

### **EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE INTO WORSHIP – Part 1**

**Note - this is the myfishbites article found on [Musicademy.co.uk](http://Musicademy.co.uk)**

So. You've worked hard with your band to improve your musicianship, teamwork and Biblical theology of worship. You're all set. But then comes the moment you've dreaded. Yep, it's the 13 year-old who always wants to play your guitar after church every week, driving your Fulltone overdrive to wig-blasting levels towards your elders. This mysterious teen speaks to you this week, rather than the usual mumbled grunt. They've made a decision. They want to play in the worship band (they've been having lessons with their Uncle Bob). Your mouth drops as a new reality dawns. You're going to have to work with... Teenagers. (Cue scary music).

Our heart must be to see young people trained, empowered and supported. Not only are they the church of tomorrow, they are the church of today. We need to encourage them and let them unleash their energy and passion for Jesus to freshen our worship. Most of the time, we don't need to inspire them to take up an instrument or vocals (although they are watching you as you play and lead!), but we do need to stand alongside them, train them – and yes, learn from them.

"But hang on!" you cry, "I'm no youth worker... What do I do? Do I call for the youth worker, even though he's tone deaf and thinks a bridge is something you drive over?!" Nope – although building a rapport with the youth workers will help! Let's kick off with 4 starting tips...

#### **1. INVEST AND TRAIN.**

If you're not a youth worker, then just think how encouraging it is that a young person wants to be involved in worship. They're keen to learn and be listened to but they also need to be trained. When one young person always appeared after a service, I knew the question was going to be, 'when are we playing this week?' There was no 'are we playing?' It was always 'when!' We quickly established that we'd practice every 2 weeks. But he was enthusiastic – something we need to harness, and your investment of love and time is key. I remember that as a teenager, a Christian lead guitarist gave me his signature after an event. It was such a small thing from him – yet such a big moment and so inspiring for me.

## **2. HAVE FUN.**

If you're working with a young band, try and have fun with them. Our ways of having fun have ranged from very surreal games, to eating fish & chips, to having stones thrown at the building we were in during practice and playing mini worship sessions. It all adds to the sense of belonging and being together, which is an essential skill they'll need when playing. In youth work, the 'main' things we do are often only a key to the 'God moments' with individuals – sitting around after an event, driving back in a car, chatting around the camp fire. In these moments, relationships are built. I naturally build these kinds of spaces into band practices. So we'll sit around on the sofas, drink coffee, laugh at my singing and eat the church's supply of biscuits...

## **3. KNOW THE PARENTS.**

If possible (and if you don't already), it's good to build relationships with the young people's parents in the church – and those outside if possible. They will mostly be so encouraged that someone is taking an interest in their son or daughter – apart from those parents whose son practices his Hillsong solos at midnight, and the drummer driving her parents insane with crashes, fills and patterns off the latest Musicademy drum workout DVD.. Christian parents will be happy their child is involved in Kingdom work. If parents know you're interested in helping their son or daughter, they will often reciprocate; for example I've had chocolate, invites for lunch, food and a lot of thanks.

## **4. PRAY AND BE REAL.**

Keep praying for and with these guys. Let the Word of God, prayer and worship do its work. As you are real and model Godly integrity, you will see God transform them from musicians to worshippers.

Congratulations. Your journey with young people and bands is beginning. It will be hard work, there will be lifts to be organised, you'll often wonder if you're getting anywhere. But believe me, you are. Around four years ago, one of the lads decided he wanted to be a youth worker and a worship leader. We had a little band together with 3 other teenage lads. It was tough going at times. But we watched worship DVDs together, chilled out and talked worship, he taught me riffs and the band had opportunities to play. He's now a worship leader in his own right, leads at Summer camps for young people, has empowered others and has played at various churches and events. He's just one person who God has transformed and is using. We play our small part, God will do the rest.

## **EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE INTO WORSHIP – Part 2**

Last time, we looked at the early stages of working with young people. We saw that the issues are the same as working with any band, but with some extra caveats. In this post, we'll look at a 10 more key issues. In all these, we're assuming that the young people are musically gifted to some extent...

### **1. ENTHUSIASM IS OFTEN HIGHER THAN MUSICALITY.**

There is often a desire to get 'worshipping' or 'playing' but often the musical skills don't match the passion. One young person I worked with would stand in front of a mirror while playing, as he elevated himself to rock god status. Unfortunately, his playing and tuning didn't match what he saw and heard in the mirror. Another guitarist was well versed in his scales, but was unable to match the key he was playing in, with the key a song was in. Time spent correcting them (in love) is well worth doing, without breaking the relationship. We need to be extremely patient and persevering to support new musicians, whatever their age. Anything worth building for God will take time, but nothing we do for God is ever wasted. Give them space to learn and make mistakes, gently equip them with ideas, riffs, patterns and harmonies.

### **2. BAND DYNAMICS.**

The fundamentals of a band and how it operates need to be communicated constantly. I know a worship leader that struggles to play with a band simply because he has always played alone and it's been a challenge to understand the dynamics, use and register of different instruments. When we come to working with less experienced musicians and young people, the issue is the same. With one younger guitarist, the idea that he shouldn't always be thrashing away was quite a heartbreaking moment, but he quickly learned. Over a year on, he's excellent at knowing when to play and what, depending on the nature and part of the song. We must constantly communicate how important it is to listen to each other when playing. You may often find beginner drummers have trouble keeping the same tempo – so a metronome is a great way to help this. Keep plugging away!

