a bridge section. In my opinion, these are the loudest and most aggressive options on a drum kit. My groove might be the same from the chorus or it can vary to be more driving with snare hits on every quarter note. In a slower tempo song I will usually play open hi-hats with a single/duple kick pattern to compliment the rest of the band who might be playing driving eighth notes at this point. Whatever option I choose, I should be using a part of my drum kit that brings the dynamics to its loudest level to compliment what usually constitutes a bridge part in modern music.

- **MP3 6: Bridge Example**

Outros and Endings: The outro is like the intro, but differs in that you are more than likely going to be as loud as the bridge and final chorus. Sometimes it will be the mirror image of the intro and the turnarounds according to how the song is written. The outro is letting the listener knows that the song is about to end.

In an outro I usually keep the same characteristics of the groove in the final chorus. To really signal that we are "driving the song home" and leaving the chorus, I will often ride a crash cymbal, be washy on a ride cymbal, or play open hi-hats to the end of the song. I will end the song strong on a downbeat with a heavy cymbal crash on a downbeat. In some cases, I might go back to the same dynamics and groove from the intro and turnarounds if the song seems to be written in this manner. In a slower tempo song, I might drop out and play the song like I played it in the intro and end with a nice cymbal swell to signal the ending. Endings might gradually end slower than the tempo of the song, and this is called a *ritard*. At this point, I might play a nice tom fill that slows to the given pace of the tempo, gradually slowing down to a cymbal crash on a down beat. There are all types of endings that can be syncopated or come to a sudden stop. Whatever the song ending might be, I always play it with tasteful expression to accent the rest of the instruments ending the song. I want to always be in "sync" with the rest of the band on an ending.

- **MP3 7: Outro and Ending Example**

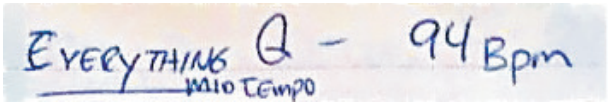
Chapter 4: Dynamic Chart Markings

I have to attribute a big part of my knowledge on chart markings to my playing at Lakepointe Church in Rockwall, Texas. I found out, in hindsight, that I took many of the charts from my playing experience there and merged them with bits of other charts I read to make my own charts. Many of these charts are my own interpretation of what I think is the best that works for me. My method seems to work well, and most of all I can decipher and apply it to any situation when I am preparing for an event or playing a live performance.

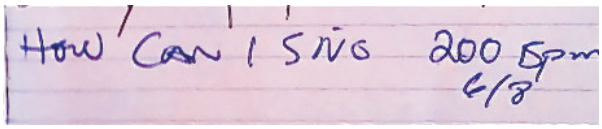
I mostly played auxiliary percussion at Lakepointe Church for four years in support of the drummer. I learned to mark up a given chart to remind me where to place a shaker, a tambourine, hand percussion, a cymbal swell, or any percussion in the appropriate section. I translated these into making charts for the drum kit. Over the years, I incorporated symbols and markings from percussion charts, the charts from Lakepointe Church and PraiseCharts.com to make my own.

Below are the explanations for the different symbols and markings you see on the samples of my handwritten charts, which are a mixture of standard musical notation and Nashville style charts.

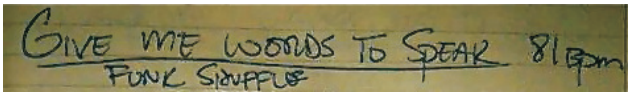
Tempo Markings: I usually put the tempo marking at the top of my chart for future reference in case I am programming my tempos for particular songs or a set. It can come in handy when asked what the tempo is for a particular song.



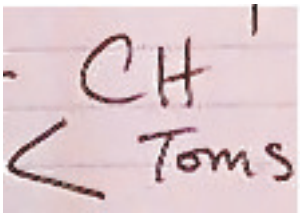
Time Signature Markings: A time signature marking will only be used if I am not playing in common time or 4/4 time. For instance, I will usually put 6/8 time at the top of my page to reference that specific time signature since it's not typical.



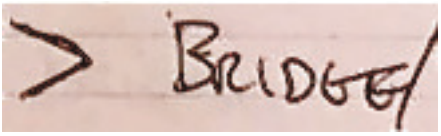
Feel Markings: This refers to terms such as ‘Swing’ or ‘Funk Shuffle’. It's always nice to be prepared to give the correct "feel" to a song.



Crescendo and Decrescendo Markings: A crescendo marking looks like this. These are Italian markings, which simply mean to gradually get louder.

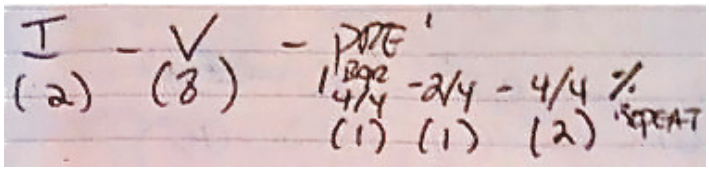


The decrescendo, on the other hand, simply means to gradually get softer.

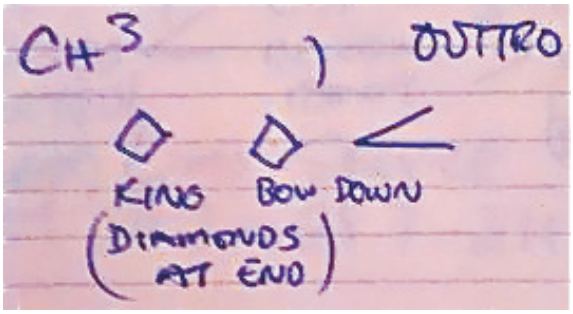


I use a crescendo marking to indicate where I am placing a fill to go into a louder section. As you can see, it usually precedes a chorus or a bridge where a fill is played, going into a louder section of the song. To the other end of the dynamic, I use a decrescendo symbol to indicate where I might use a fill (or not) to go into a softer section of the song. You might see a decrescendo marking as you go into verse sections and down choruses.

