THE WORSHIP MUSICIAN



5 Important Roles of The Worship Drummer

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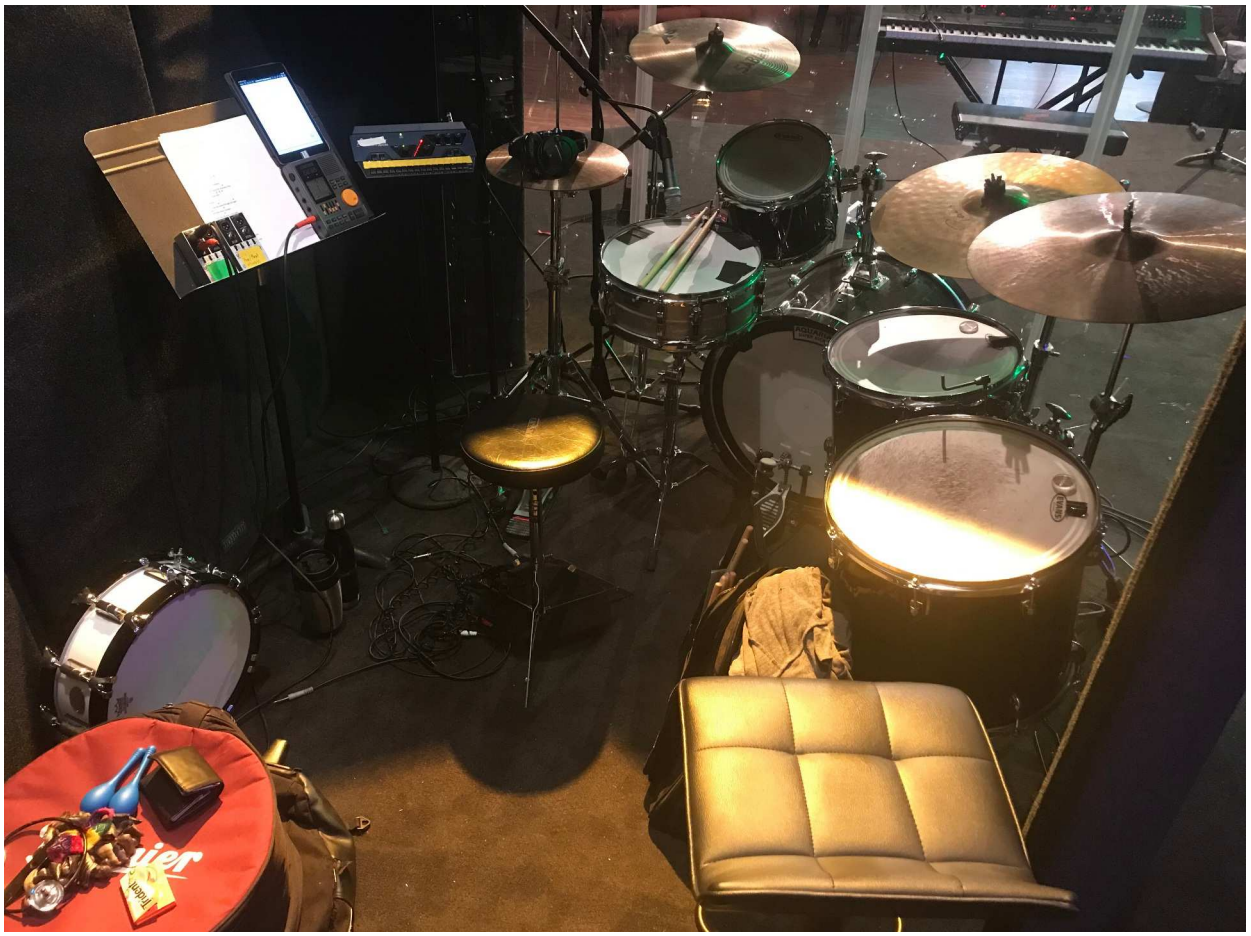
