

SA WORSHIP

MAGAZINE



SEPTEMBER 2020

GIVING OUR BEST

to God

IMPROVING PERSONAL
SKILLS IN LOCKDOWN

WORSHIP THEOLOGY
KNOWLEDGE
OF GOD!
ADELY T. CHARLES



NEW VIRTUAL MUSICAL FROM
THE AUSTRALIAN TERRITORY

ISSUE NO. 8

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TACKLING LEAD SHEETS
AT THE PIANO**

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ENHANCE YOUR PLAYING**

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**SA WORSHIP
MAGAZINE**
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In our last edition, I wrote about the opportunity that this time of social distancing had presented. I wouldn't have expected there to be so little change in our situation. Like many others, I had hoped to be able to meet with friends and family, and to worship with my church community in person. That hasn't become a reality just yet. I find that I need to channel my frustration about this into something positive, so in this edition of the SAWM we will be looking at ways that you can improve on your individual instruments.

OUR ACT OF SERVICE AS A WORSHIP TEAM LEADER OR MEMBER IS AN OFFERING TO GOD. WE SHOULD OFFER OUR ABSOLUTE BEST EACH TIME THAT WE LEAD, PLAY OR SING. THIS IS A PERSONAL REFLECTION OF OUR DEVOTION AND WORSHIP TO GOD.

Note that I didn't say that we need to be the best, but that we need to give our best. Just as we are on a journey of faith and it grows and changes, so does our service. As we learn more and grow closer to God, we are able to serve in different ways. This is not limited to the spiritual part of our lives. The functional understanding of our chosen instrument, and the rules of music that govern its playing/singing, is a journey that we need to continue to pursue.

While scales and technical development exercises may not be the most interesting things to play, mastery of these will allow us to focus more on the other parts of musicianship such as arrangement, balance of parts and what the leader is signaling us to do when we do resume playing together.

Your best and my best might be two very different things. I am responsible to give my best. I shouldn't be discouraged at how well someone else, that is gifted differently to me, is able to play. If they are giving their best, I should rejoice with them as they worship and not let my offering to God be defined by someone else's offering.

We strive for excellence to reflect the greatness and majesty of God. We strive to give our best because God gave us His Son. Nothing we will do can come close to that, but God deserves the best that we can bring. He is worthy of our praise and devotion. We can show that by how we serve him and present our offerings.

Simon Gough



Taking the Lead:

Tackling Lead Sheets at the Piano

Rachel Ewing

I remember the first time someone put a lead sheet in front of me and asked me to play for their vocal solo. I had absolutely no clue what to do and I was so overwhelmed. Even though I had taken piano and theory lessons my entire life, none of that training prepared me for what was placed in front of me. All of my training emphasized learning to play every note, dynamic, phrase, or correct fingering as it appeared on the page. So how was I expected to make music from a piece of paper which contained so little musical information?

You may have similar feelings when beginning to learn to read lead sheets or chord charts. You may feel like you face an impossible task, or you may feel like your musical vocabulary is limited, but it really is exactly the opposite. Now when I play worship songs, I prefer a lead sheet to anything else. Once you get the hang of it, it feels very freeing and you can start to really be creative. You aren't bound to every little detail of a piece of music. Truly, understanding lead sheets and chord charts is a skill. Just like any other skill, it requires effort and practice in order to improve.

Here are some general tips that really helped me overcome my debilitating fear of lead sheet reading and make some big improvements.

Your Ear is Your Best Friend

Once I heard the song, I understood the song. This is especially true if you are just working from a chord chart (no notated melody line). You need to have a musical understanding of how the harmonies change and when they change. I printed off some chord charts of songs I liked and began listening and following along. This doesn't mean that your interpretation of the song is bound to what you hear. It just means that you have a good idea of the song as a whole (melody, rhythm, harmony). Take the time to develop your ear through ear training exercises. As your ear improves, you will get much faster at reading and you will notice a big change in your musical development.

Develop Your Music Theory and Harmony Skills

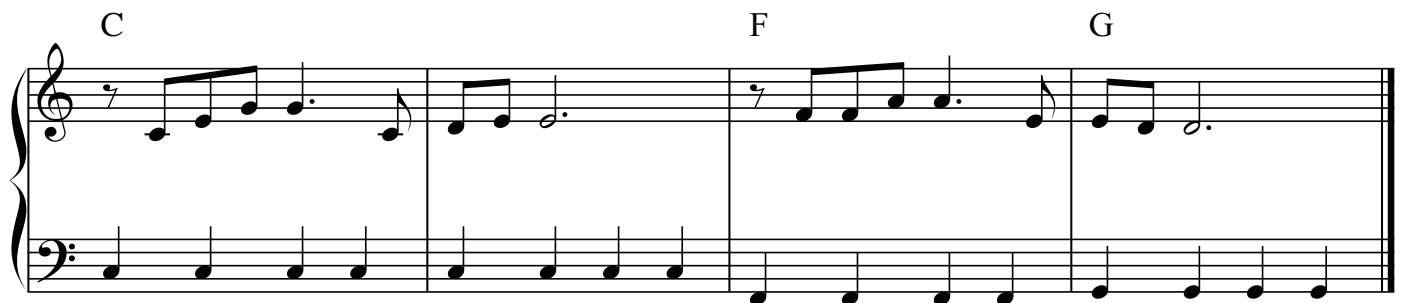
Unfortunately, there is no escaping this one! You need to understand how chords are formed, how musical sentences are structured, and know what notes are within what chords. Start looking for patterns and repetition (it happens more than you think!). Try to analyze what you see in front of you away from the keyboard, then come back to the piano and see if your knowledge helps your hands find their way faster and more efficiently.

