

## **Less is more**

One of the things we quickly understand as a musician is the power you can create by filling the stage with sound; of creating a mighty wall of music that stirs the bones of the whole congregation. On the other hand, we can sometimes lose track of the power of simplicity and silence. This is all about remembering the power that comes from showing a little bit more restraint in what we are playing and how to learn when to play and when not to.

### **Getting carried away**

One of the first things you do as you gain proficiency on your instrument is to start to branch out in terms of notes, chords and lines that you can play or sing. This can be an exciting time in your development as a musician, as you start to learn to play things you'd never thought you'd be able to pull off. This can also be its own curse as you start to play stuff not because the song needs it, but because you can.

There's been plenty of times in church where I've been guilty of this and it's something to be aware of. It's often good to question why you're playing the part that you're playing. Could you be serving more by playing less?

### **Being nervous**

Nothing causes you to overdo something than being nervous. For some people it's talking loads, for others it's over planning something to OCD levels but for musicians it often means filling the space with loads of notes. One of the causes of overplaying is feeling nervous on stage and it's hard to hold yourself back from playing loads more than you need to or playing in absolutely every part of every song in a service.

The trick to noticing this is to think whether you play as many notes in the song when you're practicing at home. If you notice that you're playing more on stage, just taking a deep breath and trying to calm down a little when you're performing. It's also a good idea to get comfortable for the parts of the song where you're not playing. Some instruments like drums or bass may find themselves playing through most of a service but if you play guitar, keys or sing, you need to be comfortable dropping out every now and then to create some space. You need to be happy standing on stage whilst not playing.

## Tips to think about

Overplaying doesn't affect everyone in the worship band. Some more mature heads amongst the team will have learned some of these lessons a long time ago. Some people are less affected by nerves and won't feel the need to overplay. Some people won't get that heady rush that comes from playing as complicated and intricate lines as they possibly can do so if you don't feel that this is a big problem for yourself, don't worry, but there are still things to think about in terms of this area of your playing.

### 1. Cultivate a quality sound with your instrument

The easiest way to play less is when your instrument makes a pleasing sound. Sitting down at a grand piano, you can make beautiful music with the smallest of gestures; a simple chord played once and held on can sound lovely. It's when you're playing a lesser quality instrument that you really have to work to make it sound good. I'm not advocating that we all need to go out and buy £1000s of new equipment but changing your strings and cleaning your electric or acoustic guitar on a regular basis can really have an effect on the sound. Getting the right sound on your amp or pedals is vitally important. Changing the strings on your bass even just once a year can spruce up your sound. Tuning or changing the heads on your snare and toms can make your kit sound better (even polishing your cymbals properly can improve the sound). Warming up your vocals before a service can help. Spending time getting the right program on your keyboard (or exploring all the sounds it's capable of) can broaden your musical pallet. Spend time making your instrument sound good and you won't have to work as hard when you're playing it to make a pleasant sound.

### 2. Learn your chords and inversions

Another good way of making your parts sound better without filling them out so much is by using cleverer chord voicings. Are you just using root position with your chords? Do you know any altered chords (using 7ths or playing Asus4 or Aadd9 instead of just A)? Have you tried using a capo further up the neck and working out how to voice things there? If this stuff is sounding kind of familiar but I lost you with some of the more technical language, then you need to go and find some resources to help you understand inversions and altered chords better. If you get stuck, just ask and I can try and point you in the right direction.

### 3. Understand when you should and shouldn't play

One of the best things you can do as a musician is to listen, listen and then listen some more. Find some tracks by quality worship bands and listen to the person playing your instrument. What parts do they play and what parts of the song are they silent for? What kind of parts are they playing (chords, single notes, melodies, harmonies)? When do they take things up or down in terms of dynamics and complex parts? The more you listen, the more understanding you're going to get of your instrument and what kind of things it's capable of.