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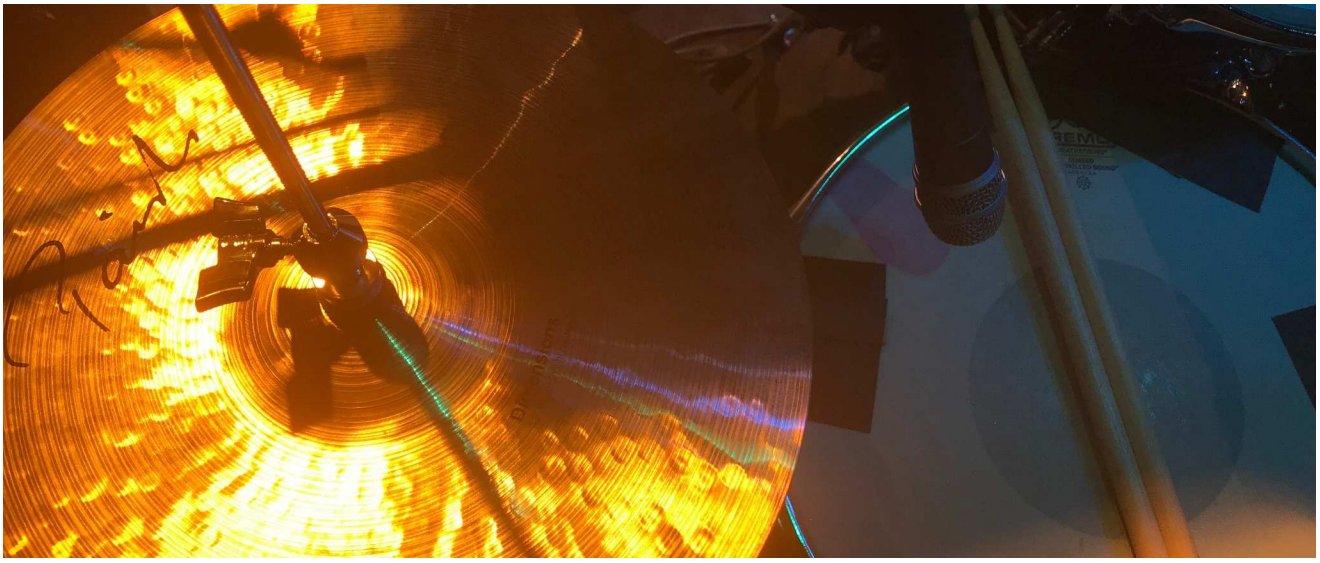
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1: The Role Of The Worship Drummer

