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.

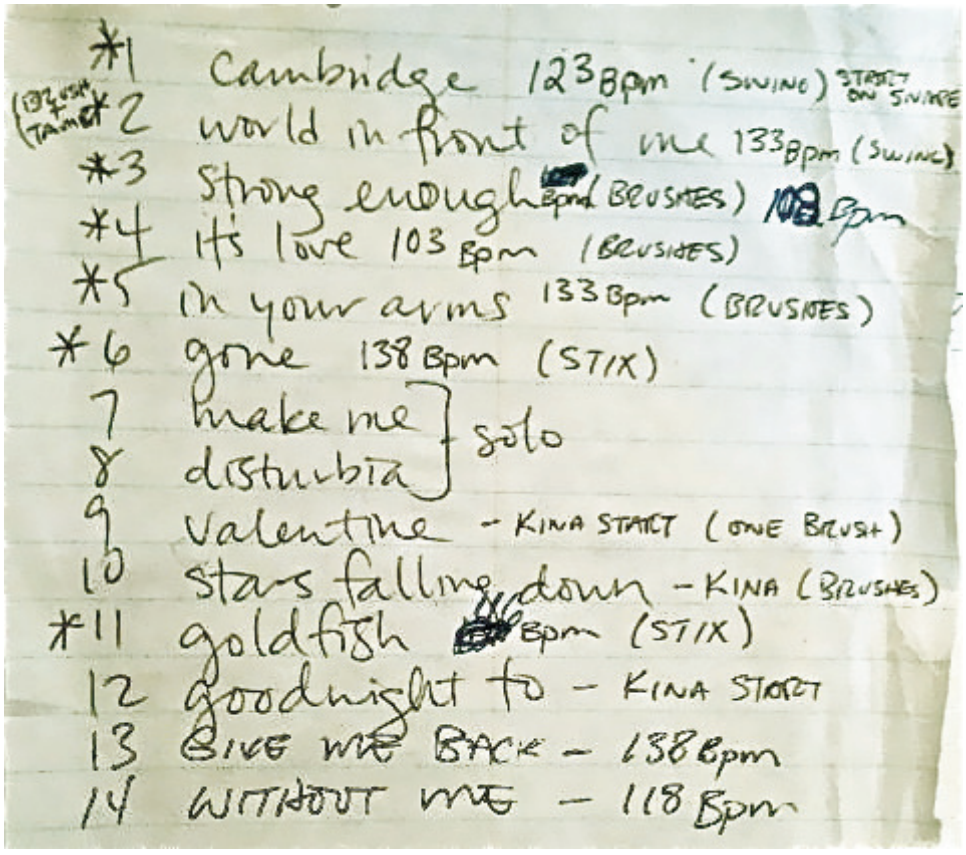
4. Rhythm Section Unity: The rhythm section I am talking about here is specifically between the drummer and the bass player. It's the true rhythm section of a band. The communication between you and the rest of your band is essential. However, **the communication between you and your bass player is very 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.*