

# HOW TO PLAY TOGETHER

## Welcome

Thanks for downloading the Speaker Notes for the Worship Central Course.

In this sixth session, we've outlined the structure and key points for the talk, and left room for you to add your own examples. Feel free to personalize the examples and make it your own, but we'd please ask that you keep the core material the same, as we want people to be able to get the same Course wherever they are.

We pray this course will be a great blessing to you and your worship team, and we stand with you as you seek to encounter God, equip the worshipper and empower your local church.

Tim Hughes & Al Gordon

## Introduction

Welcome to the sixth session of the Worship Central Course. Last time we looked at what it takes to be a T-E-A-M, now in this session we're going to look at how to P-L-A-Y together.

Let's turn together to Psalm 150:

"Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,

Praise him with the harp and lyre,

Praise him with tambourine and dancing,

Praise him with the strings and flute,

Praise him with the clash of cymbals,

Praise him with resounding cymbals.

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord."

(Psalm 150, NIV)

In this amazing call to worship we see every type of instrument represented; drums, stringed and wind instruments; there are melodies, harmonies and rhythms all colliding to form a beautiful galaxy of musical praise. God loves music.

Psalm 150 reminds us that we are to use everything we can to praise God. Music is an incredible vehicle for worship: it unites people, captures emotion and gives voice to our deepest longings. We are encouraged - even commanded - to use every type of musical expression to bring God a glorious symphony of praise.

And yet... things don't always go to plan, do they? Sometimes they even go horribly wrong.

[Insert Story]

*Share a humorous story about a musical moment that when horribly wrong. For instance, when you started in a different key to the rest of the band.*

In this session we're going to look at ways we can nurture and develop our playing so that we might fully enjoy all the riches and depths of the gift that God gives us in music. We'll start with four key disciplines that every one of us needs to embrace. The first is the discipline of 'Practice'.

## P // Practice

The Beatles are the best-selling band of all time. They have had more number one albums, sold more records and topped the charts for longer than any other band in the history of music. In the ten years they played together, they collected; 7 Grammys, 15 Ivor Novello Awards and were included in Time Magazine's list of the hundred most important people of the 20th Century, alongside Nelson Mandela, Gandhi and Einstein.

How did they do it? Malcolm Gladwell, in his book 'Outliers', describes how in their formative years in Hamburg, Germany the Beatles would play for eight hours a night, seven days a week. By the time they became a worldwide success, they had performed live an estimated 1,200 times, more than most bands play in their entire careers. They had learnt the discipline of practice.

You might be wondering how anything like that level of practice could be possible, and it's true that we've got busy lives, and that investing in becoming a better worship leader will be costly. For some, it will mean carving out time each day to be alone to worship with your

instrument. For others, it will mean using your morning commute to listen, study, think about the songs you're learning. For all of us, without practice, we're simply going nowhere.

Regular practice has great physical benefits too. Musicians have been described as athletes of the small muscles as we rely on very repetitive actions. We have over thirty different muscles that operate in our hands alone, which all need to be used regularly if our hands are to respond to what our brains are telling them to do. For this reason, we must be mindful of our physical preparation, learning to warm up and warm down before playing our instruments. Paul writes to Timothy, acknowledging that "physical training is of some value" (1 Timothy 4:8) because physical repetition, like the spiritual disciplines, helps us to form habits that soon become instinctive.

Practice also has a mental benefit. Over time, practice trains the synapses in our brains to respond so that the playing becomes second nature. Musicians can't learn without repetition, and can't repeat with practice.

For this reason, it is better to practice little and often, even if it is just a couple of minutes, than to leave long periods of time between sessions.

## L // Listen

Secondly, L is for Listen. We have to learn to listen. It sounds obvious but the most common cause of musical train wrecks is a lack of communication. But we're not just talking about listening to the music here - with so much sound flying around, we have to be skilled communicators and skilled listeners. A band will never be able to play effectively together if they don't know the signals used to end a song, repeat a chorus, cut to just the drums or voices, or to quietly keep on playing.

Here are a few simple signs [please feel free to insert your own signals] that can indicate where a song is going:

- If a song is going to end then the worship leader will tilt their guitar and turn to look at the drummer. Everyone then knows to end the song.
- If we want to repeat a chorus we'll tend to quickly lift the bottom of one leg behind us – we call it the 'flamingo position'!
- When wanting just the drums to play we'll quickly point to the drummer.
- If we're keen for the band to really build dynamically we'll begin to stamp our legs more passionately.

