

Module 4 – Instruments in Worship 1 6/2014

Introduction

Within this module you will be looking at how musical instruments may be used in worship with reference to:

- skills required in playing instruments and appropriate training
- skills required by those responsible for organising groups
- arranging for instruments
- transposing instruments
- use of bells – small and large
- keyboard instruments
- combining instruments with voices
- amplification and microphones
- technology and available equipment
- using recorded music
- publications for instrumental groups
- pastoral issues and parish policies
- opportunities for instrumental music in worship

As you work through this module, you may have the opportunity to work with an instrumental ensemble and discuss the problems faced in balancing the sound, tuning the group, playing together, conducting, arranging music for the group, and where to place the group in the church.

The partner module *Instruments in Worship 2* looks in more depth at the skills required for arranging music for instrumental groups, voices and organ, and for presentation of your own compositions using desk-top publishing software. This module is for those who are actively involved in playing, composing for / or directing instrumentalists, including the organ, in their church. It focuses on:

- practicalities of instruments, voices, and presentation of score and parts
- harmonisation
- descants and 'last verse' arrangements
- texture and colour
- arranging for the organ

Material to get you started:

Taking the above bullet points one by one, the first two mention skills required by both the players and the leader. There may be many instrumentalists that have not had lessons for some time and who may be enthusiastic but out of practice. It would make sense if a series of lessons with a local teacher were arranged for the player. This could take the form of a refresher course and could possibly be paid for by the parish. Young players might especially benefit from such a scheme. The leader may be skilled on their own instrument but cannot be expected to know everything about all the instruments involved.

The music group leader brings together what resources they can from the surrounding parish. Often the group is not ideal in its makeup of instruments or standard of playing: a Grade 8 cellist may well sit next to a Grade 1 trumpeter. Arranging music for what can sometimes be a disparate group and persuading them to gel into an ensemble takes quite a lot of patience from the leader.

Arranging and transposing for instruments.

Arranging music that is to be played in the correct keys and knowing what instruments are 'transposing' is one of the skills required if parts are to be provided for all players. Score-writing programmes on computers can be very useful for transposing parts but can sometimes be extremely frustrating to master. Writing parts out by hand is slower but to many, manageable. However, having a full score as a document on the computer can save time, especially if the players change in the group and new parts are required.

What do we mean by transposing? Some instruments are made in such a way that playing in certain keys (number of sharps or flats to remember) is difficult. This means that the length of the instrument is designed to make this easier. However, this means that if a clarinet, a trumpet, a horn or saxophone see a middle C on their music sheet, the note they play will be at a different pitch.

The so called B flat clarinet is called this because, when they see the note C, they play that note but it sounds a B flat (one tone below). So all notes written for the clarinet in B flat have to be written one tone higher to bring it back into line with the other instruments. The same applies to the Trumpet in B flat.

The French Horn in F, sounds an F below C when they read a C. So, the part has to be raised a whole fifth so we hear C when they see and play it. The alto saxophone is in E flat, Bass Trombones and Bass Clarinets in B flat need their part writing out a whole nine notes higher and so on. So we call all these instruments 'transposing instruments'.

We are going to look at how the song 'I will sing, I will sing' (Mission Praise 313) might be arranged for the instruments we get when we meet. We will be laying out a score, providing an introduction, and transferring this score to individual parts for the instruments then singing with our arrangement. We will also be looking at how to score for percussion.

Use of bells - small and large.

In module 3, you began by listening carefully to the sound of a struck bell. How beautiful the sound was as it drew us in to its harmonic colours. From there we talked about the use of bells in worship and included the big ones in our belfries. It will also be good to discuss the role of change ringing and the traditions associated with peals of bells and the role they play in our worship. The use of smaller bells to induce a calm and relaxed state could be discussed as well as the use of the bell to sound out plainchant amidst complex polyphony, (not something that we often hear but very effective).

Keyboard Instruments

The most common of these are the organ and piano. The organ is most useful for leading and sustaining the singing of large groups of people. It is large and takes up much space, is very costly to maintain and very difficult to play well. The piano is a percussion instrument that has singing qualities when played well and yet is sometimes difficult to be heard above the singing of more than 20+ people. Electronic versions of both organ and piano are available saving much space and money – but they still need playing. Issues here will probably wander into the areas

of electronic v. pipe and inevitably money! But we won't have too much time to dwell here.