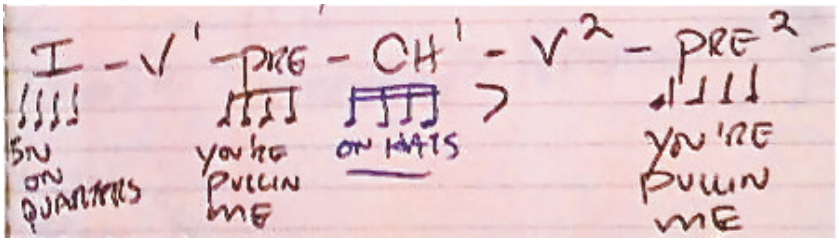
Bar or Measure Counts: The numbers under each section of the music denote how many bars or measures there are in that particular section.



The Diamond: The diamond marking is one of the symbols you will commonly see in a Nashville style chart, as shown in the picture. It means to hold out or sustain a note, like that of a whole note in standard musical notation. The diamond marking, like the whole note, usually retains the value of 4 beats. I use it to indicate a cymbal crash that sustains 4 beats or more, going into a down or soft section. I also use it just to sustain a crash through one measure or consecutive measures, until you are back into a section with full groove.



Groove Markings: Groove markings are the little sets of notation or name of a groove to indicate what groove I am playing in a certain section. I only use this to remind me if a groove changes from what it's doing throughout the whole song.



Chapter 5: The Rehearsal

Rehearsal and preparation are tests of who you are as a musician. **The practice, repetition, and mastering of the craft is what makes you a professional musician.** Rehearsal is where you begin to test all that you have prepared until this point. I always come prepared with:

- all my charts
- an iPod with all the songs for reference
- a set list (if there's one provided)

Rehearsal is also a great place for you to get comfortable with the other musicians. If you do not play with other musicians on a regular basis, then rehearsal is the place to understand the feel of everyone else playing around you. **I call rehearsal "a psychological preparation" as much as it's a musical preparation.** You have been preparing and working on your music up to this point. Now you have to get the feel of the artist, other musicians, and implement what you have been learning.

Rehearsal Before Rehearsal

It seems redundant but it's worth it. Your rehearsal before rehearsal can be the very key in understanding the parts in relation to the kit instead of air drumming and visualizing.

One thing that I do, if my home surroundings provide for it, is to set up a drum kit and rehearse the given material with my iPod or mp3 player, charts or handwritten charts. I try to set up a feel for my future rehearsal and performance as much as possible. There is no better preparation than actually getting to play through the parts you are memorizing. The first time you get a feel for the songs will be in your own private rehearsal time. This is one of the last things you can do to fully prepare before rehearsal. It's a tried and true way of making sure you are on your "A" game before you play the tunes with everyone else.

In my house in Dallas, Texas I had a big open area in the back of my house. It was perfect to leave my drums set up and rehearse there. I had to memorize a lengthy set for an artist before I arrived in Nashville to rehearse, then fly to Rhode Island for a show. I prepared for a week at the back of the house with my drum kit to really get the feel of the parts, beginnings, and endings. They were very groove involved songs.

The practice proved very helpful just to get the parts solid and memorized before I flew to Nashville. I flew to Nashville and nailed everything without any confusion or hang-ups. **The rehearsal before rehearsal is a proven recipe for success.** I highly suggest it if your home has space for your drum kit. If not, look for a rehearsal space in your area. Most rehearsal spaces, especially in New York, Nashville, or Los Angeles will have a drum kit you can use. Just bring a set of cymbals and other items like a pedal, snare and drum throne.

No matter what, it's crucial that you get some time to work out the parts of a lengthy set to let your body and mind memorize everything on the drum kit. And if you're given the opportunity always have your kit available in the same space as you. It can never hurt to rehearse anything and everything that comes your way just to get the songs into your muscles the way you will be playing them live. And that's on your respective drum set.

For the Gigging Drummer: The Rehearsal and The Rehearsal Space Drum Kit

I had to touch on a subject you might or might not deal with: the rehearsal and the rehearsal space drum kit.

Assume one of your rehearsals might happen in a rehearsal space. You might be wary about rehearsal space drum kits. They usually are not the best quality and you might end up playing drums that are barely usable. I always come prepared with my own snare, cymbals, kick pedal, drum throne, tuning key and sticks. Come prepared and be either amazed or completely horrified. I believe that under the circumstances most artists or musicians will understand that it will sound bad anyway. When you have your own gear put it over the top and show you are a professional. It will not only make you sound good but you’ll also look good.

You might not have experienced any of the things I mentioned because you only use your own drum kit, which is always a plus. It's always paramount to sound your best. So do your homework before your rehearsal. Find out what you need and bring a kit where you will be most comfortable. I know from experience the relief of showing up to a rehearsal space knowing you don't have to set up your own drums because the space has a kit. This can sometimes turn into a real bum deal when the drum kit has been beaten to shreds by the scores of previous drummers who've used it. Not many artists you play with will know the difference of what sounds or looks bad. But they will certainly know if you are not comfortable and sounding bad. As drummers we definitely know that being comfortable behind a kit is the key to having a great rehearsal or performance. So do your homework on your rehearsal space!

I recently experienced this when rehearsing for an artist at a rehearsal space around Los Angeles. We had three consecutive rehearsals in three different rooms at two different rehearsal spaces. I was on three different drum kits that were definitely sub par. I've learned over the years to be prepared when I walk into a rehearsal space. So I've started making a rehearsal and rehearsal space gear checklist. Since you cannot really throw your own drums in most of these spaces, it's a matter of give and take. I will always make do with the kick drum, cymbal stands, snare stand, high hat stand, drum throne, rack tom, and floor tom. You can count on me to bring these items on my checklist:

Tuning Key: You will most definitely need a tuning key.

Snare: I believe your sound as a drummer comes from the snare. Make sure you always have a high quality sound from your snare. Don't get stuck with a snare that you will be tweaking during the whole rehearsal just to make it work. Believe me, bring your snare!

Cymbals: I always check out the cymbals to see if anything might be usable. More often than not they cannot be used. At the very least I carry a 20" ride, 14' pair of hats and an 18" crash cymbal for rehearsals.

Kick Pedal: Unless you like the sound of a squeaky Ludwig Speed King Kick Pedal then you should have your own kick pedal. This is really a 50/50 thing. I realized that I use the rehearsal space drum kit kick pedal a lot more than I care to admit.

Drum Throne: This is a personal preference. But for my unusual backside size, I really enjoy my drum throne at a long three hour rehearsal. Believe me, unless you like sitting on the equivalent of a banana bike seat for three hours in a rehearsal space, then do not bring your drum throne. Just in case, I've got it covered in this handy checklist.