The role of a drummer is pretty simple. All drummers would more than likely say, "keeping time" or "accenting the downbeat". This is definitely true. And these are clearly defined roles of any drummer in every music genre. But is there a different role for the worship drummer? The short answer is Yes and No. And that's what we will discuss here in these 5 chapters.

A drummer in any setting requires many of the same basic disciplines to fully implement their role as a drummer. A drummer must first and foremost understand their role as "time keeper". This is a constant and most basic role that is widely taught by many drum professionals and teachers alike. And by "time keeping", I'm talking about being the reference for the song tempo(s) and meter (4/4 time, 6/8 time, etc). The drummer is the foundation of tempo and song meter. You are telling the band how fast or how slow the song is for them to play within. It goes without saying that is a very important role of the drummer.





So what about the role of the worship drummer?

The worship drummer definitely has to require the most basic roles of the drummer. So what is the different role of the worship drummer? The answer flows into the worship drummer's focus not only on being technically sound. But being spiritually sound as well. Even though we will concentrate on some technical aspects of drumming in the worship context. We will also focus on the spiritual aspects ,that I believe, are important as well. These aspects are mainly derived from my experiences and teachings in many years of playing drums in a church setting.

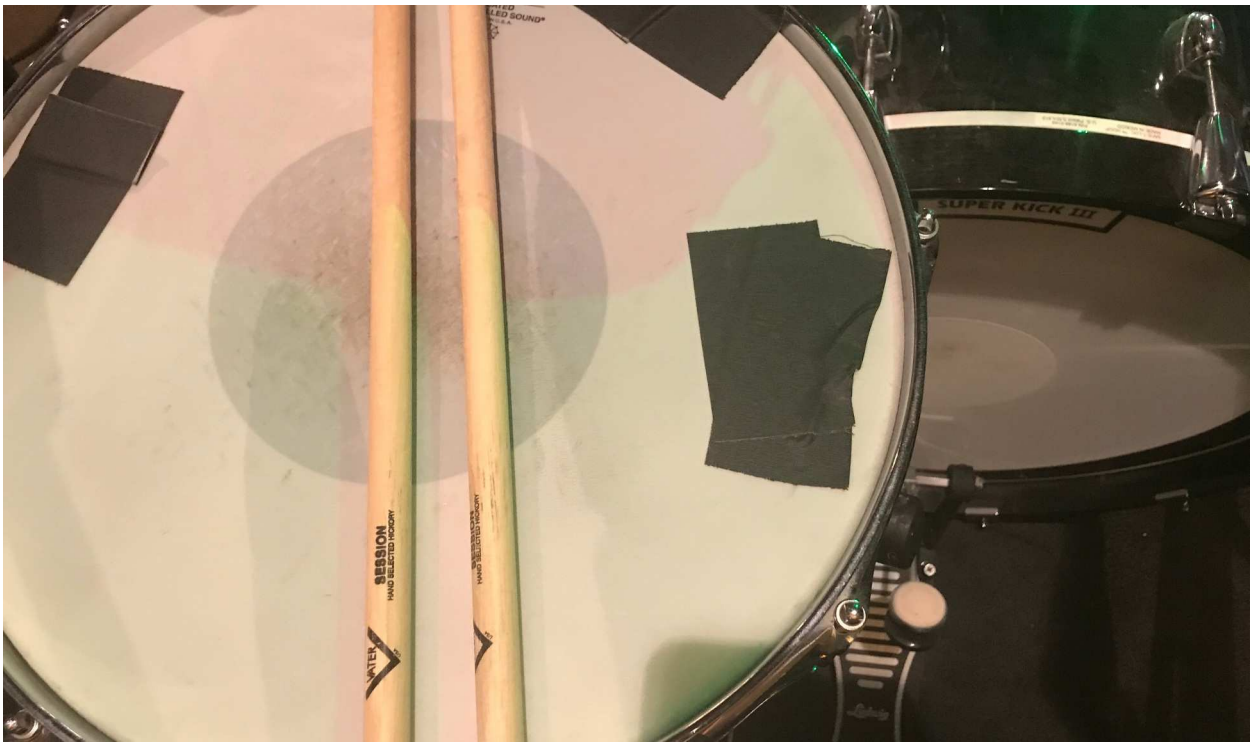
As a worship drummer, your worship leader is not only looking for a drummer that can play the music well. But also a drummer that co-leads in the worship service. So in this aspect, your role as a worship drummer ,is in fact, different than any drumming role you might have in a mainstream band that plays on Friday nights around town. A worship drummer is a different drummer's role, and a very important one in the worship band.

With this brief but important tutorial. We will focus on five important things that I believe are some of the most essential aspects of a worship drummer.

1. Knowing and defining your role as a worship drummer (Explained in this chapter)
2. Attitude of the worship drummer
3. Focus on the groove and where to place the fills (Why this is important to divide)
4. Leading worship (Along with the worship leader) as a drummer
5. Focusing on solid playing instead of flashy playing

These are five very important focus points that I wanted to accentuate in this brief eBook. I have always benefited from many teacher's brief lecture points in the past. Memorization and reference are key. Also for the fact that so many points can be consolidated into the same topics while getting the essential teachings across.





