LOOK AT YOU! by Sheri Gould

Performance coaches are popping up everywhere. Why? More and more people are looking for feedback as to how they can improve their overall performance or presentation. This is a good thing because as singers we can always stand to make improvements! ☺

Most of us however will never have the opportunity or the resources to hire a performance coach. Moreover, a "performance" coach may not feel like an appropriate avenue for those of us who are strictly involved in worship. Do we really want to improve our "performance"? Are we really "performers"? This magazine is called Worship Musician! because we are trying to minister to the folks who are involved in worship at their local assemblies, whether in leadership or simply as worshipers. This sets us apart from others who may be interested more in seeking a career as CCM artists or other types of music. We are more simply trying to worship better in our local churches.

So does this exempt us from becoming better performers? Yes and no. In my opinion there is absolutely no place for "performance" of any kind on a worship platform. None. In fact I believe that many have fallen prey to this type of thinking and have been instrumental in actually leading folks AWAY from worship. I think this happens unintentionally much of the time, but it happens nonetheless. I also believe that if we aren't very careful, we'll find that we've encouraged an entire generation to do the same as well.

On the other hand, there are few things I hate more than a poorly designed and executed time of worship! I believe we need to stress excellence in all ways on the worship platform so that God is honored and people are not *distracted* due to our lousy "performance" if you'll allow me to use that word one last time! The reason that a coach can help is because they are not on the team and can step out and give you live, minute by minute feedback as to how/what you are doing. This is helpful. So short of perhaps hiring a coach, let me make a few suggestions of things you can try on your own.
Keep in mind these three things: How you *look* DOES matter! What you *do* DOES matter! How you *play or sing* DOES matter! Do you have an honest assessment of how well you and your team do these things? Trying a few things can help to give you some honest feedback.

Audio Recordings. It's vitally important to know how you really sound to the congregation or audience. Getting a realistic recording is key to this. Don't forget however, that there are lots of different ways to get recordings and some of them are less accurate than others. Remember that the mix you're hearing through your monitors is the mix that you as a musician have chosen. It's based on what you need to hear. This is helpful for you as you sing live. However, be aware that the congregation is undoubtedly hearing a totally different mix than you are. For assessment purposes, which do you think would be a better learning tool? I would opt for the house mix. Try getting some ambient microphones set up in the house somewhere so you can get an accurate idea of what the house is hearing, then you can work to make changes accordingly.
Ask your sound personnel to be a part of this process—both the recording and the listening- so you can grow together as a team. Never forget that your sound crew is a part of your worship team. Listen with your entire team and take time to reflect on what you're doing well as a team and what you'd like to improve upon.

Video Recordings. In the way that audio recordings can help you to get an accurate assessment of how you and your team *sound*, a video recording can help you get an accurate picture of how you *look*. Both of these things are important to help you toward your goals as a worshiper and as a singer/musician.

If your church is currently set up for video recording then of course this will be easy for you and perhaps you've even taken advantage of viewing video recordings of yourself or your team. However, I want to suggest that when you sit down to view your recording, either alone or with your team, try this trick: turn off the volume. I want you to simply watch what is happening on your platform. Without sound you will see a lot more.

Things to look for. Some basic things to look for are the obvious bloopers like wardrobe malfunctions and other visual problems like people's face obstructed by music stands or the platform coming across as visually imbalanced. For example, sometimes a church will have everyone crowded onto a small area of the platform giving the feel that the whole platform would tip left if it weren't nailed down! Your platform needs to have a clean look that draws attention first to the worshipers and then ultimately frees them to focus on God alone.

Another key component to look for is this: is everyone equally engaged in worship? Many times instrumentalists who don't have a vocal mic give themselves a pass as though they were invisible on stage! They often look as though they are totally in their own world or they're face is totally plastered into the music in front of them. There is nothing more inspiring than watching a team of people who are so in love with Jesus that it shows in every move they make. Don't forget to make a connection with your "audience". Determine who the appropriate "audience" for the song is—it may Jesus or it may be your fellow worshiper, but don't forget to make connection there.

If you have never taken the time to check out CCLITV.com please take a moment a do so. There are lots of great teachers on there (I even have a video on there!), but check out the video of the Gateway Worship Team singing "We Cry Out". Notice how everyone sings whether they're on mic or not. Notice how engaged they are in worship. It's a pleasure to watch—even with the volume off!