

---

Bryan Deitrich  
**KEYBOARDISTS:  
FROM NOTES TO CHARTS**

**I. Introduction**

- A. Why do we play
  - 1. Worship over performance
  - 2. Importance of lyrics – Everything we do should support the truth that we sing about and serve to help people engage with the One that we sing to
  - 3. Be aware of pride and the fear of man, both in your strength and in your weakness. Pursue humility in your response to feedback
- B. What we will cover
- C. What we will not cover

**II. What Do I Play?**

- A. The versatility of the piano multiplied by the unlimited variety of a synthesizer
- B. The challenge of playing off of chord charts in a contemporary worship style is rarely that the parts you will play are technically difficult. The challenge is most often simply in deciding which simple parts to play at what times
- C. Listening exercise

Example Recording 1

- 1. What are the other instruments doing?
- 2. What is the keyboardist doing? How does it fit with the rest of the band?

Example Recording 2

- 1. What are the other instruments doing?
- 2. What is the keyboardist doing? How does it fit with the rest of the band?

\* Note how simple and even sparse the parts are. Note where there is space. Listen for phrasing and structure. The breaks in sound are often what makes the parts we play musical and interesting.

\*\* Note how the parts complement one another. How are they similar? How are the different? Parts should fit together well, like the pieces of a puzzle.

\*\*\* There is much to learn by simply disciplining yourself to listen this way. If I could only say one thing during the entire seminar, it would be to encourage you toward critical listening.

D. Think about role/texture as you “build” a part

1. Rhythm, Melody, Counter-Melody, Pad, Harmony, Repeated Patterns, Filling Spaces, Rhythmic Breaks, Silence, Etc. - These are all ways to think of what you are playing
2. Consider not only the content of what you are playing, but also the range in which you are playing it. Sometimes simply moving a part up or down an octave can help it to fit better into the arrangement. Where are the spaces?
3. Develop a sense of phrasing to what you play. Again, think about the spaces as much as you do about the notes. Parts/melodic lines should have a natural breathing to them.
4. Consider different tones. (see section on Various Patches below)
5. You should always know what role the other members of your band are playing in the arrangement. If you don't you will overplay. Ask yourself “What is most needed here?” rather than “What is the most impressive part that I can play?”
6. I tend to like a lot of electric guitar in my monitor mix because that is the instrument that I am most likely to compete with in the parts that I play. Making sure that I can hear their part clearly helps me to play something that compliments it not competes with it.

E. Think of your part as a piece of a pie. The more people that take a piece, the smaller each of the pieces needs to be.

F. Envision the arrangement of the song as a 3D cube, height being the tonal range, depth being volume, and width being panning in the stereo field (if applicable). Where are the spaces in the cube? What part would fit best in those spaces, if any is even needed?

### III. Basic Chord Theory

#### A. Some Definitions

1. Chord: A combination of tones played together in order to produce a specific sound
2. Steps: Intervals are measured in steps, a term of tonal distance in music. A half step is the distance between two adjacent keys on the keyboard. A whole step has one key in between.
3. Triad: A combination of three tones separated by specific intervals. The triad is the foundational chord for most Western music, including contemporary pop/rock music as well as hymns.
4. Major Third/Minor Third: Two commonly used intervals are the major third and the minor third. A major third equals four half steps, a minor third equals three half steps. Triads are built from two thirds stacked on top of each other.

#### B. Forming Chords

1. Major: Major 3<sup>rd</sup> + Minor 3<sup>rd</sup>
2. Minor: Minor 3<sup>rd</sup> + Major 3<sup>rd</sup>
3. Augmented: Major 3<sup>rd</sup> + Major 3<sup>rd</sup> (Major with a raised 5<sup>th</sup>)
4. Diminished: Minor 3<sup>rd</sup> + Minor 3<sup>rd</sup> (Minor with a flat 5<sup>th</sup>)
5. Suspended: Replace the 3<sup>rd</sup> with the 4<sup>th</sup> – typically resolves
6. Color Tones – 2<sup>nd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>: Adds 'thickness' and "color" to a chord
7. Inversions – Slash Chords: The order of the notes
8. Voicings: Combinations of inversion, color tones, and tonal spacing across the keyboard that produce various forms of the same chord

Why use inversions and alternate voicings?

1. The emphasis is on the highest note – helps to create melodic lines
2. They help avoid "jumps" in range, which can be awkward
3. They give freedom to create a variety of harmonic sounds from the same chord

#### C. Thinking In Numbers (Nashville Chord System)

1. The Concept: Simply identify the chord by the position of its root note in the scale of the key that you are in. For example, in the key of C major, C is the I chord, F is the IV chord and G is the V chord.
2. Why think in numbers? It provides a framework for hearing the harmonic content of a song.

