

How to Play Electric Guitar in Church (Hint = Turn it down and play like a zombie)

So you play guitar and you want to play in the worship band, eh? Sounds good, but there are a few guidelines you'll need to keep in mind.

1. Learn to play guitar in the 1990s. I guess you don't HAVE to do this, but it helps. If you learn to play in any other decade, you'll be exposed to all the cool things that the guitar can do, and will be eternally frustrated each week. Spend your time listening to Matchbox 20, Third Eye Blind, and Nirvana and then you'll never be disappointed.
2. Under no circumstances should you listen to any guitar playing from the 1980's except for U2. Van Halen does not exist, nor do any of those other 'guitar wankers'. The only player that matters is the Edge. Learn how to make complete songs out of 8 notes and a delay pedal, and you're golden. Get used to this.
3. Once you have assimilated all the 90's rock bands, throw them out. Now you will listen only to current worship music. Secular bands have an intensity and energy to them that cannot possibly be used for anything other than rebellious sexual energy. It's best not to think about it. Focus only on what KLove plays. And absolutely never-ever listen to classic rock or the blues. We all know that BB King, Hendrix, Clapton, Page, Frehley, Santana, etc. are all pawns of the devil.
4. Develop muscle memory. This is a tricky one. The goal here is to learn to play without actually hearing yourself. Practice your chords and your delay lines enough so that you can play physically without needing to be heard musically.
5. Get a capo. What's that you say? Real electric players don't use capos? Yes that's true most of the time, because electric guitars don't lend themselves to capos like acoustics do. However, you'll be treating your Les Paul/Strat/Schecter as if it is an acoustic, so it's ok. The alternative to using a capo is learning to transpose and play in different keys. This is not wise, however, because in learning the necessary music theory you'll expose yourself to other musical possibilities, and that leads down a dangerous road. See rule #2.
6. Don't be sexy. Everyone knows that electric guitar music is the most overtly sexual music there is, and there's no place for that in church. Don't play anything that sounds like ZZ Top or Def Leppard. Those are stripper bands. Never mind that those groovy bass lines the bassist is pumping out are probably much sexier than any you'd be allowed to play, or that the sultry emotive singing by your average female worship leader (usually always the pretty ones) is significantly more distracting than playing a rocking riff or sweet little solo.
7. Don't play solos or think about wanting to play solos. I know you're thinking, "But wait! I can make this fit tastefully and really enhance the song!" No, you can't. Everyone knows that there are two kinds of solos. You have the overindulgent guitar wankery of 'Freebird', and then there's the solo** in 'Free Fallin'. There is no middle ground. Every guitar solo no matter the length, breadth, or depth, is the equivalent of 'Freebird'. And we all know that those kinds of solos are the musical metaphors for something that rhymes with 'Pastor Nation'. Besides, who told you about the existence of tasteful solos? You're supposed to be limiting your diet to 90's rock and worship music.

**There's a solo in 'Free Fallin'? Oh right it's a 4 bar break where he plays the same chords but louder.
8. If you absolutely must listen to musically adventurous groups, check out some of the more modern gospel stuff like Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir and the like. This kind of music is church approved despite its complexity and key changes, but also conveniently features next to no electric guitar, so you're off the hook from having to learn anything new.
9. Get a POD. Real amps are for secular bands. Those guitar players who claim to want 'good tone' and need a certain volume level to get it are just selfishly making excuses because they secretly want to be the loudest person in the band. You should be able to get adequate sound for your 3 chords with a \$200 amp simulator using headphones. Anything more than that and you risk drawing attention to yourself. I mean logically, if you are on stage with a real working amplifier that makes a pleasing sweet overdrive, how then will the soundman be able to mute you? By using actual stage volume, you run the risk of being heard by the congregation, and that's dangerous territory. Really you're just onstage so that visually you balance out the bass player on the opposite side of the stage.
10. Learn to Read Music. I'm not talking about actual sheet music, of course. I'm talking about a printout with the chords on it. You want to appear prepared, but not so much that you actually memorized anything. Doing so will make the people who are using printed music feel bad. Also, having a big black music stand in front of you provides a nice visual barrier between you and the congregation.
11. Have a prayer song ready. Usually at the end of a service, there will be a prayer that will need music under it, in which someone will need to make up an innocuous bed of music off the top of their head to help people pray. This usually falls to the worship leader playing an acoustic guitar, or if he is suddenly killed, the piano player, who might suffer acute carpal tunnel syndrome. Much like becoming the President after a mass assassination, the honor will fall to you to play under the prayer. Keep it simple. Make absolutely sure that you make it up on the spot. Prayer is no time for composed music.