There are plenty of resources online that will help you expand your knowledge of theory and harmony, so I won't really go into that in this article. Spend time understanding chord formations, chord symbols, and slash chords.

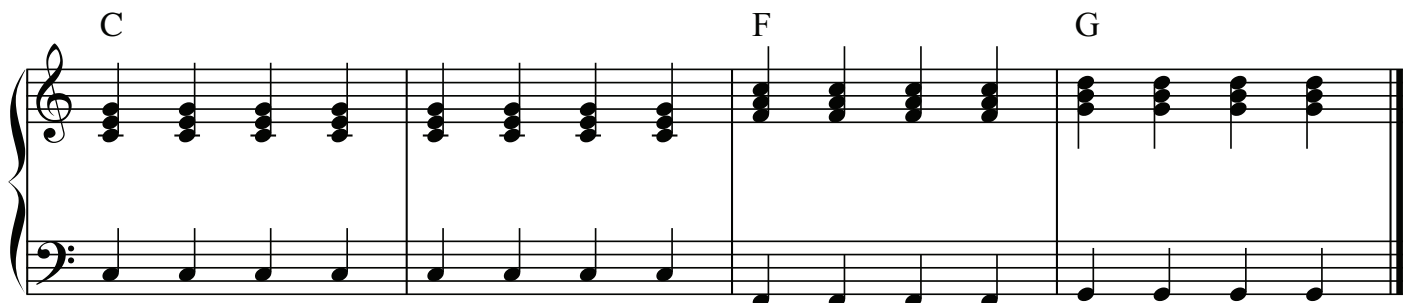
Let's get into some more specific application tips.

Start Simple and Build Gradually

If you are a beginner, start by figuring out the melody in your right hand. You can either use a lead sheet or you can do it by ear if you are just using a chord chart. Once you feel you have grasped the melody, start adding the root of the chord in the left hand (essentially just playing one note in each hand).

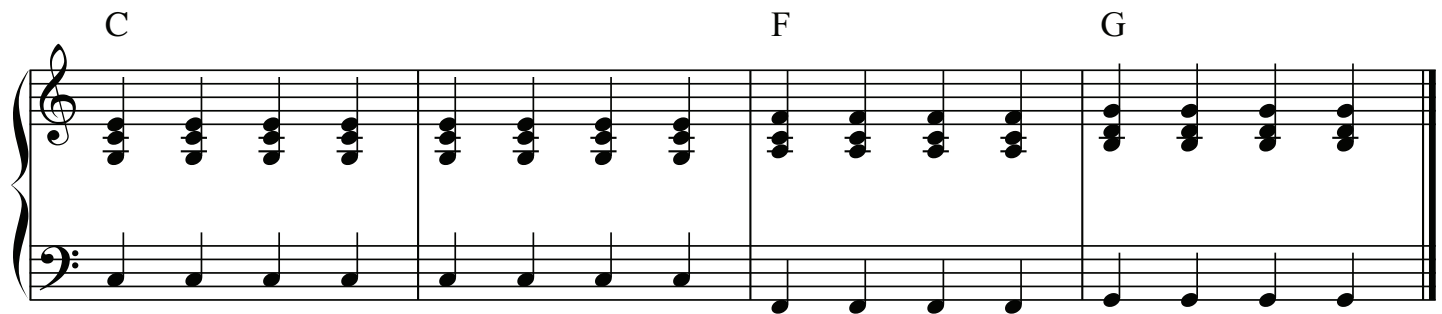


Once you feel confident that you understand the melody and root of each chord, take it one step further by playing chords in your right hand in root position along with the root of each chord in the left hand. You can play the chords held/sustained or repeated. Really try to feel the rhythm and pay attention to when the chords change. It will sound "blocked" because you are only playing root position chords in your right hand, but essentially you are now reading from a lead sheet!