For advice on renovating, replacing or buying organs, email the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) at: finance@salisbury.anglican.uk or for information on funding at: <http://www.churchmusictraining.info/funding.html>

Combining instruments with voices

After session four, we know all about using the voice in worship but what happens when we combine our group of instruments with singers? Does the arrangement enable the singers to hear the pitch, rhythmical drive, and keep them together? Does the introduction give us a sense of what is to follow? Asking these questions will throw up lots of things for the arranger to take on board. Here we can also discuss why the organ is able to be heard while we sing and how we can make the piano heard more effectively.

Amplification and microphones

Those entertaining crackles, bangs and feedback that seem to go hand in hand with using amplification and microphones are very familiar to all of us. If guitarists arrive with a big black box and wires, take the following precautions:

- read your health and safety manual – seriously!
- turn volume controls down before starting to play
- have full control of the volume and other controls so you can adjust the balance
- make sure there is time to set up properly
- stow away and make safe trailing leads
- get to know the instrument and player
- use a mixing desk if possible

Singers only require microphones if they are being 'mixed' with other instruments from a mixing desk at the back of the church. If all instruments are being mixed or balanced, then the more prominent instruments like a drum kit (digital if possible!), or electric guitar can be turned down and other instruments turned up. The operator of a mixing desk can make a big difference to the sound that is then sent to strategically placed speakers in the church. What we call 'acoustic' instruments, those without their own electronic amplification such as a clarinet, flute or trumpet, can be fed into a microphone and this signal adjusted to balance others. The signals may also be given some effects such as reverberation or delay. This provides a warm feel to the sound and smoothes off any rough edges.

Technology and available equipment

There is a wide range of equipment available that can help to make a group of instruments sound more like the sort of thing we are used to hearing on TV, radio, CD or the larger Christian conventions. It is interesting that one of the strongest inspirations for wanting to use instruments in worship comes from people returning from the large conventions where professional musicians have been used on stage with high-tech sound systems, lighting and digitally reproduced by professional sound engineers. All very good, but trying to reproduce the spiritual 'kick' this produced back in the parish needs careful thought.

It might be good here to discuss what makes this music come alive at such events and why it is so difficult to reproduce this 'back home'. The same can also be said of visits to Cathedrals where the choir is made up of professionals and choristers who rehearse twice a day accompanied and directed by a team of professionals with a huge pipe-organ in a cavernous acoustic.

The use of 'MIDI' instruments has meant that a wide range of sounds can be literally at our fingertips at a price most churches can afford. Music can be written on computer programmes and played back either through a keyboard or MIDI disc player. We shall be looking at one of these during the sessions.

Go to: <http://www.dmmusic.com/knowledge/midi.html> for further information.

MIDI enables different instruments to be linked together so that one player could be operating two or three sound sources. Cheaper keyboards may connect to sound modules that could provide a range of very good piano sounds or percussion sounds. As an 'industry standard' MIDI is universally used by all brands.

Has anyone come across the Sound Beam? A MIDI compatible beam that produces sounds when anything passes through it. The beam can be adjusted to be sensitive to the smallest movement of a little finger or spread out to cover the whole building, full of moving people. Sounds that it activates may be selected from a wide range.

Organs that use digitally sampled 'real' organ sounds can be bought off the shelf for a small margin of the cost of a pipe-organ. They can also be programmed to play any hymn or song you want. 'Combo-organs' are where a small amount of real pipes are used in combination with electronic digital sound recordings of organs. This means that the organist can play from a keyboard that feels like and uses real pipes and yet can use sounds that the church could not otherwise afford. There are highly mixed feelings about this kind of thing!

For further information about general equipment, see the DM Music website: <http://www.dmmusic.com>

Using recorded music

The CD player is now frequently used in many worship situations by clergy and lay leaders to create a mood or reinforce a point. The choice of recorded music and quality of sound production and performance, enable us to bring into our worship almost anything we like. Before some practical points, just something to ponder as an issue.

Imagine the gongs used in Tibetan worship being replaced by a recording, or the Muslim Call to Prayer resounding, not from the mouth of the Imam, but from a tape recording. It's the presence of those making sound, the involvement of those present that 'bodies' the music into the worship. By the touch of a button, do we discard the effort and physical exertion of singing together, of preparation? Do we reduce our action of community, the corporate offering, by using the effort and skills of someone not here with us and whose original performance is being artificially reproduced? Also, if we get used to listening to professional musicians, what will our own offerings sound like?

