

# Acoustic vs Electric

One of the great things about working together in a large band for worship is that the sound you can create together is huge. If you start to add in vocal harmonies, more than one guitarist, extra keyboards or even work with backing tracks, each member of the band on stage doesn't have to play a lot to really fill out the space and create an amazing sound together. It can sometimes be easy to take this for granted and no more so than when you're required to play in a more acoustic setting for a smaller meeting or if you're really struggling to get a full band together for the worship on a Sunday morning. This is all about some of the pitfalls in playing acoustically and some tips on how to cope in a smaller setting without having to compromise on quality.

## Song choice

MTV's unplugged series has been a great showcase over the years for artists to do acoustic versions of their tracks but, if you've listened to any of those recordings, you'll have definitely noticed that not all great tracks translate to acoustic instruments with equal success. The same can be said of worship songs in church. Some of the songs that are in regular circulation on a Sunday morning sound fantastic if they're done acoustically, but some really don't work as well.

The trick is to work out what's driving the song and what will be missing if it's done more quietly. If the drums are a huge part of the track, then dropping them out will have a big impact. If the song relies on loads on an electric guitar riff, keyboards or backing tracks, you may also struggle to adapt for a smaller setting without radically rethinking the arrangement or how you play it.

Songs that do tend to work are ones where the acoustic guitar can drive the rhythm and make up for some of the missing drums. Others that lend themselves well to an acoustic setting are songs that are already on the more reflective side and don't need as much 'umph' to work.

Try a few different things but always bear in mind that if you're really struggling to make the track work, maybe it might be the song choice itself.

## Instrumentation

Another big factor is how you rework the job of each instrument in a smaller band. Each instrument takes on a slightly different role acoustically and understanding how it changes in a different setting is vital to creating a great track. Here are some of the musical factors you need to think about:

**Rhythm** – normally this comes from the 'rhythm section' of the bass and drums but in an acoustic setting, this radically changes. If you have something like a Cajon or Djembe, great, but the main driving force in an acoustic setting without drums is the acoustic guitar or keyboard rhythms. The guitar or keys player needs to be really on the beat and the rhythmic pattern of the chords needs to be able to carry the song without the drums there. If your guitarist or keyboard player isn't locked in and driving the song, you're going to have problems timing-wise.

**Chords** – again this is going to come from the guitar and keys but it's worth noting that filling out the chords and harmony is more important than filling out a top melody

line on the keys or playing a lead line on the guitar. That's not to say that you can't play melody lines or guitar solos, but that you need to understand that in a smaller setting, dropping out one of the chordal instruments has a much bigger impact on the sound than doing it with a full band. If it sounds too empty when you try to play a melody, maybe sticking with the chords would be a better choice. Use your ears and listen for what each instrument is doing and the effect of their part on the overall sound.

**Bass** – when you're playing in a smaller band, the rhythm you are playing on the bass is more important than in a bigger setting so you need to bear this in mind. If your part is slightly off whilst playing behind a drummer, or if you are playing a part that is complex rhythmically, the drummer usually covers in up on stage and it's not as noticeable. In an acoustic band, your part really reinforces the acoustic guitar and piano rhythms, so you really need to listen to what they are doing and make sure your part compliments their parts and doesn't clash.

**Vocals** – this doesn't change as drastically in an acoustic environment but there are a few things you need to think about. The first is whether you need to adapt the way you sing in a smaller setting. A vocal line that might sound great when you belt it out over a full worship band might come across as a bit overpowering when you sing it over a delicate acoustic guitar. It's also harder to reach high notes when you are singing at a quieter volume so always make sure the key still works if you take the dynamics of the track down.

**Leading worship** – there are a few changes you need to think about in a smaller setting as a worship leader. Usually the drums play a pivotal role in taking the dynamics of the track up and down. They can also help the transition between parts of the song using drum fills, which often makes the job of worship leader slightly easier. In a smaller setting, without as many instruments to lead the song through different sections, the worship leader needs to really know where the song is going and be able to communicate this to the rest of the band and the congregation. I've found a little bit more preparation with the band in terms of talking about the structure for each song before the service helps. It's also good to have very clear signals that the rest of the band can follow too.

### **Listening practice**

Lastly if you're still unsure about how worship music translates from a big, full band arrangement down to a small acoustic band, go and do some listening to find out. Find some good acoustic versions of worship songs that you know and really listen to the person playing your instrument. What kind of part are they playing? How is it different from what you'd normally play? Is the arrangement different? The more you listen and expand your knowledge, the better your playing will be as a result.