

Starting a Youth Worship Band from the Ground Up

By Jason Huffman

Introduction and About the Author

My name is Jason Huffman. I have been doing youth ministry for the most part since I graduated from high school and have spent a very large portion of that time developing young musicians into worship-leading bands. Music is an incredible gift, and there is something amazing about seeing students show excitement about learning to play their instrument or sing in church.

My musical background is pretty diverse. I had nearly two years of piano lessons in 5th and 6th grade, but never really disciplined myself or applied what I was learning. Therefore, I know the notes on a piano, but I am not a piano player. I played the alto saxophone in school band from 6th grade to 10th grade and dropped out to pursue other interests, but then picked it up again when I began playing the bari sax when I was in college. In my 11th grade year of high school, I had a friend who played drums in a rock band and I decided that it would be fun to play drums. I began learning drums and after graduation from high school started playing the guitar. While in college, I played drums for a weekly worship service on campus. As some band members graduated, we recruited a new drummer and I moved to bass (since it's very similar to the guitar). Also while in college, I worked in a music shop where we sold and serviced all types of musical instruments and sound equipment.

After college, I began my first full-time youth ministry position and began working with the worship band they had in place. I've been working with youth bands at churches ever since. Through graduations, ego issues, and having students move away or change churches, I've seen lots of musicians come and go into these bands and have had to learn to adapt to these changes.

I say all of that to say this—I play a little bit of everything and not a lot of anything. I have not really developed my craft on any particular instrument. I consider myself to have a pretty average knowledge of music and music theory. I'm not really proficient at sight-reading music and am more comfortable with chords than I am with notes on a page. A lot of what I've learned has come from watching other bands and other musicians and seeing how they do what they do.

I wanted to write this book to help those (musicians and non-musicians) who were interested in starting a worship band in their youth group. I've talked with several people who wanted to do this, but just weren't sure where to start. Through the victories I've had and the many, many pitfalls and setbacks, God has shown me a little bit about these wonderful creatures called teenagers and how I can help them develop and grow into musical servants.

While music is music, worship music is distinctively different from music that is not written for the glory of God. In addition to learning musical principles, this book will examine some of the different issues that face young musicians who want to use their talents in worship. I hope this book helps you in your journey to develop young musicians into ushers in the throne room of God.

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Chapter 1: Where Do You Find Musicians?

At the National Youth Workers Convention several years ago, I got the privilege of hearing one of their keynote speakers. This man with a thick British accent who was a youth pastor in the Church of England began to tell the story of a young man who had been involved in his youth program. This young man had learned to play the guitar but was reluctant to play the guitar in the youth group meetings. One reason he did not play was because there was another student who regularly played guitar, so he didn't see the need to play. So, one day the youth pastor conspired with the regular guitar player to put his arm in a fake cast and a sling and tell the reluctant guitarist that he had to play guitar at youth group because the regular player had broken his arm. So the young man began his time as a worship leader in the youth group. His name was Matt Redman—one of the most prolific worship songwriters of the last ten years.

Although this was an exceptional and funny story, it brings home the fact that there is no real right or wrong way to recruit musicians. Finding musicians is the first obvious step to starting a worship band. Here are some things to consider regarding finding musicians?

- Do you have any musicians in your youth group?
- What instruments do they play (remember, the voice is an instrument)?
- What styles of music do they play?
- Can they or will they play worship music?
- Are your musicians friends with other musicians who may not be a part of your youth group? (Should the band be an outreach tool?)

Do you have any musicians in your youth group?

Obviously, any quest to find something in particular begins right where you are. Depending on the size of your youth group, you may or may not be sitting on an untapped talent pool of closet musicians. One of the easiest ways to find out if a student is musical or not without being too obvious is to play an instrument yourself for the group. Typically, if you have students who are musical, one or two of them will come up and ask about your instrument and your experience and they might interject, "Well, I play the guitar, too." If you are not a musician yourself you may want to bring someone in who can lead worship for the kids at a few of your meetings and pique their interest in having music as a part of worship. (For non-musicians, check out the chapter later in this book).

Once you have some discussion started about a student's musical experience, try to find out how serious that student is? Did the kid get a drum set for Christmas two years ago and it just collects dust in his room and gives him something to trip over? Or, is this the next Buddy Rich who practices every time his folks leave the house? This can be a delicate conversation, but don't put any pressure on the student. One way to find out how serious the student is about music, is to ask what kind of music he plays on his instrument. If they get really specific about what they tell you, then chances are they are pretty serious. But if he or she speaks with a lot of generalized answers, then it may be an indication that your prospect's drum set is little more than an overgrown paperweight.

Another way to find out how serious a student is would be to invite her to rehearsal. If she is fairly experienced and comfortable with her voice or instrument and her schedule

has time for a musical meeting, she should have no problem committing to come to a rehearsal or two. Since this is a start-up venture, hopefully, you've scouted out a few more mini-Mozarts who are willing to show up and see if they can make some music. An invitation to rehearsal, though, will probably separate the serious students from the ones who merely own their instruments.

What instruments do they play?

After you've discovered you have musicians among you, the next consideration is what instruments they play. Obviously there are particular instruments that lend themselves to modern worship music (i.e. guitar, bass, drums, keyboard, hand percussion), and others that can be a little more tricky (i.e. symphonic or marching band instruments, bagpipes, glockenspiel). Most wind instruments are built in different keys (Eb, Bb, etc.). Therefore, pieces written for these instruments have to be transposed from the original key into the key of that instrument (This is why band directors will warm up with a concert Bb scale. Trumpets, clarinets, and tenor saxes are playing in C, while alto and bari saxes are playing in G and flutes, being a C, instrument, are playing in Bb). If the prospect plays one of the instruments in the former list, see about moving forward with getting her to meet with other musicians. If they do play instruments that are more for marching band or orchestra, carefully explain to them that right now you want to start with a simple team but as the team grows and improves, you want to add more instruments. Once you have a core established (drums, bass, guitar or keyboard), then you can look at adding horns.

If your horn players are trumpet or saxophone players, technology makes writing music or parts for them, fairly easy if you have a little bit of musical background. A software program such as Finale will allow you to write a piece of music by selecting the instrument part you are writing (i.e. Bb trumpet, Eb alto sax), then select the concert key you will be playing in (whatever key the guitars and basses are playing in) and it will automatically transpose to the new key for the horn player. Then you can write the music out yourself and it will play it back note by note so you can hear it. Or, you can get a midi controller keyboard (available for around \$120) and play the part on the keyboard and it will write the music as you play. This takes a little bit of skill, but it's much easier than writing out the notes by hand. You may not be able to do all of your songs for horns, but it helps to write music in horn-friendly keys (Bb, C, F, Eb), especially if you have younger players. The problem is that with school band programs, you will probably have more trumpet and sax players than you will have guitar and drum players, so it's nice to have some options for them. You may also want your student to learn her scales really well in various keys and allow her to tinker with writing her own parts by ear. If your horn player is unable to play on every song, give them a rhythm instrument, like a tambourine, cowbell, or a hand drum to make her feel like a part of the band even when she's not playing her horn.

Another issue to consider is with percussionists. Playing the suspended symbol, the triangle, and even the snare drum in a symphonic band is different from playing a drum set because a drum set incorporates the feet, which is the most difficult part of learning to play a drum set. If your percussionist has never played a drum set, you may still be able to use her in your group. We will discuss that in the chapter on "What Set-Up Should You Use". While your student may not be ready for a drum set yet, you may

want to allow the student to come practice on a drum set to get used to incorporating the feet. There are several interactive “teach yourself to play” drum lesson programs that have DVDs with them. If you are not a drummer yourself, passing one of these on to your young drummer may be a good place to start.

What styles of music do they play?

As you are having these initial conversations with these students about their musical interests, another factor to consider is the style of music they play. While music is music, part of the goal of worship is to lead everyone in worship with songs and styles that appeal to a larger audience. If your student is used to playing speed metal, punk, or even country, all the time, playing in a worship band may require him to change his approach to his playing. More often than not, with a little coaching, these students will have the ability to blend in with your band. Be patient with them and work with the different members to play to each others’ styles. If a student is not able to blend with the rest of the group, it will be frustrating for everyone. An example of this is with the bass player and drummer (if you have both). In a typical band, these two instruments will play off of each other, making the bass players pattern sync up with the drummers bass drum and snare. If the young drummer is overplaying (as they often tend to do), encourage him to listen to the bass player’s groove and follow it. Maybe have him play a few bars with the bass player on the bass drum without any cymbals or snare. We will also address this more in the chapter on set-up.

Can they or will they play worship music?