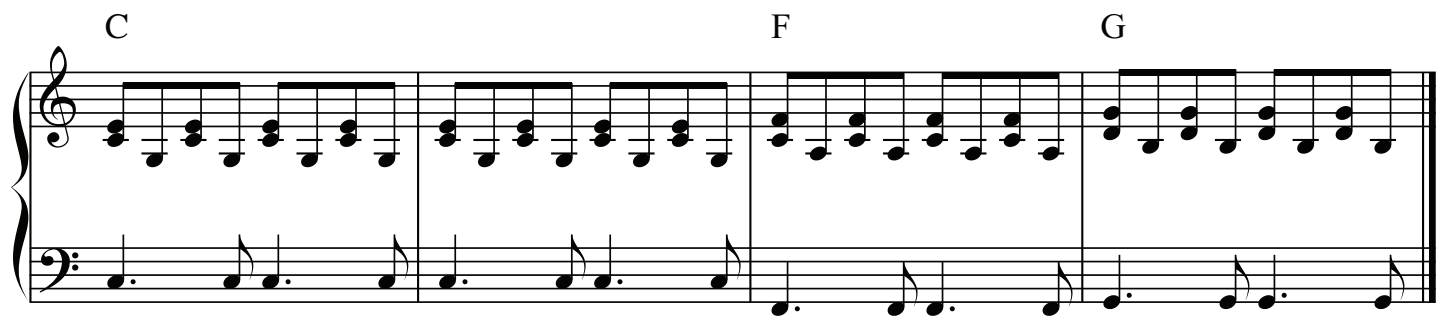
Voice Leading

The goal is to branch out from the blocked feeling and being bound to root position chords. We can do this by understanding the relationship from one chord to the next, which we often refer to as voice leading. Try to make the chord changes seamless in your right hand by looking for common tones (notes that remain the same from one chord to the next) or by experimenting with inversions. We want to avoid jumping around the keyboard so try to find inversions that allow the chord changes to be as close as possible. Let's take a simple progression from a C chord to an F chord, as an example. In root position, there is a huge jump from the C chord in root position to the F chord in root position. However, if we play our C chord in 2nd inversion and the F chord in 1st inversion in our right hand, the transition between the chords is seamless. The left hand generally always plays the root of the chord, unless a slash chord is suggested.



Creative Variation

When you get to this point, this is where you can have the most fun. This is where you get to truly express yourself musically. Experiment with different rhythms or repeated rhythmic patterns, either in the left hand or with your right hand chords. Try playing broken chords instead of blocked. Experiment with different registers of the piano based on the style or mood of the song. You are only bound to playing the correct chords in the right style. Beyond that, you can decide what other elements you incorporate into your playing. No two players will play a song the exact same way and I think that is what makes lead sheet playing special.



Hand Importance

When we start as beginning pianists, we often learn that the right hand is the most important because it contains the melody. As soloists, we strive to balance melody and harmony between our two hands. And while it is true that the right hand is important, when it comes to playing from lead sheets, I don't think it is the most important hand.

Unfortunately, it becomes the hand to which we pay the most attention simply because we still need to make sure we are playing the right chords. As you develop, try to draw your ear to what your left hand is doing. As an accompanist, I was always taught to favour my left hand over my right hand because it provides a solid foundation for a song and it allows the melody and harmony to sit on top of it. In lead sheet playing, it's the same. The rhythm, the groove and the foundation of the harmony all come from the left hand. As well, don't fall into the trap of thinking that the drive and energy of a song comes from guitar and drums. The piano has an important place within that groove and can really add another layer to a solid baseline. In addition, your ear can start to predict how the harmony changes in a song if you start tuning in to what is happening down in the bass end. I encourage you to spend time listening to what your left hand is doing and give it equal importance.

Be Flexible

Every group you play with will operate differently depending on the strengths and weaknesses that each person brings to the table. The greatest strength that you as a musician can bring to a group is your ability to adapt easily depending on what the group needs musically. Maybe the singer isn't overly confident and requires some support from the piano with the melodic line. Even the most beginner player can support them by playing the melody in the right hand and playing chords (blocked or broken) in the left hand. If you are a bit more advanced, you can work the melody into the top voice of your right hand and still be able to play some of the chord in the other part of the hand or even between both hands. Maybe you don't have drums on a Sunday and one of the songs is driving and upbeat. Your left hand can provide a rhythmic energy if you use it the right way. Try not to just learn a song one way. Practice it with multiple versions and be ready to pull out whatever version will work best based on what the song needs. Don't just be a one trick pony!

Go to www.saworshipmagazine.com to see the notation for this example

It's been several years since the first time a lead sheet was placed in front of me at the piano. I can honestly say I have learned to love playing this way. It allows me to be creative and it just gives me so much more freedom at the keyboard. Put in the hard work away from the piano by learning how to read chords, understanding how to formulate chords in the hand, and practice reading and deciphering chord charts and lead sheets quickly and efficiently. These tools will help you become more successful and I bet you will start to really enjoy this method of playing. Most of all, don't give up. God has given you a talent and He wants you to use it to glorify Him.

Rachel Ewing has her Masters Degree in Collaborative Piano and is the accompanist for the Canadian Staff Songsters



Well-known parable becomes a virtual musical experience

Paul Christensen Jr., his sister Ellie Morgan and their mother Paula Christensen are names most Salvationists would not have heard of – but that is about to change. They are the “stars” or lead characters in a new short film that The Salvation Army Worship Arts Department and the people from the Creative Arts camps are aiming to premiere later this year.

Paul (also known as PJ) is 21, single and heads up sales and marketing in the family business. He loves eating out, online gaming and partying.

PJ’s mother Paula is a 45-year-old widow. She owns a building and construction company that has been passed down from generation to generation. She loves soccer and watching Netflix.

Ellie is 25 and works in the family business as the chief financial officer. She’s married to Matt Morgan. They have two children – Lilly and Zac. Ellie loves bushwalking, cake decorating and yoga.
Any clues?

They are the central characters in a uniquely modern interpretation of the Biblical parable of the Prodigal Son – the brainchild of The Salvation Army’s Melbourne-based Worship Arts coordinator Julia Roper.

Julia said she came up with the idea when the Worship Arts Department was considering how to replace the usual annual Creative Arts camps held at various locations around the country,

which had to be cancelled because of the social-distancing regulations and fears surrounding the spread of COVID-19.