- 
- a. It emphasizes the relationship of a chord to the key of the song rather than just the content of the chord in isolation. For example, a C major chord will sound very different in the key of C (I) than it will when playing in the key of F (V).
  - b. It helps to identify harmonic patterns and chord progressions
  - c. Greatly simplifies song transposition
3. Type of chords in a Major key
    - a. Major: I, IV, V
    - b. Minor: ii, iii, iv
    - c. Diminished: vii<sup>o</sup>
  4. Common Borrowed Chords
    - a. V of V
    - b. V of vi
    - c. VI
    - d. VII
  5. Common Progressions
    - a. IV – V – I (or ii – V – I)
    - b. IV – V – vi
    - c. I – ii – I/III – IV
    - d. I – V/VII – vi – IV
    - e. I – IV
    - f. IV – vi – V
  6. Common Voicings/Color Tones
  7. Practice Techniques
    - a. As you listen to music, take time to listen critically and identify the chord progressions of the different sections of the song. Use an instrument to help you at first, but work to develop the ability to quickly recognize various progressions by ear.
    - b. Take a song that you are familiar with and write out the chords in the Nashville system. Play the song in as many keys as you can, training yourself to think in terms of numbers rather than letters.

---

#### **IV. What To Do With Two Hands**

##### **A. Basic Uses Of The Left Hand**

1. Can play octaves or single notes on the root of the chord or the bass note of the “slash” chord (inversion). Can also walk between chords.
2. Can roll up, or arpeggiate a chord using patterns like 1-5-8, 1-5-9, or 1-5-8-9-10
3. Can provide a solid rhythmic base/groove for the song. Focus on learning several basic rhythmic patterns by listening to the kick drum and bass in recordings of the style that you are playing.
4. Be very aware not to overplay with the left hand when playing with a bass player. Make sure to leave space.

##### **B. Basic Uses Of The Right Hand**

1. Rhythmic patterns – be aware of what the rest of the rhythm section is doing!
  - a. Whole Notes (great way for beginners to learn a song and get the chords under your fingers)
  - b. Quarter Notes
  - c. Rocking 8ths
  - d. Complex – Guitar strum like
  - e. Broken Chords
2. Melody and/or Counter Melody
3. Melodic Fills
4. Rhythmic Fills
5. Harmonic Texture (Moving Parts)
6. Pad (Sustained Notes)
7. Scales – For example, an ascending half note scale filled in around the harmonic progression of the song can add intensity in moving from one section of a song to another

#### **V. Use Of Various Patches**

- A. Know your instrument. Have a variety of “bread and butter” sounds that you can get to quickly and where you are familiar with how they play. Experiment during practices!
- B. Always think of how the sound you are using fits in with what the other instruments are playing. Listen!

---

C. Notes on specific sounds and categories:

1. Rhodes/Wurlly/Electric Piano: Experiment with the initial “bark” of the instrument when you hit a note hard. Guitar like “hammer on” style grace notes can add a stylistic element to what you play. (ie 2<sup>nd</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> in a major chord)
2. Organ: Organs come in many tones, soft, thick, percussive, distorted, etc. Play with different organs in different situations. Experiment with when to adjust the speed of the rotary speaker effect. The change in rotary speed is often what is heard more so than the effect itself and the timing of that change is the key to using it well. Try single note lines and sustained chords. Or, perhaps a sustained upper note with a melodic line under it (or vice versa). A glissando (slide) can be used (don't over-use)
3. Synth Pad: A synth pad can have many different timbres – cold, warm, moving, bright, dark, etc. Experiment with when to use some of the various types. There may be performance controllers programmed in the instrument for you (ie sweepable cutoff) – experimenting with these can add life to a sound. Be careful that the sound is adding something to the mix and not just muddying it up.
4. Synth Lead: Again, there are many different varieties and timbres. Many are mono-phonic. Experiment with effects like a delay and portamento. Be very careful not to compete with lead electric guitar parts. This sound tends to work well to bring in and out for only certain sections of a song. It will add more and be more audible if it is used sparingly.
5. Strings: They tend to come in solo or ensemble and attack or pad-like varieties. An ensemble sound with a sharper attack sounds good when played as a layer with an acoustic piano in a percussive part. A string sound with a slower attack and perhaps an extended decay sounds great as a pad, or harmonic bed, for the song. This can be done by itself or as a layer.

When playing strings as a primary instrument (not simply a layer behind another instrument), think about string arrangements. Think lines rather than chords. Avoid playing the same note in more than one octave at the same time where possible. Only play 2-4 notes at a time and limit the use of the sustain pedal so that the parts do not get muddy.

One final note about strings. A great way to get ideas is to listen to movie soundtracks. Shawshank Redemption is a good example.

## **VI. Other Notes On Arranging**

- A. Silence is not a bad thing. There should be times in every worship set (and probably even every song if you have a full band) where you are not playing anything.
- B. Think about tonal range – Don't be married to the middle of the keyboard. Varying from low to high, or middle to extremes can be very effective in adding depth and power to an arrangement, especially when playing solo, or with a smaller band.
- C. Be aware of the importance of volume
  - 1. The relative volume and accents in a rhythmic figure. This is part of the “groove” of a song.
  - 2. The relative volume of the notes that you are playing in relation to one another. This can mean simply playing melody notes louder than the harmony part, or even accenting particular notes within a chord.  
“Chord Balance”
- D. Learning to play a melody by ear is an excellent skill for every keyboardist to develop. The ability to sight read a melody (for example in a hymn book) should also be pursued.
- E. Simple and tight is much better than complicated/advanced and sloppy (or sometimes even advanced and tight)
- F. Did I mention to listen to the rest of the band?

## **VII. Conclusion/Demonstration**

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” 1 Cor. 10:31 (ESV)