Sticks and Stick Bag: This is an essential item that you cannot do without. In all the madness of trying to get to rehearsal, guess what is left behind the most? Yes, you're. We will not go into it.

Metronome: You will certainly want to rehearse with the metronome! It's a plus for establishing the foundation early on with the artist and band. It will let them know you're a serious solid foundation to rely on. Don't forget it!

iPod with Songs: It's always nice to reference a section of a song that you might have forgotten. It definitely comes in handy!

Charts and Set List: So you have created all those charts and you have a set list. Just don't forget to bring them to your rehearsal! It'd be a travesty to get all the way to rehearsal after spending time to make them, only to discover you've left all your charts with tempos and arrangements behind. Believe me I've done it before. And that's why I make a checklist now.

The rest is up to you! But I always take all the items listed above with me. I hope this spares you from headaches. Soon enough you will know what I am talking about or you already know this by heart. **You can never be prepared enough for the rehearsal and the rehearsal space drum kit.**

It's always best to be at least 10 minutes early for any rehearsal, especially as a drummer! We have many things to set up and we might also have to set up a click track or backing tracks, which could take longer than expected. This can be very annoying to the musicians and the artist. It's also even of more importance when you are a newbie on the gig to be as early as possible. It's important to get to the venue early, establish that you have prepared and that you are a professional. It sends a big signal to your fellow musicians around you that you are professional, respectful and serious about your time and theirs.

Make All Your Mistakes In the Rehearsal

I coined this phrase years ago: **“Make all your mistakes in the rehearsal, and nail the show.”** This means you are rehearsing to work out the kinks and flaws so that your performance or worship service go as smoothly as possible.

Your role, as a drummer, is to hold together the band and artist throughout the show. Working out every part of your performance or worship service in the rehearsal is the key to success. Just like I said earlier in the preparation portion of this e-book, **your preparation is your key to your success in rehearsal and your performance.** Knowing all the tempos and arrangements of the given songs will help you have a smooth rehearsal. It will put the artist and the band at ease and they will be very comfortable in playing the set with you.

I have formulated a plan of action on how to be as successful as possible for a performance or worship service. Though I might portray myself as a perfect, polished drummer, I’ve had my share of imperfection. I have had many rehearsals where I’ve definitely fumbled through the songs and wondered "Oh man! Am I gonna blow this when it comes stage time?" I can honestly say my record is pretty clear, though, when it comes stage time and I usually have all my ducks in a row. I think the gigs where you are given very little time to prepare and rehearse are some of the most nerve-wracking gigs ever. I have to honestly say I do and I do not like them. Why do I like them? Well, I like a challenge every now and then. It keeps my charting and instinctual skills sharp.

I was asked by the drummer of Casting Crowns to fill in for him on a date on the Lifesong Tour in 2006. I had about one week of notice to learn 16 songs to play in front of over 8 to 10,000 people. I also had to play for the opening act on two songs plus the full 35 minute Nichole Nordeman set after the opener and before Casting Crown's 2 1/2 hour set. It placed me on stage for about 3 1/2 hours! Was I scared? NO!!! Of course not!! I was so excited to be onstage that long doing what I love! But it was definitely a lot of homework.

The only time I got to ask questions about any of the Casting Crowns songs were at sound checks and at shows before the event I had to play with them. At the very least it was a relief to have some of my questions answered before the performance. I definitely made my share of mistakes because many of the

arrangements were changed to fit the live show and cut down time. To make this long story short, I played the shows and they went off without a hitch except for a longer outro on a CC tune that I only rehearsed once and forgot to play longer. I had basically improvised until the end and nobody could tell the difference. The show ended up a blast. All the mistakes I made in rehearsal ended there, with the exception of one small mental error. Overall, everyone was happy and I made Mr. Andy Williams proud. It was an event that will forever be in my mind: having little time to prepare for a big show and making a few mistakes with little rehearsal.

Where's the One?

The "One" means the downbeat. On a drum kit you commonly play the downbeat or "One" on a kick drum, Earlier on I described it as one of the biggest jobs we have as a drummer. The downbeat when counted is 1 and 3 in 4/4 time. But the "One" is the most important downbeat and it's also universal in any time signature as the start of a new bar or new section of the music. The "One" is like a warm bath to most artists and worship leaders. If you can always do a tasty fill that gives the band a great feel of the next downbeat, then you will win a vote of confidence from everyone.

The biggest enemy to the downbeat is overplaying. I love to play creative fills as a drummer. When a fill substitutes for the song and the bands then you might as well plan on not getting called back. Believe me I hear it all the time from artists and worship leaders. The comments about not finding the "One" are not a new thing. If you value the "One" more than you value your fills then you win a silent battle for yourself and everyone else every time.

Where's 2 and 4?

Your “2 and 4” is just as important as the “One.” The “2 and 4” are commonly known as the back beat. In 4/4 time you always play “2 and 4” unlike in the down beat where you always have the “One.” The backbeat can change in every time signature. But the point in any time signature, with the backbeat and the downbeat, is to make sure you play it as consistent as possible and build the best possible foundation for the artist and band you are playing with.

The combination of a solid “One” and an equally solid “2 and 4” has kept me working in the music business today. I believe in playing great and tasty fills. I have grown as a player and **I have seen that it's what you do as a solid timekeeper that keeps you in the buzz of being a drummer who artists, worship leaders and other musicians can depend on.** As a drummer that dependability always start with the “One” and the “2 and 4.” I believe that is a winning combination every time you play your instrument.

Chapter 6: Warm-Ups

Before rehearsal I like to go through a series of warm-ups to loosen my hands, wrists, arms, shoulders and back. Since drumming is a very physical activity for long and repetitive periods it's even more important to warm up before a long rehearsal that might last two to three hours.

Here are a few warmups I use before I rehearse and especially before a performance or a church worship service. **Videos are included with this eBook download.**

- Single Stroke Rolls: (Show Video Example)
- Double Stroke Rolls: (Show Video Example)
- Grooves: (Show Video Example)
- Funk Shuffle
- 12/8 time (Michael Jackson Beat)
- Mid Tempo Groove
- Up Tempo Groove

Chapter 7: Performance or Worship Service

You have either prepared or rehearsed for a few days up until your performance or worship service. You might have only a couple of hours to do some of the things I have talked about in the previous sections. The performance or worship service you have been preparing and rehearsing for will be the test of how well your memory acts under a little pressure.

