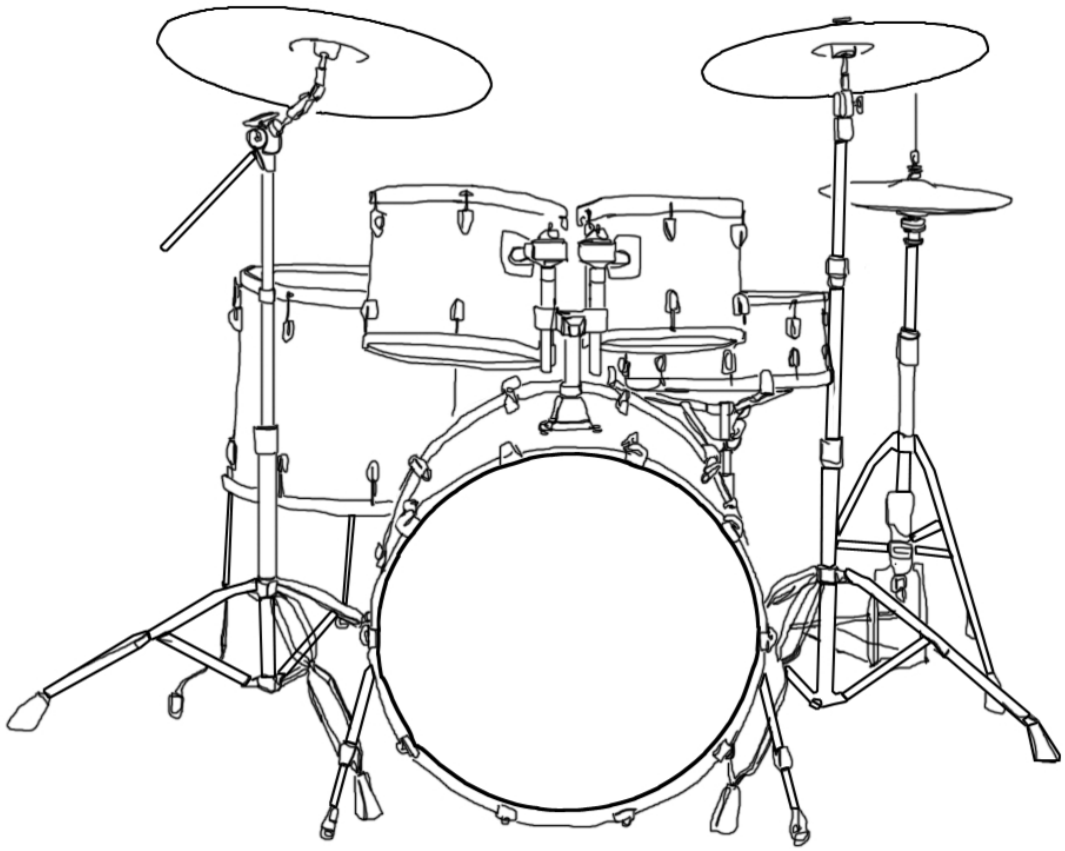
Buying Drums for Worship
(A guide for churches)



THEWORSHIPMUSICIAN.COM

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About the Author:

Jon Skaggs has been a producer, composer, drummer, and writer for over 20 years. He has played with some of the biggest names in music in both Christian and Mainstream. Though that is the case, Jon is passionate about the church and worship. As Christ is central in his life he wants to teach and guide other musicians the importance of being equipped with the truth and excellence in music. You can find out more info about Jon at his website http://jonskaggs.net and visit http://theworshipmusician.com for more resources, blogs, and articles from other Worship Leaders, Music Producers, and Christian Artists.

Jon is available for worship team clinics, speaking engagements, teaching sessions, or to sit in on drums with your band. If interested you can contact him here! mailto: jon@jonskaggs.net

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Buying Drums for Worship

Introduction:

Occasionally my worship leader friends ask me what kind of drums and cymbals they should buy for their church. Even though I've covered this subject a bit in various blogs and articles that I've written. It's a question worth answering again because there are so many brands and options.
So where to begin? Let's start by asking what kind of church sanctuary you have before you buy your church's first drum kit. There are many shapes, sizes and floor surfaces of church sanctuaries that I've played in over the years that require the appropriate types of drums and cymbals to keep your sound guy happy. You have to be honest with yourself and ask "do I just want to rock out?" or "do I want to buy the right drums that would be the most beneficial for church worship?" Would the age of your congregation, design of your sanctuary, size of your soundboard and size of your church benefit more from real drums or electric drums?

The topic of Electric vs Real Drums 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 a church I am playing at 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.