As we all know, the goal and purpose of worship music is completely different from other types of music, regardless of style. While most music is written for the purpose of speaking to the listener and provoking thoughts and emotions in the listener’s heart and mind, worship music is written to prompt the listener to praise God in various ways. This may be through verbal confession, expressing one’s need for God, or simply praising God for who he is and what he’s done. Also, most worship music is written to be sung in a group setting, employing vocal skills and techniques that average singers will be able to mimic. Therefore, the job and goal of the worship musician is not to display his greatness at his instrument, which if improperly done could be extremely distracting, but rather to perfectly complement the song and the other musicians in a way that makes other want to join in with what he is doing. Ultimately, he is playing for an audience of one. Is there a place for prowess on an instrument or voice? Absolutely! Psalm 33 tells the reader to “play skillfully” to the Lord. God is worthy of our excellence in everything we do. I Corinthians 10:31 says that we should do all things to the glory of God—especially play worship music. However, if your drummer only wants to prove how fast he can play his double-bass pedal, or your keyboard player has to put a big arpeggio on every chord, or your electric guitar player wants to shred on every song, the focus of the worship experience will be on the players and not God.

Keeping this in mind, young musicians should be instructed early on about the purpose and goal of being in a worship band. However, you can still meet students where they are. If they don’t listen to Third Day or know who the David Crowder Band is, that’s okay. These are not requirements for being in a worship band. There was a time when I believed that youth band members should be the crème de la crème of the youth

group because after all, they are leaders. They do lead other students in worship on a regular basis. But, they are young and they are teenagers. In a compilation of his collective works, former president and founder of Youth Specialties, Mike Yaconelli writes that he doesn't believe in student discipleship. He believes in impacting students with the gospel of Christ and modeling his faith before them, but discipleship goes beyond that. The idea of following Christ over and above family and friends—even unto death—is a price that many students don't fully understand until they are older. I think he's right. Should you trust the kids in your youth band? Yes. Does she have to be the kid that is president of the Christian Club at school who calls everyone to remind them about youth group, and works three days a week after school at the local soup kitchen? Not necessarily. Meet the kids where they are and help them understand the goal and purpose of worship. Then step back and let them become a team together.

Are your musicians friends with other musicians who may not be a part of your youth group? (Should the band be used as an outreach tool?)

I put this in here as a dovetail off of the last section. Teenagers flock together, especially when they have things in common. This is especially true of young musicians. If you are able to get your band up and running with consistency and things begin to come together, you may have a few other musicians come to your meetings to see their friends play in the band. So, why not make the worship band an outreach tool? While youth bands have their draw on students, they can be a two-edged sword when used for outreach. While you may have aspiring young musicians who would love nothing more to be the next Eric Clapton to your young Yardbirds, it is critical that being in the band is not the primary motivation for them coming to youth group. Here is how I address that issue.

While band members are in the band, they are members of the youth group first and foremost. It is important that they realize they are in the band because they are in the youth group, not in the youth group because they are in the band. Should you have a young musician come to your meetings who expresses a strong desire to join the band, explain to him that you want him to come be a part of the youth program and once he's been involved for a while, you can let him start rehearsing with the band to see if it's a good fit. If the student's only motivation for coming is to get in the band, this will challenge and hopefully curb that desire and will give him a more clear understanding of what the band and the group are about. Of course, the student may turn away discouraged or even upset. However, your first priority is to the kids who are there and bringing in a band member—automatically in a position of leadership—can be disastrous if not handled properly. I made the mistake once of incorporating a new drummer too soon after our previous drummer had graduated. The young band members were eager to replace their graduated friend and had someone already lined up to fill the spot. This kid had been coming to youth group on occasion, but never really got involved. I allowed him to come play and before I knew it, the whole band started changing the lyrics of some of the Christian songs they had written and were having unsupervised concerts in the Fellowship Hall (pastor had given them a key so they could get to their equipment). When I addressed the issue with them, they got mad and left the youth group and I was left without a band. We soon started a new band with some other kids and it was a much

more pleasant venture, but I learned a valuable lesson the hard way about using the band as an avenue to get students plugged into the youth group.

While I've had some unfortunate experiences with prematurely recruiting new players, many people have had great success recruiting new students by giving them a spot in the praise band. Just be aware that putting musicians in front of the other students presents its own set of challenges. Young musicians have to deal with the ego issues of performing for other students. They also have to deal with the issue of understanding the purpose of worship music. It may be God's plan for you to be the one to bring a young musician into a relationship with Christ, but I would encourage you to approach this situation with prayerful caution before enlisting a new student.

Chapter 2: What Set-Up Should You Use?

Once you've determined who your musicians are, what instruments they play, what styles of music they play, you can begin determining the format for your worship team. Major considerations are:

- What are your set-up possibilities?
- How well do those instruments blend together?
- Can you make some changes to improve the set-up?

What are your set-up possibilities?

Few things have more impact on the overall sound of a worship band than the types of instruments that make it up. In this section, we will discuss some popular band formats and how you can utilize them, given the instruments and musicians you have available. Before we begin, let's define some terms. While many students may play guitar, there are essentially two types of guitar players. **Rhythm guitar** players know the chords and strum the chords along with the rhythm of the song. This is the style used in solo guitar singalongs. **Lead guitar** players on the other hand may be able to strum chords, but if they have been playing very long may get bored with this. The lead guitar player will typically play melodic solos at certain parts or throughout the song. Lead guitarists typically have more experience than rhythm guitar players. Another term is percussion. While the word percussion applies to all instruments that are played by striking an object with a stick, mallet or hand, it can be confusing in the way it's used. Traditional drum sets are a percussion instrument. They will have a bass drum played with one foot, a snare drum, two or three tom toms, and some cymbals. These are referred to as **drums**. In a band, though, **percussion**, typically refers to extra percussion instruments that are not part of the drum set. These would include hand drums such as djembes, cajons, congas, bongos, or items that are used with a stick such as a cowbell or timbales. A fifth term that we will define is **bass**. Most often, bass refers to a bass guitar which is a slightly larger version of an electric guitar that only has 4 (sometimes 5 or 6 on upper end models) strings that play in a very low register. A bass player will usually play the instrument through a bass amplifier but will sometimes just play through a sound system. If you do not have access to a bass player, some bands play the bass with a keyboard. Since a bass guitar uses the same bottom four notes as a guitar (E A D G), it is a fairly easy instrument for a guitar player to learn. If you have an extra guitar player, you may want to consider having one of them switch to bass. Now that we have defined some terms, let's look at some typical (and non-typical) band set-ups.

- Power Trio—This is the simplest “rock” set-up for a band. It consists of a bass, drums, and guitar (electric or acoustic). This is the format used by Green Day, Rush, and Barlow Girl, just to name a few. The guitar or bass player is usually the lead singer, but you could have someone who sings and does not play an instrument. For a young musician, playing and singing at the same time requires more skill. The main advantage to this setup is that having fewer musicians makes it easier for the musicians to play together. The major disadvantage is that the guitar is your only melodic and harmonic instrument, therefore if you want to have lead solos, your guitar player will need to be both a rhythm guitar player and lead guitar player.

- Four-Person Combo—This is the rock band format made most popular by the Fab Four themselves, the Beatles. Their set-up consisted of drums, bass, and two guitars or one guitar and one keyboard, as several of the Beatles played multiple instruments and sang. This format requires that four members rather than three play together in sync. If you have a guitar player who is comfortable playing solos, he can rock out while your other guitar player can hold down the rhythm (strumming chords with the rhythm of the song).
- Five-Person Combo—This is basically the four-person combo with an additional person. Depending on what your musicians can do, you may have drums, bass, rhythm guitar, and two lead guitars (this can get complicated with inexperienced musicians), or bass, drums, rhythm guitar, lead guitar, and a keyboard. Again, you can have one or more of your musicians sing, or have a designated vocalist who doesn't have to play.
- Acoustic setup—This approach will utilize hand percussion (djembe, cajon, conga, bongo, etc.) played around one or more acoustic guitars. This is a very common setup in youth groups for several reasons. First of all, traditional drums can drown out a guitar without a bass to fill up the bottom end (lower part of the musical spectrum). If you do not have a bass player, having your guitar player(s) play along with some percussion is a good solution. If you do have a bass player, though, this setup works even better. Also, as we discussed earlier, many percussion students will know how to play various percussion instruments that they learn in school band, but will be uncomfortable utilizing their feet to play a regular drum set. Since there is a wide range of hand drums, your percussionist can utilize her own skill set to play with the youth band rather than trying to learn to use her feet on a drum set. Another advantage of this approach is the ease of setup. The largest and most tedious item to set up in any band is the drum set. By bypassing the drum set and going with acoustic hand drums, setup time is not really an issue—especially if you have to set up and tear down every week. One final advantage is that this works great in small youth rooms that don't have room for a drum set.
- Youth Choir/Vocal Team—Don't have anyone who plays instruments? Have lots of students who sing? You may want to utilize their vocal talents and go with a choir approach. If you have a large number (app. 9 or more), you may want to go with a praise choir. If your singers are good and there is a smaller number (app. 8 or less) you may make it into a vocal praise team. What's the difference? The choir is going to be like a choir in that the result will be the sum of all the voices blending together. In a praise team, though, the smaller number of singers will have their own individual microphone. There are now many worship track resources that will have pre-recorded arrangements of worship songs both with and without the vocals that you can use for performance and leading worship.
- None of the above—It is impossible to put a label on all the possible combinations of instruments to be used in a band set-up. More than likely, your band will employ some combination of the set-ups listed above. Regardless of what instruments you have, blending sounds is critical, especially in worship. You want your worship music to have a synergy where all the pieces of the group

compliment each other. You don't want certain instruments to be distracting or draw too much attention away from the rest of the group.

