



The Praise Band/Worship Team event (991), at Christian School Finals Competition, provides an opportunity for teams to perform two to three selections in a flowing, worshipful manner. Competitors in this event enjoy greater latitude in music selection that can range from traditional hymns to the most current contemporary music. Often these teams incorporate an acoustic guitarist to add versatility to their group. Recognizing the evolving role of the guitarist in worship today, ORU instructor Chris Brown discusses the basic equipment needs of the modern worship guitarist.

## THE WORSHIP GUITARIST The Tools of the Electric Guitarist in Worship

By: Chris Brown



Anybody who has listened to the releases over the last few years from people like Chris Tomlin, Hillsong or David Crowder can hear the important role of the electric guitar in worship. About ten years ago the primary vehicle for many of the worship leaders was acoustic guitar with electric guitar taking a more textural function. Who can forget Darrell Evan's *Freedom* album or Paul Baloche's *Open the Eyes of My Heart*? I started teaching at Oral Roberts University when *Freedom* was released and at that time, everybody on campus was trying to play the catchy hook from *Trading My Sorrows*. Listening to the music of these two modern worship pioneers one can hear that nearly every song began with an acoustic groove with the other parts of the rhythm section mixed in behind. Compare the music from that time to David Crowder's *Our Love Is Loud* or the Hillsong masterpiece *Mighty to Save*. There is now a mix that emphasizes the electric guitar hooks and delay-rich overdriven layering.



The role of the electric guitarist has definitely changed. Modern worship guitar is rock guitar. Stylistically, it is similar to what I call a 90s alternative rock sound. Groups like Nirvana, Smashing Pumpkins and especially U2 set the mold that drives the qualities of worship electric guitar. The music of the 90s emphasized texture instead of virtuosity, lyrics instead of instrumentation and raw energy over studio production. When Darrell Evan's previously mentioned album was released in 1998, acoustic was the primary driving vehicle. Today, a decade later, electric guitar drives the song as often as acoustic. Listen to the various Hillsong and Hillsong United releases over the last few years. Things have changed dramatically since *Shout to the Lord*. Even primarily acoustic guitar driven material such as Chris Tomlin's is interwoven with thick overdriven, echo-rich electric guitar textures. In this article I will discuss basic equipment and its uses.

In terms of equipment there are three things on which a guitarist should focus: the guitar, the amp and the effects. When I was a teenager there were really two guitars that always stood out: the Fender Stratocaster and the Gibson Les Paul. There were other brands at that time but those were the two that everybody wanted. These days it is possible for anybody to get a good guitar at a reasonable price. With web stores and the increase in quality imports, everybody can get involved without breaking the piggybank. When selecting a guitar the two important items a person must consider are playability and intonation. One can always get different pickups to change or improve the sound, but if you can't easily play it or it doesn't get in tune, upgrading it can get very costly and may not be worth it if you are on a budget.

## THE GUITAR

In terms of tone, electric guitars can be divided into two broad categories: single or double coil. By coil, I am referring to the pickup. The pickup is like a microphone which converts string vibrations into a signal which can be amplified. There are other factors which affect tone such as body type, strings, etc. but for the purposes of this article we will focus on the pickup exclusively.

A single coil guitar will usually have a thinner sound. Probably the most popular single coil guitar is the Fender Stratocaster. There are many companies that make "strat" copies and it is possible to get a very good knock-off at a reasonable price. There are advantages to a thinner sound. One is controllability. The single coil pickup has less gain (input volume) than a double coil making it easier for the musician to play harder with less peaks. On a three pickup guitar like a strat, the selector switch can be set in-between the pickups to create an out of phase sound. The strat is a versatile instrument which is used in rock, funk, country, blues and many other styles. Its disadvantages are lower gain and thinner sound. Also, the single coil usually produces a low hum which can be heard when the guitar is not being played. There are some single coil pickups on the market that eliminate the hum. Take a look at a video of Lincoln Brewster at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkT4tLiH32M>. Brewster uses strats almost exclusively live and every time I see him I want to start using a strat!

Double coil guitars have a heavier sound than single coil guitars. The most famous double coil guitar is probably the Les Paul. Originally designed to eliminate that pesky hum



generated by the single coil guitars, double coil pickups are sometimes called “humbuckers”. The heavy sound is very popular with many rock bands. The sound tends to be more “bassy” and rich. Lately, I have been using a double coil guitar in worship because I get a heavier sound at a lower volume. I believe the downside to that heavier sound is the lack of versatility; however,

I have seen guitarists in the past use Les Pauls in many different scenarios. Additionally, many guitars have coil taps and phase selectors which help add to the double coil’s versatility. There are many different types of pickups, single and double coil, which produce a variety of different tones and textures. Some guitars even have single and double coil pickups together. On the Talo amp website there is an audio clip of a Les Paul played through one of their amps. Take a moment to listen to the Combo 4 audio clip and compare the sound of the Les Paul to that of the Fender Stratocaster in the Brewster Video at this link, [http://www.talosoinstruments.com/Sound\\_Samples.htm](http://www.talosoinstruments.com/Sound_Samples.htm).

## THE AMP

The guitar amplifier or amp is as important as the guitar. I sometimes think it is more important. Think about it, does the listener hear your guitar or your amp? It’s the amp, of course. The amplifier is the voice of the electric guitar; in fact, I tell my students to find a decent guitar-maybe a used one-that plays well with solid intonation and invest the bulk of their money in a good amplifier.

There are three types of amps on the market: tube, solid state and modeling. A tube amp uses vacuum tubes to process the power. Tubes use heat to cause the flow of electrons through the tube. This process creates a warm sound which many guitarists feel results in better tone. Solid state amps use transistors to process the power. Many feel the sound is dry and sterile; however, there are some jazz guitarists who prefer the more subtle sound. Modeling amps amplify digital profiles of popular amps. For some on a fixed budget, the modeling amps are sometimes a good alternative.