Part 1: Electric Drums

An electric drum kit is usually the first place a more traditional church goes when they move to a contemporary service. The electric kit is a very practical solution for easing an older crowd into drums in the sanctuary and the volume level is also easily controlled. The only downside to electric kits has been the drum samples – especially cymbals. But with more and more drum sample libraries entering the music software market we're starting to hear some incredible drum samples. The only problem is most electronic kits on the market do not have these quality samples… yet. I believe they will in the future with more research and development. There's a way to incorporate better drum sample libraries into your electronic kit, which I cover in the following comments. I also feel a lot of churches probably will not know the difference and the stock samples in your electric kit should do the job.

The Benefits of Electric Drums

The biggest benefits of electric drums are containment, minimal input usage, and volume control. If you're just using the stock sounds from your electric kit's brain then all you need are 2 inputs for your whole drum mix. That certainly makes things easy on the soundman especially if you're a smaller church with a small soundboard. The electronic kits are also easy to move and live on a smaller stage. They don't take up a lot of space and you don't need a drum shield to tone down the volume.

There's only one electronic kit I recommend and it's any of the Roland electric kits from the TD-KV series and all the lines that go up in price from it. They range from $1500 to $7500. I like the Roland kits because of the real swivel of the cymbals when you hit them and the mesh heads of the drums. I also think their sounds are great and the integration of any outside midi is easy to patch in. For me, the feel of the Roland kits have been the best. You can also add the Roland SPD-30 pad and trigger loops or more auxiliary sounds.

Various ways to use Electric Drums in Worship



Pictured Above: Roland TD-30 Electric Drum Kit from one of the churches I've played at regularly with laptop running Ableton Live and iMac running Drum Sample Library Software.

Electric Drums and VST Samples

If you want to go the V-Drums route then here is 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 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 ProFire 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, Steven Slate Drums, or Addictive Drums. They will run anywhere between a price range of $200 to $400. I like these two libraries because they sound great and are 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.



Pictured Above: Addictive Drum program open in Ableton Live.

	
Toontrack Superior Drummer 2.0	Steven Slate Drums

I**nterface 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.



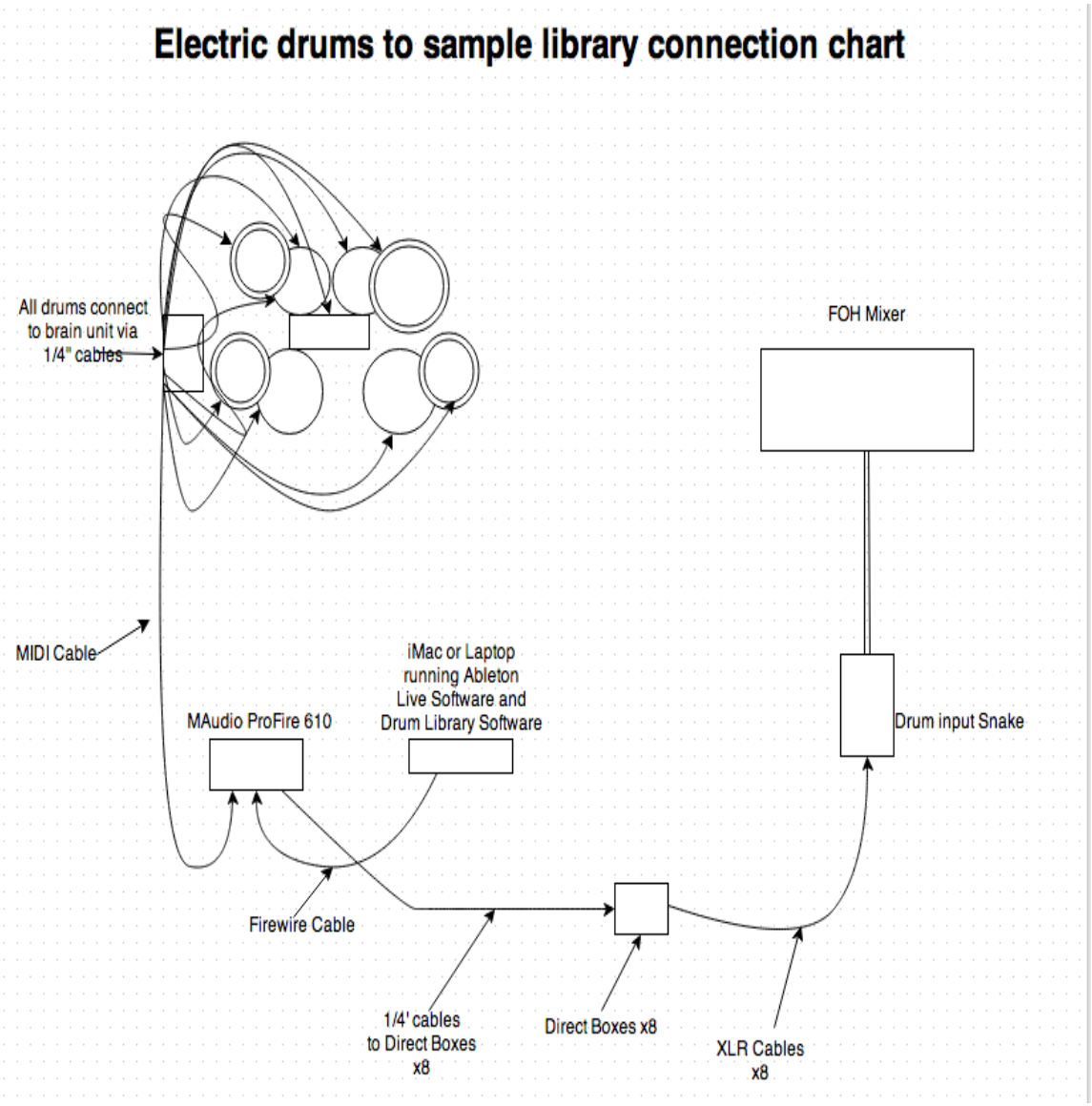
Hardware:
You need a Firewire hardware interface that will easily transfer the sample information through the computer and into your sound system. Over the years I have had many experiences with external hardware I/O for running tracks. The M-Audio Firewire 610 Interface is one of the most popular choices. 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 ProFire 610