Remember that very simple music played well has an immediacy and presence that recorded music cannot have. A single line played on a recorder or clarinet, a series of chords played softly on a piano or a single vocal melody can create something that is real, present and part of the tangible action taking place at that moment. Here are a few practical tips to ensure that recorded music is treated with the same care as anything else we bring to use in our worship:

Scale

Match the scale of the music with the scale of the worship. If a few are gathered around a candle, use simple music, perhaps one instrument or voice/vocal line.

Don't overwhelm a simple form of worship with the sound and scale of orchestral/vocal heavy-weights.

Dynamics: Adjust the volume of the speakers to match the volume you would expect to hear if you were at a live performance. There is nothing more frustrating than listening to a full orchestral sound being played quietly. If you choose something for its power, don't be apologetic, turn up the volume!

Quality: The quality of your equipment should be as high as possible. The placing and choice of speakers can be crucial. There are speaker systems available at low budget prices and portable systems that now give that 'presence' feel.

Budding recording engineers: Listen to the music you are going to use and make a note of the volume and other settings before the session begins. Adjusting graphic equalisers and speaker balance during playing will irritate and distract worshippers. It is easier if the worship leader is not responsible for pressing the buttons. Someone else – out of sight – could do this.

Length: If a piece of music is too long, choose something shorter. The habit of sudden-death endings or the cringingly long fade-out can ruin any atmosphere you have created.

Musak: Be careful when choosing music to be talked over. We are very familiar with this technique from the film and TV industry and can sometimes forget that music is a complete language in itself. Incidental music, the sort of dialogue background appearing in films, is very different to something written as a complete form of communication. Film makers are sensitive to this; we can use their example.

Publications for instrumental groups

We shall be browsing the selection available and looking at publishers' advertising material. Buying arrangements off the shelf doesn't always provide the instant fix required. Parts may be too difficult or not in the right key and may also be very expensive. There is usually some work to be done in adapting the arrangement to a particular group. However there is an increasing amount of material available. We shall be looking at Kevin Mayhew's *The Source* and if anyone uses this, or any other published arrangements, do bring copies in.

Pastoral issues and parish policies

Introducing the use of instruments into worship that has been led by the organ for four centuries sets off all sorts of emotional alarm bells in a church community. The phrase 'happy clappy' is sometimes heard as a derogatory term and as soon as a guitar is seen on the chancel steps, then reactions can be surprisingly strong.

Many 'new' things are introduced into worship without prior concern for reactions that can be provoked and that can sometimes be very damaging. We shall discuss any 'real' situations that you might have experienced and also how changes might be handled. We will also discuss how the style of music and instruments used has resulted in the division of congregations in some churches where two services are provided, one with organ and one with music group.

Opportunities for instrumental music in worship

This will be linked with what repertoire the group is able to play but we can look at what people in our group have used and which parts of our worship, especially thinking seasonally, might make good use of certain solo instruments or groups of instruments, both in and out of the church building. We will also look at the situation, now becoming more common, where there is not a keyboard player and how this role

might be filled by instruments. We will also look at the historical place of the West Gallery bands and look at the historical 'fall and rise' of instrumental groups.

Suggested background reading

Musical Instruments in 'In Tuneful Accord' by James Whitbourn, SPCK, 1996.

The Worship Leader by Joe King in 'Playing the Guitar in Worship', Kingsway, 1995.

Some demand a driving beat: Contemporary Worship Music in 'Praying Twice' by Brian Wren, published by Westminster John Knox Press, U.S.A. 2000.

Voices and Instruments in Christian Worship by Joseph Gelineau, The Liturgical Press, 1964.

Jazz – Lewd or Ludens? by Bill Hall in 'Creative Chords', Gracewing, 2000.

Making Music by Richard Giles in 'Re-pitching the Tent', Ch. 26, Canterbury Press, 1999

Further Reading

Liturgy and Technology, Tim Stratford, Grove Worship Series W154

Alternative Worship in the Church of England, Paul Roberts, Grove Worship Series W155

Useful Website addresses

Worship CDs and video resources: www.trinity-bris.ac.uk/altw_faq

Multi-media advice and news: alte@tmtm.com

DM Music: <http://www.dmmusic.com>

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2003

Revised 2006

Assignments

Write up this session (c.250 words).

Decide if this is the session you would like to use for one of your four short assignments.