How well do your instruments blend together?

One of the timeless skits on Saturday Night Live is one where the actors are portraying the Blue Oyster Cult as they laid down the studio recording of "Don't Fear the Reaper". Will Ferrell is the cowbell player and is the antagonist throughout the skit as he takes liberties with his cowbell playing. If you've never noticed the cowbell in that song, it will be impossible to miss once you've seen the skit. Have you ever wondered who decided which instruments should go with others? I mean, why are there a bass and drums in what seems like 99% of rock, country, and jazz recordings? Can you have rock music without an electric guitar? How come an organ can sound so good in a Boston or Styx song, and still sound good on Sunday morning? Well, fact or opinion, the truth is that some instruments blend well together while others typically do not. This can present some obstacles if your seedling of a worship band is a hodge-podge of seemingly unrelated instruments. So, here is some general advice to help.

- Electric guitars—Because of the amount of effects available and changes you can make to an electric guitar's sound, it is almost like a keyboard/synthesizer in terms of the sounds it can make. As a general rule, though, electric guitars will sound much better if played over a nice palette of bass and drums—particularly if it is played with lots of distortion (guitar crunch heard in most rock songs) and hard rock sounds. The reason for this is that the design of electric guitars brings out different tones from the strings than the design of acoustic guitars. Where acoustic guitars have more low-end, warmer tones, electrics tend to have more high-end, brassy tones. If you have no bass and drums and your guitar player doesn't have an acoustic guitar, see about backing off on the crunch and playing it like an acoustic. You might even look into getting an acoustic simulator pedal that will make the electric sound much more like an acoustic. If this works, all you have to worry about is the look of a Flying V playing alongside a djembe drum!
- Acoustic guitars—Because most guitar players learn on acoustic guitars, these will probably be the most common instruments in your youth program. Most students will get the guitar and either with lessons or self-teaching will learn some chords and how to strum the chords to their favorite songs on their flat-top box. The rampant number of acoustic guitars is both a blessing and a curse. Whereas two trumpets can play the same tune side-by-side in a marching band, doing that with acoustic rhythm guitars is much different. While the trumpets will have every specific note mapped out for them, the guitarists (who are probably playing off of a chord chart) might play any particular rhythm that feels natural for the two, four, or eight counts they are on that particular chord. This creates an effect I call acoustic chaos—two guitars, in tune, playing the same chord but at the same time playing completely rhythm different patterns. If both guitars are amplified through a sound system it will make the song sound muddy and disjointed as the listeners are bombarded with a barrage of mid-range tones. If you have more than one acoustic guitar, try to get them to play the same rhythms or maybe have one learn some other patterns to complement each song. Another option is to have

one of your acoustic guitars switch to bass if you don't already have one. Because a bass utilizes the bottom four notes of a guitar, it is fairly easy for a guitar player to learn.

- Drums and percussion—A common misconception about drums and percussion is “all you have to do is beat on stuff.” Therefore, lots of people, particularly teenagers, think that playing drums or percussion is an easy thing. While many skilled players work years and years perfecting their craft, rhythm instrument parts do not have to be complex. I will say that while many great percussionists are highly skilled and can do some amazing things with their instruments, a student with no experience may be able to tinker around with a hand drum and fabricate some pretty decent sounds that will compliment your worship team. The key with drums and percussion is moderation. When I first started playing drums, a friend who was “teaching” me told me, “With drums, a lot of times less is more.” As I've grown and learned, I've discovered how right he was—especially when it comes to worship music. If you have a regular drum set, make sure your drummer knows he doesn't have to play all the way through every song. Nothing controls the dynamics and texture of the song more than the drums. If you have a percussionist who plays with your drummer, make sure he is complementing the drummer, not mimicking him. For example, if you have a pair of congas, make sure your conga player isn't playing the low conga in sync with the bass drum and the high conga in sync with the snare. Use the congas to play between the notes played by the bass and snare drums. Also, make sure you don't get too many percussionists. While Santana is a fantastic band, there are some fantastic percussionists in that band. If people start wanting to play percussion too much, your band will look like (and sound like) the kindergarten rhythm band complete with finger cymbals and a triangle!
- Bass—A nice-sounding bass guitar will fit just about any genre of music. If a bass player hits her notes on time, the band is generally going to be happy. However, where guitarists and drummers tend to overplay, bass players tend to not play enough. Young bass players tend to be content just playing the bottom note of each chord. This solution can be remedied by encouraging them to learn a few scales (mainly the major and pentatonic) and then trying to incorporate them into your songs.
- Keyboards—Piano players are a luxury for most youth group bands. The biggest problem I've seen with keyboards in youth bands is dealing with various types of sheet music. Most piano players learn by taking piano lessons at a young age where they learn to play note-by-note. Most bands, though, use chords for their songs. So where a piano player may be able to play all three, four, or five keys on a keyboard to make up a G chord, she may or may not realize she is playing a G chord. Learning to chord on a piano can be a challenge for a young keyboard player. Another issue is that if you are able to get sheet music for your keyboardist, the band will generally have to follow in that key unless the keyboard has a transpose function and she knows how to use it.
- Wind instruments—We discussed wind instruments and some of the challenges they present briefly in the previous chapter about “Where Do I Find Musicians”. While Cake is known for their trumpet solos, Jethro Tull had an amazing flautist,

and The O. C. Supertones made horns a staple of their sound, these are the exception, not the rule. The major problem with young musicians playing wind instruments in a worship band has to do with transposing. For example, trumpets, tenor saxophones, and clarinets are Bb instruments. When a band director says “Let’s play the Concert Bb scale”, those instruments play in the key of C (Bb for everyone else is C for them). This poses a couple of issues when incorporating wind instruments into a youth band. First of all, the wind player will need to be proficient in playing in a number of keys to accommodate the keys played by the rest of the band. Second, the keys preferred by most guitar players (E A D G) due to the amount of open strings are not the same keys that are preferred by wind players (Bb, Eb, F). Also, unless your wind player is a prodigy, he may require charts to play from rather than being able to play his own parts by ear. Writing lead charts for wind instruments to be used in a praise band takes some skill and knowledge because charts have to be transposed. If you have access to a keyboard (and can play it) and a computer with music notation software, you can write charts for wind instruments in various keys. Then, it’s just a matter of helping their sound blend with what you are doing. (If you have a smaller youth room and group, you may want to mute your trumpet.) Another option for woodwind players is having a student learn the recorder or tin whistle. These items are extremely cheap (less than \$10) and can bring an amazing complement to a band’s sound. The drawback with these cheap instruments, though, is that they are only made in the key of C, so they will only work on songs your band plays in that key.

Can you make some changes to improve the setup?

One of the challenges of working with youth bands is not knowing exactly how many musicians you will have and what instruments they play. So, if your would-be band is a hodge-podge of random instruments, here are some things you can do fairly easily to bring more balance to your team.

- Go acoustic—one of the common issues dealing with aspiring teenage musicians is they are often drawn to the glam of a screaming electric guitar. While the electric guitar is as legitimate of an instrument choice as the next, it does not blend well in a band unless it has bass and drums to go with it. So, if you have one or two kids with the Eddie Van Halen starter kit, but can’t find other students to play bass and drums with them, encourage them to get an acoustic guitar. If he is unable to get one for himself, see about getting one for the youth program that would belong to the church but that he could use. This solves several problems. First of all, it gives the student a chance to play an instrument that blends well with or without a band. Also, if you are devoid of a drummer, you may have a student who is intimidated by a drum set, but is interested in playing djembe or some other hand drums which would fit well with the acoustic sound.
- Get some hand drums—If you don’t have a drummer or don’t have a bass player to complement your drummer, hand drums can be a quick fix. Hand drums are fairly easy to pick up, especially to an experienced percussionist, and will blend well with an acoustic guitar with or without a bass. They are also cheaper than purchasing a full drum set with hardware and cymbals and travel easily.

- Move a guitar player to bass—The bass utilizes the bottom four strings of the guitar. So, while it is played differently, it is fairly easy for a guitar player to pick up. If you want to start a group but have too many guitar players, see about having one switch to bass. Here again, you may need to purchase a bass and an amp for the youth department that your bass player can use.
- Consider a drum machine or other electronic rhythm device—If you have electric and bass guitars, but no drummer, you may want to consider a drum machine. These are available from \$100 to \$500 depending on the features you want. Most of these come with a variety of pre-programmed drum tracks that will provide a solid groove for your group to play with. You may also customize some of these tracks to fit more of what you need in your songs. Percussion background helps, but is not essential in using a drum machine.
- Schedule a “just for fun” rehearsal—For the student who is used to rockin’ out in his bedroom, playing in front of an audience can be intimidating. If you suspect one of your students may have some talent, try to get her to come to a “no pressure” jam session to see how well her talents blend with the rest of the group.