The worship drummer adds an essential part of the worship team when they are of sound technical ability and spiritual focus. Knowing your role as a worship drummer will enhance a worship service not only for you and your team. But for the congregation itself.

Take these next brief chapters to heart and meditate on the spiritual examples. The worship drummer is a great piece of the band when focusing on the teachings Jesus gave us on humility and worshiping God in Spirit and in Truth. That combined with excellent technical ability can do incredible things in the worship service as the spirit moves and is ultimately glorified in these disciplines.

I wish you the very best on your journey to becoming sharper in your ability as a drummer and as a follower of Christ. And I hope these words give you a broader understanding of what it means to be a worship drummer.

2: Attitude In All Things

Many have read the verse about the humility of Christ. But do we really understand it? I've quoted this verse quite a bit in other books and in other tutorials. It's a verse that deserves our study and application. It is a verse written so eloquently by the apostle Paul on the attitude that every worship musician and human should have. So for our study. Here it is.

Philippians 2:3-8 New International Version (NIV)

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, **4** not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.
5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:





6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

This passage gives us the quintessential guidance on attitude. Jesus exemplified the mindset we should strive for.

Worship services and rehearsals can be stressful to many. We will be stretched and pulled to show our strengths and weaknesses in times of trial. The attitude of Christ is an example of great strength in trial. He was and is the ultimate example of grace under pressure.

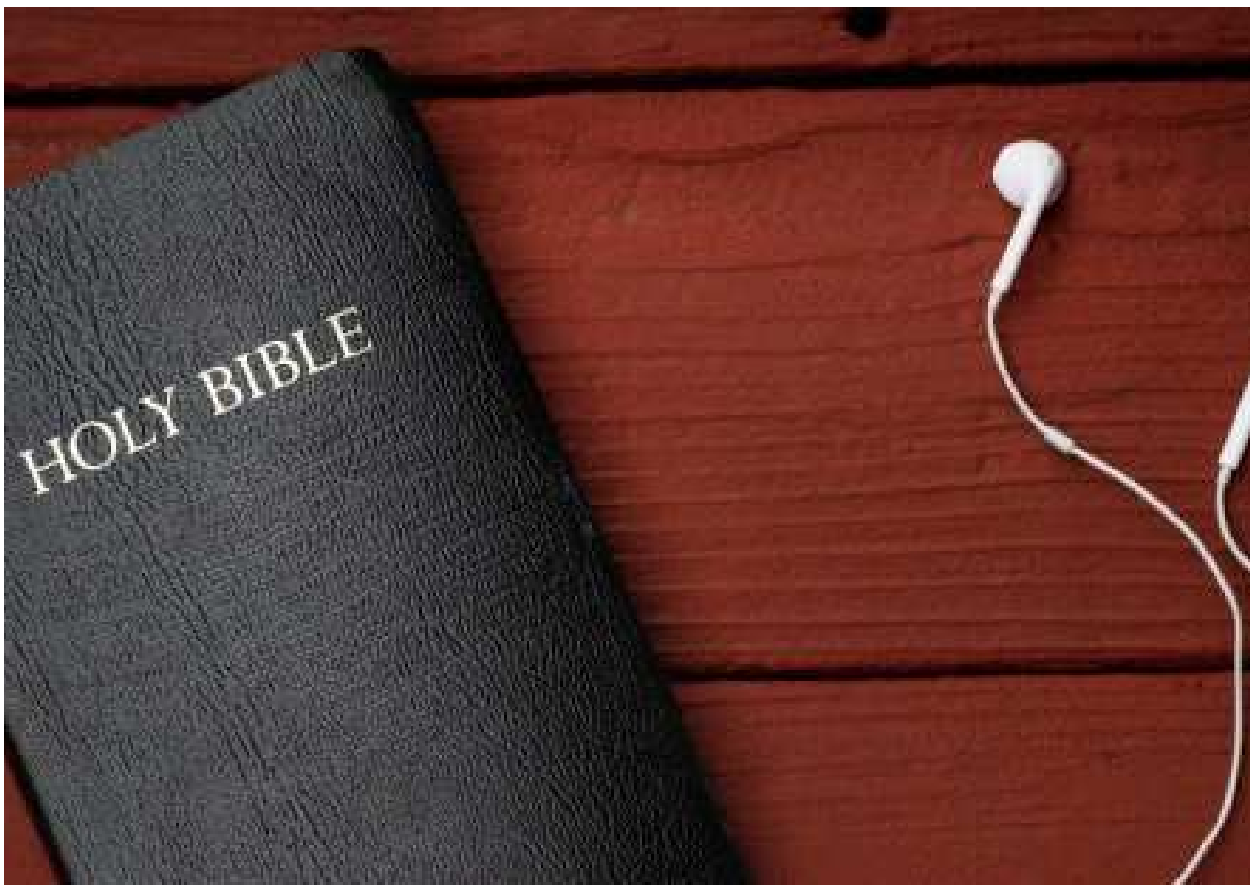
You will be tested in times of trial. And many times will you hear the voice of self beckoning you to demand your role be increased in a worship service. It is our nature. And a nature that we must be constantly be at war with. It can be tiring, especially for musicians. We struggle with the attitude of Christ because we are on a stage. A stage not designed for our glory. But for God's alone. A stage not designed to display the full range of our gifts. But to display the glory of God through us.

