

Creative Gear for the Worship Stage

Your Backstage Inspiration

by Mike O'Brien

Drums. Bass, Guitars. Keys. Vocals…. What Else?????

After 20 years of leading worship in the contemporary church, I have acquired various musical instruments that have helped me develop musicians, challenge bored creatives, and **inspire possibilities on the worship stage**. Most church backstage areas have an excess of unused gear just collecting dust. I hate this! These unused instruments could be a pathway to new inspiration and opportunity.

" Look through the backstage of most churches – a pile of unused gear inspiration + opportunity collecting dust!

There is a good chance most of your teams have **under challenged musicians** that could use another instrument or two to wake them from their three-chord slumber. Adding new instruments will excite the band and elevate its sound. It will also inspire the congregation as they see and hear new instruments. Adding new instruments will

require your musicians to be flexible, vulnerable, and courageous, but I found most musicians appreciate the challenge.

If the Church is the hope of the world and we are tasked with sharing that gospel of hope through music, why should our instrumentation be so limited? Here are some creative gear ideas that might already be hiding backstage:

IN YOUR BACKSTAGE AREA

Tambourines and Shakers – *Extra percussion is a great tool to have for modern worship. Often times I will employ a horn/string player to use percussion on a song if it doesn't call for their "normal" instrument. Background singers can also help out by adding percussion to a song. If you can clap in time, then you can play hand percussion.*

***Hot Rods*, *Brushes* + *Mallets* –** *Many times newbie drummers or folks that play with only one style of music will not have alternate sticks. I have found that in most 46 song sets could benefit from one or more stick changes depending on the song. Encourage all your drummers to have a variety of sticks, but the church should have some on hand.*



Accordion – *This is not a joke. I have lent out the church accordion to MANY keyboard players over the years. I encourage them to search youtube for lessons and play along to a slow song using the keyboard (not the button) side. It's a fun and life giving musical tool to use for a song or two. Can sound like a pad or cello, not always polka.*

Ukulele and/or Mandolin – *If you have more than one guitar player, often times I will ask one of those players to learn mandolin or ukulele and use it in a song or two.*

Cajon or Any Hand Drum – *I have trained up many drummers starting on hand percussion. They play along with the main drummer. As they get better I eventually have them trade seats with the drummer for the slow song. All of a sudden, I have more drummers! Check out Monk Drums, a very cool drum company that makes affordable custom* cajon's.

***Melodica* –** *In Germany, they use this instrument to teach kids music. It's a fun little piano that just about anyone can play. Don't use it for every song or every week, but you can pull it out for a little inspiration. Keep the alcohol wipes handy.*



Glockenspiel or Bell Kit – *These instruments add a loud and significant punch to melody or riffs on vamps. They get a workout at Christmas time!*

Baritone and Hi-Strung Guitars. Baritone guitars are tuned super low and sound in between a guitar and bass. They are fun and can work on some songs. High strung or Nashville tuning is a way to string your guitar to make it sound "chimey". If you have extra guitars hanging around the church, consider making one of them hi-strung.

Extra Snare Drums and Cymbals – *Since the snare drum and cymbals are so* critical *to the overall sound it's nice to have some extra* high-quality *options for drummers to choose from. If you have better drums and options at church you will suddenly have more drummers!*

A Midi Keyboard Controller and Old Laptop – *I lent out an $99 midi keyboard and an old church laptop (with Reason and Garage Band loaded) to a 10th grade homeschooler. She came back to church with pads, Rhodes, and all kinds of sounds loaded up ready to play. This stuff is no longer rocket science. CPU>USB Cable>Old Laptop>1/8'' cable>DI Box>Sound System.*

A Real Fender Rhodes Electric Piano – *This is a popular sound that you hear on recordings and many keyboards already have a "Rhodes" sound built in. I have found it to be inspiriting to actually have the real thing on stage. They require some maintenance but really add to the overall expression of sound. You can usually find them on craigslist for $600-1000.*

NEW INSTRUMENTS IN PRACTICE

- Lead your drummer to use mallets on the cymbals for the slow part of the song to create dark orchestral swells to add emotion.
- Ask your bass player to play the glockenspiel for a song that doesn't need bass.
- Instruct your drummer to use brushes on a slow 6/8 song to help create a softer element in a song.
- Have your acoustic guitar player play the tambourine on their thigh like they are clapping.

- Lend out your Cajon to a youth who has good rhythm, invite them to play the next week.
- Strip down the stage to acoustic guitar, hi-strung acoustic guitar, accordion cajon and Fender Rhodes.

My name is Mike O'Brien and I am passionate about teaching and mentoring worship leaders and teams. My calling is to use my experience as a producer, worship leader, songwriter, and multi instrumentalist to come alongside musicians, helping them more fully worship God with their instrument and lives. Contact me to talk about how we can raise the bar through virtual or onsite training for your worship ministry.

