

Worship Leading & Stage Presence

Overcoming Stage Fright & Communicating Confidence

By Dan Smith

First things first, we are not judging you! Stage presence is not always a direct reflection of an individual's internal emotional, psychological or spiritual status. However, stage presence has a very real and direct impact on how we lead and the effectiveness of our leadership as worshippers and musicians in church. Good stage presence isn't about performance, it's about leadership.

What is Stage Presence?

Technically, stage presence is defined as "the ability to command an audience with impressive style or manner."

For our use, in a church environment, we will refer to it as "the ability to inspire and lead an audience with transparency, integrity, energy, sincerity and passion."

At CFC, we believe that praise and worship through music and song is profoundly important to the spiritual health and well-being of the church, the bride of Christ. We desire to lead our church in singing and praise with sincerity and passion and to inspire others to do the same. This kind of leadership requires humility, practice, conscious effort and a willingness to be challenged and to conquer our fears.

Good stage presence communicates engagement. Those you are leading cannot read your heart and mind and simply trust that you are engaged in the lyrics and music you are singing or playing. You communicate your engagement through your body language and stage presence. It's not enough to simply sing the songs - we **MUST** be engaged in the entire process of worship.

It has been said to me that if I'm experiencing stage fright it's because I'm thinking too much about me and not enough about Jesus. OUCH! Dang, that stings. But that sentence has stuck with me and continues to push me out of my shell every time I lead worship.

One thing we need to get out of the way first is an understanding that worship through music is not just a time of spiritual engagement, but it is also an emotional and intellectual one as well. Music is a profoundly emotional language - that's the point of music! God gave us the gift of music so that we could emotionally connect with Him and worship Him. We need to understand that worship and music in church gatherings is an emotional, intellectual, and spiritual response - an opportunity to give God our ALL. It's okay to communicate our emotions as leaders from the platform both verbally and non-verbally. God is after ALL of us - not just part of us - this includes our emotions, and music is an emotional tool God uses to receive His glory!

Lastly, there is an important distinction to make between performance and stage presence. At CFC we lead worship from a platform not a stage. A stage is a place of performance, a platform is a place of influence. When done well, stage presence from a platform is highly influential and inspirational when practiced in worship leading.

Here are, what I hope to be, some helpful thoughts and insights to help you conquer your fears and mature as a worship leader with confident and commanding stage presence.

Body Language is Everything

Awareness

Being aware of oneself is absolutely the most crucial first step to good practices in good stage presence. When you are singing, when you aren't singing, when you are or are not playing - being aware of what your body, your posture, your face, etc. is communicating is critical. Always know that at every moment you are communicating something whether or not you are speaking, singing or playing.

Posture. Posture. Posture.

Posture consciousness is a crucial skill to have as a worship leader. Did you know that the majority of what we communicate is done non-verbally? Between 60-90% of our communication is done through our body language (non-verbal cues) or vocal tone or vocal inflection. How we physically hold ourselves can communicate a lot to our congregation. A couple questions to ask yourself before or as you get on stage:

- 1.) Am I standing straight with a straight back?
- 2.) Where am I facing, the projector or the congregation in front of me?
- 3.) How are my feet planted? Am I standing like a pencil or am I standing like I normally would stand?
- 4.) Am I stiff and awkward or am I fluid and comfortable/confident?
- 5.) Am I standing still or moving to the music?

Avoid Stiffness

Try to avoid stiffness, planting your feet and never moving. Take the microphone out of the stand and hold it in your hand. As a vocalist, microphone stands can act too much like anchors and safety blankets. As an instrumentalist, music stands have the same effect. Move around the platform in your own space. Sway to the music, respond to it as you play and as you sing - these actions communicate confidence and that you are connecting and engaging with the music and it's content, not just singing it.

Music Memorization

Vocalists and instrumentalists - I STRONGLY encourage you to memorize your music - chord progressions, instrumental parts, lyrics, etc. The less locked you are to the lyrics on the projector or the chords on your music stand, the more free you are to engage 100% of yourself in worship. You will feel a freedom you've never known in worship when you

remove the mic stands, the projectors and the music stands and you can solely focus on Jesus with all of your energy and attention. The less you are looking down at a stand or back at a wall, the more you can engage with God and the congregation.

What Should I Do With My Hands?

"Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the Lord." - Psalm 134:2

Lift your hands. Move them. Groove them. Make them dance. Hold your hands out as if you are offering something to God. Begin worship this way - it will set a tone for the entire congregation. Lift them high at moments as if you are reaching to touch the very face of God. These actions will encourage the congregation to do the same. They will follow your lead - what you do, they too will feel comfortable doing.

Avoid keeping your hands connected to your sides or stuck to a microphone stand as a crutch for the entirety of a worship set - this communicates an awkward uncomfortability and can be off-putting.

What Should I Do With My Face?

Smile naturally! A lot of us have resting b#@%\$ face. I get it. (I have it). It's important that as we talk, pray, sing, we smile and be conscious of our facial expressions as if we were in conversation with someone. Even if we are simply a musician or vocalist who is not singing in that moment - be aware of your facial expressions and what they are communicating. Make the effort to be engaged at all times - smile in response to the lyrics or a prayer and what we're singing about. Communicate a relaxed yet confident look. I have a hard time remembering not to furrow my brow all the time and look like I'm constantly perturbed or annoyed about something - we all have things we need to conquer but it requires us all to make the effort!

What Should I Do With My Eyes?

Open them or close them? That's always the question in worship leading. Should I keep my eyes closed all of the time or open them and stare awkwardly at the congregation? The answer here is balance. Find a comfortable balance for you between opening your eyes and closing them during worship. When they're open, try to avoid staring blankly at the lyrics on the projection screen or staring awkwardly at the crowd with a blank face. Again, smile with your mouth and smile with your eyes - it's okay to make eye contact with those you are leading - it lets the congregation know that you are present with them and makes them feel comfortable. When we close our eyes the entire time we unintentionally construct a wall between ourselves and the congregation. If you feel uncomfortable making direct eye contact with the congregation, don't look into their eyes - look at their foreheads and funny hairdos.

Look up into the space above the congregation as if Jesus were sitting right before you and you were singing directly to him. Make eye contact with the invisible God we love, serve and worship.

Conclusion

Just remember, no matter what, to be engaged at all times with the Holy Spirit at work in and through you as you lead, sing and play. It's not about performance, it's about worship. It's not about you, it's about Jesus. Cast your fears aside as you trust solely in Him and look upon His face with majesty and splendor. Be amazed by Him as you sing and invite your brothers and sisters to do the same as you lead them into His throne room.