App Advice for the Worship Team Percussionist

by Mark Shelton

The electronic percussion unit was not cooperating. The rehearsal was about to start and the plan for me to play an 'electronic toms' line on a song was in jeopardy as the sampler was down for the count. Pondering the situation, I suddenly remembered an app that might solve the problem. After opening the iKaossilator app on my iPhone and plugging in my earphones, I settled on an appropriate patch. The vintage drum machine sounds fit the vibe for the song and I played my iPhone during two services that day.
I had to wonder if anyone in the congregation suspected me of texting during the opener.

An app came to my rescue that afternoon. As the universe of touchscreen helpers continues to expand, I discover clever apps that can assist me as a musician. Read on for several recommendations for the worship team percussionist.

Reference
"Let's try '10,000 Reasons' with a merengue groove this morning." Would that directive from the worship leader freeze you in your tracks wondering what to play?
Download PercussionTutor and be ready to easily access notation and recordings of South American, Caribbean, and West African grooves. Study from a library of world rhythms played by first-rate percussionists.

If the percussion score requires timbales, you might start setting up the shallow-shelled drums associated with Tito Puente and salsa music. But wait! 'Timbales' is also the French word for TIMPANI. Confusing? Percussion terms can be tricky. Download Percussion Pocket Dictionary and you will have quick connection to the names of dozens of common percussion instruments in English, French, German, and Italian. Consult this resource and you can spare yourself the embarrassment of shaking a tambourine when you should be pounding the 'tambourin de Provence.'

Tempo & Tuning
Back in the tick-tock pendulum days, you might get a pass if you didn't have quick access to an exact tempo--and those old-school devices did not have a tap-tempo feature! Nowadays there's little reason to be caught without a metronome. Both the Pitchronome and The Metronome (Soundbrenner) live on my smartphone. Not only a dependable metronome, Pitchronome also includes tuner and drone features that might be of service at a timpani gig.

Capture & Create

The brilliant song lyric or infectious groove that just came to you could easily escape your hippocampus. When the creative moment strikes, open a recording app and document that snippet of genius. Voice Memos (comes with iPhone) has been my go-to app for grabbing my ideas before they slip my memory. There are several other simple recorders to choose from and you can also use a camera app to shoot a quick video of your fresh ideas.

Keezy Classic is a super-simple sampler app that allows you to record onto the eight on-screen tiles and play back rhythmically by tapping the tiles (or holding down a tile to loop). Another recording feature in the app makes it easy to capture a creation and share it through email, text, or Air Drop. I love the straightforward design of Keezy Classic.

Percussionists will have this one up and cookin' within a few minutes. Keezy Drummer is a drum machine app that combines aspects of a sequencer and a looper. With twelve percussion sounds and up to nine tracks, you can stir up some interesting grooves without a lot of learning curve. Super fun!

Sounds

Do you need to transcribe a melodic hook so you can play it on glockenspiel? Having access to a pitch source might help. A basic piano app will fit the bill. My choice among the many available is The Piano Free. It sounds like a piano—and it's free!

A quick search will uncover plenty of apps that can deliver percussion sounds. One of my favorites is Rhythm Pad with an uncomplicated design, low latency, a metronome, and an in-app recorder. The aforementioned iKaossilator is the app cousin to the Korg Kaossilator. A cool X-Y interface controls a variety of percussion sounds and drum loops along with a wide range of synthesizer sounds.

Required Reading

If you are carrying your smartphone around, you can easily bring along over fifty English language versions of the Bible. No excuses. Make sure you include a convenient container of the Word on your device—and read it. Every day! My personal choice is YouVersion with an assortment of languages, versions, reading plans, and handy features.

Readers can access Worship Musician! (magazine) by typing the URL into a browser or using the convenient Worship Musician app. If you don't have this free app, download it now and you'll have quick access to current and past issues with inspiring and educational articles. Make sure to read the scintillating writing about drums and percussion.

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