Mix it up to keep things fresh and fun.

One fun thing to do with a band is to change the setup now and then to challenge your players and to break the monotony for your youth group. After a while, the kids in the audience will get used to hearing the same songs played the same way. By modifying the setup, it will give the songs a fresh appeal. How can you do that?

- Have your electric player switch to acoustic, or vice versa. This will require very little change in what they play, but will give them a very different sound.
- Have the drummer switch to hand drums for an acoustic set every now and then.
- Change the lead instrument in the song. If your rhythm guitar player has always started and carried the song, let your keyboard player start the song and play it all the way through.
- Let your vocalists play a tambourine or other percussion device. You’ll be amazed at how much this can add to the sound.

Chapter 3: Where Do You Find Instruments?

I think we would all agree it is impossible to have a band without instruments. Likewise, it is impossible to have a musician without an instrument. Obviously a number of your budding rock stars will have their own gear—hopefully all of them will. There may be times, though, that it is in the best interest of your group to have some instruments on hand for the students to use. While musical instruments can be fairly inexpensive, many of your youth parents are already forking over plenty of money to send their students to camps, retreats, and other youth events. Anything you can do to help them with the cost of your band program will be better for everyone. In this chapter we will discuss some of these situations where the band or youth program should purchase instruments and more importantly what to look for in quality instruments of each type.

General Tips—

- Used instruments—You can buy a higher-quality used instrument for the same price as a low-quality new instrument. With the exception of drum heads, guitar strings, and vacuum tubes (for certain guitar amps), most musical instruments should not fall apart with time and should not require much regular maintenance. While that dusty pawn shop special may not be as pretty as a new one, quality is still quality and in the long run, will be a better investment.
- Be careful on the internet—While this tidbit could apply to just about any area of life, it rings especially true when purchasing musical instruments. You may get a better price online through Ebay or an online music store, but nothing can replace being able to pick up an instrument and play it, hear it, and try it out. Some websites offer guarantees and will give you time to return items if you are not satisfied.
- You get what you pay for—Whether you are shopping online or at the local mom and pop music shop, you may find some instruments that are so affordably priced, that you won't believe your eyes. But if you purchase one of these musical mark-downs, you may realize why the price was so low. When dealing with a youth budget, price will almost always be an issue. But make sure you don't sacrifice quality to save a few bucks. Buying a higher-quality instrument that will last longer will be cheaper in the long run than buying a low-quality instrument that will need to be upgraded soon.
- Keep it simple—All varieties of musical instruments are made with numerous features and options that are now available. These may be active pick-up systems for a guitar or bass, basses with extra strings, or a hybrid electric guitar that can sound like an electric or an acoustic. While these features may have their place and may be an answered prayer for veteran musicians, they will be unnecessary sources of confusion for budding players.

Drums

The most cumbersome, bulky, awkward, and tedious part of any band is the drum set. I have likened the drum set more to a piece of furniture than a musical instrument at times because of the rigorous chore required in setting it up. Sure, you can cut corners

and move the kit partially assembled, but this will expose your drums and cymbals to potential damage as they bounce around inside your vehicle and get carried through narrow doorways. The safest way to transport them, though, is disassembled and in individual cases, which is no quick task. Experienced drummers have their set-up and tear-down routines down to an art form and can constantly do it in faster time much like a NASCAR pit crew! Some drummers, though, get discouraged with this routine. Many musicians who got their start playing drums eventually switched to guitar or vocals (i.e. Stephen Tyler of Aerosmith, Dave Grohl of Nirvana-drums and Foo Fighters-guitar, Peter Dinklage of Newsboys). I am convinced that the hassle of lugging these instruments around and setting them up played at least slightly into their decisions to switch! If you want to run a kid off from your band really quick, make your drummer tote his kit up to the church for every rehearsal and worship time and of course back home again so he can practice! If you have a drummer and want to have drums in your band, a drum set is an essential purchase. So, here are some things to consider when purchasing a drum set.

Cymbals are as important as the drums. Many cost-conscious buyers will spend a large portion of their budget on drums and buy cymbals with the leftovers. This is not a good idea—here's the reason why. When a drummer is playing a drum set, she will play the high hat and ride cymbals as much or more than any of the drums. These two items are used for keeping time and are played almost constantly and therefore should be quality instruments. Another important cymbal is the crash cymbal that is used for accents and fills at various points in the songs. A kit should have at least one and/or any number of additional crash cymbals. Some beginner kits will have a cymbal called a crash-ride. This is a dual purpose cymbal that is heavy enough for keeping time like a ride, but fast and light enough to be played like a crash. These are okay if you can only afford two cymbals and stands, but generally by trying to accomplish both crash and ride sounds, the cymbal doesn't do a very good job of either one. Since cymbals are crafted from metal alloys, there is little you can do to improve or change their sound. Therefore, having quality cymbals is essential to a good overall drum set sound. I've always said you can make a cheap drum set sound good, but you can't make a cheap cymbal sound good. So, when purchasing cymbals here are some things to note. 1) Some drum companies sell cheap cymbals with their beginner package kits. Usually these cymbals are little more than shiny sheet metal. Try to avoid these cymbals. Look for cymbals manufactured by reputable cymbal makers (Zildjian, Paiste, Sabian). 2) You will get better quality cymbals for the same price if you shop for used ones. If a cymbal is not cracked or chipped, with a little cymbal polish it will have the potential of the same sound it had when it was manufactured. 3) Reputable cymbal companies have budget lines that will not break your budget. If you can't find decent used cymbals, try the bronze alloy lines from these companies such as Zildjian ZBT (Zildjian Bronze Technology), Paiste Alpha, or Sabian's B8 line. These are often sold in value packs that will put a pair of high hats, a ride, and a crash in a box set and discount it slightly.

Quality drum heads are essential. Okay, so you don't have a huge budget and now you know not to skimp on cymbals. What can you do? Well, cheap drum heads can make a professional drum set sound horrible. But good drum heads can make a cheap drum set sound great. So regardless of what you pay for your drum set, make sure you put quality drum heads on it. Remember, the heads are the only part of the drum that the stick will actually touch, so they are essential to having a good drum sound. The good

part of this is that drum heads are the cheapest part of a drum set, so you can get good heads are not that expensive by comparison. Quality heads are made by companies like Remo, Aquarian, and Evans. You should be able to supply batter heads (the part that you hit) for a whole five-piece kit for less than \$100. If you think you can afford it, or your drum set really needs it you can purchase resonant heads (the bottom part of the drum that you do not hit) that will help the sound even more. Drum heads, like guitar strings, do stretch and wear out with time as they are hit over and over with a drum stick. However, if your drummer is not too rough and doesn't play all the time (only during rehearsals and worship times), you should be able to make a set of heads last a very long time. If you can not afford to re-head your whole set, start with the most important drums—the bass and snare—then do the toms later.

Choose your drum set wisely. Now that we've talked about the importance of quality cymbals and drum heads, we can look at the actual drum set. Here are some things to keep in mind. While it may apply when purchasing an SUV or a big slice of cheesecake, when it comes to drums, bigger is not necessarily better. While it may look cool to have a double kick drum ten-piece drum set in the corner of the youth room, you will spend a lot of unnecessary money on it. Start with a basic four or five-piece kit which will have a bass drum, a snare drum, and either two or three tom-toms. Second, look for quality features in a drum set. If you can go to your local music store and examine the kit before purchasing it here are some things to look for. First, does it have sturdy, well-built hardware, or is it kind of cheesy? Remember the drums will be hit with a stick OVER AND OVER AGAIN! You don't want to skimp on hardware to save a few pennies. Second, is the finish a lacquer finish or a veneer/wrap finish? A lacquer finish means that the manufacturer stained or painted the exterior of the drum shells. This is a feature of many quality drum sets available at all ends of the market. If the finish is not a lacquer finish, it may have a veneer or a wrap finish. This is simply a sheet of laminate wrapped around the outside of a drum shell. Some upper end professional kits have wrap finishes, but these are high quality and well-made. In low end kits, the wraps can crack or peel over time exposing your drum shells to moisture (and it just looks bad). Third, look for quality woods. The most popular woods used in drum sets are mahogany, birch, and maple and the prices correspond from least to greatest respectively. Birch wood is sought for its crisp sound and quick decaying tone which makes it very desirable for recording. Maple is a louder wood and is used in the finest of drum sets available. For an introductory kit, expect birch and maple to be out of your price range. Mahogany is a less expensive but quality wood. It has many desirable acoustic properties for a smaller price than birch or maple. Many drum manufacturers offer quality mahogany drum sets for affordable prices.

