Kill The Music: When The Music Gets In The Way Of Worship

Sometimes, the music gets in the way of worship. Sometimes, the best thing a band can do for the worship experience is to stop what they're doing – either partially, or completely.



In my last two decades as a worship leader, I've had the privilege of working with some amazing musicians. They are professional, capable, and have a lot to offer to any moment that something special is needed.

And executing a song? They nail it – the pushes, the rises, the falls, the musical elements – like masters.

I also have many peers who are simultaneously worship leaders and producers. They know how to build a song, sonically, from the ground up. They can arrange and paint that same song in many different ways, and can shift styles like most of us change clothes.

But the music can get in the way of the worship. A professional musician can miss reading the moment. And worse yet, a worship leader can fall into executing the songs instead of leading the worship.

The Music Can Get In The Way Of Worship

A nice, clean song, with a verse, chorus, verse, big double chorus, and sweet chorus out – is a well executed worship song.

Most worship leaders can execute a song like that, and the musicians can fill the sonic space from start to finish.

But I've noticed, for myself and for some of the best musicians/producers/worship leaders I know, that sometimes the music is leading the way, rather than the heart.

It's a problem.

In worship leading, the music can get in the way of worship.

Great Music Is Not Enough

When the music leads, we execute the experience, and our community appreciates it. Well done.

We would also agree together that weakly executed music hinders worship. It just does.

I'm still convinced that's why Saul threw the spear at David.

But it doesn't follow that *excellently executed music always facilitates worship* in the best possible way.

Rather, it is great music, led by the *heart* of a worship leader and bandmates, that facilitates the kind of worship that ultimately moves us.

A Call To Lead From The Heart

When the heart leads, we still execute the experience and the music, but we are also free to lose ourselves in the worship moment, to pull the band back to creating a space that is sonically sparse – for people to personally respond to God.

In fact, when the heart is leading, the leader and the band know when to stop completely, reading the moment, to allow silence in the community's worship experience.

Silence. It is music itself.

I've been in many corporate silent moments in the last few years, even in large conferences, that have been profound moments where God was truly leading the worship. Those moments, pregnant with the presence of God, are often missed when executing the music is the primary *modus operandi*.

Communities Need Worship Leaders Who Are Able To Kill The Music

People need open spaces to converse with God. Those spaces can be created with songs, but also with simple music played repetitively and without flourishes, and with silence.

Worship musicians who can play 15 minutes of a 4 chord pattern, tastefully and without throwing in lead breaks or distracting (in this context) frills, are worth their weight in gold.

Worship leaders who are sensitive to more than the music, who can read that moment well, are also worth their weight in gold.

It's in those moments prayer can occur – a woman struggling with depression can taste God's nearness, a man who's mistreating his family can hear some straight talk from the Spirit, or a desperate soul who needs physical healing can be prayed for by others.

I am convinced that such sensitivity is learned only in the secret place – not in the rehearsal hall, on the stage, or even in the leading of a thousand worship sets.

We can never replace leading from the heart with leading from the music, and the heart can only be cultivated in the secret place – when no one but God is listening.

In knowing when to quiet or kill the music, we can experience fresh life in our worship gatherings.

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Question: When is the last time the music had to take a back seat to leading worship, in your experience?

Resource: The Essentials In Worship Course aims to work this kind of heart-leadership approach into young worship leaders.

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