The Worship Leader / The Artist

Remember whom you are playing for and who called you to be there. Further elaborating on my quote why a rehearsal is "a psychological preparation:" it's because you constantly have to keep checking if the artist is happy and feels good with the groove and feel of his or her songs. After all, aside from most church worship services, you are playing the songs that they have written for a certain purpose.

For instance, some artists and worship leaders really like for you to play only the drum parts given to you on the recording. Some artists will not mind if you change it up a bit if they really want to try something different from the recording. More often, in my experience, the artist will want you to come in prepared with only the drum part given to you on a recording. You will find all the things that I referenced during the preparation chapter are more experiences of what I have confronted when playing with many artists. The majority of them might appreciate your creativity in coming up with a different drum part than what is recorded. I always play it safe and respectful and learn what is on the recording.

The Green Room

The Green Room or Dressing Room is just a place to hang out, mingle, and eat some appetizers before you hit the stage. I really like to use my green room time to wind down a bit before I hit the stage, and run over a few of my charts and songs one last time. The most important thing is to simply relax and not get anxious about how you are going to perform behind your drum kit. Your nerves can be your worst enemy and your best friend. You do not ever want to not care about how you perform but you also do not want to get too anxious that you forget all your cues and arrangements. So use your green room time to relax and

mentally prepare, while hanging with the musicians and artist that you are about to play with. After all, if they think you are uptight and worrying, then you might not ever get called back a second time.

Create the Foundation

The foundation is your Modus Operandi. You are the foundation of a house on which everyone else in the band builds the music. If you falter then the song gets shaky and will eventually implode upon itself. Everyone has often heard the expression "That was a train wreck!" Usually a train wreck in music occurs when you can't find the downbeat or the back beat. It's one of the most critical things you have to establish as a drummer. The downbeat is way more important to most artists than the coolest fill. If you establish that solid "pocket" then you will almost certainly create the foundation to make your band and artist feel comfortable during the rehearsal and performance.

Performance Time

The time has come. The worship leader calls you to the stage. By now, you have prepared, rehearsed and memorized your material. However, there are still some key things to remember and execute during your performance. Here are the last ten things you should remember to do while playing with your band.

1. Memorization: If at all possible, do not use your charts. Memorize the music, arrangements and cues so you can concentrate on making the groove, band and artist feel comfortable. If you are playing on short notice and you need charts, then be fully aware of what you have done, and make sure the points mentioned here do happen as best as you possibly can.

Playing drums is a very physical profession. It also demands a lot of stamina, mental alertness, and awareness to maintain a successful set. If your head is buried in charts, you sometimes forget that you are playing and you look boring. If you are an expert at reading charts and have mastered your stage presence, then this point might not apply to you. I still say memorize your music as best as you can. It makes for a better worship service for your congregation if you seem more aware than distracted.

2. Stage Presence: Maybe there's a chance you do not enjoy a few of the songs. **It's very important that you maintain a positive presence while on stage because you are visible and are also seen as a worship leader.** To some people, this could seem like I am telling you to act out your presence on stage. No, I am not. I am actually telling you to enjoy yourself. I believe that is the best stage presence you can ever have. Stage presence is the key to the enjoyment and engagement of the listener.

3. Eye Contact: This goes hand in hand with stage presence. It's also one the best things you can do as a drummer. Stage communication with the artist, worship leader, and your band using eye contact is not only essential for good stage presence but also for communicating an early ending, an audible vamp so the artist can talk over the music, a repeat of a chorus or verse, or anything that the artist or any of your band members might need through the course of your set or song. Eye contact is merely one way of stage communication. Do your best to work out good communication on stage with the artist, worship leader, and band you're playing with. Eventually you will work out the system that works best for you. Eye contact always seems to be the most essential part of stage communication.

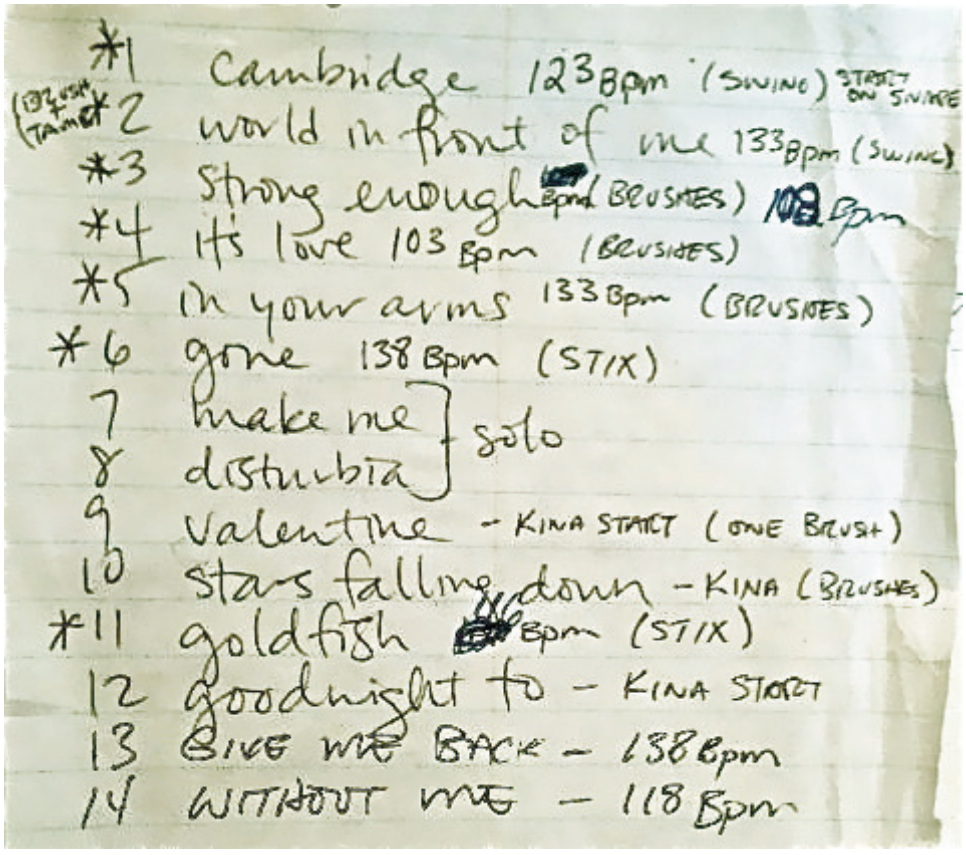
4. Rhythm Section Unity: The rhythm section I am talking about here is specifically between the drummer and the bass player. It's the true rhythm section of a band. The communication between you and the rest of your band is essential. However, **the communication between you and your bass player is very important in order to create a strong foundation throughout the worship service.**

Since the bass player follows your kick patterns, there is a need for some communication prior to the worship service as to exactly what you will be playing. Whatever the pattern you and the bass player end up agreeing to, just make sure it's uniform and you are playing the same thing. I always say that **a great bass player will always want to be on the same side as your hi-hat** so as to have a visible line of sight to your kick pedal. Since this is not always possible, then you should be aware of your bass player at all times. In essence, you are successful in creating the best foundation for your band, performance and worship service.

