

Introduction

Great sound starts on stage. In church the voice into the microphone is potentially the most important instrument on stage. Songs are defined by lyrics and the way we use our voice and microphone on the stage will play a crucial role in the overall sound and experience of worship. In this edition of On Stage Sound let's look at tips for improving singing from the stage.

Your Voice

Your voice is an amazing instrument. Air from your lungs passes through your vocal cords and into a microphone. Hydrate your body and you will hydrate your vocal cords. Rest your body and you will rest your voice. Think about the journey that your voice takes: The first room your voice enters is your mouth. From there it travels through the mic, and cables, to the mixer, back to the loudspeakers, into the room and then to the listener's ear. The equipment is simply a means to help the audience better hear what is already there... your voice.

The Microphone + Stand

A quality microphone is the most important tool to help get your voice to the congregation. The most popular and functional vocal microphone is a Shure SM58. It is THE standard. It only costs about $100. If you have a "budget" microphone it will more than likely negatively affect the quality of your voice and the ability of the mic to avoid feedback. Use a mic that is as good or better than the SM58. You can experiment, but like most of the worlds singers (professionals included) there is a good chance you will return to the standard SM58.

If you use microphone stand make sure it is adjusted to where the center on the mic points directly into the center of your mouth (more on this below). Some higher end mic stands have telescoping arms which means there are more options for adjustment.

Placement

A singers placement on the stage can affect the overall vocal performance. Being able to see other vocalists or instrumentalists in your peripheral vision can improve performance. On most smaller stages, know that your microphone will act as a mic for the whole band, so it can be beneficial move further away from loud amplifiers or drums. Even moving 12 inches from another sound can drastically improve the isolation of your vocal mic.

Proximity (EAT YOUR MIC)

Where you put your mouth in relationship to the vocal microphone is very important. Most of what we learn about mic placement comes from watching videos where often times the singer is not even singing (they are lip syncing) and the director has encouraged them to not obstruct their face with the mic. This is not a good plan! Are you ready for the secret to a great vocal sound in the house? It is this: EAT YOUR MIC! The mouth close to the mic eliminates the bleed of other instruments into your mic and the actual tone of your voice will resonate better. The sound person will be able to turn you up louder without feedback. If you are using a condenser mic, it will probably louder and more sensitive and the adjustment will vary. The main idea is to try to avoid as much bleed as possible and utilize the power of the mic by getting closer to it.

Straight On/ Off Axis: Once your mouth is very close to the mic make sure it's not off axis. You should be able to draw a line from back of your tongue to the center of the mic. Many singers use the imagery of singing THROUGH the mic instead of singing TO the mic. Project directly into the mic.

Removing Plosives: The only time you should NOT have your mouth directly on the mic is when you are singing worlds with plosives. When singing with plosives, quickly take your

mouth off axis and sing the “p” to the side. It is a very quick motion, returning to the on axis performance.

EQ

EQ or Equalization was created primarily for the voice. It’s used to lower frequencies that are hurtful and/or raise parts of the frequency to make it better stand out. Most voices sound pretty good just a capella, so the EQ is a tool to help bring that natural voice back to it’s best placement. It’s a good idea for every singer to know what a sound person does when turning those knobs. Spend some time singing into your microphone back at the soundboard and have a sound tech show you how it works. It will build confidence and help you help them when something sounds off.

Volume

The way you monitor your vocal is important in adjusting your perceived volume. If you use in-ear monitors be careful not to turn yourself up so much that you are singing softer than ideal. Take your ears out every once in a while during rehearsal to recalibrate your natural volume. With any kind of monitoring, keep in mind that you can TURN DOWN everything else other than your vocal to help hear your voice better. You don’t always have to keep turning yourself up!

Compression

Compression is a tool that sound engineers use on many instruments to balance the super loud and super soft sounds. Basically it makes you voice sound more pleasing and clear on top of the band. Keep in mind the singer can actually self-compress their vocal to make it more pleasing and workable in the house. Compression is a bit too complex to discuss here, but just like eq, spend some time with your sound tech exploring digital compression and also research the art of vocal compression.

Reverb and Delay

These are the finishing touches to the voice that you ultimately don’t have control of from the the stage. That being said, the closer your mouth is to the mic, the less natural room sound (or reverb) will be present in the vocal. Learn from the soundboard how these effects can affect your vocal performance, they can be very powerful.

In Conclusion

Your voice, your microphone, and your placement all play a role in what comes out of the sound speakers. Simply improving a piece of gear or experimenting with placement can drastically improve the vocal performance. If you have questions or would like to discuss training for your worship team that covers issues like this and much more contact Mike O'Brien at vineband@hotmail.com