Jesus was on one of the grandest stages in human society of its time. The Roman empire was one of the grandest kingdoms at the time of Jesus and Jerusalem was its jewel. Jesus's popularity and audience grew exponentially after he began his ministry. While obviously, it turned to negative listeners as well as those who followed his teachings. Jesus understood this stage. He took it with great responsibility and became a servant to both his critics and followers alike. He did this all while being the creator of everything. The universe in all its 13 billion light years in measurement and billions of people populating the earth. He created it all. Everything. And yet, he humbled himself on the grandest stage in the universe. All while being fully the creator of all things and being fully human. Subject to every temptation and doubt. But Jesus prevailed and was without sin. He was victorious over his humanity and proved his deity.



7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

While on our stage, we can be victorious over ourselves. Humble our hearts like our Lord and Savior and have this mind of Christ. The death to our selfish ambitions ,while being worship leaders, demand this attitude of Jesus. It is actually imperative and a prerequisite of leading on a stage that can easily become a desire for us to become greater. But our greatness lies in the attitude of Jesus and to the death of self. This is our worship of the one true God.



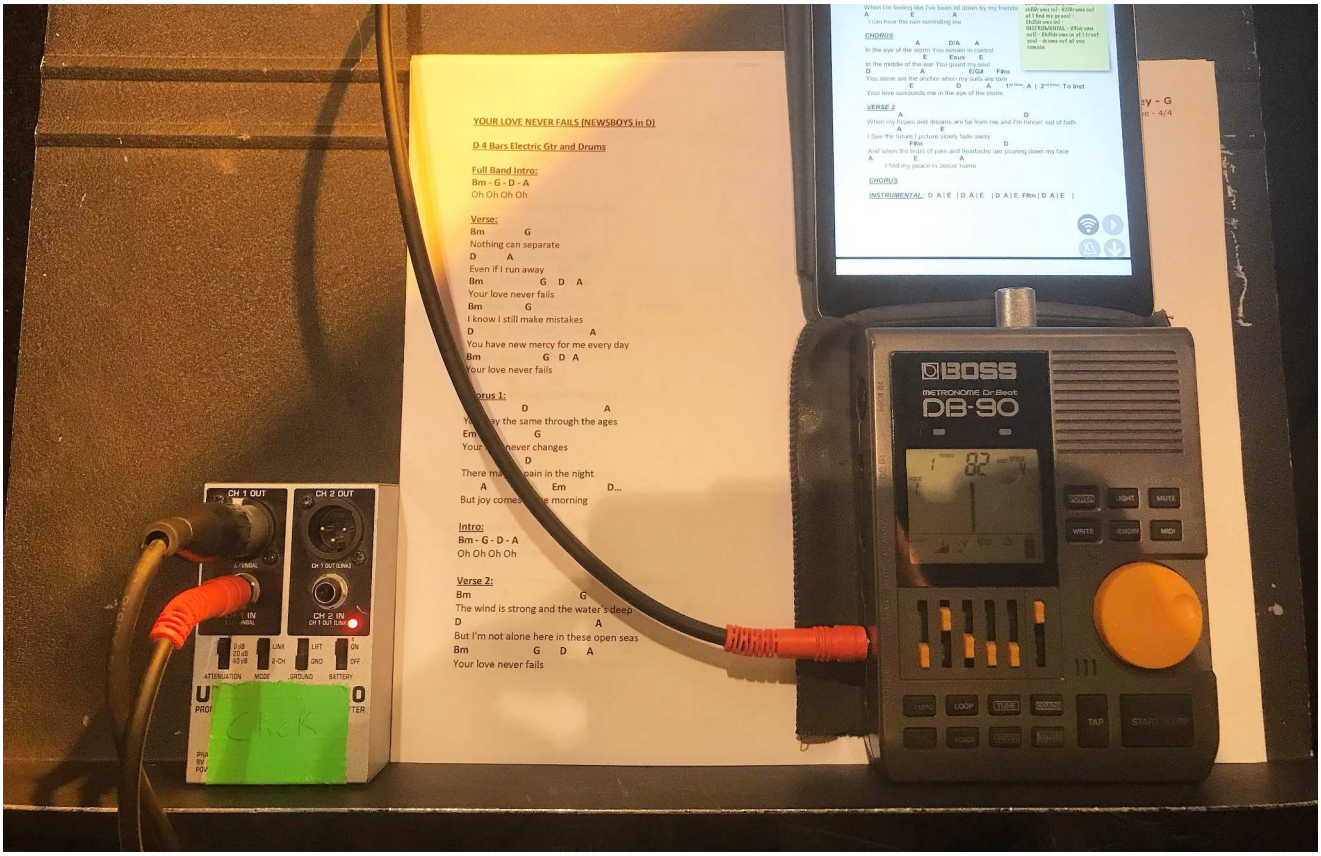
3: The Groove And The Fills

There is such a demand for a drummer to understand the difference between the groove and the fills. The reason is because they're used for completely different purposes. You would think we wouldn't need to think about it that much. But this thinking is the problem for so many drummers.

There are some amazing drummers out there. Some that play a groove so in the pocket it moves you. The same could be said for the fills. But what sticks out the most for you? What sticks out the most to your congregation's worship experience?

The groove should be the first thing that any drummer tackles. It seems that we try to hard to conquer the fills though. Why? Because fills are the wow factor for most. But this way of looking at drumming is backwards and doesn't serve the song. We should master the groove.





How to do this? Read below on some questions to ask yourself to improve on this discipline.

How often do you or your drummer play with loops or a metronome?
How often do you or your drummer play with a band?
How often do you or your drummer listen to drummers that play solid grooves?
What is most valued? The pocket groove? Or the flashy fill?

