

# KILLING WORSHIP

BY WARREN ANDERSON

I can't remember all the details now, but I was probably at my desk, pushing papers, when the phone rang. Because I oversee the chapel ministry at a Christian university, I occasionally get calls from booking agents hoping their up-and-coming bands can lead worship in one of our chapels. This was one such call, so I knew what to expect. Except this time I didn't.

"You've got to bring this band to campus," the agent bleated. "They lead killer worship!"

Excuse me? Okay. I know what he meant, and I'm sure you do, too—but the fact that we all know what he meant is indicative of one of the real dangers of 21st-century contemporary worship music, especially where congregational singing is concerned.

## KEY INGREDIENTS

What he didn't mean was that these were young people after God's own heart, seeking to pursue worship as a lifestyle, in the spirit of Romans 12. And he didn't mean that they were studying the biblical foundations and historical precedents of Christian worship, engaging in rigorous academic exercise that was informing their theological convictions, which in turn were guiding their worship-leading decisions, not to mention demonstrating their desire to love God will all their mind (Mt 22:37).

No. He meant that they rocked, that this band had jaw-dropping musical talent

on display across the entire stage. And he equated excellent musicianship with excellent worship-leading capability.

## TOO MUCH EXCELLENCE

We should, of course, offer our first fruits to the Giver of every good and perfect gift, and this includes our musicianship. But where the display of musical talent is concerned, let's acknowledge that the enemy wants to distract us in any way he can in the midst of our worship. For many of us, nothing distracts like awesome displays of musical prowess. Hence, we need to be aware that our excellent musicianship has the very real potential of getting in the way of the corporate worship we endeavor to lead.

It's for this reason that Matt Redman, in the Vineyard training DVD *Leading Worship*, points out that while the Psalms encourage us—in one passage (33:3)—to play skillfully, in all the rest of Scripture, God time and again focuses on our hearts, not our hands or voices. "I've heard too much about excellence in worship," Redman concludes.

## DARING REMEDIES

So what's the solution: Should we play poorly to keep our weaker musical brother from stumbling? Of course not. But how about considering some of these counterintuitive ideas if you sense that the musicianship of your band is too prominently displayed every Sunday?

- 1 **Practice only long enough to be able to provide a solid musical foundation for the congregation, not long enough to sound as good as the band on the CD.**  
This will look different for different bands of different talent levels, but I'd be willing to bet that it will mean shorter rehearsals for all of us. And shorter rehearsals translate into more time for God and family, a healthy dynamic to foster in our constantly-on-the-go culture.
- 2 **Purposely allow yourself and your band to feel musically unfulfilled during rehearsal.**  
Willow Creek worship leader Aaron Niequist recalls that early in his career as a worship leader he left a band rehearsal feeling as if it had been a horrible evening. "Something just seemed to be missing," he remembers. Come Sunday morning, he knew what it was. The congregation hadn't been there. If the music sounds fabulously complete in rehearsal, that might be a warning sign.
- 3 **Consider a moratorium on all instrumental solos for a while.**  
Go back and read the story behind Redman's "The Heart of Worship" if you need to. If his church could pull the entire band off the stage for a season, you can probably do without that "killer" guitar solo for a short time, anyway.
- 4 **Sing at least one chorus of one song a cappella at some point in each set.**  
Do it on a tune that's familiar ... and be ready to stand amazed at the how the congregation responds. **W**

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