THE
ESSENTIALS
IN WORSHIP
TOOLKIT



4 STEPS TO BALANCING STRUCTURE AND SPONTANEITY IN WORSHIP

worshiptraining

INTRODUCTION

How do we create a healthy balance between structure and spontaneity in worship?

Although the foundation for a worship set is practicing a specific list of songs with the band, there are tender moments in the service that we simply can't plan for in advance. These moments are sometimes silent, sometimes musical, usually spontaneous, and often emerge as part of the collaborative movements of worship in a fellowship.

Some spontaneity in your worship sets will encourage the community to engage in unique and fresh ways in the midst of a service. However, it can be difficult to flow as a band without ground rules that help us do it well together. Here are some tips on creating that ideal balance between structure and spontaneity, and how to lead your band through spontaneous moments.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Bones & The Body
2. Prepare For Spontaneity
3. Secure Your Team
4. Passion & Restraint





STEP 1 - THE BONES & THE BODY

Consider the bones and the body.

Our bones are the rigid super-structure of our bodies. The bones contain us so we don't fall apart. They order our muscles and systems, administrate our movement, and direct the vital life flow systems within the body. The structure – the bones – are flexible to some degree, but not as flexible as the rest of the body itself. This is an analogy for how we can view those spontaneous moments in worship.

There are people who fulfill bone roles in our band, and people who fulfill more flexible body roles. Bone roles can lock down a sound and keeping a steady foundation of groove for the spontaneity happening in a worship set. The drummer and the bass player, and sometime a keyboard or rhythm guitar, fulfill bone roles, keeping a repeating vamp happening while other instruments play over top. More flexible body roles, on the other hand, can be guitars, keys, and voices. They can flex their muscles, create unique motion, and experiment with new things.

We need both bones and body in spontaneous worship. Make a plan for the bone roles, and, 90-100% of the time, stick with the plan. Then, in your band rehearsals, map out where the fluidity – the free-form and spontaneous moments – may come in.

STEP 2 - PREPARE FOR SPONTANEITY

Prepare for spontaneity.

Instead of just “hoping” spontaneous moments go the way you want them to, you can to prepare your band for the spontaneity. Point out which chorus you think might need some room to breathe and be repeated instrumentally. Give the band a heads up that you’ll be repeating 4-8 specific bars of music in a loop (called a vamp) if you say the word, until you give them the cue to move on.

Also tell your fellow worship leaders in rehearsal when you think the fireworks might occur, or when you want to experiment musically. If you communicate well with your team in rehearsal about these possible moments, instead of just flying by the seat of your pants, over time your team is going to grow in their ability to anticipate those moments — and be more effective as a worship leading force.

STEP 3 - SECURE YOUR TEAM

Secure your team.

As your team practices anticipating and executing spontaneous moments in a worship set, they are also simultaneously learning your particular way of leading.

Your band gains security when they realize you are practicing for structure, and not just playing everything by ear (pun intended). I.e. It's important for your band to know that you're holding to the bones you've worked hard on together, and that spontaneous moments will be the spice rather than the meat and potatoes of the set. This awareness helps them to prepare well at home and in rehearsal, and to be ready to ride with you into unknown territory.

When a band has security in their ability to vamp and improvise together, and gains confidence in you as a worship leader, when you come to the place where the worship set begins to breathe they'll happily go there with you. Why? Because the next song is probably going to start up the way you practiced it, and that helps build security and trust in a band. They know that you're going to move through the set according to the plan, and then, only then, can spontaneity emerge beautifully as it draws your entire band to new places in worship.

STEP 4 - PASSION & RESTRAINT

Passion and restraint go hand in hand.

We want to express passion and “go for it” in worship. At the same time, however, sometimes our "going for it" can be indulgent – i.e. about us rather than about ALL of us. This means that passion and restraint must run arm and arm in spontaneous moments of worship.

For us as worship leaders, or as a band, our goal is to stay connected with our community. Sometimes, many times, we need to restrain all that spontaneity we want to express in order to serve the congregation. Too much spontaneity can create disconnection rather than connection.

For those who are masters of restraint and are less comfortable with free-form improvisation or repetition, it’s important to understand that sometimes your community needs a breathing moment of musical spontaneity. This could be a chorus or a phrase sung repeatedly, or moments of silence or instrumental music as you move through the set.

ACTION STEPS

> Summary.

As you're planning for your worship set, consider the bones and the body. When you're in doubt, stick to the bones of what you've rehearsed. God is moving through the worship songs just as they're written, and we're responding to God in the midst of the different liturgies that we use.

Then, from that structure you've prepared, plan with your team to be spontaneous at certain key moments. This kind of spontaneity will build your band's sense of security over time, and will encourage the congregation toward enjoying much-needed breathing room in the middle of the worship time.

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