Buying a guitar (electric, acoustic, or bass)—While distinctively different in their sound and design, electric guitars and basses are, well, guitars and there are some things to know to help you in your decision process. Guitars and basses are made in all parts of the world by hundreds of different companies. Almost all of these companies have upper-end, professional quality instruments as well as lower-end entry level instruments. The professional lines tend to be made in the United States, Europe, or Japan with the finest parts. As the instruments drop in price and quality, you will find they are made in places like Korea, Mexico, or even China—some with quality parts, and some with cheap

parts. One reason for the price difference is that labor is cheaper in many of these countries. So, how can you go about finding a quality instrument? Price isn't always a good indicator of quality, but more often than not, you get what you pay for. Also, do not assume that because a low-end guitar or bass is made by a famous guitar company that you are purchasing a quality instrument. Once you find an instrument that is within your budget consider the following. 1) How is the action? The action is the distance between the strings and the fret board (aka fingerboard). The closer the strings are to the fret board, the easier it is to play. If you have the luxury of checking it out first hand, you may want to pluck the strings with your fingers at each fret position to check for any bad sounds or buzzing. This is especially important on steel-string acoustic guitars since they require more finger strength than electric guitars. 2) How does the hardware look? You don't have to be an expert on musical instruments to look at the construction of something and tell if it has quality parts. Do the tuner knobs at the end of the neck look like they are well made and will stay in place? Does the bridge (the part that holds the strings in place by the playing hand) have a lot of small screws and parts that look like they will easily come out? Is the input jack (the hole where you put the instrument cable) loose or is it snug?

Electric guitar—Hopefully, if you have the next Eric Clapton in your band, he has his own electric guitar with an amp and maybe one or two stomp boxes (effects pedals to modify the sound of the guitar). However, if you have a plethora of students toting around acoustic guitars, having an electric guitar would be an easy way to broaden the sound of your band. So, if you are considering purchasing an electric guitar for your worship team, here are some things to think about.

Buying a quality electric guitar—(For a breakdown of some things to look for in a quality guitar, see “buying a guitar” section earlier in this chapter.) I used to think that since they were not designed or shaped to carry sound like acoustic guitars, that all electric guitars were essentially the same. I could not have been more wrong. While they come in all shapes and sizes and do not make much sound without their amplifiers, electric guitars are manufactured with one essential thing in mind—sound. From the type of wood used for the body, to the type of pick-ups (the magnetic coils under the strings that “pick up” the sound), to the shape of the guitar's body, all of these factors contribute to the sound of the guitar. So, what should you look for in purchasing a quality electric guitar?

There are many things you can look for when determining the quality of an electric guitar. One of those is the quality of wood. The most popular wood for electric guitars is swamp ash. Alder is another popular wood but does not have the acoustic qualities of swamp ash. Another feature is a set neck versus a bolt-on neck. Set necks are infused into the body of the guitar. The idea behind this design is that the fewer pieces used in the construction of the guitar, the better tonal resonance the instrument will have. Set necks are a feature on high end guitars and will probably not be available on any selections you may make for your youth band. Some other terms you will find tossed around in guitar shops are “hard tail”, “Floyd Rose tremolo”, “floating bridge”, and “whammy bar.” These terms refer to the set up of the guitar's bridge. A hard tail is a bridge that doesn't move. A floating bridge is part of a hard tail's design. On a Gibson-style bridge, the strings are run through a tail piece, while the floating bridge holds the

strings up off the pick-ups and body of the guitar. On a Fender Stratocaster-style design, these bridges have a tremolo. This is a device that allows the player to slightly bend the strings with the use of a “whammy bar” or tremolo bar. The strings are brought back to their original positions through some springs that are underneath the bridge in the body of the guitar. On lower end guitars of this design, frequent use of the whammy bar may cause the guitar to go out of tune. A design that became really popular with 80s rock and metal was the Floyd Rose Tremolo. This design allowed the player to lock the strings at the bridge and the nut (the small piece of plastic or bone on the headstock at the end of the strings) so that the player could be ensured that they would hold their original tuning for more psychedelic wailing on the whammy bar. If you are purchasing your guitar for a beginner or novice player, you will probably want to take the whammy bar off, if the guitar even has one. This is very simple as it just screws into place and can be removed by unscrewing it in a counter-clockwise rotation.

Another thing that sets electric guitars apart from acoustics is all the knobs. While knobs may look confusing, they are nothing complicated. Generally, there are two types of knobs on a guitar—volume and tone. There may be a volume and tone knob for each pick-up, or there may be one volume knob for all the pick-ups and separate tone knobs for the pick-ups. Switches on the guitars are pick-up selectors. So by using the pick-up selector switch in combination with the knobs your player can get numerous sounds out of one instrument.

Choosing a style of electric guitar—Since the onset of the electric guitar in the 1950s, these guitars have basically fallen into what I consider to be one of two categories—the Gibson style and the Fender style. The main determining factor in this is the guitar’s pick-ups. Traditional Fender designs (Telecaster, Stratocaster) have single coil pick-ups. This is the tone of choice for such great players as Eric Clapton, Stevie Ray Vaughn, Jimi Hendrix, and many rock, blues and country artists over the years. The tone of a single coil pickup is distinctly different from a double coil pick-up (aka. humbucker). Humbuckers were designed to eliminate the “hum” found in single coil pick-ups at high volumes. By incorporating a second coil, the noise of the magnetic coils would cancel out. This allowed for a pick-up that could be played much louder with less noise. Humbuckers are most popular in Gibson guitars like the Les Paul, SG, and hollow body jazz guitars. These are the pick-ups used in heavier rock music (Angus Young of AC/DC, Ace Frehley of KISS, Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin, Joey Kramer of Aerosmith, etc.) There are also guitars that combine the elements of both of these major styles. These guitars are called “super strats” because they have single coil pick-ups at the neck and middle positions, and a humbucker at the bridge. There are many manufacturers of quality guitars, but you will find one of the three above pick-up configurations for the basic sound.

One important thing to remember with guitars is that a lot of the sound of the guitar comes from the amp as well as any effects applied to the guitar signal. To the untrained ear, any electric guitar with the right amp or effects will sound good, especially if it his played well. Young players tend to be obsessed with the heavy sound possibilities of an electric guitar and tend to flock to the heavy sounds of the Les Paul, humbucker crunch. If you feel like your group will benefit from a very heavy crunchy guitar tone, an Epiphone Les Paul or other guitar with solid humbuckers would be a good fit. However, these guitars can easily overpower the sound of the band if not managed

properly by the player. I prefer the sound of the Fender-style guitars with single-coil pick-ups. At high volumes, these don't have the heavy harsh sounds and in my opinion blend well with a youth band set-up. But that is just me.

Bass guitar

(Before you read this, please see the “buying a guitar” section earlier in this chapter) If you are serious about having a band in your youth program, a bass guitar will be essential. If you have a typical youth group, chances are you have a handful of guitar players, but don't have a bass player. Or you may have a student who can play bass, but doesn't have one. In the teenage years, few students set out to be bass players the way they dream of being the next guitar icon. So, getting a student to play bass may take some coaxing, (and a bass). As I mentioned earlier, for a guitar player, bass is fairly easy to pick up because it uses four of the six strings of the guitar—they are just tuned to a lower register. So, if you do not have a bass player in your group and have a student who is willing to step up and play, here are some things to consider when purchasing a bass guitar that we did not cover above.

Size—Because a bass is a lower register instrument, by design it has to be slightly larger than regular guitars. If your player is younger, make sure she has a chance to try the bass out for herself to see if she can reach all the positions on the neck. A comfortable strap may be a wise investment, too, since basses tend to be heavier than standard guitars.

Number of Strings--One other thing you may find when shopping for a bass guitar is that there are 4-string, 5-string, and even 6-string basses. Four-strings are the standard basses. If your player is a beginner or is even switching from guitar, the 4-string will be the simplest one to pick up and learn. The 5-string versions have a lower string below the low E (the lowest string on a standard 4-string bass). If your player is familiar with the patterns on a bass, she should be able to go to a 5-string without much trouble. However, if that student graduates and you need to start a new player, the 5-string will again be more confusing on a new player.

Active or Passive—Another feature you may find (even in lower end basses) is active or passive pick-ups. Standard designed basses are passive, meaning that the pick-ups do not require additional power to run. Active pick-ups require a battery that is changed out in the bass (usually a 9v) that provides power. Active basses are known for having a brighter, punchier sound. For the beginner bass player, and for the bass that will sit in the youth room and occasionally be carried to your bass player's home for practice, active pick-up systems are an unnecessary expense and hassle. Keep things simple for yourself and your young player and you will be glad you did.

