

# Playing Music - Skillfully

14 January 2017



*'Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.'* (Psalms 33:3)

The Bible encourages us to make a joyful noise unto the Lord, but in Psalm 33:3 the Bible also tells us to play skillfully. There are moments in worship where just a joyful noise will do (when the walls of Jericho came down with a shout, I doubt anyone checked what key they were in). But there are also moments in worship where great skill is required.

## **Learning Skillful Worship**

It is difficult for an inexperienced drummer to play quietly. It is hard for a beginner on the bass to play fast or with joyful Latin syncopation! A pianist with limited skill will simply bash away, and a singer who is untrained may struggle to find the note or stay in key.

## **My Rookie Error**

I remember the first time I ever fronted a live band. We were on a youth outreach in Spain. The day before my birthday, I was asked to fill in as lead singer, because the regular lead singer had to return home to Norway. So my 21st Birthday was spent sitting in a university canteen near Malaga, learning the songs, in English and Spanish (a language I didn't speak), for the big gig we would do the next night.



The next night arrived. We shared the stage with an R&B act and an indie band my brother and future brother-in-law had. When it was our turn, I spent twenty minutes running up and down stage, stirring up the crowd and singing my heart out.

At the halfway point, we came off stage. Our youth pastor, who was once in a successful pop band in the 80s, and so also acted as our music coach, spoke to us. 'Great job guys, lots of life, lots of energy, really good... Adam, can you try singing the songs, not just shouting?'

A little embarrassing!

It wasn't that I couldn't sing. At this point, I had been a backing vocalist for years and had led worship often. But in front of a large crowd, the excitement had gotten the better of me. With hindsight, one day's rehearsal wasn't enough to change me from a backing vocalist into a Rock 'n Roll front man!

'Don't practice till you get it right. Practice till you can't possibly get it wrong.'

## **Practice Makes Perfect**

Skill comes from a combination of knowledge and experience (experience is just another word for practice). My piano teacher always used to say, 'Don't practice till you get it right. Practice till you can't possibly get it wrong.' It is important for any musician who wants to use their gift for God, to honour God by practicing and growing in musical knowledge and skill.

*'Music Theory' is a term that unnecessarily scares a lot of people, especially self-taught musicians. In the 'Playing Music' part of this blog, I will be blowing the cobwebs off some music theory and helping make it practical for everyday use. This basic understanding of music theory will enhance your skill as a musician and enable you to flow better in moments of spontaneous worship.*