Behind the M-Audio ProFire 610 – The numbered ¼" cables you see pictured are all connected to separate direct boxes so individual drums can be mixed/processed separately by your soundman.



Electric Drums with Real Cymbals

Real cymbals used with an electronic kit seem to be a paradox in my mind. The dynamics of real cymbals used with an electronic kit are hard to balance. Real cymbals used with an electronic kit are a monitoring nightmare for the drummer. Real cymbals used with an electronic kit don't make sense when you can get great cymbal sounds from a sample library. I have to be honest and say I have experienced this type of setup only once. 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:

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 drum kits 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.

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. If you use in-ears 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. 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. 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.

	
Pearl E-Pro Live	**Alesis Dm6**

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 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.

Part 2 Real Drums

You'll have to experiment to see if real drums work for your room and congregation. You might want to either start with a drum shield or add it later if your drums are too loud. A drum shield will take getting used to for your drummer and worship team and requires its own set of rules. I have played drums with no drum shields in small rooms and it's worked just fine. Of course this approach takes some major restraint on a drummer's part to not overplay and hold back in volume.
Drum shields make sense in the older sanctuaries because they were built for choirs, organs and to amplify unplugged sound from the stage. Drums are naturally going to be boomy and overpowering in an older church building.

The Benefits of Real Drums
I prefer to play real drums over electric drums any day of the week. I also notice a difference in energy from the stage when the band plays with real drums. Even if your whole band is using in-ear monitors the drums are still live and loud. I also think real drums sound the best. It takes a great soundman to know the room, right equipment, and right mics in order to pull off a great live drum sound.

Drums and Cymbals for Church
Here are some quality drums and cymbals that I prefer. The price range can depend on how many pieces you add on. We'll base the ranges on the standard 4-5 piece configurations (not including hardware or cymbals)

Higher Budgets (If you have a large budget for drums)



Craviotto: $7k – 9k.

Boutique cream of the crop drums that can be bought at select drum shops or online. These are my dream drums and I love the way they sound but they're pricey. They're loud and are perfect for big stages and churches. craviottodrums.com



C&C: $2k – 4k.

Great sounding, top of the line drums for the price. Can be found at select drum shops or online. I've never heard a bad sounding C&C kit and they're gaining popularity beyond the Boutique drum community. candccustomdrums.com



DW: $1.5k – 7k.

DW Drums have been a very popular and solid drum kit for a long time. I always ask for them when I do fly dates with artists and I need to rent a kit. They sound great and have a distinct sound. They do tend to detune in the lug system at times but that's about the only problem I've encountered. You can find them at about every Guitar Center, drum shop, or online store for affordable prices. dwdrums.com



Gretsch: $1k – 5k.

Gretsch are great drums for the range of price. I once set up a Gretsch Renown kit for Vinnie Colaiuta and sat behind him while he played it. Needless to say the kit sounded amazing (Vinnie can make anything sound good) and I was hooked on Gretsch after that. They're solid high end drums for the price.gretschdrums.com



Ludwig: $1k – 4k.

Ludwig has really stepped up their game in the last 5 years with their higher end drums and they look and sound great. Ludwig was one of the first drum kits manufactured and have been around a long time. Some of the greatest drummers choose Ludwig. I am frequently asked when doing session work if I have any vintage Ludwig drums and usually rent them for studio work because of their coveted antique sound. If you don't want to pay for the new ones then you can often find the vintage Ludwig kits on Craigslist or Ebay. The vintage Ludwig kits are high in demand and sound great. It's up to you how retro you want to look and sound for your church service. ludwig-drums.com

Lower Budgets (But you still want a kit that sounds good)



Yamaha: $500 – 5k.

