

by Mike O'Brien

How To Record Your Worship Team

Making Your Own Greatest Hits

The first part of this article will be all about the vision and inspiration; in the second part I will break down specifically how do it.

PART ONE

It used to be that only major labels and artists willing to spend tens of thousands of dollars could record their music. Today just about any worship ministry in a local church can afford to

record original songs or other worship songs that will benefit your local congregation. Fourteen years ago our church worship band (called Poured Out Like Wine) recorded its first album of original songs entitled "Songs of VCC"; although it was far from perfect, the whole church fell in love with it! It was a boost to corporate worship and the sense of family in our local church. Since then we have written and recorded five more full length album's, four EP's and several singles in our little church. We have fostered a culture of musicians and songwriters and now enjoy a catalog of over 300 original songs and recordings that are uniquely us!

Why Record Your Church's Worship Team?

With so much worship music being released every day, why does the world need another worship song recorded? For starters, as image bearers of God **we are commanded to make new things**. Psalm 40:3 exclaims "He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God." Songs birthed and shared within your local context can be incredibly exciting. Some other practical uses for a recording:

- Use the product to give first time visitors a unique gift

- Recorded music is an evangelistic tool for churches since your church members will buy copies for their friends and family.
- A band that records together, stays together. (*We attract great musicians because they know that their creativity will be desired and celebrated.*

Recording is also a force of great inspiration, bringing unity and furthering vision for worship ministry. I will never forget the look in many a musician's eyes when they enter into a fully functional professional recording studio. People light up when given the chance to to make music in a high quality manner. If the musicians in your church have never had an opportunity to record, you are missing out on an awesome team-building experience. Being a part of a permanent monument in the form of recorded music is a pretty neat thing.

Finally, **a great reason to record is to bless and encourage your congregation.** Proverbs 29:18 reminds us that without vision, the people perish. Songs keep us tethered to the vision by giving us a simple, singable summary of God's story. Churches are families. We can and should have songs that reflect a bit of who we are. We can make a soundtrack to the journey that your church is embarking.

PART TWO

STEP ONE: Get Vision

What would you like to accomplish with the recording project? Can you picture a CD release party where you celebrate the songs together? Do you want a small 3-4 song EP or a more complex 10+ song product? What is your budget? Who do you want to develop through this process? Do you want to hire some "pros" to inspire the rest of the team? What is the time frame?

Some sample Vision/Goals:

- *Record a 4 song EP in the Summer of 2016 for January 2017 release using a mix of professional musicians and local church musicians. Our locals will be inspired by the professionals as an additional bonus. Budget is $4500.*

- *Create a 10 song CD project with songs from the "Fiery Love" sermon series. Track 5 original and 5 cover songs using all local church talent. $8300 budget. Use all local worship team, but hire a producer/ engineer. Release May 2016.*
- *Record a Christmas EP in July 2016 for December 2016 release. 45 Songs. Theme is "The Gift of Jesus". Budget is $2500. Digital release only.*
- *Tell the story of our amazing outreach program through a 4 song EP entitled "Send Us Out". Proceeds will go to our missionaries. $3500 budget. Due Date March 2016.*

STEP TWO: Songwriting

If you already have several songwriters in the church, a deadline for recording will be a great excuse for new material. There is nothing like a goal to rally the creative spirit! In today's creative culture, "collaboration is king" and it's makes sense that we should *work together* to craft worship songs for our unique churches. Many large worship movements like Passion, Bethel, and Jesus Culture write songs for their church this way. Book a getaway for 1-3 nights and commit to several writing sessions in groups of 2-3 throughout a few days. Alert the pastor and elders to pray for the writers as they go.

Start, continue and end everything with Prayer. Ask God for favor, ideas, wisdom. Encourage everyone to arrive with verse/chorus ideas ready to contribute

Capture all your ideas on a smart phone, share them immediately with one another so everyone can listen and make tweaks.

Write and rewrite until you have solid songs. Some of the most incredible songs have been re-written DOZENS of times over several years!

Involve both seasoned writers and some others that will benefit from the experience of just watching.

Consider bringing in an outside writer that will inspire.

