

THE
WORSHIP
VOCALIST

WORSHIP TRAINING

THE ROLE OF A BACKGROUND VOCALIST

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THE ROLE OF A BACKGROUND VOCALIST

Singing harmony is an amazing skill to have... but as worship team vocalists, more important than knowing **how** to sing harmony is knowing **when** to sing harmony. It's so crucial that we understand our role as supporting vocalists on the team. There are some very specific things we're aiming to create in our sound as a team, but also... your role goes so much further than just the sound! It's about our whole presence—our appearance and body language on stage—and the heart and attitude that we bring to the team.

What is a background vocalist?

If you're not the worship leader, you are a background vocalist! What does that mean? You are in the background! You are there to **assist and support** the worship leader, the overall sound, and the worship experience you are creating as a team.

Unfortunately, many background vocalists see their role as so "background" that they fail to prepare properly for services... they arrive to rehearsal and services without knowing the songs, the lyrics, the harmony parts... without warming up their voice or working to improve their vocal skills. Some vocalists are shy and don't know their parts well; others sing loudly and heartily. As a result, the collective sound of the vocalists often ends up being distractingly off-pitch, off-time, and not blended well.

As worship team vocalists, we **must** not be haphazard and unprepared. Planning and process and details are in the very heart of God... our Father God is creative, immensely detailed, strategic, and purposeful! And as children of God, we are created in His image... made to be like Him! We are not created to settle for mediocrity. It matters that we sing well! It matters that we are prepared and purposeful!

2 Corinthians 3:18 AMP

And we all, with unveiled face, continually seeing as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are progressively being transformed into His image from [one degree of] glory to [even more] glory, which comes from the Lord, [who is] the Spirit.

When we create something beautiful with our voices, we're not stealing from God's glory... we're reflecting His glory and His beauty. When we are creative, skilled, strategic, and intentional... we are looking into a mirror and doing exactly what Scripture says... we're being transformed into His image from one degree of glory to even more glory!

When man's natural musical ability is whetted and polished to the extent that it becomes an art, then do we note with great surprise the great and perfect wisdom of God in music, which is, after all, His product and His gift. — Martin Luther



NOTES

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLANNING & PREPARATION

God doesn't ask for perfection, but He does ask for humility, diligence to learn and grow, and for us to be good stewards of our time and our talents. Life gets busy, yes! But that just means we need to be creative and get practical about ways we can grow in our skills and prepare more effectively for the times we're scheduled on our worship team. Here are a few ideas... and I'm sure you can come up with a few of your own as well!

- ▶ Schedule in your home practice time the week you are singing on your worship team. If it doesn't get scheduled in, it usually doesn't happen!
- ▶ Once you receive the worship set list, begin listening to the songs every day to get them in your head and your heart! Create a Youtube or iTunes playlist so the songs play back-to-back.
- ▶ Use an online song transposer tool like transposr.com to transpose the songs to the key they will be done in at your worship service, so you can practice most effectively.
- ▶ Print out the song lyrics and have them in places you spend a lot of time, so you can be memorizing them throughout the week.
- ▶ Ask your leader for direction on what harmony parts (if any) they want you to specifically prepare for.
- ▶ Use the **vocal warmup from The Worship Vocalist website** before rehearsal and on Sunday mornings so your voice is ready to go once you're singing on stage!
- ▶ Use the **vocal exercises** and **harmony exercises** from The Worship Vocalist website throughout the week (*anything is better than nothing... commit to 1 vocal workout per week... or 2... whatever you can manage!*) so that you will see growth in your vocal range and strength over time!
- ▶ _____
- ▶ _____

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Have you settled for mediocrity in your skill level? What skills and areas do you want/need to grow in, in order to better serve your worship team and your congregation? What are some practical things you can do to see growth in those areas?

Do you spend enough time preparing the weeks you are scheduled on worship team? Do you know the song lyrics? Do you know the parts you will be singing? What are some ways you can commit to plan and prepare more effectively?



NOTES

YOUR JOB DESCRIPTION

- ☑ Your job as a background vocalist is to **blend your voice with the lead vocalist**. We must blend our vocal tone and match their phrasing, pronunciation and timing. When we don't, our voice sticks out awkwardly when it should be blended in the background.

- ☑ Your job as a background vocalist is to **sing in the style and genre that your church/worship team is aiming for**. For many vocalists (but not all!), this means learning to sing in a current, contemporary style.
 - ▶ A **traditional** style means singing with a head voice tone, vibrato, and many harmonies.