All this can sound a bit ridiculous, and different signals will work better for different groups, but these have been proven to work. If you lead solely with your voice then your hands are free to communicate. You can also use vocal prompts to direct a band. If, for example you're leading a song and want to repeat the chorus, in between choruses you could simply sing an ad-lib, such as first two words of the chorus. It fits in with the sound of the band, but conveys what is about to happen next. The main thing is that the band has a series of signals that are clear and understood and enables them to flow together, playing in a way that is sensitive to a congregation.

Of course, all these visual cues mean that the musicians have to keep their eyes open. We obviously want our musicians to engage in worship, but if everyone's eyes are always closed, most signals become redundant. So everyone needs to keep their eyes on the leader,

especially as the band approach the end of different musical sections. In this way everyone can be clear where things are heading.

God created us with two ears but only one mouth, a good reminder that we should listen twice as much as we speak. In playing with others it is critical that we learn to listen to one another. What others play should impact your own musical contribution. If there's a new melody line coming through - or a singer adds a fresh harmony - your hands or voice should work to compliment rather than challenge it.

Sound checks are also vital if the band members are to listen to each other effectively. Take time to carefully check each instrument and make sure that each musician can hear what others are planning. It may seem tedious, but will always make a significant difference to the overall sound. There can be a temptation to rush sound checks, but we do so at our peril. We mustn't be afraid of taking the time to ensure that we can hear all that we need to hear adequately. These times are opportunities to serve one another, rather than moments to jam. Encouraging musicians to be considerate to others is key. If the goal is to hear each other, it may mean turning the guitar amp down on the stage so others can hear more clearly rather than turning everything else up.

So that's the second discipline, learning to listen. Thirdly, we think about the A - A is for arrange.

## A // Arrange

Arranging an individual song or a time of worship needs great care. Firstly, think through the groove of the song. The groove is the underlying rhythm of a song; it is always the foundation of any music and is chiefly determined by drums, percussion and bass guitar. If the groove of

a song is unclear, then the band will sound shaky and unstable. Like the foundations to a building, if they are not firm and secure, then all that lies above is vulnerable. Spending time with each other locking in to the same rhythmic pattern is so important. It is particularly key for the drums and bass to be playing in unison. Different grooves will always give a different flavour to a song. Any song will take on an entirely different feel if it is played with a varying groove such as country, disco, jazz or reggae.

Secondly, be aware of the harmony in the chords and notes each musician plays. The combination of music and chords provides the essential bedrock for the melody to sit upon. The musical harmony adds depth, meaning and expression to a song. It's important to ensure that everyone is playing the same chords at the same time. If the bass guitar is hitting a root note that clashes with what the keyboards and guitars are playing, then the music will sound unsettled.

Thirdly, think about the motif of the song. A motif is a musical idea, often a melody that becomes intrinsically connected with a song. It can be a powerful way of capturing the emotion of a song. Think of the piano motif on John Lennon's song 'Imagine'. As soon as you hear the intro, you can instantly name the song. Everything about it sets up the sentiment of the song. Or the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, which is arguably the most famous motif in classical music, with its trademark 'dud-dud-dud-daah's.' The motif adds drama and depth to the song.

Fourthly, map out the dynamics of the song. Without dynamics you have no music, you simply have sound. Every style uses musical dynamics to take the listener on a journey. If there is no variety in a song, with everyone playing loudly at all times, then pretty quickly people will lose interest in the song. We need to be intentional with how we build our arrangements, adding and subtracting instrumentation at key moments.



There are several types of musical dynamic. For instance, a song can be built up through using linear dynamics, where the band move together as a unit, either in crescendo or decrescendo, getting louder or quieter. A band may do this when building into a chorus. Alternatively, a song can use terraced dynamics. In this case, variety in a song comes by alternating when instruments are introduced and removed. It may be that after playing a chorus you decide to repeat a chorus with just the drums and bass. When the band hit the final chorus, by adding an electric guitar along with backing vocals the whole song will feel like it explodes. This type of dynamic helps engage the listener in a deeper way.

One vital element of dynamics is thinking about not over-playing your instrument. It is often said of truly great musicians that it's not what they play, but what they don't play that sets them apart. Great music needs space. Silence is an art form.

