

# FOCUS TRACK: MISCELLANEOUS INSTRUMENTS

The typical Worship Team configuration for the vast majority of local congregations most often consists of an acoustic guitar (or two), a bass guitar, a drum set (acoustic, electronic, or percussion), an electric guitar (or two), a keyboard / piano, and a vocalist (or 100). For the past several weeks we have focused on each of those typical instruments individually.

But what about the Worship Team that uses atypical configurations, or the Worshiper who wants to offer their bagpipe, ukulele, or xylophone skills to the Worship Team? Let's talk about it!

If you are a miscellaneous instrument player, or a Worship Leader who is trying to figure out how to incorporate miscellaneous instruments into the Worship Team, here are some helpful tips to keep in mind (appearing in no particular order).



**Miscellaneous instruments typically sound better when they are *added* to a solid musical foundation.** There are not too many people who are lining up to hear a timpani solo -but the timpani sounds absolutely awesome when added to the solid musical foundation of an orchestra. Remember the musical pie illustration. Each slice represents a different piece of a song's instrumentation. Miscellaneous instruments typically sound best when they represent a small slice of the musical pie.

**Pay attention to the fundamental frequency range that the miscellaneous instrument is playing in.** If the instrument is playing in the same basic range as the bass guitar, then the bass guitar may need to back off to provide more sonic space. If the instrument is playing in the same basic range as the electric guitar, then the electric guitar may need to back off to provide more sonic space, etc. There is only one pie. If you are adding more slices, you need to make the other slices a bit smaller.

**Pay attention to tuning!** Not all instruments were created equal. Sometimes adding a miscellaneous instrument or two means that you will have to play in a different key -one that is more comfortable for the miscellaneous instrument to be played in. In some cases, the other musicians may even have to tune slightly differently in order for all of the instruments to *sound* in tune with one another.

Once again, not all instruments were created equal. Most of the typical Worship Team instruments have an easy way to plug them in to the sound system. Many miscellaneous instruments do not have an easy way to plug in. Therefore, **you are likely adding live microphones to an already (likely) acoustically complex environment.** This should not deter you from working to find a solution, but be aware that extra open mics on stage often translates to extra feedback. A Worship Leader's dream can quickly become a Sound Man's nightmare!

**It's okay to use a miscellaneous instrument for just one song.** Sometimes there is one song on your set list that could *really* benefit from a violinist, and you happen to have a violinist in your congregation. *Voilà!* That's great! Feel free to just bring them on for that one song. It is

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honestly less distracting to just have them play for that one song than it is to make them be a part of every song — especially if the other songs do not benefit from the addition of a violin.

**It's okay to use a miscellaneous instrument for every song.** If it is really working for you, go ahead and make the miscellaneous instrument(s) the highlight of the set list. Give your miscellaneous instrument(s) a big ol' slice of the musical pie and allow the congregation to experience something different for that particular morning. Personally, I would not encourage you to do this often, but an occasional “Blue Grass Sunday” with banjo, fiddle, mandolin, spoons, and a washtub could be a lot of fun!

Just because some famous recording artist used an accordion on their record doesn't mean that you have to. I know it is tempting to be cool and sound just like the record, but just because you have the same instrument does not mean it sounds the same as the recording. Many miscellaneous instruments have a unique sound that comes from using a technique which takes years of practice before it can be played skillfully. Personally, I would much rather hear that accordion part played on an electric guitar or keyboard instead of hearing it played poorly on an actual accordion.

At the end of the day, most Worship Teams use the typical setup that I described earlier because it just works. **Always remember that our job is to point people to Jesus -not distract them from Him!** Still, our God is wildly creative, and His creativity is a part of our DNA, as well. Adding skillfully played miscellaneous instruments can be a deeply meaningful way to worship our Creator! If you have the ability to add miscellaneous instruments to your Worship Team, do it! If you don't have the ability, that's perfectly fine, too! Whatever is not enhancing is distracting. Don't distract people from Jesus.