

The Right Tunes at the Right Time

Five tips to weave together a great worship set

By Brent Helming

Here are some quick yet helpful tips to keep in mind when preparing your next worship set.

1) Build on a theme

Most services or small group meetings have teaching times that are based on a particular theme. If your pastor is preaching on God's Worth or the Centrality of Christ, then design your set with those ideas in mind. Our goal as worship leaders is to help people connect with the theme of the message in their worship.

Here's a sample worship set based on the above themes. I've included the keys that I would play each song in as well.

- G Forever (Chris Tomlin)
- G Hallelujah, Your Love is Amazing (Brenton Brown/Brian Doerksen)
- G Treasure (Jared Anderson)
- D Rock of My Salvation (Brent Helming)
- D Be the Centre (Michael Frye)
- G You Are Worthy of My Praise (David Ruis)

It's important to remember that the set doesn't have to revolve around a single theme. In the example above, there are several related themes: God's love and God's ultimate Worth and Centrality in our lives. There is a progression here that evolves as the themes build upon each other and actually support on another.

It's important to remember not to include too many themes in one set since this may lead to confusion and thus hinder worship.

2) Group Songs by Similar Key

Grouping songs together that are in the same key or a corresponding key (such as G and D, as in the sample above) will help the congregation stay within the flow of worship. Too many changes in the musical key can create a disjointed feeling and pull attention away from the focus of worship.

3) Establishing a Flow

Many times the difference between good worship and great worship depends upon how well the set flows together. Do the songs seem to blend together and enhance one another, or is there an obvious start and stop feel with "dead air" between the songs?

One of the best ways to enhance the flow of the set is to work out musical transitions between songs. Some common transitions include:

- a) Big “Las Vegas” ending – The band gives a big finale finish and as the cymbals are ringing out, you then kick into the next song.
- b) Tempo changes – End a fast tempo song by repeating the chorus at the slower tempo of the next song. When moving from a slow song to a faster song, you can play the chorus or verse of the faster song at the slower tempo before launching into the faster tempo.
- c) Changing keys – Change keys in one song in order to set up the next song (“We Exalt You” in G with a key change to A in order to play, “You are My King”).

4) Balance Between “the Standards” and Newer songs

It is usually a good idea to have a mixture of the standard favorites (“You are Worthy of My Praise”, “I Stand in Awe”, “Hallelujah Your Love is Amazing”, “Isn’t He?”) and newer songs in the set.

The older songs will help to bring a familiarity to worship (familiarity equals participation). The newer songs will help to bring a fresh breath of the Spirit.

5) Dependence on God

There is nothing that can or will ever replace our desperate need for God to breathe life into our worship. We can devise the greatest worship sets in the world, with the best blend of songs, sung in all the right keys, and woven together masterfully with crafted musical transitions; yet without the sweet intervention of our Lord and Savior, all we’re left with is a bunch of songs.

Brent Helming has been involved in Pastoral and Worship Ministry for over 16 years. He has traveled both nationally and internationally leading worship and teaching at Churches and conferences. He has written numerous worship songs such as “Your Beloved”, “Jesus Lead On” and “God of All Splendor”, along with an interactive work book titled “Hot Tips for Worship Leaders”. Brent is currently developing a Coaching and Consulting Ministry for Worship Ministries and Leaders (WorshipDevelopment.com) and lives with his son in Escondido, CA.