When preparing for a time of worship, we often find it simplest to highlight a selection of the songs to really work on arranging, while for the others we would use the default arrangements that don't require masses of reinvention. By balancing the familiar with the fresh we find we are able to rehearse best together as a band, and ultimately serve the people we are going to be leading in worship.

So we've looked at P, for Practice. L is for Listen, and A is for Arrange, the final letter is Y, and Y is for Yield.

## Y // Yield

The best way to play well together is to yield - or give in - to one another. Bands form when individuals unite and lay down their own personal agendas to become one musically. Great bands will always have a collective musical goal, rather than simply being about personal

aims. There is an understanding that ultimately the sum is greater than all the parts. This mindset has huge implications on how we play musically when we join with others. Whether your team involves a fifty-piece orchestra, a rock band, percussion and an acoustic guitar, or an organ and choir, the same principle remains. There is no room for ego in the worship of Jesus.

For this reason, it's important to realize that as musicians we play very differently when we are on our own to when we are playing in a band. A guitarist playing unaccompanied has to fill out all the sound, as there is no other instrument to add texture or colour, only the chords and rhythm of the guitar. The dynamics will have to come from the way in which the guitar is played. However, add in more instrumentation, and the approach to playing guitar will have to change. Suddenly it is not the only sound in the room. A drummer will provide rhythm, a pianist will bring melody and harmony and a bass player will add drive to the songs. Now, rather than providing all the sound, the guitarist can concentrate on adapting the orchestration to complement the other musicians.

Whatever you play, the goal is always to play as one - not to sound amazing on our instrument or with our singing. If that means playing the simplest of chords on the keyboards, or a drummer using brushes, or a singer only singing in the choruses, then so be it. The conductor Leonard Bernstein was once asked what the most difficult instrument to play was. He responded saying, "Second fiddle. I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find someone who plays second violin with enthusiasm is difficult. Yet, if no one plays second fiddle, we have no harmony."

So that's the P-L-A-Y of how to play together, let's now turn and look very briefly at the individual instruments involved in a typical band.

## Drums

*Q: What do you call someone who hangs around with musicians?*

*A: A drummer.*

If you're a drummer you have to keep a **STEADY** pulse throughout the music. Drummers need to lay down the foundations with strong timekeeping, so practice by playing along to a song or album, and by rehearsing regularly with a metronome. This will help highlight any areas of weakness. You can improve your timing by learning to count the subdivisions of the beat: dividing the beat up and counting the "1-and-2-and-3-and-4's" in your heads as we drum. Learning to be rock steady will provide a fantastic foundation for the rest of the band to build on.

Then there's the **SOUND** you make. It has a lot to do with the caliber and tuning of the drums you're using, but regardless of the quality of your gear, how the drums are played is how the sound is produced. If you're careless and hit the snare in different areas, each snare hit will sound different, which will result in a lack of crisp consistency to the overall sound. Practice slowly, concentrating on hitting drums in the centre with consistent velocity, being aware and in control of the dynamic balance between all parts of the drum kit.

Lastly there's the issue of **SENSITIVITY**. Great drummers are sensitive drummers - responding to the musical dynamic, the worship leader and the Holy Spirit. It's hard to stay focused on your sound and timing at the same time as being relaxed and open, but it's what makes all the difference. When you're practicing try playing along to a song with a 'feel' that inspires you, which you can then try to emulate. Play a simple beat and sit on it, don't change the rhythm, and try to make the beat 'feel' good.

## Bass

*Q: How many bass players does it take to change a light bulb?*

*A: None; the piano player can do it with his left hand.*

The bass is a very powerful instrument, using the lowest and most powerful sonic frequencies. Consequently great TONE is essential. Spend time getting a sound that you like and make sure it works best with the rest of the band. The tone controls on the bass and the amplifier are your best friends, and watch out for moments when you need to be delicate and moments when you need to play with more attack and purchase on the string.

Secondly, timekeeping. This is more often associated with drummers, but it's just as important for the bass player to keep excellent TIME. It is essential to 'lock-in' with the drummer's rhythm, not just relying on them, but taking responsibility for your own timekeeping. Once a solid sense of time is established, then the rhythm section can truly come to life. Chris Wood, a leading Jazz bassist, puts it like this, "The best grooves have conversations going on, like little subtleties that kick them up to the next level and add excitement. Simplicity is what makes you tap into that, because when you leave space, you listen... When you hear what everyone else is doing you can answer them."

