10 Tips On Improving Your Worship Band Rehearsal

by Mark Cole

I have spent many days and evenings at rehearsals. It is the price you pay if you want to do music at a good musical level. It is the price you pay if you want to get past the music and be able to worship God freely.

I have had rehearsals with orchestra's, choirs, marching bands, studio sessions, vocal sections, brass & string sections and worship bands in Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa, the Caribbean and North America. Along the way I have picked up a few ideas on how to have a good rehearsal. Here is what I have learned so far:



1. Rehearsal Space

Preparation for a rehearsal starts long before the actual rehearsal. First you need to get a good rehearsal space. Depending on the size of the group, that could be your house, a recording or rehearsal studio, a church or a hall auditorium. Things to consider include good lighting, ventilation, acoustics and musical and sound equipment. The best place to practice is usually the place you lead worship.

2. Musicians

Next, you need to organize the people you need to come to the rehearsal. That usually happens weeks ahead through email, texts and phone calls. People are busy. Make sure you give all involved the necessary lead time for them to be there. With my church worship team and sound people, I usually book them 4-8 weeks in advance.

3. Songs

Picking the songs is another important step in the process. Questions that you should ask yourself include: Are these the best worship songs for this situation? Will these songs work for my congregation? What does God

want? Can the band and singers successfully perform this style? Is this the best key for this song? What is the best tempo and metronome marking for this song?

For more ideas on picking great worship songs, see my blog on "What I've Learned About Picking New Songs For Worship"

4. Charts

Next you need to prepare the charts. Different band operate with different charts. In my early years, we didn't have charts. We played everything by ear. Someone lead a song and we just picked it up by listening. Later on someone wrote out the music and we followed along. Today many worship bands use words topped with the chords.

I personally prefer a full vocal chart with notes, words, form and chords. The more time you spend working on a great chart and arrangement, the less time you need to work on explaining those details to the band in your rehearsal. Great charts make for a much more efficient rehearsal.

Personally, I never use other people's charts. Most charts have mistakes. I always make my own charts and tailor them to how I want the music to go. I also make special capo parts for acoustic guitar players.

5. Distributing Charts

Once the charts are written, I put the charts online in Dropbox in a pdf form and either give the band links to download them or I directly email them. Then I send notes to the players about which areas will probably need their attention. I also photocopy all the charts and bring them with me to rehearsal.

6. Pre-Rehearsal

The sooner the band gets the charts and links to the music (i.e. MP3's and/or Youtube) the more chance they have to rehearse. My habit has been to send out the music for Sunday on the Monday before. My midweek rehearsals have usually been on Thursday, so that gives the musicians and singers four days to prepare. Some people send out the lists weeks in advance. But I personally find that most people don't rehearse until a day or two before the rehearsal.

7. Leader's Preparation

The next most important step is the personal preparation of the leader. After the leader has spent time with God then their next responsibility is to know the music inside and out. I take time to know what the drummer's groove should be, the basic bass patterns, what each vocalist should be singing and the form of the song; including the intro, ending and exact tempo.

Other areas to know would be the lead lines for the keys and the lead guitar and the basic strumming and playing patterns you want each player to play. The more you know the music and what you want from each player and singer, the better results you will get.

8. The Rehearsal

The next step is the actual rehearsal. Start and end on time! Be highly organized and keep the rehearsal moving. Make sure everyone tunes their instruments ahead of time. Start with the new material when the energy level is higher. Know the potential problem areas of the music before you get there.

Expect and foster a Christian attitude among the band members. Treat others the way you want to be treated. Communicate clearly. Pray. Spend time worshipping God. Remember, your actual goal is to worship God, not just do music well.

9. Listening

As a leader it is important to really listen. Don't get so caught up in your own playing and singing that you don't listen to the whole arrangement. Is something out of tune? Is someone playing the wrong chord or note? Is that the right tempo? Is someone dragging or rushing? Is the groove for that song correct? How is the vocal and band balance? Is someone too loud? Is the band too busy?

Great music has ebbs and flows, learn the dynamics of the song. When should the different players be sitting out of a section of the music? Generally speaking, the band will only get to the level that you expect from them.

10. Excellence

Don't be afraid to challenge the singers and players to play to the best of their ability. People want to be part of something good. Learn to speak the truth in love. Challenge people to practice the music and memorize the music. Expect excellence!

Here are some **final tests** for your worship, music and rehearsal:

- Is this song really working at a musical level?
- Does this music minister to people and work for your congregation?
- Is the band and singers just playing music or are they also worshipping God?
- Does this music glorify God and do you sense God in this music?

Question: What can you add to this list? What is working in your rehearsals?

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The article above and many additional insights may be found on Mark's blog at http://markcole.ca/

Check out Mark's new book - "Leading Worship ~ Notes from a Grand Adventure" available in Kindle or Soft Cover Editions. This is a great gift for the musician or worshipper in your life.