

the INSTRUMENTAL SOLO IN WORSHIP

One Sunday, while leading a rehearsal for that morning's service, I turned to the guitarist and said, "After the second chorus, I want you to take a guitar solo for eight bars." At this my drummer jokingly spoke up, "Hey, how come he gets all the solos? I want to worship, too!"

We had a good laugh, but the comment does open up the discussion on instrumental solos in the worship setting. Many of us, having been bred on a rock 'n' roll mentality, are used to hearing instrumental solos during a song. And since much of the contemporary worship music today is modeled after contemporary pop music, doesn't it make good sense to incorporate guitar solos, drum machines, loops, etc as well? But there is still a large contingent who are opposed to the idea of instrumental solos in a worship service. They believe we run the risk of taking people's focus off of God and placing it on the soloist.

OBSERVING VS. PARTICIPATING

There is a common misconception that if the worship leader or congregation is not singing, people have stopped worshipping. Not so. An instrumental passage or solo is a great time for a worshiper to meditate on God without having to concentrate on lyrics (or worse yet, read them from an overhead screen).

Lyrics have long been given the credit for establishing the mood and subject matter of a song. However, the freedom of the listener to experience a musical mood in his or her own way is not only a gift from God but can also be seen as an expression of worship to God. I often have worshipful moments when listening to instrumental music without knowing if the composer or instrumentalist is a believer. It is my own experience of that music that allows it to become worshipful.

Allowing your musicians occasional breaks where they are allowed to solo not only gives them a chance to express themselves musically but allows your congregations some "free" time to meditate, which is both Biblical and essential in our times of worship.

WHO GETS THE GLORY?

Is there a chance that an instrumental soloist may lose sight of the moment and begin to accept the adulation due to God? Sure, but no more so than a singer. This is an individual responsibility that cannot necessarily be controlled by the simple arrangement of a song. Whether the soloist is a singer or a guitarist, it is our spiritual leadership and their spiritual maturity that help determine the heart of the moment.

I spent time visiting a church in Kiev one year. They were featuring me as a guest soloist on trumpet for the week, and I was thrilled to learn that their musicians were indeed very fine players. The stage in their auditorium, however, was too small for the number of musicians playing. This meant that the second keyboardist was forced to set up behind the curtain, out of sight from the audience and to most of us on stage. During worship services I would be in the spotlight and in direct contact with the enthusiasm and admiration of the audience. They were worshipful, to be sure, but also very appreciative of the effort by all the musicians, myself included. Then, one night, I happened to catch a glimpse of the second keyboardist out of the corner of my eye. This

young 20-year-old girl was behind the curtain and, at this time, no one else was looking at her, only me. There she was, right hand on the keyboard, left hand in the air, mouth open and singing loudly, eyes closed and body jumping to the beat, wholeheartedly worshipping her King. It didn't matter to her at all whether anyone was looking; she was truly playing to an "audience of One." I've heard that phrase a million times in Christian circles, but never before had I seen it displayed so visibly.

Here I was in the spotlight, receiving so much adulation, and I suddenly had a picture of what I might look like if I were set up behind the curtain. I could just see myself: sitting down, looking a bit bored, going through the motions, probably upset that I was back there out of the "fun zone." It was, to be sure, very humbling. Since then, I have tried to always be aware that whether I am accompanying a singer or taking a solo, it is the presence of God that is truly the focal point of the moment.

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Tony Guerrero is a music director at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, CA and for Promise Keepers, as well as being an internationally recognized contemporary jazz recording artist. www.tonyguerrero.com.