From it has come a virtual musical involving many 15 to 30-year-old performers from around the nation who recorded their singing, acting, playing and dancing parts on their mobile telephones, tablets, cameras, desktop computers or other electronic means to be mixed together to produce the virtual musical – called Three Bags Unpacked.

“It’s quite different, but I think that’s important, too, because it illustrates that the parables that Jesus told are not restrictive; they’re timeless and they can be put into our own personal context and still be relevant,” Julia said.

To make Julia’s idea a reality, some of the most creative minds and talents in the Army in Australia have come together to produce a script and scores for the virtual musical. All that was needed was the cast.



Musical theatre experience

A large Facebook and email personal contact campaign was put in motion to get as many musical hopefuls as possible to register and send in a recording of their area of expertise. Registrations closed in late June ahead of the rehearsal period through July.

The virtual musical is the brainchild of Worship Arts coordinator Julia Roper. Julia and her counterparts in Sydney (Shushannah Anderson) and Brisbane, (Louise Mathieson), have gone through recordings that have come from every state. Lead roles were cast from those auditions.

"This virtual movie musical is a unique way for our youth and young adults to connect with old friends and make new ones while being part of this fantastic musical theatre experience," they said. Louise said it had taken the isolation regulations during the COVID-19 pandemic to "show this is possible."

"We probably would never have thought of it if we hadn't been forced into a situation where we can't travel or get hundreds of kids together in a space, so this is, although there is an intense amount of work involved, a really good alternative to be still being inclusive and flexible. I think what's exciting for all of us is the collaborative aspect of it," she said, adding that doing the musical was making a feature of the limitations the pandemic had brought about.

Julia said that, once the project started rolling, it was quickly realised how "big" it could become. "We realise we had to pare it back because it was going to become a bit overwhelming," she said. She said it was originally planned to have the script and songwriting as part of the virtual camp sessions but, because of the size of the

project, it was decided to the Worship Arts team would take that on. Three original songs have been penned.

Louise said that, while there had been various incarnations of collaborative recordings in isolation around the world, Three Bags Unpacked would be the first of its kind: "It's insane but it's totally awesome and I think one of the most exciting things is that nobody else is trying to do anything like this that we know of."

Working in isolation, everyone involved connected with a team through online meetings to brainstorm ideas, rehearse and encourage one another in the performance of their individual roles.

"Of course, with a limitation of time and space, we have our key cast members in three different states, but hopefully we will be able to get them to film their bits in such a way that they can be spliced together into something illustrative of the whole," Louise said.

Julia said the social aspect of the production would be a strong focus. "It will be one of the three Ss – skills, social and spiritual." She added that there would be online Bible studies along with other social events such as games nights and dinners. The script focuses on the theme "We're Found Together" with the musical set in modern society with a background of topical issues and pastimes while portraying the parable's message of redemption, grace and reconciliation.

Couch to couch

Louise said that many Army young people, if they had not experienced it themselves, knew of someone who had gone through homelessness or been "couch surfing."

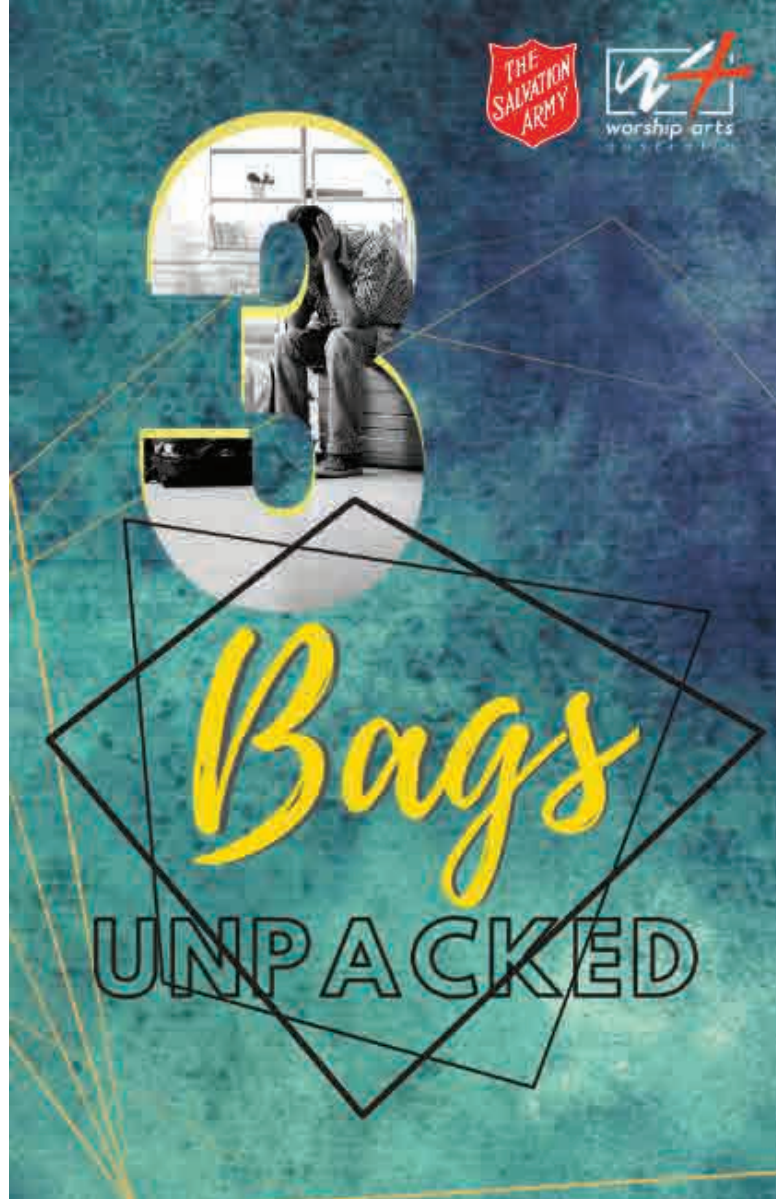
"The thought of you're not sure where you're going next and you pack up all your bags and you go from couch to couch to couch – that's the reality of what homelessness looks like for many young people in Australian society and so we tapped into that: the idea of packing up the three bags and going," Louise said.

