

Instrumental Music Ministry in the Smaller Church

DAVID WINKLER

The ministry of instrumental music is first and foremost a ministry of praise to God, as echoed in the familiar words of the 150th Psalm. This ministry is fulfilled, however, not by instruments, but by people—people who find joy and meaning in using their talents to express their faith as a part of the body of Christ. Whether it's through being part of a full symphonic orchestra, or as a soloist or member of a small ensemble, an instrumentalist's offering of praise is important both in the life of the individual, and in the kingdom of God.

Though many churches have large ensembles of 25, 30, or more players, it is to the smaller church situation that this article is addressed. However, it is hoped the topics discussed will be of value to anyone seeking to involve players in a variety of new and different ways.

The Players in your Congregation

In almost every congregation, there is at least one individual who plays or has played a band or orchestral instrument. He or she may be a high school or junior high school student; a college

student; a young adult who is not far removed from his playing days; or an adult who might call himself a “has been” player. Some of these instrumentalists may already be involved in your ministry as choir members. In other cases, you may find a player who is not particularly interested in singing, but would relish the chance to play her instrument in church.

There is also the occasional situation of an adult who has learned to play an instrument later in life. For instance, a woman I once knew had always wanted to play the cello, and after her children were grown, she acquired an instrument and began taking lessons. After a year or so, she began sitting in with the church orchestra, and after about two years, she became a regular orchestra member.

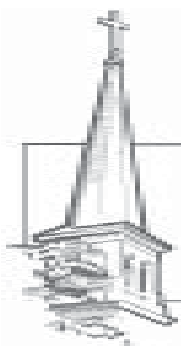
Because of the diversity of ages and ability levels, it's essential to conduct some type of audition or interview with prospective players. Set up a time where you can hear the person play. Invite him to bring a piece or two to play for you, and have some music on hand which he can sightread as well. Generally, students need a good three years of playing in band or school orchestra before they have mastered the basic techniques of their instrument well enough to participate in a church music ministry. Adults who have not played in a number of years can be encouraged that, if they had a decent amount of ability on their instrument in the past,

they should be able to recover their skill to an acceptable level within two or three months of playing again (though, particularly for brass players, their endurance may be lacking compared to the time when, as a student, they played an hour or more daily). The audition time also offers an excellent opportunity get to know the person better, to ask about his family, and to become aware of his spiritual needs.

Getting Started

After you have discovered who the instrumentalists are in your congregation, your next step is to decide where to “plug them in.”

The first and easiest place to involve instrumentalists is in accompanying the congregational hymn singing. Nontransposing instruments, such as the flute, violin, or trombone, could easily play out of the hymnbook, but in most cases, some type of orchestrated hymnal is desirable. These are available in several formats (see **Orchestrated Hymnals**, page 13). For greater variety, don't have everyone play on all the verses. For example, brass could play on the first stanza, woodwinds on the second, and everyone on the last. Some of these hymnals also contain an obligato or descant line. Another option would be to use separately published instrumental descants or obbligatos, such as Douglas Smith's **61 Trumpet Hymns and Descants** or **61 Trombone Hymns and**



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Counter melodies, both from Hope Publishing Company. Be creative. For example, try having an instrumental solo play the entire melody of the hymn before the congregation sings, or have two instruments play alternating phrases (such as the echoing lines of the hymn, “All Creatures of Our God and King”).

Once you’ve established your instrumentalists in playing during the congregational hymn singing, you’re ready to move on to (1) featuring the instruments by themselves, and (2) using the instruments along with the choir.

Solos, Duets, and Trios

If you have a player who is competent and can play with confidence by himself, by all means, consider using that person as an instrumental soloist. There is an abundance of sacred music of varying styles and difficulty levels which has been arranged for solo instrument. Some of the outstanding offerings from various publishers include: the Fletch Wiley solo collections from Word Music; Anderkamp Music’s **People’s Church Solo Series**, by Jim Gray; selections from David E. Smith Publications (numerous); and solo music from SoundForth Press. One of my favorite solo books is **The Faithful Clarinetist**, by Ron Harris, in which the full range of the clarinet is idiomatically exploited in a delightful way. For some very easy solo arrangements, check out the **Instrumental Hymn Solos** from Lillenas. Hal Leonard, Psalm 150 Publications, and Mel Bay Publications also have several solo collections in their catalogs. Besides the usual piano accompaniments, some solo arrangements also come with CD tracks or even MIDI disk options.

