

(GOOD) DYNAMICS, PLEASE!!

Classically trained musicians intuitively know the benefits and importance of good dynamics. Sheet music is typically written with key, tempo, and dynamics information clearly noted. Song dynamics are important. The dynamics of a song are one of the main factors contributing to the emotional experience for the listener.

Sadly, unlike classically trained musicians, the typical church Worship Team member has not been trained in proper dynamics. Most Worship Teams that I have observed think of dynamics in one of two main ways: either (1) everyone plays all of the time, creating a sort of freight train forte, or (2) lower parts are slower parts and bigger parts have the need for speed, creating more of a musical roller coaster for the listener.

Neither of these ideas of dynamic expression for a Worship Team are correct, helpful, or even musical. There is a better, more effective way, and it is not difficult to grow in this area as an individual and as a Worship Team. Here are some suggestions that will help to that end.



Map out the song. Listen, or play through the song, and intentionally think about what each instrument should be doing during each section. What should be happening in the Intro? When should the drums come in to the song, and with what kind of beat? Personally, I like to use a simple table chart that includes each section of the song (Intro, Verse 1, Chorus 1, Bridge, Ending, etc) in the top row, and each instrument (Lead Vocals, BGV, Acoustic Guitar, Bass Guitar, etc) listed in the left column. As I think through each section of the song, I fill in what each instrument should be doing at that point (whole note strumming, sixteenth note plucking, arpeggios up the octave, low pad, quarter note kick only, nothing, etc).

Include dynamics information on your chord sheet. Most Worship Teams do not use sheet music (though some do), which is fine -especially since most Worship Team members do not know how to read sheet music, anyway. The typical Worship Leader will give simple chord sheets to their Worship Team members. These chord sheets consist of lyrics and chords (typically the acoustic guitar chords). A slightly more thought out version of a chord sheet will include arrangement, tempo, and song key information. Before handing out the chord sheet, consider adding pertinent dynamics information. This can be easily taken directly from your map of the song.

Talk through the arrangement before playing. At the beginning of your typical Worship Team practice, or rehearsal, take the first 10-15 minutes to talk through the songs. I would definitely recommend doing this WITHOUT instruments in your hand. Simply gather everyone together and walk through the song chord sheets (hopefully with dynamics information added). Make sure that everyone understands how the song should flow, when they should and shouldn't play, how you will begin and end each song, and anything else that you think is relevant to communicate at this point. I think it is important to note that not every single piece of information needs to be communicated to the Worship Team. I would NOT hand out my personal song map at this point. That is simply too much information. Only communicate what you think is absolutely necessary, and what you think is helpful.

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Practice with a metronome. Whether it is personal practice or Worship Team practice, make sure that you are spending ample time with a metronome. This will help to ensure that you are not using tempo fluctuation to attempt dynamics change. When you first implement this strategy, you will probably notice yourself (or your Worship Team) speeding up at the big parts and slowing down for the smaller parts of the song. This typically translates to slow verses and fast choruses (with a super speedy bridge). Long builds will be especially troublesome. The more practice you can have with a metronome, the better you will be without one.

If you employ these helpful suggestions, I promise you will begin to craft more dynamic song arrangements, which will translate into more powerful times of worship.