Buying a quality guitar or bass amplifier—While they can be played through any sound device with a 1/4" input, electric and bass guitar sounds are best complimented by a guitar or bass amplifier (amp). Just like the instruments themselves, amps are made in all price ranges to suit players of all different skill levels in various different venues. Essentially, there are two kinds of amps—combo amps and power amps or “heads.” A combo amp is essentially an amplifier with a speaker or speakers built into the same unit. This may be a practice amp with one 8" speaker or it may be a 200 watt bass head with 4 10" speakers. A power amp or head is simply the amplifier without the speaker. People who use these

amps will purchase a speaker cabinet separately that will fit the power capacity of their head. Guitar players call these combinations full stacks or half stacks which is a guitar amp head coupled with one (half stack) or two (full stack) speaker cabinets. Most heads are upper level price range. Combo amps for bass and guitar will fit the needs of almost all youth group band applications. Amplifier capabilities are measured in watts. A small practice bass amp may be 15 or 20 watts whereas a large amp may be 100 watts for guitar or 400 watts for bass. This will be different if the amp is a tube amp. Tube amps were popularized in the 1950s as British and classic rock bands grew in popularity. These amps ran off of transistor tubes just like old TV sets. As technology improved, sound engineers migrated to a new way of building amplifiers that had clearer sounds and less noise. Some purists, though, prefer the warm, rich, sound of a tube amplifier. Therefore, many modern sound companies still make tube amps for bass and guitar. A 40 watt tube amp may have the same volume as a 100 watt solid state amp. Tube amps are mostly made for guitar players but some are still made for bass. Therefore, when choosing an amp, it is important to know how it is designed. Most beginner to intermediate combo amps are going to be solid state amps (non-tube). When selecting an amp, it is also important to remember that you can always pull volume back on a large amp, but you can't make a small amp any louder that it can go (and if you max out the volume, the sound will probably be distorted). If you have a large youth room, you may want to seek out a larger amp. I have a 200 watt bass amp head with a speaker cabinet that has two 10" speakers. It has provided all the power I need even in rooms as large as 100'x200'. For guitar, I have a 40 watt tube combo amp that has provided all the sound I need for any venue. If you ever need more power, you can put a microphone in front of your amplifier to run through the PA system. Some amplifiers have a direct output that is designed for going directly from the amp to the PA. Your player will get better stage volume from the amp's speakers, but you may want to go directly from the amp to the PA. Bass players usually don't mind a direct out, but guitar players tend to prefer a mic in front of the amp. Construction is another factor in selecting an amp. If the amp is going to be stationary in your youth room, it doesn't need to be made with a road-worthy construction. However, if it's going to be moved around a lot, you may want to select one with a more sturdy design. This will cost more up front, but will last longer.

Effects—Coming in all shapes and sizes, effects are the devices that modify the sound of a guitar, bass, keyboard, or other instrument to give it different sounds and textures. I could spend a great amount of time and never really get anywhere trying to explain all the different types of effects, so I will just keep it simple. For the simplest set-up, vocalists won't need much in the way of effects except maybe a little reverb which may come on your sound system's board. The majority of effects will be used by the guitar player(s), so here is a breakdown of what to look for in the effects department.

- Stomp boxes—This term is used to describe effects pedals that can be purchased individually to add a sound (usually one) to the guitar. These pedals are the simplest form of effects unit as they are easy to adjust and can be turned on or off by pushing the switch with the foot. The drawback to these pedals is that most stomp boxes only have one effect, so in order to get a variety of sounds, the player must have a variety of pedals. Popular effects pedals are:

- Distortion or Overdrive—increases the power of the guitar signal to give it that crunchy sound popular in rock music (think of the Beatles’ song Revolution).
- Flanger or Phaser—modifies the shape of the sound waves to pan from left to right or between treble and bass tones
- Delay—adds an echo effect by allowing the sound of the instrument to be replayed after the initial playing of the note (i.e. U2’s Where the Streets Have No Name)
- Wah—allows the player to control the bass and treble tone of the instrument with a sweeping motion of the foot on this pedal. (i.e. the “whicka-whicka” sound in the theme song from “Shaft” or guitar intro on Hendrix’s Voodoo Chile Slight Return)
- Tremolo—allows the volume of the instrument to get louder and softer at a very fast rate set by the player (i.e. Duane Eddy’s Rebel Rouser)

This is not the extensive list, but these are some of the most common basic effects for guitars.

- Multi-effect processors—These units can come in rack-mountable formats or in floor boxes with two or more pedals. They are a viable alternative to the stomp boxes for several reasons. For a smaller price, you can have a variety of effects in one unit rather than having only one effect per stomp box. This makes set up much easier. The drawback is that it can take some time for the user to figure out how to navigate the menus and settings on a multi-effect unit. Also, since these units do so much in the way of effects, you can often sacrifice sound or tone quality to get a unit that offers more variety.

Keyboards—I’m not a keyboard player, so I will not pretend to know my way around the keyboard world. I can say that any keyboard purchased needs to have good piano and organ sounds as well as the Fender Rhodes pianos of the 1970s. The organ sounds would be similar to the rock organs (Hammond B-3) Get in touch with a local music store. Keyboards can be purchased for less than \$100 however these do not have the sound quality you would probably want for your band. You should be able to get a basic keyboard with professional quality sounds without spending too much money.

Horns—(Before reading this, read the section on horns in the chapter on “Where do I find musicians?”) If you have sax, trumpet, or other horn players that are talented enough to play with your worship team, chances are they have their own instruments. It would not be advisable to invest in a horn section for your youth praise team. If your church is large enough and has had an orchestra before, there may be some unused instruments that would be available to you.

Chapter 4: What about Music?

Unless your start-up musical group is made up entirely of prodigies with tonal memory and an uncanny ability to regurgitate anything they hear, you will need music. “What if my players don’t read music?”, you ask. That is perfectly fine—do not be discouraged. I will show you what I mean. “Music” is one of those words that has a number of meanings. The first meaning of course is the sound made by notes played melodically and harmonically. The second is the notated form of music that is represented by notes on a staff. When someone asks, “Can you read music?” this is to what they are referring. A more loose meaning of the term is any written representation of a song that may or may not be notated.

Music is written out and notated in several ways. Chord charts are the most common form of music for worship bands—especially those made up of young players. Since most guitar players, especially rhythm guitar players, do not read music, but rather play chords, chord charts allow the player to follow the song and play the chords as they correspond to the words of the song. Guitar players (and piano players) may also use a lead sheet which is a combination of actual musical notation (usually just the melody or “lead” of the song) with the chords notated. If a player has never heard a song before, it is nearly impossible to play the song correctly using a chord chart alone. However, if the player is familiar with the song, a chord chart will be the simplest way to guide the player through the song. If a singer can read music a bit, a lead sheet will help them with the melody of the song. Since chord charts only show words and chords, there is no way to notate how long notes should be held out or how many measures are in a verse or chorus or how many measures of transition there are between song elements. If a chord chart is all you will be using, it helps to have a recording of the song available for your band members to help them learn the song. Another option is the full notation version of the song which has the piano part written out note by note. You may also find the full notation version with chords written above them. Sheet music stores will call these PVG arrangements for Piano, Vocal, Guitar.

Guitar players may use tablature or TABS for short. TABS are notated diagrams that look similar to regular printed music, but it has six lines instead of five. The six lines represent the six strings of the guitar. Notes are notated with numbers that correspond to the frets of each note that are played on each string. If a song you want to do has a recurring riff (a melodic phrase, often constantly repeated, forming an accompaniment or part of an accompaniment for a soloist—Dictionary.com) or a guitar solo, you may want your guitar player to learn to read tabs to certain songs. Just be aware that if your guitar player learns the TABS to a song, they will have to move up or down the fretboard if your group (probably your vocalists) decides to do the song in a different key.

Piano players primarily learn music in a completely different fashion than their guitar-playing counterparts. While guitar players learn chords, most piano players learn to read music on a page. Your keyboard players may not know how to play a G chord, but they do know how to play the notes G, B, and D together (a G chord). If this is the case, you may have to look for music that is written out if you want to have them in your group. You may also want to give them a chord book to help them learn to play with chords. It may be a difficult skill to learn at first, but in the long run will make him or her a more well-rounded player. Also, your keyboard player will need to be able to play and

read quickly and accurately since he will have a full band playing with him. Playing piano with chords takes some of the pressure off of playing individual notes and gives the player more freedom.

So what about the bass player and drummer? I thought you'd never ask. Since most young bass players are converted guitar players and since most worship music is written in chord charts, bass players usually play the same parts as rhythm guitar players. While a guitar player may be playing a G chord, the bass player will be playing the G note, which is the root note of the chord. If a chord is notated G/B, this means that a guitar player will play a G while the bass player will play a B. As for the drummer, unless you have a full orchestral arrangement for the song, there will not be a chart for the drummer. Drummers usually play rhythm patterns that fit the feel of the song. The most important aspects of being a drummer are keeping good time (making sure that the song is not too fast or too slow and that it doesn't rush or drag), and playing with the bass player. The bass player and the drummer will need to play off of each other as well as the rhythm guitar player or piano to find the rhythm that fits the song best. If the drummer is playing a beat that has a funk or hip-hop feel, while the bass player is playing a more simple country or folk rock type pattern, it will cause the band to sound very disconnected. Getting everyone's rhythm patterns in sync will make the band sound like a unit and not like a bunch of players playing at the same time. For more information on this, see the chapter on "Making it All Work".