Finally you bass players have got to have good TASTE. Flea, the bass player for the Red Hot Chili Peppers once said, "Play every note like it's your last." Don't be afraid of keeping it simple and just playing root notes with blistering precision. When you're rehearsing try and find the best and most tasteful part to play in the context of the song. Make every note count.

## Keys

*"My mum bought my dad a keyboard for his birthday.*

*A few weeks later, I asked how he was doing with it.*

*"Oh," said my mum, "I persuaded him to switch to the clarinet."*

*"How come?" I asked.*

*"Well," she answered, "Because with a clarinet, he can't sing..."*

Your task is to listen to where you can fit in to the overall sound and mix of the other instruments making good choices to SELECT the right sounds and parts. Don't overplay: play what is necessary. For example, playing the bass line or melody line might clash with other lead instruments. In rehearsals, you should think carefully, make notes, talk with the other melody instruments and listen to the vocals, so that we select the right path for the journey through the song. Allow the melody to breathe.

Secondly, learn how to master your instrument, switching quickly between your presets and parameters. You've got a lot of sounds at your disposal, and you can influence the style of a song in endless ways. The danger with all of these sonic possibilities is losing a sense of focus, so develop your SKILL in understanding the sounds you are using for each song or section.

Lastly, good keyboardists SUPPORT what is going on in the rest of the band. Listen to the electric guitarist and support each other musically. While one of you might choose a more rhythmic pattern, the other might focus on a more melodic line. Or if the electric guitarist is playing high up the fret-board then the keys will perhaps be more effective lower down the octave range. The relationship between the keyboards and the other melody instruments is as crucial to the band as the relationship between the drums and bass.

## Electric Guitar

*Q: How many guitar players does it take to change a light bulb?*

*A: Twelve. One to change the bulb and eleven to say they could do it better.*

You're a powerful addition to a band, adding melodies and rhythms, shaping dynamics and ambience. It is easy for you to dominate the band so think about the space you create as well as where to play. Think about the VIBE the instrument is creating. Is it adding emotion, or anticipation? Is it creating a sense of energy or majesty?

Electric guitarists need to be able to play two instruments: your guitar and silence. Don't give into the temptation to play too much rather than selecting the part that will really help. Don't 'noodle' through the song ineffectively - playing endless riffs that go nowhere. And watch your VOLUME too, because we all know that you turn it up when you think nobody's listening.

Get a good VARIETY of great sounds by learning to master your guitar, amp and effects. You might want to start with three basic sounds: a 'clean' tone for verses, something more distorted for the chorus and then something special that you reserve for taking it to '11' in those Spinal Tap moments. Always be thinking about what the song needs rather than what you want to play.

## Solo Instruments

*Q: Why can't gorillas play the trumpet?*

*A: They're too sensitive.*

Whatever instrument you play you need to check the TUNING before you start. This is particularly true of melody instruments - especially if yours is the sort that is affected by temperature. Orchestras always tune up right before playing a concert, because in the time between their warm-up and the performance the air in the concert hall will have altered in temperature and humidity, changing the tuning. Invest in a good quality electronic tuner to make it easier to tune to the same frequency as the other members of the band.

Melody instruments should think about adding TEXTURE to the sound. Often long held notes can sound amazing and change the dynamic to a verse. Equally playing a fast, driving melodic riff can input real energy to a section of the song. Melody instruments such as strings add depth and beauty to an arrangement, which is why they are so enduring. To get the most out of how they are used, focus on complimenting the song rather than dominating it.

The most common temptation you melody instrumentalists face is to overplay. But when the instrument is used to compliment and enhance the TEAM, the music goes to a whole new level. Don't be afraid to keep it simple and to step back from some songs in order to be more effective in others.

## Church Organ

*Q: What's the difference between an organist and a terrorist?*

*A: You can negotiate with a terrorist...*

Organists don't need to be afraid of CHANGE. The organ has often been on the cutting edge of change in the church, from the music of Bach and Handel, to the soul organ of the gospel music movement. Today, the organ sound offers an incredible resource to support the band. If used properly, it can undergird and add great depth and power. Don't be afraid of changing how you play the instrument.

The organ is designed as a solo instrument, and as a result covers almost every audible frequency. But when you're playing with others, less is more. COLLABORATION is key. The sonic landscape is shared between the other instruments in the mix, and you need to work carefully with the worship leader, keyboards, bass and electric guitars. It might be that for more hymn-like songs, the organ plays a more central role, while for others it might sit out completely, or subtly undergird. For older instruments, tuning can also be an issue, and it's worth investing in regular servicing so that the organ is well maintained.