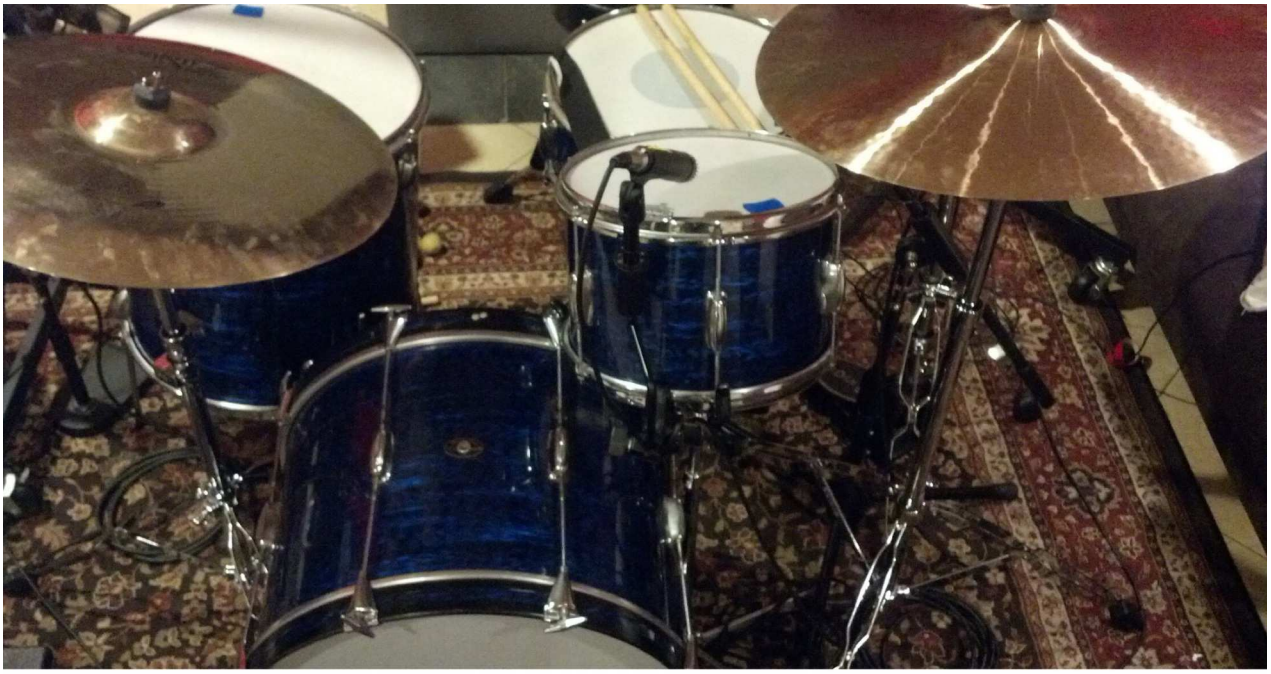
A worship song is at most a song that needs a drummer's discipline. There are so many worship leaders that count on the drummer to be the backbone.

A fill is for accents, building, and effect. A fill should never supersede a groove pattern in the hierarchy of what the song needs. This is what a worship leader counts on in a drummer.

The discipline is to see the groove first and see the fills as second. The drum set should be approached as an instrument to keep time. The fills are what add the flavor around the groove. It takes discipline to think of the groove for extended periods of time and play in patterns. Patterns that are consistent and repetitive. That have feel and creativity.

Patterns are grooves that stay consistent and flow with the feel of the song. A pattern can be 4 measures long, 8 measures long, or however long a pattern needs to be.





Fills coincide with patterns. For instance, a typical fill might happen every eight measures. A fill would usually fall somewhere within the pattern being played. The fill would need to be played so that it lands on the downbeat within that given pattern being played.

It’s important to note that every note being played has meaning. This especially goes for the fills. The fills need to have as much meaning as the groove. This really helps create the feel for the whole band. Everyone adheres to what you’re playing and how well you’re executing the groove and the fills within the song.

4: The Drummer Leads

At a worship event in Plano, Texas in 2004. I was playing drums for a worship leader named Jeff Johnson. There were the normal starting songs in a set and then the slower and more reflective songs near the end. It was a great crowd of people and everything appeared to be great on the surface. But onstage, it was a different story. The evening ended up being a bad night for sound. On the stage we were all having problems with monitors and personal mixes. We fought through it and did our best to finish the set.