Most amps have the ability to be “overdriven” by turning up the pregain and overdriving the master or post gain. This type of distortion is usually the most desirable because it usually has more clarity than a distortion pedal. Many amps have two channels—clean and lead. The guitarist can set the clean channel for softer tones and the other for a hotter distorted sound. In order to reduce stage volume, many churches have a no amp policy and require everybody to go direct into the PA system. If you watch the Lincoln Brewster video you will be surprised to hear that his amps are for stage volume only and he actually uses a POD X3 Live for his performance sound. You can visit the POD X3 Live website at <http://line6.com/podx3live/>.

Over the years I have used all three amp types, but most of the time I am a tube man. For worship, I am currently using a Dr. Z Maz 18-Jr. To enjoy their audio clips visit the website at <http://www.drzamps.com/maz18.html>.



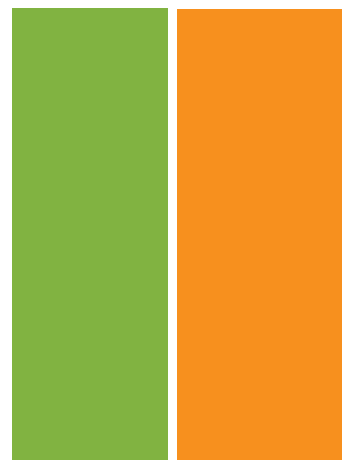
## THE EFFECTS

Effects are integral to the sound of modern worship and probably no other group does it better than the Hillsong crew. Listen to the delay rich sounds of *From The Inside Out (Everlasting)* on the Youtube clip at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbGgA2IIDjc&feature=related>.

There are literally thousands of effects on the market and many different categories but three stand out as the most integral to modern worship: distortion, modulation, delay or echo. A distortion pedal more or less changes the wave form of the guitar signal to make it sound like an overdriven amp. In the past, many distortion effects muddled the sound and decreased clarity. During the early 80's Ibanez developed a stompbox called "The Tube Screamer." Many believe this device created a benchmark for distortion or overdrive pedals. I have been told by those in the know that many of the distortion pedals on the market are variations of the Screamer. If you are ever discussing distortion with a fellow guitarist and want to sound smart and informed you should check out this site <http://www.geofex.com/effxfaq/distn101.htm>. Today, there are some amazing units which create that desirable rock sound without sacrificing clarity. I often use these pedals to get a light overdriven sound; however, I also use them to get a hotter, hard rock tone. I use the "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" by Visual Sounds and the "Fulldrive" by Fulltone.

Modulation effects are a broad category which includes chorus, flanger, phase shifter and others. They are called modulation effects because they usually have some aspect of their process which affects tuning. The most popular modulation effect is probably chorus. Chorus became widely used in the 80s and still gets much use today. It creates a shimmering doubling effect by feeding a signal back into itself and allowing the user to vary the intensity. Occasionally I will put a chorus pedal in my chain, but lately, I have been using the modulation effect on my digital delay. To many, the chorus is a dated sound. Tremolo, vibrato and pitch detune/harmonizer also fall into this large category.

Digital delay is sometimes called echo. It basically duplicates the source tone of the instrument in the form of a repeat or echo. The volume and tempo of the echo can be changed as well as the number and type of repeats. Although it's debatable who invented it, the first market ready echo devices were created during the 60s and used actual magnetic tape with multiple tape heads to record the source note and create the repeat. Today the repeat is created digitally although there are some manufacturers still making tape and analog delays for those who desire a truly "retro" sound. In modern worship the skillful use of delay is critical. I have met several worship leaders who specifically look for guitarists who know how to use it. In many instances the repeated note becomes part of the song. *From the Inside Out* has a distinct repeated delay pattern overlaid against the source notes. It is a "dotted eighth" repeat pattern. This is the same type of pattern made famous by The Edge from U2 in songs like *Wire* and *Where The Streets Have No Name*; in fact, much of the worship style electric guitar can be traced back to the music of U2 from the early to mid 80s and later. The Edge's sound is primarily based upon a dual delay setup where one delay is



reprocessed by another creating a wide, multidimensional effect. There is an excellent site at [http://www.amnesta.net/edge\\_delay/](http://www.amnesta.net/edge_delay/) analyzing his delay setup. It even has MP3 examples of certain U2 songs with and without effect. Personally, I have found that the best way to learn is to play with the effect until you get the sound that you want. I use the Line 6 Tone Core and Boss Gigidelay for my delay needs.

By no means have I covered all aspects or categories of the equipment needs of the modern worship guitarist. In the future I plan to address issues of style, rhythm, technique and many other things critical to successful worship. Until then, try to always achieve excellence and always remember why we are ultimately involved in worship.

Chris Brown is a professor at Oral Roberts University. He teaches guitar as well as improvisation and contemporary theory. He also directs the Guitar Ensemble and Jazz Combo. Brown is heavily involved in the Worship Arts/Worship Leadership Program including auditions, teaching classes and curriculum development. He attends and plays electric guitar at The Life Connection in Jenks, Oklahoma. He can be reached at [chbrown@oru.edu](mailto:chbrown@oru.edu).

### **CHRISTIAN SCHOOL FINALS COMPETITION DATES**

The next ORU Christian School Finals Competition will take place May 23-28, 2010. Reserve these dates on your school calendars.

### **COMPETITION HANDBOOK 2010**

The 2009 Competition Handbook will be accessible online at the Competition Web site at <http://competition.oru.edu> by November 1, 2009.

### **CONTACT US**

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