

The Basics of Managing Stage Volume

By Jon Schafer

The use of live electric instruments and drum kits brings a whole new dimension to the modern worship service. But with multiple instruments and their respective amps occupying the same space — not to mention stage monitors — the volume onstage can be a bit overwhelming, even before the sound gets to the PA system. Here are a few ideas that can help you minimize or eliminate stage volume.

When talking about stage volume, two of the most common culprits are the electric guitar and the bass. It seems that the guitarist's and bassist's quests for more volume begins as soon as he or she first plugs into an amplifier. Volume is great in an arena, but in a worship service, it can cause a wide variety of problems. So, how do you tame the volume-hungry guitarist or bassist? It's easy — if you have an amp emulator. These compact little boxes are built to faithfully emulate the sound and feel of a real amp. Plus, there are often effects built in, which allow the performers to express their creativity. Best of all, there's no significant stage volume generated by an amp emulator. Another good solution for silent onstage bass that can still rock the rafters is a direct box. See a full explanation of how a direct box can simplify your stage setup on page 132.

Drums have long been an issue when it comes to stage volume. The very act of striking a drum with a stick seems to appeal to some sort of animalistic instinct that encourages high volume. Again, this level of volume can be perfect for a stadium show, but it's downright problematic in a house of worship setting. One solution is to implement an electronic drum kit into the worship band. These nearly silent percussion sets let you pump the stereo output of the sound module (what actually makes the sound when the electronic pads are hit) straight into the soundboard, putting the sound engineer in complete control of the drum volume.



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For situations where acoustic drums are to be used onstage, there are handy isolation panels. These panels don't render an acoustic kit completely silent, but they do aid in greatly reducing the stage volume of a drum kit, making it easier for performers to hear themselves during the performance.

Monitoring is another common cause of excessive stage volume. But monitoring is how the performers hear themselves, which is crucial to a good performance. So, how do you go about keeping your monitor mix from adding to the stage volume problem? The short answer is that you get rid of those wedge monitors — and replace them with a slick in-ear monitoring system. The in-ear revolution has truly changed the way musicians view monitoring. With an appropriate system, the members of the band have control over how much of themselves they hear, as well as control over the levels of the other instruments in their personal mix. A very cool solution to onstage volume wars!

What we've presented here are possible solutions to minimizing the volume on your worship stage. You could go with a wholesale sea change, implementing all of these ideas. Or, you could do it in stages, changing a little as you go. Either way you do it, you won't believe how much better your mixes sound when you've been able to lessen the amount of sound coming directly off the stage. Reducing stage volume makes your job easier, and the congregation is certain to hear a noticeable increase in sound quality. Call your Sweetwater Sales Engineer today and start down the road to cleaning up your sound!



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