

Though the phrase “blended worship” is in some ways out of fashion, there is still a great need in local, inter-generational congregations to learn how to effectively put together different music ensembles and worship styles in their worship services. Should you hold different services based on musical style? Have different ensembles lead different parts of the service? Blend everything in each service? This session will address methods of putting together diverse worship elements in a way that feels like they’re cut from the same cloth.

Blended Worship 2.0

Greg Scheer

INTRO: A LITTLE HISTORY

- Since the 19th century revivals, church music styles have changed with each generation.
- The contemporary praise movement was an even greater shift.
- In the 80s, many churches split over style or created separate “traditional” and “contemporary” services.
- In reaction to this, the blended worship movement began. There were two strains:
 - Blended – a combination of musical styles, best exemplified in *The Celebration Hymnal*.
 - Convergence – championed by Robert Webber, it focused on a return to liturgy and the convergence of historic and modern worship elements. See Webber’s *Renew!* hymnal.
- Since that time, worship styles have splintered even further.

WHY SHOULD WE BLEND?

- Christ calls us to be one. Shouldn’t this include some form of musical unity?
- We need to break the cycle of divided generations.
- We should utilize the variety of musicians God has given us.
- We are enriched and challenged by each other’s approaches.
- As the musical shepherds, we should not only use what is popular or comfortable, but also lead our people into an ever more expansive vision of worship.
- *Other reasons for (or against) blending?*

WHAT GOES INTO THE BLENDER?

- Different music styles.
- Different instruments, ensembles, people.
- Different “equipment” (organs, sound systems, hymnals, etc).
- Different liturgical and presentational approaches (written vs. extemporaneous prayer, formal vs. informal, transcendent vs. immanent)
- *Other elements that should be considered?*

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT METHODS OF BLENDING?

- Separate services (contemporary and traditional) could be seen as diversity under one roof.
- Blend over time. Different styles each week, with the goal of presenting a blend of styles over the course of a month or season.
- Blend by section. Different leaders and styles for different sections of the service; for example, an opening hymn on organ followed by a praise set, then an *a cappella* global prayer song, etc.
- Total blend. All musical styles and ensembles used throughout every service.

A BETTER BLEND?

- A few philosophical starting points:
 - Worship and music is only the tip of the iceberg.
 - Liturgy/sacraments may reduce some musical conflict.
 - Understand your own church's worship/history.
- Put people first!
- Be a pastor:
 - Know your church's "sweet spot" and stretch from there.
 - Choose your "stretching" music wisely.
 - The farther out of the sweet spot a particular song is, the more careful you need to be leading in and out of it.
- Be an artist:
 - Know your materials! Which songs fit together comfortably? Which instruments sound good together? Which elements flow and which break flow?
 - You can never know too much music.
 - Be creative.
- Know the tools of the trade:
 - Develop themes rather than just choosing songs.
 - Create flow by connecting elements.
 - Use instrumentation for cohesion and variety.
 - Plan and rehearse transitions.
 - Use key signatures and modulations to your advantage.
- Don't be tacky.

RESOURCES

Planning Blended Worship. Robert Webber. Abingdon Press. Nashville, 1998.

From the man who coined the term, this book is not a treatise on the practicalities of blending worship styles, but a superb introduction to the four-fold worship pattern. If you haven't read anything by Bob Webber (shame on you!) this is an excellent place to start.

The Art of Worship. Greg Scheer. BakerBooks. Grand Rapids, 2006.

Although the subtitle of my book is "A Musician's Guide to Leading Modern Worship," chapter four concentrates on understanding worship structures so that a variety of musical styles can be used. Chapter 6, "Timeless Hymns in a Contemporary Context" may keep your praise team from committing musical sins. All proceeds go to the

Sing! A New Creation. Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, FaithAlive, Reformed Church Press. Grand Rapids, 2001.

This collection should be on every worship planner's shelf. A variety of musical styles sit side by side according to their liturgical function.