Creative Worship Ideas for Student Instrumentalists
(from a 2012 Music Week Workshop at Lutheridge in Arden, NC)
Erik Whitehill

OVERARCHING PHILOSOPHY

I think we can all agree: having student instrumentalists participating in worship is a worthwhile goal. To achieve this (or anything worthwhile in life, really), the first thing needed is an understanding of why we want to do it to happen. With this in mind, let us begin with a big picture philosophy, or “the why.” Consider the following worship leadership mission statement: “As worship leaders it is our goal to help people become and remain life-long worship participants.”

The first part of the statement is “helping people become worship participants.” This calls us to two tasks: inviting participation in worship and providing worship education. In the case of student instrumentalists, this means not only do we need to invite them to come and play, we also need to teach them what worship is and how their part fits in the service. They need to know that their participation is wanted and why it is important.

The second sub-category is helping people remain worship participants. This calls us to two more tasks: providing opportunities for meaningful contribution and providing worship leadership training. If we want the continued participation of student instrumentalists, we need to be sure that what we are asking them to do is of the highest quality and purpose. We also need to provide them the necessary training to do it successfully.

STUDENT INSTRUMENTALISTS IN WORSHIP

ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE SCHOOL

Unpitched Percussion
A very simple way to involve younger children in worship music is to ask them play unpitched percussion instruments (e.g., hand drums, rhythm sticks, finger cymbals). Most elementary school music programs are teaching students steady beat and ostinato patterns with these instruments. Why not have the children use those skills in worship as well? These instruments could be added to special music/octavos sung by a children’s choir. They can also just as easily be added to congregational hymns and service music. Just be sure that the children are playing something specific, not just random noise (I have seen what a disaster that can be). Children can easily play simple ostinato patterns and have immediate success. The possibilities are endless. See two examples below:

Orff Instruments
If you have barred Orff instruments at your church, by all means get your children going and incorporate them into worship music. Again, a lot of schools use these instruments as major component of their music programs, so there is no reason not to have children playing them in worship also. I have been through two level of Orff certification training and could write an enormous article on this subject alone, but let me just list a few ideas and show some examples.
Borduns
A very simple and time-honored way to use barred instruments to support congregational song is through borduns. These are repeated patterns that use the tonic and dominant primarily in bass instruments. There are four types of borduns: chord, broken, crossover (alternating hands), and level (shared between bass and alto instruments). See examples below:

![Bordun Examples](image)

These elemental patterns are easily mastered by young players. They work particularly well to give bass support to pentatonic hymns (built on the pentatonic scale of do, re, mi, sol and la). Here are some examples of pentatonic hymns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hymn Tune</th>
<th>Common Texts</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ave de</td>
<td>Come, Let Us Eat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beach Spring</td>
<td>Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Converse</td>
<td>What a Friend We have in Jesus</td>
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<td>Foundation</td>
<td>How Firm a Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Holy Manna</td>
<td>God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jesus Loves Me</td>
<td>Jesus Loves Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingsfold</td>
<td>I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nettleton</td>
<td>Come Thou Font of Every Blessing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Britain</td>
<td>Amazing Grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slane</td>
<td>Be Thou My Vision, Lord of All Hopefulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayfaring Stranger</td>
<td>I am a Poor Wayfaring Stranger</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pentatonic Tone Clusters
Another easy way to incorporate barred Orff instruments in pentatonic hymnody is to use pentatonic tone clusters. Simply remove the bars that are not in the pentatonic scale of the hymn (e.g., if it were a hymn that used the G pentatonic scale, you would remove the Cs and Fs [fa and ti]). Instruct the children to play any two notes they wish of the remaining notes on their instrument on specific beats. The cluster sound is glorious and they can’t play a wrong note! Here is an example:

![Pentatonic Tone Clusters](image)

Recorder
This is another case of taking something that most children learn in music class at school and trying to incorporate it in worship. I find that students really like playing recorder and there are always a few in every class that could handle playing alone. Some children make sounds that might not be wholly pleasing, however, so if you do choose a student to play (perhaps melody during a hymn introduction or interlude), be sure that your discretion is in high gear. That being said, there are a lot of hymns that use the midrange notes that would sound lovely on a well-played soprano recorder.
**Tone Bells and Boom Whackers**
These are both pre-handbell instruments. They can be used to create pentatonic tone clusters (see above) or rhythmic ostinatos (see above). These instruments provide opportunities to enrich texture, but should not be over-used.