STEP THREE: Pre Production

Commit the best songs from the songwriting sessions to a “demo”. Basically, get one or two instruments (usually a guitar and/or piano) and sing the song with a metronome to establish the tempo. Lay out a good arrangement on paper and add any licks or musical ideas on the demo you think might work for the final product. Send these demos to everyone that will be recording so they can play along

and prepare their part. It’s helpful to leave out vocal harmonies or too much production so musicians can create their own additions. Practice the songs with the full band as much as possible before you go into the studio.

Listen to industry standard songs you like and find inspiration for drum ideas and vocal lines. Change the key. Find the right singer. Tweak lyrics and chords. Listen to a DEMO of “I Love Your Mercy” by Miami Vineyard. Now listen to the FINAL PRODUCT. *As you can see the demo leaves lots of room for musicians to make it their own and many things can change.*

STEP FOUR: Recording

Find a great studio and record the drums, bass and “scratch” tracks. Focus on drums and bass, but you can have other musicians play along to inspire the basic tracks. Once everything is set up (which can take several hours FYI) take time to record each song several times. Listen back. Record again until you reach consensus that it’s the best take.

STEP FIVE: Overdubs

During this process you will overlay all the guitars, pianos, keyboards, pads, horns etc on top of those basic tracks. Record the vocals.

STEP SIX: Editing and Mixing

Editing is the process of cleaning up the tracks, tuning and aligning vocals,drums etc. Mixing is where you add the EQ, compression and automation to the instruments and voices to make it sound like a record! You can used the same studio you recorded in or hire an outside ear to do the mix.

STEP SEVEN: Mastering, Duplication and Distribution
Mastering is the final part of perfecting the audio. Usually you send your mixed songs to another facility. Each song is adjusted so it fits well

together. The mastering engineer makes the volume compatible for iTunes, car stereos and ear bud listening. There is tons of science to this process. Expect to pay $10-15 per recorded minute.

Once you have the audio master files you then

upload the artwork and audio to a one-stop company like CDBaby who will send the songs to iTunes, Amazon, and Spotify

etc… From there you can choose to order physical product from a company like Discmakers (for CD's) or Dropcards (for credit card like download cards.

FAQ's

Should we SELF PRODUCE or HIRE A PRODUCER? I think it's important to hire an expert producer and/or engineer for your FIRST time recording. A producer is like the director of a film, and the engineer is like the camera operator. When you hire a "producer" you basically figure our STEP ONE (above) and then allow the producer to lead the rest of the steps, with your help. Shop around for a great studio and or producer. Try at all costs to avoid studios that are less than 5 years old– everyone has a friend who has a friend who can record you in their basement for a good price, but that can produce disappointing results. Find a studio that understands the details of your project and seems genuinely willing to help. Ask to hear samples of what they have done in your style/genre. Get references. You might talk to ten different producers/studios before you find the right fit.

A word of warning from personal experience: there are establishments out there that rip off church bands and give them a much worse product just because it's Christian. Sometimes engineers will pump up the reverb and chorus just to make it sound "churchy." Be on the alert!

WHAT SHOULD THIS COST?

Countless variables can affect the budget, but I find that I spend anywhere from $500-$1500 a song for a good recording. That includes start to finish– all the way to a shrink-wrapped copy of the CD. This is simply a rough estimate and will vary depending on which studio/producer you hire.

FUNDRAISING IDEAS

Crowd Sourcing
This is a brilliant way to have your church and grandma pitch in by pre ordering. They charge fees for the service, but we have had success using these services. Kickstarter is the most popular, but there are others.

Go to the Pastor or the Church Board
If you include the church name and website on the packaging, the project serves as an advertisement for the church and the church might be willing to pitch in.

Musicians Pitch In
Ask the musicians to each contribute to help pay for the recording. If you have a drummer, bassist, 2 guitarists, a keyboardist, and 3 background singers that's 8 people absorbing the cost of the project.

WHAT ABOUT ARTWORK + PHOTOGRAPHY?
As you begin the recording phase you should also commission artwork. Keep in mind the most important art is that little square people see in iTunes or on the internet.



I have helped dozens of local congregations craft Worship records and I would love to help your church. From inspiration, to demo, to master.
CONTACT MIKE O'BRIEN