5. Transitions: Transitions are one of the most important parts of a worship service. By transition, I am referring to the time between songs that can sometimes result in awkward silences, especially when you end a song and take too much time to begin the next one. There are many factors that make for long transitions, i.e guitar tuning, track or computer malfunction, etc.

For you, the drummer, the role here is to click off each song in the set. Make sure to buy the BOSS metronome, or one like it that I mentioned earlier in this e-book. The reason I use this type of metronome is because of its ability to program the BPM's for each song in a set. I believe it takes more than 2-3 seconds to dial in the next BPM and then click off the next song. This probably will result in taking too much time and will be a dreaded awkward silence.

Mark your set list with asterisks in front of the song name to indicate if you are starting a song. Maybe make a few notes at the end as to what the feel/groove might be or any other important notes. **I also make a point to put the BPM beside the song name just in case the BPM's I have programmed are lost.** Here is one example from my set lists to see how I mark it up for reference.



6. Take Command: As the drummer, you are the time, tempo, and solid foundation for your band. Do not let anyone tell you differently because it's your role! You must take the initiative to take command of the time and **think of yourself as the glue for your band.** There will be many people pushing and pulling on you but take command! Stand your ground on where the time is and make sure everyone knows it by your confident playing and not overzealous playing.

When I say, "take command," I always think of the late great drummer, John Bonham. If there was ever a drummer who played with command it was him. His playing was solid, simple, loud, big and confident! When you are timid with your playing it shows in your groove and timekeeping. Timid playing also gives the rest of the band no sense of where the tempo, groove, downbeat, backbeat and feel are. So you must take command and play confidently, just like Bonham.

7. Be the Machine Without Being the Machine: I hear this quote every now and again and have no idea where it came from but it truly applies to a live situation. If you play live with a click track or a metronome you tend to play too mechanically. Although it's great that you are holding down the time and it's great that you are playing like "Bonham" you can lose all sense of feel when you try to play to a click too much.

I know that sounds crazy when many drummers, including myself, preach that you must always play dead on a click every time. I'm not saying you should not play all over the click track. I am saying **you should not sound robotic while playing it.** I think you can hear when someone is playing with a click too much - you can hear this robotic quality to their playing that leaves no room for space and feel.

Naturally, with a band of musicians, you are going to have a lot of push and pull on the tempo. It's your job to always pull back or push forward if your band is interpreting the time in either direction. **But you, as the drummer, should always try to land in the middle of the click.** By doing this you should try as hard as possible to not sound too mechanical. You can fix this by playing with a click often with different tempos and grooves.

Always try and "be the machine without being the machine." I believe the best example of this philosophy would be any groove from Jeff Porcaro or Vinnie Colaiuta. They're drummers who play in the middle of the click but make it feel and sound amazing. They are truly examples of what a human drum machine sounds like. You may have observed it if you have heard their playing - It's anything but robotic sounding and has huge heart and soul.

8. When In Doubt Be Simple: I find it easy for many drummers, including myself, to play a lot of notes. Ironically, it always seems to be the hardest to just play it simple. This is truly tested in every part of your playing, especially in your choice of fills.

A lot of music today focuses more on the quarter and eighth notes. I always try and think of every fill within those parameters before I attempt anything else. **It seems the simplest choice for kick patterns and fills always tend to be correct choice and serve the song best.** For example, the bands Coldplay and U2 use a lot of quarter and eighth notes in their music. These bands have influenced the majority of the music you play and hear today. In fact, the signature delay effect The Edge uses in the classic U2 songs is based on the eighth note. By choosing the simplest option while playing live, you will make the song sound and feel better. **There is no room on stage for a drummer who overplays.** This is the reason why many drummers never keep their gig or are called only once. Make sure to choose the simplest option first when choosing a pattern or fill to play.

9. Dynamics and Intensity: I've talked on this subject a little in the previous chapters but I can never reiterate it enough. Throughout the set you play it's important to play soft as much as you play loud. Since drums are naturally loud instruments you will always be challenged to match the level of intensity of the other musicians at all times. **The point is to always play confidently and strongly, with feel, and not too mechanically.** On top of that, you have to add in your level of dynamics and intensity.

In quiet situations, use your taste and best judgment to match the intensity that a quiet section aspires to. In the big, heavy sections that drummers really like, you should play with the best intensity and dynamic that fits that situation. **A lot of drumming is tasteful playing in a volume that is appropriate for the song.** After a while you will develop your awareness of how loud you are as opposed to how loud the rest of the band sounds. There is nothing awesome

about a drummer who plays too loud or too soft. But everything is awesome about a drummer who always plays in the moment and adjusts his or her volume with the rest of the band. Be aware of your surroundings and adjust your playing intensity and volume accordingly.

10. Improvisation, Composure and Having Fun: First, let me expound on improvisation. I am not talking about straying from a part or playing jazz improvisation. I am talking more about the improvisation that happens when the artist or worship leader you are playing with makes a mistake in the song or in the structure of the song. This might be if he goes too short or too long through a section.

We all know when we play live the nerves can affect our memory and we may forget a part, a section, or a groove. The best thing to do is improvise. And by improvising I mean subtly improvise. This may be in the form of continuing a part through a section that went too long or going to the turnaround groove when a section goes too short. Whatever might happen, just make sure you do not lose your composure and drop a beat or totally stop in the middle of the song. **Composure can cure the worst of mistakes if you improvise your way back into the song while appearing like you meant to play the mistake.**

It's equally important that you blow off your mistakes or anyone else's and continue the song as arranged. You have to loosen up and have fun. If you shoot a smile at the rest of the band and the artist you are playing with, it gives them a big boost of confidence that we are all in this together and that we are making this fun for everyone in audience. After all, music is entertaining and it makes us laugh, smile or cry. As musicians, it's our job to communicate the song's intended message as best we can. In the process have fun together.