### **3. THE CULT OF FAME AND BEING UP-FRONT.**

One of the hardest things to handle in our Christian life can be success. It's good to be confident and let your light shine, but all that we have comes from God – worship is reflecting back what he's done in and through us. For younger musicians, this can be an issue. One young person was given an unhelpful 'word' once that could easily have puffed him up with great pride. Fortunately, he handled it well and stayed very humble. Model humility and thanks in accepting praise and criticism. God is more interested in our character than our gifting!

#### **4. CONSTANT ENCOURAGEMENT AND SUPPORT.**

Teenage emotions can go up and down, feelings can predominate (can't they with all of us...) I've had times where individuals are in a very dark place. Other times, they want to be somewhere else (like at home on their Xbox...) You need to learn people management skills and how to negotiate with and between individuals. I've seen bands in schools rip each other's heads off (very messy...) Your role will often be peacemaker and someone who can show there's another way through. Use informal and very clear encouragement, but be real with praise! At other times, you'll need to just sit with, listen to and understand what is happening in their world, which can often be quite painful. Often the question from young people is, 'how much do you really love me?' Jesus believed in the disciples, despite who they were. We need to show that same belief and love.

#### **5. START OFF PLAYING A SMALL NUMBER OF SONGS THAT THEY KNOW AND LIKE.**

In time, play more songs and with wider traditions / musical challenges. With a band I'm currently working with, we initially had a pool of just 10 songs. All these were ones they knew and liked – making it much more enjoyable and easier to learn! Where they didn't know the song well, we got the original CD, played the song and listened to it individually and together in the car. Over time, the band expressed the desire to learn more songs and ones that would challenge us a bit more musically. So we picked songs with specific guitar parts and specific drum patterns; we played a song in 6/8 rather than 4/4; we chose songs with a greater range of dynamics; played an old hymn etc. We also journeyed with individual songs, stepping out beyond the music to create 'new songs'. All the time, you are looking to move forward and grow, while bringing the young people with you.

## **EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE INTO WORSHIP – Part 3**

### **1. GRADUALLY RELEASE THEM.**

This should go without saying, but generally speaking, don't unleash a young band or individual musician onto the main Sunday worship service initially! There are many other options for them. We have played at small youth events; at other churches; played on weekends away; played at smaller gatherings and prayer nights etc. With an individual, and depending on your setup, it's good to connect them to one specific band at first – preferably with you or another worship leader who'll connect well with them. When getting a band to play for the first time on a Sunday morning, put in an extra evening of practice if you can during the week. You may also want to choose the service wisely and really let them know you believe in them. Your church should be encouraged that young men and women are prepared to step up and serve God! I recently played with a band on a Sunday morning aged 14, 15 and 17. They were awesome! In time, they will play in other bands.

### **2. DON'T WORRY ABOUT MESSING UP!**

Having stepped back from one band, they played on their own for the first time. Their worship set had 'See his love' followed by 'There is a voice'. Unfortunately, while 3 of the band started playing 'See his love', the lead guitarist somehow thought they were playing 'There is a voice' without noticing at any point. As I sat on the PA controls, the horror and amusement of the moment dawned on me. Fortunately they realised after verse 1 and the rest of the band had to change to play 'There is a voice' for the chorus on! Another time, I was playing with a band when the batteries ran out in my electro-acoustic. As I replaced the batteries, the band carried on with 'Everyone needs compassion'. Leaving the drummer and guitarist to sort the tempo I was surprised to hear it start off like a happy hardcore track, then abruptly slow down to a dirge. It was difficult to see a way back so I simply stopped the song, counted them in at the right tempo and we set off. In God's providence, something broke in the church at that moment and the worship took off!

### **3. PEOPLE MANAGEMENT.**

Take time with individual musicians to work on their contribution, but never publicly rebuke them. Instead, take them aside quietly and prod them in the right direction. When something goes wrong, take corporate or personal responsibility. 'Sorry, I should have led more clearly' or "Shall we start again. I don't think we had as much energy as we could." etc.

#### **4. INVOLVE THE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE LEADING AND IN THE CHOICE OF SONGS AND THE WAY SONGS ARE PLAYED.**

The last time we played in church, the young people helped choose the songs completely, with guidance. Previously it had been 1–2 songs. I allowed them quite a bit of freedom; even including a song that I warned them probably wouldn't work. We did that song; it didn't work. But that was OK as they learned from it and became more aware of which songs work and why. The young people are also encouraged to share their musical ideas on how to play / start songs. Do this, whether there's a natural 'worship leader' within the band or not. If there is a 'worship leader' type, work with them independently to advise and encourage on song choice to a deeper level.

#### **5. BRING IN OTHER EXPERIENCED MUSICIANS TO PRACTICE AND PLAY WITH THEM.**

On several occasions, we have brought in more experienced musicians from within and outside the church to work with individuals. One time we had a session lead guitarist in, a phenomenal drummer and someone to train a girl vocally. The young people then played with these guys during the practice session. The tips they picked up increased their confidence no end. The other hint is that when you play on a Sunday, add one or two experienced musicians into the band to build confidence, certainly in the early stages.

Hopefully this has given you some tips to working with young people in your worship band, or in bands generally. Thanks for tuning in and God be with you in your worship leading and mentoring