Where Do You Find Music?

In the days prior to the internet, you might take your kids to camp and hear the worship leader do a song during worship. After the service, you might go ask him for a copy of the chord chart, or just pay really close attention to his hands then write your own chord chart when you got home. Or, you may sit around with other musicians and see what songs they had in their notebooks and ask them to make you copies of certain ones that you did not have. I still have a file box with several copies of each song that I had so that if our group played a song, I would have at least 5 or 6 copies to hand out to the players and would still have one as an original. If you heard a song on the radio that you really liked, you could run down to the local music store and see if they could get you the music to it. Many times that meant you had to purchase an entire book (maybe an album by that artist, or a Greatest Hits collection).

Now, in the days of high speed internet, WiFi, iphone apps, Blackberries, Twitter, and all other sorts of technologies, attaining music for your favorite songs is different and more convenient than it used to be. If you've heard a song before and are pretty familiar with the melody, then you can go online to a number of free websites to get a chord chart for that song. One of these is iwillworship.com. If you are on a budget, these sites can be a great way to find music. However, the drawback to free sites is there is no accountability as to the accuracy of the charts. In other words, a chord chart to a song by Third Day is not posted by Third Day. It was probably posted by a guy sitting in his bedroom listening to that song and trying to figure out the guitar chords as he went along. He then typed up a chord chart and uploaded it to that site. While I've had success using these charts, I've also had to go through and correct some incorrect chords. So, if you can pay for a service, it is probably better in the long run. One popular worship site that requires such a fee is worshiptogether.com. You can find lyrics, audio downloads of new

worship songs in mp3 format and downloadable music and chord charts. Membership to the site is free, and there are some member perks, but the majority of the features on the site will come at a cost. My favorite online resource is CCLI.com. CCLI stands for Christian Copyright Licensing Inc. They are the entity that licenses churches and worship leaders to project copyrighted song lyrics onto a screen. They also pay royalties to songwriters as people use their music. For more information about licensing, see the section on licensing later in this section. CCLI has a number of resources for worship leaders and band directors. They have instructional videos, videos of new popular worship songs, devotional stories that share how songs were written and much more. They also track the most popular songs used in worship music and have all that information available right on their website. For a fee, you can access CCLI's Song Select program. With Song Select, you have access to their entire library of songs and can download lyrics, chord charts, lead sheets, and even import the lyrics right into your worship software (Easy Worship, Media Shout, Power Point, etc.). The number of songs you can download for a year depends on the size package you buy. Currently, our church has the Advanced Melody package which is well under \$200 and allows us to download lyrics and chord charts for 200 songs per year. If you have a piano player who needs actual notation, you can get lead sheets for many of the songs as well. Do the math and that is just under 4 new songs per Sunday. There is no way we will use all of that even with our adult praise team and youth praise team doing different songs.

Why Do I Need a License to Play Music?

Technically, you and your group do not need a license to play music. Just like a band at a bar can play Sweet Home Alabama and doesn't have to worry about paying Lynyrd Skynyrd royalties for playing that song, Christian bands can play any song they want. If that band who is covering the Skynyrd tune decides to record the song and sell their recordings, then they will have to pay royalties to the entity that has the rights to Sweet Home Alabama (usually the original songwriters). While some Christian bands record popular worship songs and sell their recordings, the issue of licensing primarily comes up with lyrics. Since worship music is written and performed mainly for the purpose of the audience singing along with the band, lyrics must be printed for the audience or projected on a screen or monitor for the audience to follow along. Since lyrics are copyrighted, churches must be licensed to print and project lyrics. This is done through Christian Copyright Licensing Inc., or CCLI. Your church should have a license they pay for annually (around \$60) to project or print song lyrics. If you do not know if your church is licensed, you can go to CCLI.com and call their customer service number to find out if your church is covered. I mentioned earlier that CCLI has lots of resources for worship bands and leaders. Basic lyrics are covered with your license fee, but getting chord charts, lead sheets, or TABS will require a reasonable fee to allow you to access a certain number of songs per year. If your church has an adult praise team, they may have an account that allows access to premium features of the CCLI website. If so, you may work with the adult praise team leader to access some of this information.

Another thing that CCLI does is pay royalties (from the license fees) to the artists who write the music. While it would be nearly impossible to track every piece of music printed up by every worship band across the country, they do attempt to monitor which songs are being utilized the most. Many CCLI users will be asked for a short period of

time to track their use of various songs and how they are used—just lyrics, printed music for use in a band one time, or printed music to be used by a band repeatedly, recorded music copied for learning, etc.

Since the advent of the cassette tape, we have had the ability to duplicate music. With the digital era, we can duplicate music without any loss in sound quality and can store music in more ways than ever. While music duplicating is perfectly legal for back-up purposes, the free distribution of music is illegal, even though it is extremely common. Through CCLI, you can purchase a license to copy music in audio form for your band's learning purposes. They also have licensing for the use of movies in youth events and video clips used as lesson illustrations.

Chapter 5: What About Rehearsal?

Once you have some musicians and they all have access to some instruments, it is time for rehearsal. Here are some general guidelines that will help get your practices started consistently and smoothly. Consistency in the band is its biggest asset. The more regular the rehearsals are in the same time and location, the better results you will have as students make or miss practices. The more times you go through a song the same way, the better they will begin to play that song. The more you play with the same musicians and not having players who miss a lot, the better the band will begin to play as a group. All of these factors hinge on the hub of rehearsal. If you can have rehearsals at the same time, same place, with the same musicians, playing the same songs, your band will quickly improve.

Time and Place—Rehearsal needs to be in a convenient location. The most obvious place is the youth room where the youth group normally meets for Bible study and other activities. Hopefully your youth room is big enough for your band’s set up, whether it be acoustic with hand drums, or whether it’s a full band setup with a full drum kit, bass, and guitars. If your band is bigger than what you have room for, you may want to practice in another area of the church (choir room, Sanctuary, fellowship hall), and have youth meetings in there on special occasions when the band plays. If you have to move instruments between rehearsal and worship times, this will quickly discourage your young musicians. The less stuff they have to set up and tear down at rehearsal, the better.

Obviously, rehearsal needs to be at a time when all members of the team can meet on a regular basis. In all the churches I’ve had youth bands in there is at least one student who wants to come jam for the worship times but for whatever reason can’t make rehearsal. I have had to be the “bad guy” in not allowing these students to play. For one thing, allowing them to play is unfair to the students who do come to rehearsal. Also, having an unprepared musician “jam” during our worship times creates a distraction for the band and the worshipers. Instead of playing what they’ve rehearsed, the band and/or its leader has to walk the new guy through the songs. Having a student commit to the band enough to make rehearsals teaches him a lot about character and discipline. For me, I’ve found that Sunday afternoons tend to work best, before our Sunday evening youth group Bible studies. This also works well because the team can spend time working on the songs and then lead the rest of the group in those songs when youth group meets a little bit later while the songs are fresh on their minds. If your youth group meets on Sundays and Wednesdays you can do the same songs at both meetings until your worship team builds up a repertoire of songs they can do without much rehearsal.

If you choose to meet on a weeknight, it may pose a few issues. First of all, kids who are active in worship teams tend to be involved in other activities, so getting everyone together on a particular weeknight may work for a while, but chances are, eventually someone will need to move the meeting time or drop out of the band. Second of all, while Christ-centered activities are the most important things our kids can engage in, our students still do have responsibilities at school, at home, and some even have them at work, too. Taking up another night of the week for rehearsal does take time away from homework, chores, and other activities which they may have to do when they get finished with rehearsal. Wednesday night may be a better night if the youth group meets on

Wednesday. However, if the youth group meets for an hour and a half to two hours and rehearsal lasts an hour or more, that can easily be three hours taken up on a school night which doesn't leave much time for homework or chores (especially if your guitar player was at volleyball practice until 5:00 before you started rehearsal).

Getting Started—It is an awkward feeling the first time everyone shows up in the youth room with their instruments wondering what's going to happen. You may feel uncertain in the awkward silence as well...and that's okay. This is where, hopefully, your rhythm guitar player can help out. The easiest way to start a first rehearsal is with an easy jam session. I know the word "jam session" sounds like something you would see break out at a Van Halen concert and that's correct. However, jamming doesn't have as much to do with skill level as it does giving musicians freedom within a certain framework. Have your guitar player start out playing a simple 3-chord pattern. Then have your bass player play along, the same three notes (if the guitar player is playing the chords G, C, D then the bass player will play those corresponding notes), then have the drummer come in. Allow all the musicians to come in as they feel comfortable. Hopefully they will begin playing in sync. Listen for the rhythm of the bass and drums to follow the rhythm played on the guitar. If this does not happen, encourage them to listen to the rhythm of the guitar and try to play the same rhythm as well as the same notes. After you've loosened up with that, try a different chord progression—maybe with four chords this time. After your group has enjoyed a couple of jams, begin with a simple song that only utilizes three or four chords and plays these chords in a pretty regular pattern. Some good starters are Lord I Lift Your Name on High, and Every Move I Make. Once your group has enjoyed playing a song together, there's a tremendous sense of accomplishment and playing together only gets better. What gets more difficult at this point is the skill level required by the songs that you play and getting through the songs as your musicians exhibit different levels of talent, skill, and practice time.