 - ▶ A **contemporary** style means singing with primarily chest/mix voice tone (*see the Discover Your Voice videos on www.theworshipvocalist.com for more on that*), subtle vibrato, and mostly unison, 2-part, and sometimes 3-part harmony. The lead vocalist singing melody should be by far the most prominent voice heard in the mix. The more vocals singing different harmonies, and the louder all those harmonies are turned up, the less "current" the sound will be. If you don't know how to sing in a contemporary style, I encourage you to go through the Discover Your Voice course on www.theworshipvocalist.com.

- ☑ Your job as a background vocalist is to **be a skilled, versatile harmony singer**. This means knowing when to sing harmony and what harmony part to sing, and not getting stuck in the part you "always sing".

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Do you tend to sing in a more traditional or more contemporary style? What is the style/genre of music that your worship team is aiming for? If your style of singing differs from the vision of your leaders, what can you commit to do in the upcoming months so that your voice fits and blends in the best way?

Do you know how to sing harmony? Do you find yourself getting “stuck” in old patterns and ways of doing things? What areas can you commit to growing and improving in, so that you can be a skilled, versatile background vocalist?



NOTES

KNOWING WHAT TO SING

So... what harmony part should I sing?

1. **The one that you are asked to sing.** If your worship leader or worship pastor asks you to sing a specific harmony... sing it! *Note: If you're not sure, ask! If you're not given direction, follow guidelines #2 and #3 in this list!*
2. **Sing in a range where you can consistently hit the notes on pitch!** Off-pitch harmony (singing flat/sharp) is not harmony. *Note: If you are asked to sing a part that's not in your range, ask (humbly) if (for this time) you could sing a different part. It's not your leader's fault if some notes are out of your range! And then... start working out your voice at home so that you eliminate range limitations!*
3. **Plan your harmony parts so that they create the best dynamic journey for the song.** Know that your voice is there to create moments, so be a student of creating moments! Harmony creates moments by adding depth and drama. But... if you start singing harmony too early in the song, peoples' ears can't handle it. Subconsciously, our congregation loses interest because the sound becomes stagnant. When harmony begins too early, we lose the potential to build and create dynamic moments in that song. If we arrive at the destination too soon, there's no journey.

Which of these three areas do you need the most growth in? Do you have a hard time following instruction? Do you tend to strain your voice and sing out of your comfortable range? Do you need to work at creating moments with your harmony parts, instead of just singing whenever and wherever?

CREATING A DYNAMIC JOURNEY

Background vocalists should rarely sing the whole song into their microphones.

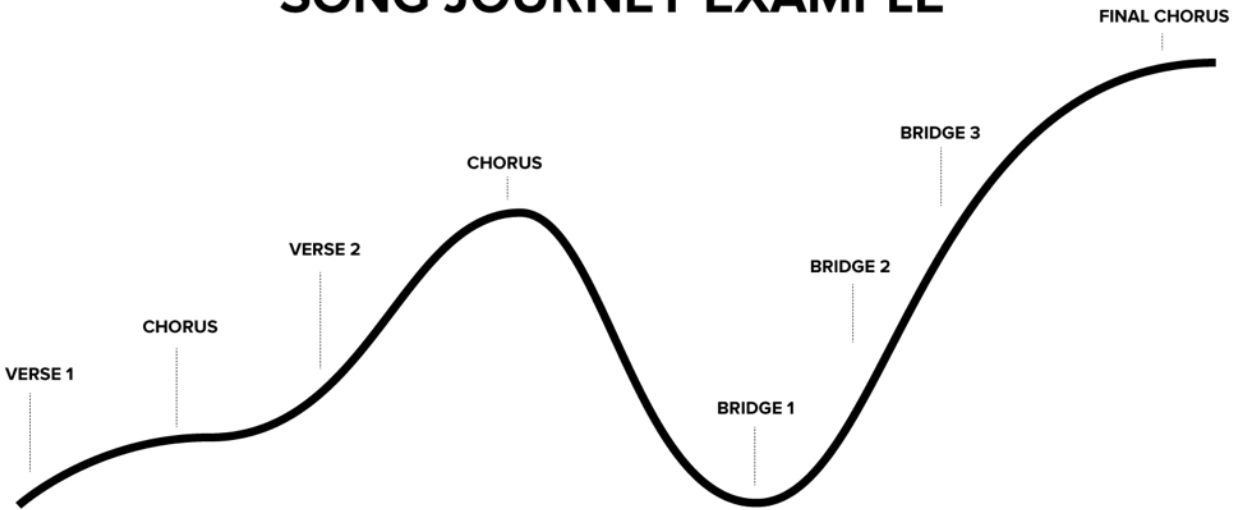
If all the singers come in right from the beginning... where do you go from there? It's important to think about each song as a journey, and think about where that journey will take us. How will it stay interesting and engaging? How will it build?