If you have two or three good players, consider having them perform in duet or trio fashion. Most often, such small groupings will be of like instruments (such as a trumpet trio), or of those from the same family (such as a flute/clarinet duet). Again, a perusal of several publisher catalogs will yield a number of possibilities. Douglas Smith has duet books for flute, trumpet, and trombone available from David E. Smith Publications. **Brethren, We Have Met to Worship**, arranged by Alan Lohr (SoundForth Press), is a fine duet for

two B-flat instruments, and would make a great service opener. A well-received arrangement of mine is the flute trio, **In the Garden** (Psalm 150 Publications, distributed by Theodore Presser). Lifeway Christian Resources’ quarterly publication, **Instrumental Praise**, often includes duets or trios of various types.

Small Ensembles

Small ensembles are traditionally built around standard instrumental groupings, such as the string quartet and the brass or woodwind quintet. Much music is available for such homogenous groupings. For example, Lillenas Music has recently developed a series of small ensemble arrangements entitled **BrassScapes**, **WindScapes**, and **StringScapes**. Other publishers offer a good amount of brass ensemble music, with several including woodwind and string arrangements in the catalogs as well.

In many churches, however, the standard instrumental formulas are not easily fulfilled. The church instrumental ministry by its very nature is often a “whosoever will may come” proposition. The results of this reality are that, in most cases, our handful of players consists of something other than a classic instrumental grouping. Fortunately, several publishers have stepped in to address the needs of such hybrid ensembles.

The **Exaltation** Series, from Genevox Music Group, uses a carefully crafted, four-part, flexible format with optional piano and percussion parts. Produced by Camp Kirkland and written by several church orchestra directors, this is music which will truly “work” with a small group of players, up to an entire orchestra. There are presently three volumes of 10 pieces each available. A similar series from Genevox is the new **Rhythm Plus 4**, arranged by Tom Payne. These arrangements utilize a rhythm section backing up the four-part format to create a fun, upbeat sound.

Similar flexible approaches can be found in “4 or more” arrangements from SoundForth Press and in the Salvation Army series (available from David E. Smith Publications). Another noteworthy product is the **Sounds of Celebration** collection, arranged by Stan Pethel, published by Hal Leonard. These arrangements are designed to be played

by a solo instrument with piano or CD tracks, or multiple players up to full orchestra.

Finally, depending on the instrumentation of your group, you may be able to use some easier level church orchestra pieces, such as the Allegis **Silver** Series, Genevox **Jubilation** Series, or Word **Sunday Sounds**. Also worthy of consideration are Douglas Smith’s **Churchestra** arrangements, published by Psalm 150 Publications and Doxology Music.

An example of a small church ensemble would be the group at Preston Oaks Baptist Church in Roanoke, Virginia. The group, which includes both youth and adult players, is composed of nine players: one flute, three clarinets, an alto sax, a trumpet, a trombone, electric bass, and piano. According to their director, John Martin, even with this limited instrumentation, they have been able to use some of the Genevox Jubilation arrangements. John says, “I sequence some of the missing parts, such as the percussion. Sometimes I have the accompanist play the string reduction on one keyboard while the sequence covers the piano part.” Evidently this combination works, as John adds, “the congregation doesn’t know what’s live and what’s ‘Memorex’!” In addition to the regular church instrumental group, Preston Oaks has begun a separate group for younger, less experienced players who will eventually graduate to the “orchestra.”

Accompanying Choral Music

Having your instrumentalists in play with the choir can be accomplished in several ways. The first would be to use one of many choral arrangements which include an optional instrumental solo or duet. An example of this would be Hal Hopson’s arrangement of **Be Thou My Vision** (Brookfield Press), which includes optional parts for one or two C instruments (flute, oboe, or violin). Another example would be Benjamin Harlan’s **Gesu Bambino** (also from Brookfield Press), with optional percussion and flute or oboe. The advantage of this approach is that adding one or two instruments can add some color and interest to the arrangement without the danger of overpowering the vocals.

The second approach would be to use a published orchestration to accompany the choral piece. This will often work well even if you don't have all the parts covered, as long as there is sufficient support from the keyboards. Use your own judgment and depart from the written score if need be to get the best overall sound in your situation. For example, a trumpet line which was mixed way down in the demo recording may sound out of balance with your performing group, so you may need to politely ask your player or players to leave out those few measures for the sake of the whole.

The third approach would be to create your own instrumental parts as needed. This can be time-consuming and perhaps a little tedious if you are not practiced in writing music, but the rewards are great in that you can customize the music to fit your situation. If you don't have the time or the skills to do this yourself, perhaps another musician in your community or an aspiring student composer could step in and assist. There's no greater way for a developing composer to learn than to have his or her music performed by a live group of players.

