Let's Talk "Song Delivery" by Sheri Gould

What makes for an effective delivery of a song?

First of all let's define what we mean by 'delivery' of a song. By way of analogy we'll look at the most famous of all delivery people-the "Pizza Delivery Guy". What is his job? He takes a pizza (hopefully deliciously made and piping hot) and makes sure that you receive the pie in as close as possible to the original intended condition. Completely intact without being messed up, too cold or with extra things on it that you did not order or expect.

Our job in delivering a song is not all that different. We want to make sure that the song we are singing gets to the ears, minds and hearts of our listeners. We want to make sure that the integrity of the message doesn't get skewed somehow. We also want to make sure that any 'additions' we make are welcome and add to the overall 'product'. In essence we are tying to give the people what they ordered—a blessing, encouragement or exhortation.

How do we start?

The message

Once you've decided to sing a song and you've chosen a song to your liking, it's time to work on the message of the song. You need first of all to be sure that the song is 'saying' what you feel needs to be 'said'. In addition, you need to KNOW what that message is! All too many singers are simply singing songs because they like the way the song *sounds* without being mindful of what they are actually 'saying'. They're drawn more to the music then they are the message. So be careful when you choose your song to take all of that into consideration.

I like to have my students first take the text for a week and only speak it-like a piece of poetry. This will truly bond you to the words and the message will become more a part of you. After you've memorized the words and can really say them effectively, then you'll be more confident that you have a real grasp on the meaning of the song. In this way you can better deliver '*the message'* of the song.

The key

One of the most important aspects in making sure that your song delivery is the best it can be, is by choosing the proper key for your song. Most songs that we are listening to on our contemporary worship CDs and in turn singing in our churches are typically sung in a conversational style. This conversational style of singing is best suited when sung in the 'sweet' part of your range or at least that part of your range that you're the most capable of articulating your song similarly to the way you would simply speak it. If the key is too high, you won't be able to articulate the words as well. You'll also have to sing in a style that is likely not conversational but more classical or you'll be straining and in that case the message once again can be compromised. If it's too low you'll be groveling and not be able to even 'eek' out certain words, let alone tones. So stay in a key that allows you to freely express the song in its entirety.

Memorization

Once you're comfortable with the words and the key, then you can begin to memorize the song. This is one of the most important aspects of delivering a song well. Vocalists who are reading words as they are singing are doing a great disservice to themselves and their audience. There is no way to convey to your audience the message you want to give them when your head is buried in the words. In addition, it hasn't become *your* song until you make it *yours*. You are simply replicating a song you heard. Your

audience deserves more. If we (as your audience) wanted to simply hear a song, we could've listened to it on a CD. However, we wanted you to minister to us through your song. Not simply read it to us while you're adding musical tone to it.

Then what?

Once you've memorized a song, then you can really begin to *start* working on your song delivery. You need to 'sing yourself into a song'. When I was studying voice in college, my professor would assign me a song on Tuesday and expect it memorized on Thursday. If it wasn't memorized, I was not to bother coming to my lesson because there was 'nothing we could do' with the song in his estimation. He also maintained the notion that you never sang a song in public that you hadn't sung at least 100 times on your own. Perhaps that seems like quite a high standard, but it's worked well for me and if that's the standard that my secular college held to, how much more do I want to give to my Savior?

In order to get a real message across to your audience, you must be authentic in your delivery. Think about what you are saying and make sure you really say it when you are singing. Bear in mind that this song is not about you. You are a servant there to simply hand off a message. Your emotion is not nearly as important as the emotion and thoughts of your audience. You want to *INVOKE* emotion rather than feel it yourself. In reality the audience isn't nearly as interested in *how you feel* as they are in how you *make them feel*.

For this reason I recommend staying away from hand motions for the most part, especially hand motions that draw attention to YOU. Use your hands and body only in a way that you would use them if you were *speaking* this message to someone. Try to keep the concept of the song as a message foremost in your mind. You are there to communicate a message—what will it be? If you tend to overuse hand and body motions that are not a natural part of conversation, then the attention will begin to be drawn away from the message and onto whatever it is you are doing with your hands or body.

Try to maintain eye contact with the people you are singing to. Many singers will get 'lost' in what they are singing and close their eyes. They may start swaying mindlessly and appear to be 'in their own world'. Stay engaged with your audience. You are talking to THEM. Your message is for THEM. If your song is a prayer then you can try to engage them with what you are saying and occasionally lift your eyes upward to give the sense that you're ALL lifting this song/prayer to the Lord, just don't go there all by yourself.

May God bless you as you pass on His message through song…