**Instrumental Solo**
This seems rather self-explanatory. It’s important to remember that there are many children in our midst who are taking private lessons on instruments (particularly piano) and who would benefit from having the opportunity to play an occasional prelude or offertory.

**HIGH SCHOOL/COLLEGE STUDENTS**

**Handbells**
Whole books could be written on handbell ensembles and the process to make them happen. I will not discuss handbells in detail right now, except to say that having a teenage handbell ensemble is a good idea. Teenagers can do it, and do it well.

**Percussion Ensemble**
One of the things that I have discovered is that many teenagers really enjoy playing percussion instruments. Consider creating a teenage percussion ensemble to accompany hymns (perhaps a World Music Sunday?). These can be big or small. Just be sure that you use instruments of differing timbre. There are many published books of percussion ensemble charts, but you can certainly create your own. Here is an example:

![Percussion Ensemble Example]

**Guitar/Bass Guitar**
I am sure that it is no surprise to anyone that a lot of teenagers play guitar and bass guitar. Incorporating these players in worship just makes sense. If you do choose to invite teenage guitarists to play, just be sure you have vetted them first. Indie band dreams does not always mean they have the ability to play in appropriate style for a given hymn. With training (and throwing the picks in the wastebasket), teenagers can really thrive playing guitar in worship.

**Instrumental Solos/Obligato Parts**
Many teenagers play instruments in school bands and orchestras. It seems like a no-brainer to have these students come in to play special music. A great way to give them connection to more than one part of the service is to create obligato lines for them to play with hymns and octavos. A simple way to do this is to have the soloist play the alto line an octave (or two) higher than written for a hymn. You could also give them instrumental lines extracted from the keyboard accompaniment of an octavo.
Orchestration for SATB Hymns
If you have a lot of teenage (or adult!) instrumentalists, you can create easy orchestrations by extracting parts from SATB hymns. I will show you a two-measure example of the process.

Here is the score as it appears in the hymnal:

Below, you can see how the SATB parts are distributed between instruments:

I have also made sure that the parts are transposed correctly for each given category of instruments. Here is a listing of transpositions:

*Instrument Transpositions*

**C instruments**
- No transposition
  - Treble: Flute, Oboe, Violin
  - Bass: Cell, Bass, Trombone, B.C. Baritone, Tuba

**Bb Instruments**
- Up a major second
  - Trumpet, T.C. Baritone, Clarinet, Tenor Sax

**Eb Instruments**
- Up a major sixth
  - Cello, Bass, Trombone, B.C. Baritone, Tuba
Alto Sax, Bari Sax  
You will notice that I have given the melody part (soprano line) to all instruments. This is to provide options for various combinations and textures. Here is an example road map:

- **Stanza 1**: whole orchestra plays SATB
- **Stanza 2**: melody played by woodwinds with organ
- **Stanza 3**: melody played by brass while strings play harmony parts
- **Stanza 4**: melody played by solo trumpet while organist plays alternate harmonization
- **Stanza 5**: whole orchestra plays SATB

Here is a chart of instrument ranges that shows beginner, high school, and advanced:

**General Tips**

1. Do not let a student double the melody unless they are experienced or advanced players
2. Do not do the same instrumentation/arrangement for every verse
3. For tuning avoid parallel octaves
4. For tuning, never two on a part... always one, three, or more...
5) Consider inviting experienced players to play with youth players (intergenerational orchestra)

CONCLUSION
This article is only brief overview. Each of these subdivisions could be their own article, or book, or section of the library. It is my hope that reading this brings some ideas to mind as you continue to work at involving student instrumentalists in worship. It is not easy. It takes a tremendous amount of time . . . but it is possible and it is WORTH it! My contact information is listed below. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or discussion.

Erik Whitehill served as the Associate Director of Music Ministry at King of Glory Lutheran Church in Tempe, Arizona, for more than a decade. He is currently the general music teacher and choir director at Fuller Elementary School in Tempe. He is originally from Council Bluffs, Iowa, and is a graduate of Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. He has served as the vice president of the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians Region 4 and is now on the board for the Arizona Orff Chapter. His music is published by Augsburg Fortress, Falls House Press, and Handbell Musicians of America (coming Fall 2013).