Using Rhythm and Folk Instrument Players

In addition to players who have been through the discipline of being a part of a band or orchestra, there may be someone in your church who plays a "rhythm section" instrument, i.e., guitar, electric bass, or drums. Likewise, there may be someone who plays a folk instrument such as the banjo, mandolin, or dulcimer. Often these players will not even know how to read music, but may be skilled in improvising or playing "by ear." Depending on the musical style which is being employed, the inclusion of these musicians can often lend a pleasing element to the music used in worship or other occasions in the life of the church.

A friend in a former church of mine came into the music ministry as a trumpet player. He usually played third part and had a very modest ability. I learned that he played harmonica, however, and was surprised to find that he had a very sensitive and expressive way of playing that instrument. When-

ever he played his "harp" in church, it always brought an unusual sense of joy and blessing to those listening.

Julia Callaway, Organist/Associate Choir Director at Vine Street Christian Church in Nashville, Tennessee, describes a group which has come about at her church which calls itself the "Joyful Noise." The group is led by a volunteer who plays guitar and mandolin, sings well, and is also a songwriter. Julia explains: "He 'arranges' various folk or gospel hymn tunes for occasional use in worship and is good at working out simple chord charts for the songs. Most members of the group and play some kind of string instrument—guitar, mandolin, autoharp, electric bass, banjo, etc., and one youth plays the drums." Some of the players sing as they play, and they are joined by several non-playing singers as well. Julia adds, "It takes a very creative person to make these amateur musicians sound as good as they do. Their leader works hard on getting an authentic sound...I just help out a little if a song is not familiar to them."

Utilizing Players Outside the Worship Service

There are many occasions in the life of a church which may provide an opportunity for instrumentalists to use their talents outside of the worship service itself. Fellowships, banquets, and Sunday School parties are excellent places for instrumentalists to share their music, as are weddings and even funerals. Outreach efforts, such as visits to a childrens' home or a senior citizens' center, are also wonderful opportunities for your players to share their gifts. Christmas is a choice time to utilize instrumentalists in small groups playing in the church foyer, at shopping malls, or at caroling events. The possibilities are truly limitless.

In conclusion, whether your church is large or small, I encourage you to seek out the instrumentalists in your congregation and help them find a place of service. It will make a difference in the life of those individuals, and in the life of your church.

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ORCHESTRATED HYMNALS

by David Winkler

Many of the major hymnals published include supplemental product for church orchestra. These hymnal orchestrations come in several different formats, and it's helpful to understand how the arrangements are constructed before committing to purchase them for your instrumental group.

One type of orchestrated hymnal consists of a simple SATB format which follows the SATB parts from the hymn itself. An example of this type of orchestration would be the instrumental books that accompany the **Majesty Hymns** hymnal (published by Majesty Music). These arrangements have a lot of flexibility, since parts can be assigned as needed.

Another type of hymnal orchestration could be called an expanded SATB format. The brass parts provide the "core" of the arrangements, their parts being adapted from the SATB hymn, while the woodwinds and strings either double the brass or play countermelodies. Percussion parts provide an additional feature. This approach was used in **The Instrumental Hymnal** (which accompanies **The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration**, from Word Music) and the 1991 **Baptist Hymnal**. Because of the brass core, these arrangements sound solid, but have the additional interest of the countermelody parts.

In the "third generation" of hymnal orchestrations, the orchestra is treated more in the manner of a choral accompaniment. The brass may play a supportive role or provide accented figures between the phrases of the hymn, while the woodwinds and strings play various sustained parts or countermelodies. This treatment was used in the **Sing to the Lord** hymnal (Lillenas), the **Celebration Hymnal** (Word), and the 2008 **Baptist Hymnal**. These orchestrations include (1) the song lyrics, and (2) the melody of the hymn on a separate line, both of which were added to aid the players in worship by making them aware of the hymn text, and to provide the option of playing the melody rather than the orchestrated line if so desired. Because these arrangements are scored more symphonically than the previously described formats, they often require more rehearsal time to prepare, but may be preferable if you desire an orchestral sound which does not double the voice parts.

For more information on orchestrated hymnals, please see my "Sources of Instrumental Music for Church Musicians" list at <https://www.davidwinkler.com/articles-about-instrumental-music>.

One final word: because many hymnals carry the same standard tunes, it is possible to use one hymnal with the instrumentalists, and a different one with the congregation. Occasionally, however, the hymns may vary in key or in the arrangement, so be sure that your keyboard players have the same version that the orchestra is using. Otherwise, you may be in for an unexpected surprise!

(Note: this article has been updated slightly from the original Creator magazine article titled "Instrumental Music Ministry in the Smaller Church").