"It's like PJ, the prodigal – he's packing up his three bags with great excitement and venturing out and then he has to take his three bags progressively down the scale away from his highfalutin life back into his couch surfing and, in the end, the only thing he wants to do is take his three bags home where he can unpack for good; that coming home and being found together. That shapes the arc of the story which is straight from the parable but in the context that is something recognisable for a young person in Australia today," she said.

The musical's vocal and choreography components were produced from June 27-July 10, the orchestra recordings from July 4-17, and the dramatic performance from July 11-24. Technical production work began in late July and is nearing completion.

A final time and location for the musical's public online premiere is still to be confirmed, as the team's focus has initially been on the collaborative process and getting the musical produced. A special cast launch is scheduled for September, and further information on the premiere will be made available via the Worship Arts Australia social media platforms.

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BY DARRYL WHITECROSS



**I'm not afraid
to show You my
weakness.**



**My failures and faults,
Lord You see them all,
and You still call me
friend.**

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD!

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”¹

A. W. Tozer's declaration relating to the knowledge of God is of eternal importance for God's image-bearers. Tozer continues, "Wrong ideas about God are not only the fountain from which the polluted waters of idolatry flow; they are themselves idolatrous. The idolater simply imagines things about God and acts as if they were true."² What are your thoughts and ideas about God? What is the source from where these thoughts and ideas arise? As Salvationist worship leaders, what we think of God is what we live, sing, teach, and preach – it is what we lead God's people to believe.

We read in John 17:3, "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."³ As creatures whose lives are divinely designed for the worship of our Triune God, we must be diligent in disciplining our minds to think about whom He says He is (His nature, character, attributes), His perfect plan for creation, perfect provision for our fallen state and His presence manifested throughout history according to Scripture. James Boice said it best, "...true knowledge begins with spiritual knowledge, knowledge of God, and that is to be found in God's revelation of himself in the Bible and in

Jesus' own life and work, the work of the Saviour."⁴

Has it ever crossed your thought-process that the Creator of the universe desires for you and I to know Him personally?

Authors Boyer and Hall explain the profound mystery of God, "To approach God is to approach an unfathomable depth of reality and truth that, like the sun in the sky, is too intense, too bright to look at, but that nevertheless brings meaning and coherence and beauty to everything else. God is a mystery."⁵ As astonishing and perplexed as this reality is, Yahweh still longs for His image-bearers to know Him intimately. Scripture is His revelation, which testifies of His unconditional, steadfast love for us. Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23), came down from His Heavenly throne to make His dwelling among us (John 1:14).

As Salvationist music and arts leaders, our spiritual maturation continued in our ongoing, personal experience of God's knowledge, will equip us to share His good news in a powerful and relevant way through the creative ministries we serve in. How does theology reveal who God is?

In the first article of this series, we acknowledged God's nature, character, attributes and they are worth a reiteration: God is **Holy** (read 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalm 77:13; Revelation 4:8), **Infinite/Self-Existing** (read Psalm 147:5; Colossians 1:17); God is **Unchanging** (read Malachi 3:6; James 1:17), **Omniscient – All-Knowing** (read Isaiah 46:9-10), **Omnipresent – Always Everywhere** (read Psalm 139:7-10; Jeremiah 23:23-24), **Omnipotent – All-Powerful** (read Psalm 33:6; Job 11:7-11)

He is faithful, gracious, good, glorious, just, loving, merciful, wise, and this is just the tip of the iceberg. The question is, how has He manifested Himself to you lately – especially through COVID? Furthermore, how are we displaying such knowledge of our Triune God in corporate worship? Do we sing or read Scripture about His nature, character, and attributes?

