



## IN THE SERVICE OF WORSHIP: Lessons from Three Churches in Singapore



### Purpose

1. To study the significance of music in worship, both for the musicians and the congregation.
2. To question whether music is more important or the act of worshipping

### Research Questions

1. How are musicians for the music worship ministry chosen?
2. What is the process of a typical music worship rehearsal?
3. How does each member in the music worship team decide what to play?
4. How did each member of the music worship team learn how to play?
5. What is the difference between a music worship rehearsal and worship session, versus a pop band rehearsal and performance?

### Methodology

- Qualitative Approach
- Field observations of one music worship rehearsal and the corresponding worship service was done. Field notes were taken during the observation
- Individual online interview with the musicians and members from complementary ministries was done
- 26 adult participants across three Singapore churches were observed. 21 of them were musicians, and 5 were from complementary ministries that supported music worship

### Findings

#### Musicians were fearful of being a 'Distraction' [sic] to the congregation (ie. Focusing on the music instead of God)

- **Using Allen's (1998) 3 senses of power - power-over, power-to and power-with**
- Church leadership had the power-over the musicians to give the musicians the power-to serve in the music worship ministry.
- Power-over and Power-to was enforced through the list of prerequisites and musical auditions
- The prerequisites and auditions ensured that the power-with the music worship band to serve and support congregational worship without distractions was checked and maintained.
- **The interviewees acknowledged that they had the power-to affect worship through their music, and they made the conscious choice to prepare and practise to avoid "mistakes" [sic]**
- These mistakes include
  - unintentionally deviating from chords agreed upon;
  - mistimed entries;
  - dynamic levels not consonant with the worship band's dynamic;
  - and indulgent soloistic playing at the expense of the worship band
- Using Tresch & Dolan's (2013) framework of instrument's ethics:
  - **Material Disposition of the Instrument**
    - Ethical disposition that instrumentalists should have for music worship is to use their instruments and skill in serving for music worship rather than for one's own ego.
  - **Mode of Mediation**
    - Musicians keep in mind that mediation involves balance between individual instrumentalists and the band as a collective for congregational worship.
  - **Map of Mediations**
    - Mediation of music contributed to the potential of music being a distraction to the congregation
  - **Telos of an Instrument's Activity**
    - Not making music to entertain people like in a popular music performance, but for glorifying and serving God and for creating the environment for people to worship and experience divine presence.

### Limitations

1. I did not engage in interviews with the congregation, which would have given me perspectives on the congregations' reception on music-making congregation and music-making congregations
2. Studies on religion and theology remain subjective in the academic world as they are based on interview subject responses, from church leadership through to the congregation. My interviewees responses would have been based on their own belief in the religion, with attendant biases.

### Conclusion

- Playing skillfully either aided congregational worship, or potentially 'distracted' the congregation from their worship.
- What do the musicians prioritise? How do the musicians know if they are empowering the congregation by playing less or more? Do musicians restrain themselves while music-making for worship? If so, what is the purpose for upskilling?

ALLEN. (1998). Rethinking Power. *Hypatia*, 13(1), 21-40.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1998.tb01350.x>  
Tresch, J., & Dolan, E. I. (2013). Toward a New Organology: Instruments of Music and Science. *Osiris*, 28(1), 278-298.