The advantage we had is that I always ran a metronome independent of my monitor mix. I monitored the metronome through in-ears and ran wedge monitors. The other way you can run a metronome is through a dedicated Direct Box and Channel on the monitor console. But in this instance, our mixes weren't working well enough for in-ear monitors. My metronome setup seemed to be a great fail-safe.





Why did it help? It’s simple. The Drummer Leads. Not in the leading worship sense. But in the leading music sense.

In a worship band, everyone leads in their own role. But there’s a big difference in why the drummer leads. The drummer holds down the foundation. The drummer is the last line of defense against a total train wreck.

This is why it's important for drummer to have an incredible sense of time. That sense of time can sustain a band through a lack of anything. It's a must. It's also very important for a drummer to know the song arrangement, builds, and accents. You are not only doing your part to guide the band in the feel of the song. But also helping lay the road map of where the song is going.

The drummer leads with his or her understanding of these things. You're the rock of the song(s). You hold it down. And you lead the way your role as a drummer directs you too. As the foundation.

Let's continue to talk a little bit more about "laying the road map" for the band. Or guiding the band in the song's direction.

The drummer also leads with an understanding of these things. This goes hand in hand of what Chapter 5 will talk about. Being the “solid” drummer. These all coincide with each other and there’s a big reason why. You’re striving for excellence.

When you understand the song’s direction. You’re saying, “I know where the verse is and what I’m playing on the drum kit to communicate that verse section”. For instance, a verse usually is stated by a closed hi-hat and simple kick + snare groove. The Chorus would usually be open hats or a ride cymbal with a different pattern on kick + snare.

Whatever pattern you choose. You’re accentuating these parts because of proper dynamics and you are showing everyone else what part of the song this is. The rest of the band does it with chords and more intense strumming or playing. The drummer plays a voice that instructs loudness or softness to indicate that section of the song





When the band was fighting sound issues on that night in 2004 in Plano, TX. I led with instructing the band where we were at in the song. My confident playing professed, “Here’s the time - 104bpm. Follow along”. They did, and it saved us from impending disaster.

Someone had to lead in this way. Nobody else could do it. That was and is the drummer’s role. We lead with time. With confidence in our arrangements. And by saying here’s where we are in the song and this is how the tempo feels. Follow along.

This is how the drummer leads.

5: The "Solid" Drummer

Solid drumming requires musical maturity and practice. And musical maturity and practice come with adjustments. The band is not only counting on you for this but it will make you a better drummer. More trustworthy.

That reliability is what has always been my strong suit. I’m not a fancy drummer and fancy has never been needed. I always heard the term “Solid” when referred to my style of playing. It never offended me and seemed like I was onto something.

Playing solid is simply laying down a great groove that everyone in your worship team can feel and play within. You might play more or less but your feel is solid. Your downbeat does not waver and your backbeat is the foundation. A cymbal crash isn't every bar or measure. But used sparingly and thought of as an accent to a section.

The Solid drummer uses fills ,when necessary, and has a focus on serving the song. The solid drummer asks the question. What does this song need? Instead of, what can I do to make this song more "drum like". Of course, a song should not ever be uninteresting. But it shouldn’t be a drummer’s song either.





The drummer should play within the song's context. That should be fairly easy to comprehend since a slow song is a slow song. A fast song is a fast song and etc. You will know where hits and beats should land and how many of them to play.

It's important to focus on the simplicity of your playing and where you're at in the song. Being a solid player is a lot about understanding the road map of the music and not getting lost. I mean, we've all been at this point in the song and had no idea if we're going back to the chorus or to the outtro. But being a solid player is always knowing where you're at. Where you're going and how the song will end.

So you could say being a solid drummer is more than just the technical aspects of playing. Absolutely. This all goes back to being reliable. If you wish to give your worship team a boost and flow. Then be a solid drummer. You're doing your team such a great service by doing so.

The Worship Drummer is a solid drummer. He or she worships with their drumming and is not a spectacle on stage to be a distraction to worship of God. There can be only be humility in it. Therefore, solid playing is required.

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