Secondly, knowledge of God also witnesses our fallen state as His creatures and the need for redemption. Our fifth doctrine in the Salvation Army makes this reality plain, “We believe that our first parents were created in a state of innocence, but by their disobedience they lost their purity and happiness, and that in consequence of their fall all men have become sinners, totally depraved, and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God.” James M. Boice agrees and states,

On the one hand, knowledge of ourselves through the knowledge of God is humbling. We are not God, nor are we like him. He is holy; we are unholy. He is good; we are not good. He is wise; we are foolish. He is strong; we are weak. He is loving and gracious; we are filled with hate and with selfish affections...on the other hand, such knowledge of ourselves through the knowledge of God is also reassuring and satisfying. For in spite of what we have become, we are still God’s creation and are loved by him. No higher dignity has been given to women and men than the dignity the Bible gives them.⁶

Thirdly, praise be to God that knowing Him also reassures us that a perfect, sacrificial Lamb took upon Himself our sins and gave us new life. Through Jesus Christ, we receive salvation and are born again of the Spirit (read Ephesians 1:3-14). Reconciliation is available to the ‘whosoever’ who declares with their mouths,

“‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in their hearts that God raised him from the dead.”⁷ As Salvation Army worship leaders, we must extend this invitation when we lead God’s people in corporate worship and within our sphere of influence outside the Corps building at every opportunity. James M. Boice once again adds, “Consequently, according to the Bible, knowledge of God takes place only where there is also knowledge of ourselves in our deep spiritual need and where there is an accompanying acceptance of God’s gracious provision for our need through the work of Christ and the application of that work to us by God’s Spirit. Knowledge of God takes place in the context of Christian piety, worship, and devotion.”⁸

Lastly, knowledge of God is evident through His redemption of our lives on a personal level. Throughout the history of Israel, we see time and again God’s redemptive footprint for His people. That same love has been extended to the ‘whosoever’ – you and me – and it needs to continue to echo unto eternity by bringing to the Father those who are still lost. “The love of God is one of the great realities of the universe, a pillar upon which the hope of the world rests. But it is a personal, intimate thing, too. God does not love populations, He loves people. He loves not masses, but men.

1 A W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God, Their Meaning in the Christian Life* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1978), 1.

2 Ibid., 4.

3 John 17:3

4 James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive and Readable Theology*, revised and expanded edition (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 5.

He loves us all with a mighty love that has no beginning and can have no end.”⁹
Amen!

As Salvationist worship leaders, may we always remind God’s people of whom He says we are in Him and also whom He says He is as we lead corporate worship (His nature, character, attributes, perfect provision/purpose, presence) – all found in His love letter to His beloved, the Bible. May our personal walk with Him also testify of the Great I AM.

Adely Charles

⁵ Steven D. Boyer and Christopher A. Hall, *The Mystery of God: Theology for Knowing the Unknowable* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 10.

⁶ Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 11.

⁷ Romans 10:9 (paraphrased – NIV)

⁸ Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 9.

⁹ Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 102.

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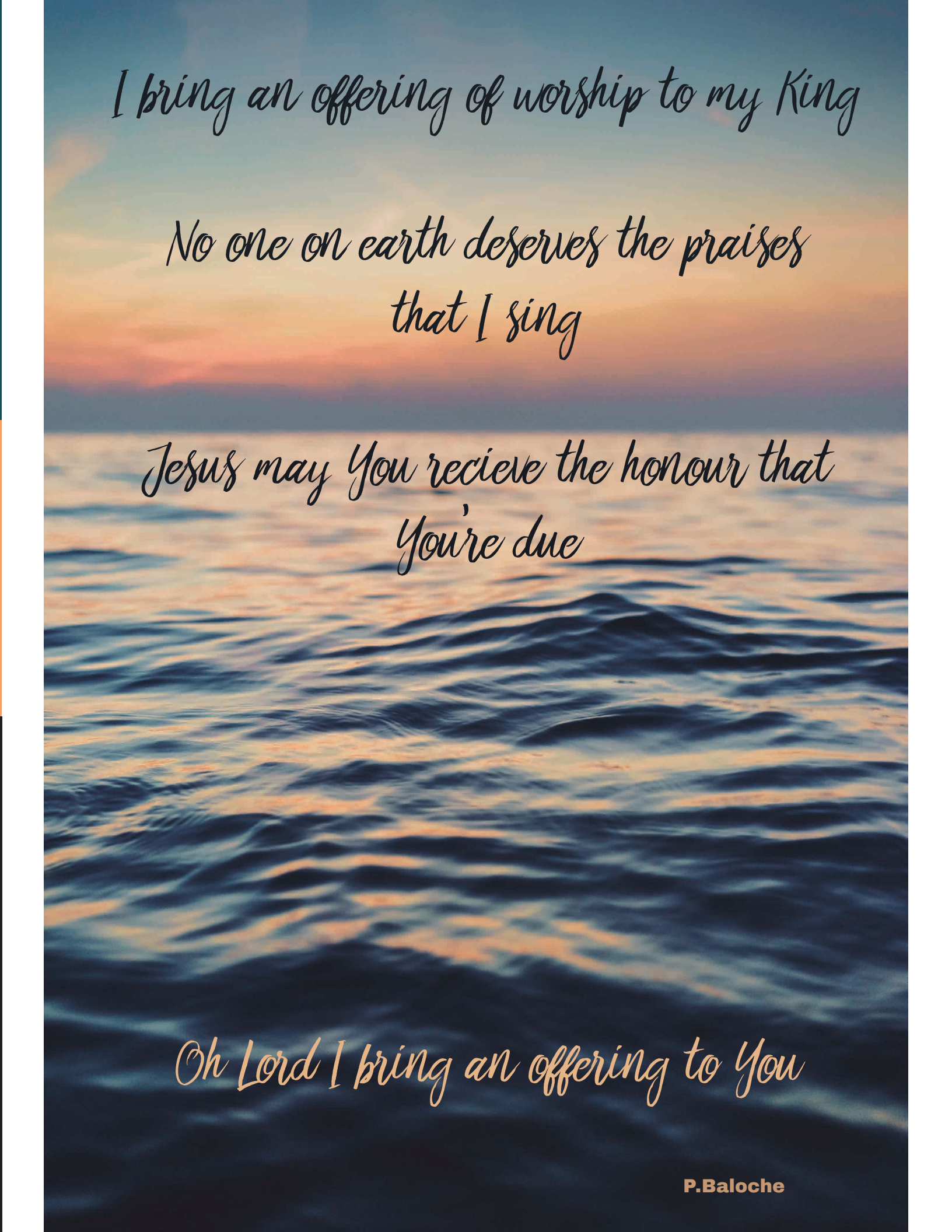
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SAWM SING SEARCH