Yamaha makes the entry level Stage Custom all the way to high end Maple Customs – Yamaha is known for that tight and punchy sound and have been the choice of many drummers for many years. I think Yamaha is great and they have their own distinct sound. You can find Yamaha Drums about everywhere. http://usa.yamaha.com/products/musical-instruments/drums/



Pacific PDP: $300 – 1.5k.

DW makes Pacific PDP drums and I think they are the best midlevel drums for the price and quality. I recommend them to many worship leaders who don't want to spend a lot of money but still want good drums. Guitar Center usually carries a Pacific PDP kit. pacificdrums.com



Mapex: $300 – 3k.

I have to give Mapex recognition because they were the first drums I ever owned. They have always made great kits and great drummers like Gregg Bissonette and Russ Miller swear by them. And like the other drum kits in this category you can usually find them at a Guitar Center. usa.mapexdrums.com

Cymbals

You really can't go the frugal route on cymbal quality. The cheaper or lower line cymbal you buy will give you that "trash can" effect. Lower line cymbals are usually heavy and not hammered. The hammering done by the manufacturer takes time and creates the tone of the cymbal. The different cymbal makers in the drum community also create cymbals from bright to dark to trashy to splashy. It's important to understand the qualities of each cymbal line and not just pick any cymbal before knowing what will sound best in your church. Cymbals are the loudest and the hardest thing to control on your kit even behind a drum shield. Over the years it seems the darker cymbals work better the in a church environment than brighter cymbals. They aren't as shimmery and reflective as a bright cymbal. The cymbal line that has usually been the most successful in this regard has been the Zildjian K line. The Zildjian K's are made to be a darker overtone and have recently released the Hybrid Zildjian Ks to blend the bright with the dark.



Zildjian K Cymbals

I personally have always used Paiste Signature and Traditionals for years. The Paiste Signature line is beautiful and bright. They are very loud and I started using them for Studio work to have cymbals that cut through a rock ‘n roll mix. Drummers like John Bonham and Alex Van Halen are some of the most famous Paiste users using the 2002 and Signature lines for rock. The Paiste Traditional and Dark Energy lines are the opposite of the Signature and 2002s in that they are definitely darker and a little softer. They are a great answer to bright and loud.

	
Paiste Signature Cymbals	**Paiste Traditional Cymbal**

Most churches benefit going to the darker lines of cymbal before using a Zildjian A or Paiste Signature line which are brighter and loud. You want a cymbal that doesn’t take over the stage and be a hassle for your soundman. Most cymbals bleed right into vocal mics and make a soundman have to use gates on overheads and vocal mics just to control the bleed. So usually darker has been, in my experience, better. The frequency and natural softness are easier to maintain in a church setting and you’ll probably save your soundman a lot of headaches. I think a great and practical cymbal setup are a pair of 14″ Hi Hats – 18″ Crash – Another 16 – 20″ Crash – A 20 – 22″ Ride (All cymbals will usually range from $250 – $600 within the diameters I mentioned above) Here are some cymbals I suggest: Paiste – Traditional, Signature Dark Energy Zildjian – K, K Custom, Constantinople, Bosphorus – Any Istanbul – Any Meinl – Byzance Traditional, Byzance Dark. If you want or need louder/brighter cymbals look to Paiste Signature or 2002s or Zildjian A Customs.

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.

	
Drum Shield with Roof – Price Range: $1700-$3000	**Drum Shield with 3 panels or more (no roof) – Price Range: $100 - $800**

There are two types of drum shields that exist; the drum shield with a roof and a drum shield without a roof. They come in different shapes and sizes to be customizable according your space. These days I'm seeing a lot of churches go to the drum shields with roofs. A lot of times I'm seeing this it really makes sense. For instance, if your sanctuary has a shallow stage and the front row of your congregation sits really close to the front of the stage. It makes sense to fully contain a real drum kit because of reflection from cymbals off of the floor and ceiling that make it hard to control other instruments in the mix. If you go with a drum shield with no roof because of budget constraints; you can always keep adding panels and add a roof later.

Conclusion

This is a guide to the drums, cymbals, and other accessories that I think are quality. There are many who have asked me.. "Why didn't you add _____ drums/cymbals?" This is a very subjective article based on my 20 year experience. There are going to be drums and cymbals that may work better for you than anything that I've suggested in this eBook. In any case, we're all here to learn. You're more than welcome to email me at jon@jonskaggs.net about any questions or something that may have worked better for you and your church. I welcome the input and hope this eBook is beneficial in buying the appropriate drums for your church.