12. "Wait, hold up - let's go back to #7...What about Journey?" What about Journey? They are a nice middle of the road secular rock band that is ok to like because the vocals are slightly girly and they never rock TOO hard. Just make sure to cover your ears during the guitar parts. Those are the only things about Journey that worship music as a genre hasn't stolen.

13. Don't make friends with the drummer. If you do this, you run the risk of developing a rapport. When two musicians have rapport, they start to play off of one another and want to try new things. This is bad because it shifts control of the music away from the leadership team and into the hands of musicians, who are notoriously bad about wanting to play their instruments. When that occurs, jams happen and that's bad. Why is it bad? Because Chris Tomlin doesn't jam, and neither should you.

14. Don't be distracting. Worshipers in a congregation are easily distracted from their worship. We know this because that is the reason always given for why electric players shouldn't do X or Y. "We don't want to distract people from the worship experience". Now to avoid confusion, here is a list of things that apparently are NOT distracting, given that they are allowed to happen all the time at churches all over:

1. Out of tune acoustic guitars
2. Waiting for the out of tune acoustic guitar to be tuned
3. Loud horn players, usually much louder than guitar or drums based on sound pressure levels (SPL)
4. Fancy animated graphics behind the lyrics on the screen
5. Male worship leaders wearing shorts and flip-flops
6. Female worship leaders wearing outfits significantly less conservative than shorts or flip-flops
7. Sound guys who constantly twiddle knobs and change levels in the mix (e.g., let's pan the backup singers so far to the sides that we no longer hear them... because 'mixing in stereo is cool!')
8. Solos by any instrument OTHER than an electric guitar (e.g., violin, saxophone, piano, organ, some high school kid just learning to play the flute, etc.)
9. Hearing any sort of singer than isn't a Chris Tomlin or Casting Crowns 'wanna-be'
10. Elaborate vocal gymnastics clearly not intended to be sung-along-with
11. Speakers who always have their first word cut off because the sound man fell asleep and forgot to un-mute the mic in time.
12. That "really cool" 20 minute drama that just made you drop 4 worship songs from your set list
13. SUPER. LOUD. AWESOME. VIDEO. BUMPER! That someone made in Final Cut Pro during the week that, when played before the sermon, is louder than the worship band that just finished playing.

Now here is a list of things that ARE distracting:

1. Electric guitars that are any of the following:
 - A) playing more than 3 chords
 - B) playing any sort of lead line
 - C) playing with any sort of feeling or dynamics
 - D) audible
2. Anything that doesn't sound exactly like everything else they are playing on the current Christian Top 40 FM radio station (and just like all the other praise songs in your set). Come on, this is church, where everything has to sound the same... God didn't really make us different so that we could use our individual talents for creativity expression now did He?

Conclusion

Well there you have it. Follow these basic guidelines and you'll be well on your way to being the best worship band electric guitarist around. You'll never have personal conflicts with anyone, you'll never distract anyone with your playing, and you'll also never add anything to the music, and people will look at you and say 'wow how average. I guess that's how these Christians view the world'

Hmmmm, wait a minute... 'average'?!?! Is that how God wants His music and His church to be viewed?!?!