Our first Song Search is now closed for submissions. Thank you to everyone who has sent in songs. We will be announcing more about the publication and availability of the songs in our next edition in early December.



I bring an offering of worship to my King

*No one on earth deserves the praises
that I sing*

*Jesus may You receive the honour that
You're due*

Oh Lord I bring an offering to You

VOCAL

WARM-UP & TECHNIQUE

When we look at the makeup of a typical worship team, it's such a diverse grouping of instrumentation; from the singers to strings, brass, keys and percussion. Any sort of warm-up is likely to be the whole group playing something together and is less focused on the individual warm-up that a certain voice or instrument would need. In this article, we will look at the singers in a worship team, how we can warm-up before rehearsal, and more specifically, how we can use this time of Covid-19 to work on our individual vocal technique.

We certainly need to physically warm-up our voices before launching into our repertoire. A good warm-up also helps us focus in on what we're about to rehearse. Perhaps one of the biggest benefits of a good warm-up, however, is that it helps us improve and develop as individual singers. We can work on breath support, extending our range, tone and intonation, diction, and so many other facets of our singing. As I already eluded, when we come together as a worship team, the warm-up we go through may not allow us time to really hone in on a particular aspect of our singing.

Perhaps in this time of pandemic, when we aren't meeting and rehearsing like we normally would, we can use this time to develop our own individual talents and skill and give it some of the attention that we may not typically have. As we improve as individuals, we improve as a group. As our own sound improves, so does the overall sound of the group. It becomes a great way to contribute to the team.

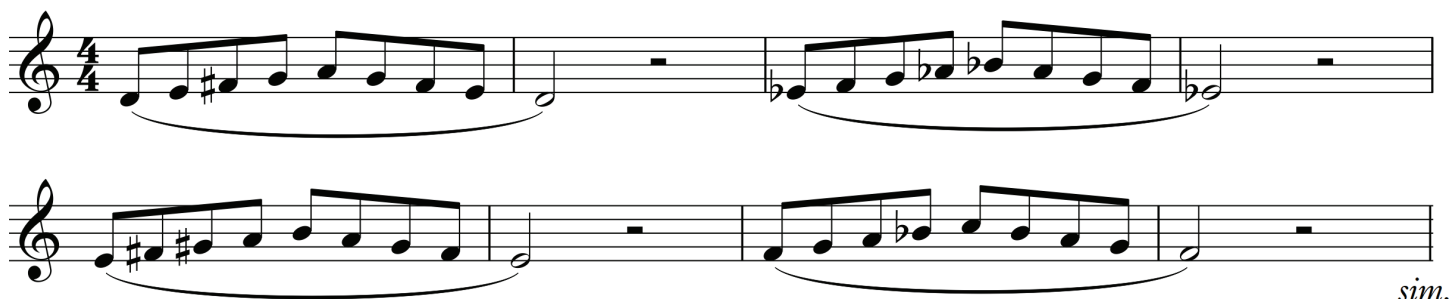
So what can this look like? If you're at all like me, these pandemic times have proven to be far busier than anticipated, with a lot of juggling of work, family, and health considerations. To keep your voice in shape, even a few minutes every day can make a big difference. For example, check out this warm-up:

FOR MORE VOCAL EXERCISES GO TO

WWW.SAMAGACB.COM

**DEMONSTRATION VIDEOS, ACCOMPANIMENT TRACKS AND A PRACTICE PLAN ARE AVAILABLE TO
DOWNLOAD TO GUIDE YOU THROUGH THESE EXERCISES.**

Lip Trills (ascending)



Lip Trills (descending)



Lip trills are one of the best vocal exercises you can do to help ensure you are singing in a healthy and supported way. It requires good breath support and it's also one of the easiest exercises to bring your voice through your range. If you sang through an exercise like this everyday, moving through to the very upper part of your register, and then moving down to the very lowest part of your register, you would likely see some extension of your range over a number of weeks, and you would be doing so in a healthy way. Remember, even extending your range a semitone is a big feat and great accomplishment! While it's best to practice this when you can stand and sing like you typically would, and in a way that would give you the best posture and support for singing, the reality is you can try this while driving in your car, or while gardening, or any number of activities that you have to complete throughout your day.

Here is another great exercise to work on:

Triads w/Tongue Out (ascending)



While it feels ridiculous to be singing with your tongue hanging out, it is so helpful in relieving the tension in our vocal cords. It also helps us place the sound in the best, most resonant part of our voice as we move through our register.