You also will need to learn to adapt to the CHORD-based song structure. Organ music is heavily complex and therefore rightly dependent on classical score. However, as most contemporary bands use a much simpler musical structure, it is worth investing your time in learning to adapt to this model on the organ. You might have to think more harmonically and transpose where necessary, not being afraid to step out and extemporize. The songs may seem simple, but simplicity is an art form that in practice is complex to deliver well, but one that adds great beauty to corporate worship.



## Vocalists

Q: How many singers does it take to change a light bulb?

A: One. They hold the bulb and the world revolves around them.

Deciding and knowing your vocal PARTS is very important for any vocalist. Singers add tone and texture, adding colour to the main voice. Harmony is the ideal way to do this - such as singing a 3rd below or above the melody (E in C major) or 5th (G in C major). Think about choosing a harmony line that works well with the melody rather than gets in the way. Often the best harmonies are the ones that stay consistent. If in doubt, don't be afraid of sticking to the melody, or of singing nothing at all in certain sections.

'PHRASING' is the way vocalists use the diction and tone of their singing voice to add to the dynamics of the part, this is really important. You'll need to lock in to how the main vocal line is being sung, while being careful not to stray away from being a support voice. It requires both sensitivity and boldness to do this, as well as an ability to understand how your voice relates to the microphone you're using. Learn to master your mic technique by spending time practicing both on our own and with a microphone, listening to how our voice works with different techniques.

Singers are unique in that they have an instrument that has been created by God, and not mankind. And because you're often at the front and visible it's important that you model PASSIONATE, heartfelt worship with the way you sing. Of course you need to be yourself, but at the same time make sure that you're not getting so intense and worried about the parts that you stop enjoying yourself and worshipping God. If the vocalists look like they're miserable and not having any fun, this will be quickly picked up by the congregation. But if you model authentic worship, people will follow.

## Sound Engineering

*Q: How many sound engineers does it take to change a light bulb?*

*A: One... Two... One... Two...*

You've got to get a **FOCUSED** sound out of the band, and the better they get so you have to improve as well. Master your set-ups and make the experience relaxing for the team. Sound checks should be run with confidence and gentle authority as you work through each instrument to get the best out of the specific feed. Focus on each instrument's frequency individually and find the best place for them in the mix. A mix that lacks focus will always sound messy, but a mix that is well crafted and thoughtfully constructed will add life and colour to the worship.

You get to lay a solid **FOUNDATION** that enables the congregation to worship. The engineer has great power and therefore great responsibility to lead worship with your mix. If it's too loud, the congregation will be overwhelmed and won't sing, but if it's too quiet, they may feel uncomfortable about others hearing them and they won't sing either. Mixing for a worship time is different to mixing for a gig or performance as the music in itself is not the goal, but rather the aim is to enable worship. Therefore, find the sweet spot that releases the people to worship, allowing the room, the people and the musicians to work together.

Finally, don't think of yourself as being separate to the band, but rather as an extension of the band, with the same vision, goal and heart. Get **FAMILIAR** with the different members of the team and their equipment so that you can build on their strengths. Immerse yourself in the songs and be aware of what each instrument is doing at different times, anticipating the different sections and parts and being able to compliment and enhance what the band is

doing. For instance, if a song starts with an opening guitar riff, be ready to highlight that instrument at the right moment.

So, we've looked at Practicing, Listening, Arranging and Yielding, and some of the different considerations for the various instruments that typically make up a band. As someone once said, "You can't whistle a symphony on your own. You need an orchestra to play it." In playing together as a band, time must be invested in appreciating the strengths and uniqueness of each musical contribution. This understanding and awareness is essential in playing great music. When individuals join together as one, something special can be accomplished.

We end with the words of the theologian Chris Cocksworth, who says this, "Together, in time and in tune, the people of God can play the score of God's mercy, truth and goodness to a world battered by its own noise but starved of the sound of God."

## Pray

Father, we thank you for the amazing gift of music. We pray you'd bind us together in time and in tune, so that we'd fill the world with the sound of your mercy, truth and goodness. Let everything that has breath, Praise the Lord! Amen.

## Next

*Take time to pray for people, then gather people by instrument (if you have enough people) and discuss the three practical recommendations outlined above.*