Conclusion:

I hope this e-book has provided you with some knowledge of how to prepare, rehearse and perform with greater confidence than ever before. The topics covered here are everything I've experienced and tested to help you be successful as possible. I believe each point in this e-book will help you progress even further to be at your best for any artist or worship leader.

Sincere thanks for buying and reading! I wish you all the best and more success. God bless you all! *Jon Skaggs.*

Bonus Report #1 – How to Create Amazing Drum Solos

During a performance you may be asked to perform a drum solo. If you have never performed a drum solo then here is a sure how-to-guide to perform a drum solo without having to prove you're the greatest drummer in the world. Let me share with you an anecdote from a personal experience of mine.

In 2006 I toured with Christian recording artist Nichole Nordeman and with the multi platinum, Grammy winning and multiple Dove Award winning band Casting Crowns. It was a tour in support of Casting Crown's multi-platinum release *Lifesong*. We were playing for over 5,000 seats a night in big theatres, churches, and arena across the midwest and east coast.

Halfway through the tour, Andy Williams, the drummer for Casting Crowns at that time had to attend his son's birthday party back in Jacksonville, Florida. He had to miss the date in Denver, Colorado. He literally asked me one week before the play date to fill in for him in Denver. I went overtime gathering, preparing, memorizing, rehearsing and charting. Casting Crowns put on a 2 ½ hour set every night, which is the equivalent of about 13-14 songs. Most of the songs contained tracks to play with while the others were to click off from memory.

I was given two brief rehearsals with Casting Crowns after their sound checks on the road. They were really quick and more like blowing through a song. I got a few questions answered before it was time to get to catering. My hands were really starting to be a source of irritation. With Nichole Nordeman I had to play really dynamically with nothing more than hot rods and brushes so my callouses and blisters were all healed up. By the 32nd day on the tour my hands had become accustomed to softer, more light hitting strokes. It was quite the opposite with Casting Crowns. I had to play a 2 ½ hour set in an arena with sticks that were literally destroying my hands and reopening my blisters and callouses.

On the day of the Denver show I wrapped up the majority of my left hand and fingers. I had to play the opening set with CCM artist Josh Bates and then Nichole Nordeman's set on my drum kit forty minutes before my set with Casting Crowns. I had been on stage prior to my performance with Casting Crowns a total of an hour and fifteen minutes. My wrapping was holding up fine and my hand seemed to feel good as well. I proceeded to play the set as I have memorized it

with Casting Crowns. I played the first half of the set with little or no hang-ups and got through to the intermission with flying colors. I walked behind stage where Mark Hall, lead singer of Casting Crowns, met me in the hallway and asked if I was ready for my drum solo? I literally gasped and thought to myself, “Oh yeah!’” There is a drum solo after the intermission every night! So I took a deep breath and said ”Sure man!”

While Mark was introducing me, I thought to myself that I had not prepared anything for this solo. I also thought that this is not a crowd of drummers but an audience who have to be entertained. That stream of thought actually helped me to relax a bit and just focus on entertaining rather than wooing. In fact, all of the Buddy Rich and Neil Peart drum solos filled my mind. I just pulled about everything that I had heard from them and incorporated them into a drum solo. I honestly cannot tell you what I played because you sort of black out when the spotlight is on you in front of over 5,000 people. I do remember I went into my ‘have fun’ mode and proceeded to play and entertain.

Most of the solos I’ve heard Buddy Rich perform always start with a theme, keep your attention, end with a bang and were always entertaining. I thought quickly to conjure up the same spirit as a Buddy Rich drum solo, although my drum solo would include a bit more of my personality and have more ‘Hack Saw’ Jim Duggan yells and Tommy Lee stick twirling.

It seemed everyone enjoyed every bit of the 5 to 10 minutes I played this solo. I do remember including a few Neil Peart elements from his Rhythm Method drum solo on every live album Rush ever put out. I also ended it with my best Virgil Donati impression of over the top cymbal tricks and triplets between kick, snare, and toms. It played out all nicely and it seemed to be good despite not having planned for it. I believe my philosophy of just entertain and be myself was the best bet. I started with dynamics, had a few different themes, got the audience involved, was flashy, and ended with a bang. It seemed to be a tried and true formula for a future time when I might be hit with a spontaneous drum solo request. Since it was so spontaneous, I seemed to have forgotten most of what I had performed. And with that, here are the best tips I can give you if you're ever told at a moment’s notice to perform a drum solo. Here it goes-

Have a theme: I admit that drum solos can be boring. I think they are even more boring when a drummer either goes too technical or not technical at all. It's really the middle ground between those two that makes a good drum solo. A theme refers more to starting with a groove and building off that.

Be Entertaining: Do not be boring! There will probably be a few drummers in the audience. More than likely, they will be normal everyday people. And those people will all enjoy some flashiness more than a stream of your best ostinato patterns or a straight groove in 7/8 time. Do things that make sense and provide energy. There are many solos that are technically amazing but would never make sense to an audience full of non-musicians or non-music students.

End with a Bang: Just like anything in life, you always want to crescendo to an ending that everyone will always remember. In drum solos the ending needs a grand finale like feel. Yes, just like a fireworks show or a grand performance at Disneyworld. There is nothing worse than an abrupt ending that makes sense to no one. Endings always need preparation to precede it. And within that prepping, it requires a loudness and busyness in volume and in playing. This is the one time you get to show off all you have in that toolbox of yours. So end with a bang!

To best reference this, go and watch some Buddy Rich Drum Solos on YouTube. Buddy was the "End with a Bang" master. I'm sure you can also find a plethora of drum solos that use this methodology. It only seems logical to give people what they want in a drum solo. After all, drums are loud and obnoxious to a lot of people. This is your one chance to win that person over with extreme obnoxiousness.

Have Fun: Even if you've never played a drum solo in your life it's important to have fun. This 'fun' attitude will at least cut through to the audience that if it's fun for you, it should be fun for them. Lightheartedness and levity have always been key to playing music in the first place. If people can escape in their hearts and minds in certain songs then I am sure they can also do that during a drum solo. Make it infectious with the smile on your face and the velocity of your limbs. I can say that most people in this life will buy anything if you carry a genuine smile on your face while selling it. It says that you believe in it and that they should also. So have fun! Really!

