

The Worship Song Arranging Checklist

From Blue Print Sounds

As you work through the song you need to identify 5 elements of the arrangement in this order:

- **The Groove:** The rhythmic footprint of the song, played by the kick drum and bass. Grooves may change from section to section.
- **Main Rhythm Instrument:** The instrument which provides most of the rhythmic energy. If you are leading from acoustic guitar or piano, it's probably you. But it could be the electric guitar or mandolin.
- **Holds:** The instrument which adds warmth and sustain to the first two elements. This is usually a piano or keys, but it can also be an acoustic or electric guitar playing big open chords. These are also called diamonds or whole notes, although this instrument can do more than just whole notes.
- **Pads:** Any thin or transparent sound playing long lines. This could be a synth pad, organ, strings such as violin or cello, or even an electric guitar using an Ebow. Pads are usually played in an upper register to give an angelic, floating sound.
- **Arpeggios:** Chords played one note at a time, usually in an upper register. This is often the electric guitar picking strings with reverb and delay, but can be done by any pitched instrument. The idea is to add polish and sparkle.

One last thing:

- In addition to the groove of the song, you are going to listen to the drummer. In most grooves, the kick drum and snare drum remain steady. But the drummer can achieve different feels for the same groove. Here are just a few examples:
 - 1/8 or 1/16 notes on hi hat (most common in verses)
 - Tom groove (typical of a bridge)
 - Crashing on the ride or crash cymbals (typical of a bridge or big chorus)

Now that you know the 5 elements (plus drums) let's begin.

- **Skip to the second chorus** and listen for the groove. For a groove which uses 1/8 notes, write down “1+2+3+4+” and circle the important beats. The groove may be one or two measures long.
- **Stay in the second chorus and answer these questions.**
 - Main rhythm instrument is _____.
 - Holds are played by _____.
 - Pads are played by _____.
 - Arpeggios are played by _____.
- **Now go to the intro and answer these questions:**
 - Which instruments come in first?
 - Which of the 5 elements are they playing? Put things like lead lines or solos in the arpeggio section.
- **Listen to the first verse and answer these questions:**
 - Did any instruments come in or change roles?
 - Did any instruments drop out?
- **Listen to the first chorus and answer these questions:**
 - Did any instruments come in or change roles?
 - Did any instruments drop out?
- **Listen to the second verse and answer these questions:**
 - Did any instruments come in or change roles?
 - Did any instruments drop out?
 - Was there a change in dynamics (louder, softer, drums)?
- **Listen to the second chorus and answer these questions:**
 - Did any instruments come in or change roles?
 - Did any instruments drop out?
 - Was there any change in dynamics (louder, softer, drums)?
- **Listen to the bridge and answer these questions:**
 - Did any instruments come in or change roles?
 - Did any instruments drop out?
 - Was there a change in dynamics (louder, softer, drums)?
 - What was the arc of the dynamic? (building, adding instruments, etc)

- **Listen to the chorus and answer these questions:**
 - Did any instruments come in or change roles?
 - Did any instruments drop out?
 - Was there a change in dynamics (louder, softer, drums)?
- **If there is another chorus repeat the previous step.**
- **Listen to the outro/ending and answer these questions:**
 - Was there a change in dynamics (louder, softer, drums)?
 - How did the song end?
 - Crash out
 - Trash Can (hit everything and sustain)
 - Quiet finish (one or two instruments)
 - Hard stop

How to Use This Checklist with Your Team.

This process may go slow the first few times you do it, but your ear will get used to listening for the most important elements and ignoring fluff.

Eventually you won't need the checklist, and you'll be able to sketch out a song in just a few listens.

The next step is to teach the process to your team. Each time you practice, clearly point out the role of each player (i.e. Electric guitar, can you do the arpeggios up the neck? Cello, can you do the pads? Piano, can you do holds plus a little extra in this section?)

Bring your lyrics/chords sheet with your notes, and have everyone in the room write down the notes which pertain to their instrument. (i.e. Drums, can you go to eighth notes on the ride cymbal for the last chorus? Acoustic guitar, can you fingerpick the intro before moving to strums for the verse?)

You may need to even play the recording over the sound system and walk your team through each section. Then explain that this is the method you want each member to use in their weekly practice. You can even ask them to show you their notes.

Every member of your team should come to practice knowing which of the 5 roles they fill, and have an arrangement sketch for their instrument. Your job as the leader is to teach it and require it.