

ARE WORSHIP BANDS A BANE OR BLESSING?

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At a time when many churches are doing away with their organs, we happily retain ours – indeed, it was only four years ago that we bought one of the latest ‘state of the art’ Allen organs. I firmly believe that there is still a place for organs.

But there is undoubtedly also a place for worship bands. Indeed, we have fortunate enough to have four, if not five, separate worship bands which regularly play at our three Sunday services. We are a church which is blessed with a good number of gifted and (most importantly) committed musicians. Yes, I readily confess that there are times when the music they play does nothing for me. But I know that the music they play is a means of worship for the younger half of the church, and so I am more than content. For frankly, if my musical tastes were to be the final arbiter in our church, our congregations would be halved, if not decimated!

This does not mean to say that I do not share my opinions with the worship band leaders. Far from it. In fact, I meet on a monthly basis with them, after the evening service, to discuss issues of concern. Sometimes I raise issues, sometimes they raise issues – and then there is ‘full and frank discussion’. For instance, at our last meeting we talked about the ‘flow of worship’. The minutes state: “PB-M cited how essential it is to have a ‘Call to Worship’ which leads into an opening hymn praising God, which in turn leads to prayers as we consider our response. Ian challenged whether we need a hymn or whether a modern song could be used instead. Dave challenged whether we always need to open the service in the same way; why not begin with a dance, a video, or a block of worship”. I love that word “challenged”: it certainly gives the flavour of our meetings, where no holds are barred and no quarter is given – and yet, where my worship band leaders, bless them, respect the fact that ultimately their senior minister has the responsibility for the church’s worship.

We talked too about ‘blocks of worship’ and the problems that older people have with an extended block of worship, “especially if they have no direction about standing or sitting or if they have no idea how many songs they are going to sing in a row.... As worship leaders we need to be sensitive to these concerns”. On the other hand, “for many an extended time of worship is the place when they can draw close to God, and it can take three or four songs before you push aside your day-to-day concerns and really begin to worship. With a rigid three-song limit, this point may never be achieved”. Do you get the feel of where we are at as a church? Our difficulty is that we are neither one thing nor another. We are neither totally traditional nor totally contemporary – we have decided to aim for diversity. It is in that context that our worship bands are prepared to operate – and they are most certainly a blessing.