Bonus Report #2 – An Easy Way to Memorize Any Song

Here's a tool for you to memorize a song on the fly and apply certain grooves and dynamics for the different sections. Once you get the hang of it, this will help you feel out a song's movement from beginning to end. The type of structure you'll see below is sometimes referred to as "The Verse with Middle Eight," meaning the "B" part is 8 bars long.

In today's music, however, the "B" part can be 4 or 16 bars longs depending on the writer. Below is an easy method I've formulated to make it work for me. **I simply make all sections 8 bars long for ease.** If it's 16 bars then I will double it: A, A for repeating 8 bar verses or B, B for repeating 8 bar choruses. If a section is shorter, which will probably be more applicable in an intro, turnaround, or outro, I will write (I 1/2, or T 1/2).

Look at the key and examples below for reference.

Key:

I = Intro and Outro

T = Turnarounds - Sometimes known as Midtros or Connectors

A = Verse

B = Chorus Sections

C = Bridge Sections

Looks fairly simple, right? Here are few examples of songs using this type of tool:

Chris Tomlin's "Our God"

I, A, A, B, T ½, A, B, B, C, C, C, B, B, B, I

WorshipIdeas "Forever Amen”

I, A, B, T ½, A, B, T ½, C, B ½, B, I

Coldplay's "Clocks"

I, I, A, A, B, T, A, A, B, B, T, T, C, I, B, B, I, I

Feel free to elaborate and claim this as your own. It's a tool for speed and accuracy when you do not have time to gather, prepare, memorize and rehearse all your material. This tool will help you in a crunch or in everyday charting while you prepare and rehearse for your worship service.

Bonus Report #3 – Essential Tips for Real & Electric Drum Kits

This is a topic of controversy that seems to be in most church worship services where I play. I've played a wide array of real and electronic kits in both small and mega churches alike. One would think just because you're in large church building you're automatically going to be placed behind a live acoustic kit. That is not always the case in my experience.

For instance, when I served at Prestonwood Baptist Church for three years in Dallas, Texas I played an electric kit for half my time there. The main sanctuary seats anywhere from six to eight thousand people. Their worship services were more formatted towards a large choir and orchestra. The technical director did not want the hassle of dealing with the stage volume or a live drum kit.

Over the years they seemed to have a change of heart and decided to build a literal soundproof house for the drums that were placed on the right side of the stage. Although I prefer to play real drums I do not enjoy the stuffiness of an enclosed drum 'cage' as I so affectionately call it. Though it did serve its purpose by enclosing and controlling the on stage volume of the drums, it defeated the purpose of providing the group the feel and natural energy of the drums.

There are pros and cons to both real drums and electric drums in a worship service and any venue you might play them. In the following statements I am going to echo the sentiments of many front of house soundmen and my experiences over the years. There is an argument for using real drums and electric drums. The argument is always won when the appropriate type of drums are used in the proper context.

For instance, at Eastside Christian Church, where I am playing on weekends, the church sanctuary is relatively small, very live, and not fit for real drums and real cymbals. With real drums in a room like that you have no control over the drums and stage volume even behind a drum shield. Even if you did put the drums behind a drum shield on a small stage in a small room, you'll have an aesthetic problem because of the clunky appearance of a drum shield. It just does not make sense to me, even as a drummer, that you'll go for ok sounds behind a drum shield and still have to tell your drummer to play softly and have no energy at all. There are many reasons why live drums on a small stage or room do not make sense.



Jon's drums at Eastside Christian Church

Electric Drums and VST Samples

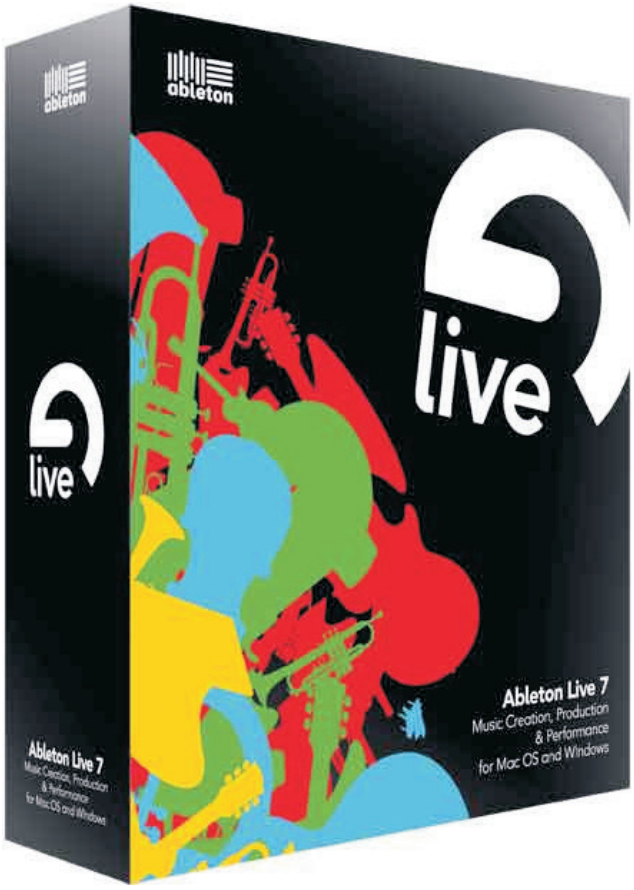
If you want to go the V-Drums route then here's a good tip about how to soup them up and make them sound better. Today, you have access to the world's best drum samples such as Toontrack's Superior Drummer 2.0, Addictive Drums or Steven Slate Drums. There are more drum samples but these are my personal favorites because they sound amazing and are relatively user friendly. Use a Mac laptop because it runs a very safe and smooth operating system that rarely melts down or crashes. You'll need to run an efficient program like Ableton Live to interface with an external I/O like an M-Audio Firewire 610 or Avid Mbox Pro/Digi hardware device to run to your front of house and monitor engineer. **You're basically bypassing the given factory sounds in the V-Drum or electric drum 'brain.' The electric drum kit becomes a midi controller and controls the sounds coming out of a sample library like Superior Drummer and Addictive Drums.** Here's a flow list for your electric drum kit VST library set up so you'll better understand it.