Taking Breaks—Just like a song is made up of played notes, as well as non-played notes, called rests, life in a musical group must be made up of seasons of playing as well as seasons of rest. While you will not be able to have every player to attend every rehearsal (and that's perfectly fine), there will be times where it is more likely that you will have people out of town or unable to attend rehearsal for various reasons. Since your worship band is a commitment over and above that of your regular youth group activities, do not succumb to the pressure to make your rehearsal schedule directly coincide with your youth group schedule. If the Christmas holidays are coming up, or it is time for school to be out for summer, it is perfectly okay to cancel rehearsals all together. This will give the kids a much-needed break and will allow them to return after the break with a renewed interest in playing. In the meantime, you may want to have your acoustic guitar player lead the group in a few songs at your meetings or do what we've done before and just have less formal meetings with no music. Many programs have lots of mission trips, camps, Vacation Bible Schools, and other events that make it hard for a youth group to meet regularly once or twice a week. Removing the music for these short times takes the pressure off of the musicians and will allow your youth group to feel like it's doing something different, rather than trying to do a lame version of its normal meetings. Also,

time off will give you a great time to find new songs and get charts for the members of the group.

Chapter 6: Making it All Work

Just like being at McDonald's doesn't make you a hamburger, nor does being in a garage make you a car, having a bunch of musicians doesn't necessarily make you a band. Once you have musicians, music, instruments, rehearsal time, and have some idea where your band wants to go, there are still some things that are important to keep in mind. This section will discuss a few of these issues. This is not a definitive list, but these are some of the common issues that ensembles made up of younger players with less experience make.

Playing in Sync

Find any orchestra or any symphonic or marching band that is playing music that is charted out note by note and you will see a large group of people playing in sync. In these cases dozens of players are playing together to create one big sound. But, take the smallest youth trio on guitar, bass, and drums, and give them a chord chart of the latest worship tune and you may or may not have players who are playing in sync. Why is that? For one, a chord chart does not show rhythm. So while a bass player, a guitar player, and a drummer may all be playing the same song, they could possibly all three be playing different rhythms and just changing chords at the same time. This can create a musical train wreck. The players will be playing the song but may not be able to put their finger on why it just doesn't sound right. It is not blistering guitar solos, fantastic musicianship, or killer vocals, but the ability to play in sync is what separates average to mediocre worship bands from the great ones. So how can you make that happen?

The most important part of keeping the band playing together is to make sure the bass player and drummer are on the same page. If your young musicians read music and you are able to get written charts for the song, the bass player and drummer can play off of those. If your group is like most young worship ensembles who do not read music, there are a couple of ways you can go about this. First, if you have a recording of the song you are going to play, have the bass and drummer replicate the groove of the recording using the chords on the chord chart. Even if they have to simplify what is played, they should be able to play something similar to the recording. You may not want to play it like the recording, and that's okay, too. Have your group determine what they want the song to sound/feel like and have the drummer find a pattern that is fitting, then have your bass player try to mimic that pattern on the bass. Once they are playing together, you may have the rhythm guitar or piano come in on top of their groove. A common mistake that young drummers make is that the high-hat will keep a solid 8th note pattern and they will keep a consistent back beat on the snare, all the while the bass drum is playing all different rhythm patterns because the drummer just likes the groove. While this may be fun for jamming by himself in his bedroom, it makes it extremely difficult for the bass player to figure out where the groove is going. Try to get the drummer to play a consistent pattern that is appropriate for the song and have him play that pattern or a slight variation of it all the way through the song. If your young rhythm keeper feels like that is a boring way to play, allow him to play a consistent pattern with a bass player playing along and see if he notices how good it sounds when those instruments are locked up in a tight, synchronized groove. It should be a gratifying feeling and the whole band will be much better off for it.

While learning drummers may be more likely to play random patterns, it is not uncommon for rhythm guitar or bass players to do the same. Make sure each member of the core section of the band (bass, drums, rhythm guitar/keyboard) is playing a consistent pattern. If you do not have a bass player and a drummer, but maybe only have a rhythm acoustic guitar player and a hand percussionist with a djembe or a cajon, these principles still apply. Try to encourage your percussionist to play a consistent pattern throughout the song and even get your rhythm guitar to keep a constant pattern as well.

Avoiding Monotony

Once you have everyone playing together, another danger facing your group is that of monotony. Your group may have figured out how to play a couple of songs but if those songs all sound too much alike, your worship band will not be as effective. How does this happen? It usually begins with the drummer. Many times the youth band drummer is a kid who went to his cousin's house for a couple of weeks in the summer where he learned to play a couple of beats on the drum set. Or maybe he's the kid who learned to play the snare drum and the mallets in 6th grade band and his parents bought him a drum set that he never really learned how to play except for a few basic patterns. Either way, now, he wants to be the new drummer of the upstart youth band, but has a very small repertoire of rhythm patterns. So, what happens is the other musicians start to play to his rhythms and then the group is held back by his limited arsenal. The most obvious solution for this is for the drummer to immerse himself in the tutelage of the likes of Neil Peart, Keith Moon, John Bonham and learn to play a number of quality drum patterns at a high skill level. But what if you don't have time to wait for him to learn all that? Here are some things you can do to meet your young drummer where he is and allow his limited skills to make a contribution to the group.

First, remember that sometimes "less is more"—especially with drums. So allow your songs to build and breathe by starting with just the acoustic guitar or keyboard. As the song progresses, bring in the bass and eventually the drums, maybe on the first chorus and have them continue until the end of the song, or maybe have them fade out toward the end and have the band repeat the chorus a cappella. Even if your drummer only knows a couple of patterns, it will not seem so monotonous if he doesn't play all the time on every song. Second, allow him to play the same rhythm pattern on different elements of the kit. In a typical rock beat, the drummer will be keeping 8th notes on the high-hat while playing the snare drum on counts 2 and 4 and the bass drum in varying rhythms to create the groove of the beat. Without the drummer having to learn anything new, he can play almost a completely different sounding pattern by simply playing the same rhythm on different elements of the kit. For example, instead of playing 8th notes on the high-hat, he could play them on the ride cymbal and instead of playing the snare drum on the 2 and 4 counts, he could click the rim with the side of his drumstick for a lighter, jazzier feel. And for more rocking stuff, he could play the 8th notes on the floor tom and the snare on 2 and 4.

Keeping Them Excited

Unless your band is made up of the next Chris Tomlin, Matt Redman, David Crowder, or (you get the idea), chances are that your young musicians will be more into playing music from the latest super-indie-neo-hardcore-punk-emo rock band than they

are into playing the worship music that you give them. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Too many times, I think we place unrealistic expectations on students instead of meeting them where they are as teenagers. Regardless of whatever content may be in the lyrics of their favorite mainstream music, the fact is that non-Christian music is a huge part of teenage culture and won't be going away any time soon. So if your young guitar player spends hours a day learning tabs to her favorite secular songs, is that a bad thing? Sitting down and practicing will make your student a better player, regardless of what style of music she is learning. The eventual hope is that if your student is not a big fan of Christian/worship music, she will soon become one. When that happens she may look for new songs she wants the band to do. When that happens, jump all over it. There is something special about working up a song that was her idea rather than a song that was her youth director's or band leader's idea. This will fuel their fire to keep learning more music.

Taking Breaks

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon writes that everything has a season—a time to every purpose under heaven. That is true with youth bands. Sometimes when it takes a long time to get something going, the natural tendency is to keep it going as long as possible in fear that if you stop it, you may have problems starting up again. This was my philosophy for a number of years. This made things pretty tricky in the summer time when band members would be gone to summer camps or on a family vacations. We always had to have good communication as to when everyone would be there or not. Recently, though, I decided to slow down a lot of things for the summer, not just in the band, but in the youth band altogether. Instead of meeting in our big meeting space, we met downstairs in some of the smaller lounging areas of the youth building. We also quit using Power Point, the sound system, and multi-media elements of our Bible study. The band took the summer off.

This accomplished a number of things for the band. For one, it gave the kids a break from band rehearsals. While band rehearsals were fun and rewarding, they still required time, commitment, and practice. This allowed the kids to relax. Also, it took the pressure off of them to try to be in town every weekend or get back from something early for rehearsal. The most rewarding advantage of this was that it gave the kids a renewed interest in getting the band going again in the fall. The time off caused the students to really anticipate playing together again and gave them renewed interest. It also caused me as a director to look forward to starting up again.