Too Much 'Me' In The Monitor…. by Sheri Gould

The Problem

Every singer who has ever set foot on a platform or stage of any kind faces that special uncertainty that can accompany live sound: Will I be able to hear myself? There are two sides to this predicament and I'd like to take a fresh look at some ways we can help ourselves as singers to be able to better hear ourselves.

First of all, the reasons for wanting to hear ourselves are multiple. If we can hear ourselves then we have a much better chance of actually sounding good and singing well/in tune. Additionally, if we can hear ourselves well, then there's less chance of us trying to 'out sing' the band. When we attempt to out sing the band, which is impossible, we will invariably strain our vocal cords. This is especially true of singers who are untrained and have a tendency toward straining anyway.

I'm also deeply concerned about volume levels on stage and in our congregations. We need to take hearing conservation seriously. My generation is seeing unsurpassed levels of hearing loss at earlier and earlier ages. I recently read that one the best places to invest is with hearing aid companies! If this is true for MY generation, how much more true will it be for our children who constantly have ear buds in theirs ears as they listen to iPods, videogames, DVD players, etc..

I have attended church services that were so loud that even with earplugs it was nearly unbearable for me and yet, I'll look over and see some apparently unaware young mother dancing around with her baby on her hip! What kind of damage is that child sustaining?! This needs to stop. The church needs to be a safe place for all.

Solutions

IEM

Fortunately there are several moves that can be made toward healthier decibel levels and one of these is the use of in-ear monitors (IEM). My prayer is that every church can get to a point where they are able to start employing the use of these little wonders. With proper use, they can significantly lower stage volume (ultimately the house volume as well) and give the wearer a much better chance to hear themselves and get the mix they truly need. For those of you who are unaware of how they work, they are simply a way of getting your monitor mix through in-the-earphones as opposed to a wedge on the floor.

For vocalists, the use of in-ear monitors can be a great relief because it finally becomes possible to really hear yourself and many times, with the right equipment, you can even control the volume levels of all the instruments in your own individual monitor mix. It's important however to use the IEM correctly. Many times people will wear them in just one ear so that they can get the feel of the congregation or audience. This is a mistake and in fact can potentially be MORE harmful than not using the IEM at all. Be sure to watch your volume levels as well remembering that the decibel level + duration are what can ultimately equal hearing loss.

Proper Sound Check

One of the big issues we find in this field is the serious lack of technical knowledge among our sound technicians. The purchasing of better (and more complicated) equipment has left many of our sound servants in the dust technologically. Many need much more training than they have been given. Others may have the training they need but are not given the proper place in our

rehearsal times or sound checks. It's so important to make the sound technicians a regular part of your worship team and include them in all rehearsals and fellowship times. This will help to insure a mutual understanding and sharing of goals. It's so easy in the heat of the moment to become frustrated with person standing in the sound booth when all you want do is be able to hear yourself and it seems like no matter what he/she does-it doesn't work. A lot of this can be avoided by spending time with one another.

We really need to have two kinds of 'rehearsals' so to speak. There needs to be your rehearsal time as a team, and there needs to be a sound check time as well. The sound team needs *time* to get proper levels and adjustments. This should be a time when they are in charge and we as a team need to give them what they need. If they ask for just the drums to play for a minute while they get their levels, everyone else needs to *be quiet*! You will be the ultimate beneficiary of this time if they're able to get the levels set properly from the start. It's fair and reasonable to expect the tech team to have some specific needs in this regard and we need to accommodate them. They are ultimately serving not only us but the entire congregation and they want to do their job well.

Try This Trick!

A trick I've heard some great sound guys talk about might very well help your team if you do *not* have IEM yet. The human brain is amazing in its ability to adjust to different sounds. In the same way that your eyes dilate according to light input, your ears also can adjust to different volume levels (to an extent of course). Have you ever noticed that you can be listening to the TV at one level and then need to turn it down for some reason and after a minute you can hear it just as well? Your brain will make the necessary adjustments. This can be helpful for you on a platform.

When I was younger and singing professionally, we never used monitors at all. We only listened to the house mix. This was something we were used to. If you were to have your sound tech set the house first while your team played, although at first this would be very different for you, you will find that you *can* function. Make sure you play like this for about 10 minutes so your ears adjust. *After* that, start to add some monitor. I believe you'll find that you need a lot less monitor this way. In fact you may even find yourself saying "A little less me in the monitor please…"