Assuming you already have an electronic kit with a brain unit and appropriate cables that hook into all drums and cymbals to brain unit, you'll need the following items:



Drum library software: You have to purchase a drum library program like Superior Drummer 2.0 or Addictive Drums. They will run anywhere between $200 to $400. I like these two libraries because they sound great and are relatively user friendly. My first choice is Superior Drummer 2.0 because I like the cymbal sounds better. I always have a harder time finding good hi hat sounds in VST libraries but Superior seems to be the best cymbal samples I have heard so far. Moreover, the signal chain Toontrack used to record with at the Avatar studios in New York seems to be a winner. They are only improving on it more and more.

Interface Software: My first choice for interface software would easily be Ableton Live. It might be tricky to learn at first but it's truly the most reliable and provides the best sounds. Ableton Live will cost you about $340 and there is an Ableton Live Lite version as well.



Hardware: You need a Firewire hardware interface that will easily transfer the sample information through the computer and into your sound system. Over the years I have had many experiences with external hardware I/O for running tracks. The M-Audio Firewire 610 Interface is one of the most popular choices. The back will have outputs to run your kick, snare, toms, and cymbals separately to the front of house snake or stage input.



M-Audio Firewire 610



Behind the M-Audio Firewire 610

Electric Drums with Real Cymbals

I have to be honest and say I have experienced this type of setup only once. It was at First Baptist Church of Garland, Texas. It was a very live room as far as I can remember. I can understand the good intentions most people have when they think this is an optimal setup. For me, the logic and feel of this setup is very awkward:

Real cymbals used with an electronic kit seem to be a paradox in my mind. An electronic kit can be volume controlled because it's simply pads that are triggering samples in a sound bank. And obviously a real cymbal will be heard at the volume in which you hit it and are hard to control. Drum shields are used many times for acoustic drumkits because of the loudness, frequency and shimmer cymbals project when you hit them. We know the rest of the drum kit is loud. I have to admit I'm told to hit cymbals more lightly than anything else on my drum kit.

The dynamics of real cymbals used with an electronic kit are hard to balance. On the other hand, electric drums work in relation to each other to create a feel of their own. The awkwardness comes from playing real hi-hats while playing a mesh head electric pad. Your right or left hand has to play differently to compensate for your left playing on a pad that only emits a sound through your headphones and a sound system. To me it's a very awkward feel that's only understood by a drummer and not a soundman. I remember being told to play my cymbals softer while I was playing the V-Drums at a church. To me that was a challenge - the whole situation seemed very illogical.

Real cymbals used with an electronic kit are a monitoring nightmare for the drummer. If you use inears or headphones to monitor then you must work hard to hear your cymbals in relation to your electric kit. It's key that you get used to the volume difference between the real cymbals and the electric drums. To me it's just not worth the frustration of having to constantly balance the two while you play. It could be a huge distraction and a struggle just to get through your set.

Real cymbals used with an electronic kit don't make sense when you can get great cymbal sounds from a sample library. Most electric drums are made with cymbal pads that look like cymbals and "give way" when you hit them. I believe many people started using real cymbals with electronic kits because of the

bad cymbal samples and the awkward feel of hitting a pad instead of a cymbal. I understand when you hit a cymbal there's a natural 'whoosh' and 'give' to really lay into it hard or hit it soft. I believe with the many adjustments Roland and Yamaha have made you can now get a better feel.

Real cymbals used with an electronic kit seem to defeat the idea of containing the drum volume in a church sanctuary that is too small for loud acoustic instruments. Cymbals are loud and can be the loudest part of the drum kit. The challenge for your sound engineer will be to manage a heavy-handed rock drummer bashing cymbals with the controllable snare and tom volumes.

There are a few electric drum kits that are integrating real feel type cymbal. They seem to have been successful in the electric drum kit market. If this type of kit appeals to you, then look at the Pearl E-Pro Live and the Alesis Dm6.





You might actually spend less money and save some frustration by going to this type of kit. You still get the cymbal type of feel and 'give' and you can also trigger sounds from any drum library that has been explained above. I believe it's a win-win situation.

This is my opinion and there may be some of you out there who can make this work. I've always taught my students to do what works best for them. Feel free to comment at JonSkaggs.net if you do use this setup and it works for you. I'm interested in how you've approached the situation.

Real Drums and the Drum Shield

If you're a drummer, I believe you're constantly fighting your soundman about putting your drum kit behind a drum shield. I say ‘”You’re fighting a losing battle!” While I do agree that is a bit uncomfortable being caged up behind a shield, it's not the end of the world.

There are major benefits to using a drum shield for acoustic drums in a small room. The benefits affect your ability to play a little louder and harder if you naturally play that way. I also know it's the only option for many churches and venues that use a lot of miked instruments - a shield prevents bleed into the drum mics and vocal mics.

There are also many churches and venues that do not use a drum shield. This is purely a technical decision. It's made with the knowledge that the drums do not affect the stage volume or contribute too much of a bleed problem to onstage mics.

Whether or not to use a shield often is a technical decision over which the drummer has no control. It's important to always have a good attitude about this if you're opposed to the drum shield. You are there, after all, to provide a service that has no bearing on technical issues. If you hit the drums harder than other drummers who’ve previously played without a drum shield, don’t be offended if the soundman uses one because you're a hard hitter. Just be thankful they are respecting the way you play, and are allowing you to play your natural way, instead of telling you to tone it down.

I personally don’t mind the drum shield as much as I used to. In my earlier days as drummer, they used to drive me nuts and bother me to no end! Nowadays, as a producer and having been around more uncontrollable sound situations, I see the benefit of using drum shields, and actually value them more than ever.

They are also not an end all to drum volume or bleed problems if you're a soundman. They are a means to minimize the volume and bleed. A drum shield, in theory, should decrease the drummer's decibel level by half, but you'll still hear a bit of frequency and shimmer issues with the cymbals depending on what kind of surface the drums are on. I think a carpet or rug is beneficial to soak up some of the refection and frequencies many cymbals project.

This is subjective issue with many technical staff in churches and venues across the world. However it’s a common sense issue. You’re either going to have to contain an erratic stage volume problem from your drum kit or fight the volume every weekend with uncontainable mic bleeds. I do think it's a great investment for every church to have one. Every drummer hits differently and every room is different. I say, "always be prepared to work in a situation that you have properly prepared for, but do not blame anyone else for an avoidable inconvenience."