What are the **big, dramatic moments** we want to get to in a song? What will the vocalists will be doing in those spots? Usually the biggest moments are the bridge and the choruses later in the song. These sections will be most impactful when we have multiple vocalists singing—some on harmony, some on melody—and when we bring in the highest harmony lines.

What are the **lowest moments** in a song? What will the vocalists be doing in those spots? Usually the lowest moments are the first verse, first chorus, and the first time through the bridge. These sections will be the most impactful the more we strip away those extra voices and harmonies, usually having only the worship leader on mic singing the melody.

The goal is to use our harmonies and the number of vocalists we have on stage to create an intentional dynamic journey, with multiple rise and fall moments within our songs and worship sets. As background vocalists, we need to be thinking about and planning out when we'll sing on mic and what harmony we'll sing... we can't just be singing in our mics at all times if we want to create a dynamic journey! Harmony adds such a beautiful depth and texture to a song, and waiting until later in the song is so important because that's when the song needs something added! That's when it needs the build. The song wouldn't be as impactful if you weren't there to sing your harmony part, and it wouldn't be as impactful if your harmony part was present for the whole song. By showing restraint and choosing to be intentional, you actually bring more value to the sound... wow!

SONG JOURNEY EXAMPLE



By adding and taking away vocalists and instrumentalists, we create rise and fall moments for a dynamic journey.

How intentional are you about when you sing and what you sing? How intentional is your vocal team overall about when you sing and what you sing? How can you grow in this area? Are there things you could suggest to your leader, or to your team, about how you could do things differently?

STAGE PRESENCE

The presence and life you bring to the platform through your stage presence is so valuable. Your role as a background vocalist is so much more than what's coming out of your mouth! Your harmonies should be a support to the worship leader and to the overall sound, and your body language should also be a support to the worship leader and to the worship experience that you're creating as a team. As vocalists on stage, we should be demonstrating the kind of engagement that we want to see in our congregations!

You may be called a "background vocalist", but visibly, you are not in the background! We are all worship leaders on stage! Which means... you never have an "off" moment. Even at the times you're not singing into your microphone, it's still so important that you stay engaged, keep singing, and be leading the congregation through your facial expression and body language.

If the congregation sees you engaged in worship (mic up or mic down!), they will engage in worship. But, if they see you looking nervous or bored... if you're barely singing or barely moving... if you always look like you're waiting for your next time to come in... they will do the same!

How would you describe the way you look on stage? Facial expression, body language, movement? Have you seen a video of yourself on stage? Have you asked for / received feedback on your stage presence? How could you improve in this area?

THE HEART OF A WORSHIP VOCALIST

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. — Phil. 2:3

The worship team is a place for joy, passion, sincerity, unselfishness, humility, encouragement, a love for worship and a desire to see people encounter Jesus! It's a place we can have fun, build healthy community, and grow in our musicianship and skill!

The worship team is not a place for:

- our love of singing
- showcasing our skills
- wanting to be turned up loud
- a low level of commitment
- showing up late
- needing practice to be done at a certain time
- getting stuck in the way you always do things
- staying at the same skill level
- egos
- bad attitudes
- negative talk
- jealousy
- gossip
- offense
- dishonouring leadership

SELF-ASSESSMENT

As difficult as it may be, I encourage you to do a self-assessment of your heart and attitude! Are there things in the above list that you know you struggle with? Are there people you need to forgive? Are there people you need to apologize to? Are there ways you know you need to commit to change? Ask God for wisdom and help, and ask your leader to be honest with you about ways you can improve your attitude!

Let's all commit to learn, grow, and strive to be passionate worshippers and ideal team members!



Want to improve your harmony skills? Want to learn how to blend your voice with the other singers on your team? Check out my library of videos and resources at www.theworshipvocalist.com and join this amazing community of worship vocalists all around the world!