Triads w/Tongue Out (descending)

ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah

ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah *sim.*

With this next exercise, which you may remember being taught at a very young age, we are working on pitch accuracy and flexibility in our voice, as well as not spreading those “ee” vowels as in the word “bee.”

Bumble Bee

Bum - ble bee bum - ble bee bum - ble bee bum - ble bee.

Bum - ble bee bum - ble bee bum - ble bee bum - ble bee.

Bum - ble bee bum - ble bee bum - ble bee bum - ble bee.

Bum - ble bee bum - ble bee bum - ble bee bum - ble bee. *sim.*

Our aim here is to find the centre of each pitch. As you improve with this exercise, try to speed it up, thus increasing your flexibility.

These are just a sample of the exercises you can use to strengthen your voice. The reality is that if you commit to singing exercises like this for a few minutes each day, it will help improve many aspects of your singing. Once we return to our rehearsal times together as a team, you will feel encouraged, better equipped, and ready to share God’s message with your unique God-given talent.

Heather Osmond is the Assistant Territorial Secretary for Music and Gospel Arts in the Canada and Bermuda Territory.



USING YOUR CAPO

TO ENHANCE YOUR PLAYING

As soon as I write the word capo, I hear the piano players and other instrumentalists complain and grumble about guitarists “cheating.” While it can be a crutch, if we understand the theory and musical reasoning for using our capo, it can be an amazing tool that allows us to play and lead at the same time or to create voicings that add to the sound of the song.

As young guitarists, we learn the root positions of our chords. As we progress into playing with a worship team, we see that there are groupings of chords within key signatures.

For example, when we are playing in the Key of G we have used the chords G, C, D and E-minor a lot. These chords make up the 1, 4, 5, and minor 6 of the Key of G. For a long time now, a lot of music has been written with these chords at the heart of their theoretical construction.

As guitarists, we should commit ourselves to learning the chords 1, 4, 5, and minor 6 in all major keys. This is a skill that will allow us to position our capo and create alternate voicings to root position chords. It also allows us to experiment with range so we don’t muddy the mid-range of our sound when playing with other guitarists. As well, it creates a larger sound when playing with just a pianist but spreading out the phonic range that the listener hears.

These are just some of the reasons why we use a capo. How can we do it well? Here are some tips.



1. Don't reprint chord charts in root position keys

Remember how I said that the capo can be a crutch? Well this is it. Everyone gets confused when the guitarist tries to talk to the other band members about the G chord that is really a B-flat chord to everyone else. This is letting the capo do the work for us and doesn't encourage us to think musically. I know that initially, you will need to do this when you are learning to play with a capo but try not to do it for too long.

We must strive to develop the skill of transposing root position chords when we are playing with our capo on. When the capo is on the second fret, don't think of the root position of a G chord but think of it as an A chord.

Again, knowing the 1, 4, 5, and minor 6 structures will help you so much. If you look at a song in the Key of A, you know that these chords are: A, D, E and F-sharp minor. If you put the capo on the second fret, you can play these chords in an open G formation and play G, C, D and E-minor. This will simplify the F-sharp minor chord that would most likely be a bar chord when using open positions. It just gives us a different voicing option.

Part of this is examining the key and identifying these important chord combinations in the song. Then think in that way when you transpose. If we want to play a song in B-flat with our capo on the third fret using an open G formation, try not to start comparing chords by thinking B-flat is now G, E-flat is now C, F is now D etc...

Try to think in numeral notation (I, IV, V, vi) or take the chords out altogether. We refer to this as the Nashville Numbers System. This allows you to take the key of the song and assign numbers to the notation. Once you unlock the structure of the 1, 4, 5, and minor 6 chords, you can put the capo on wherever you like and play functionally from the knowledge you have developed of that particular key. This takes some time to develop but it is worth it.



Take the root position G above and when you use your capo don't think of it as a G chord anymore. Memorize the transpositions for the root G chord as you move the capo up the neck. This is the one chord of this key when using the G shape. Using C, D and E minor root positions you can also play the 4(IV), 5(V) and 6(vi) chords of the keys below.

Capo Fret 2 - A (I)

Capo Fret 4 - B (I)

Capo Fret 3 - B flat (I)

Capo Fret 5 - C (I)

2. The capo can unlock finger picking options

Some embellishments (like hammer-ons and pull-offs) can be easily played in certain open chords but aren't as easy when you have to play in keys that are dominated by bar chords.

Using your capo allows you to find some of the 7th, 9th or suspended notes more easily within these keys. It unlocks another depth of sound intended by the writer that can be difficult for you hand to maintain during a song in a challenging key.

3. Learn how different open key combinations are voiced

This is especially important when you are playing and leading worship by yourself. Using all six strings gives the guitar a chance to show off the beautiful full range and colour of the instrument. Paul Baloche has a method called the "Train Tracks Method" which is essentially based around a root position E and power chords, leaving the top two strings open. This method can then be used in conjunction with a capo to play in different keys. I have used this method when playing in G. Instead of using the root position G chords, I put a capo on the third fret and use this open E style to get a punchier sound during a song.

4. Play in worship-friendly keys

Being able to transpose a song can help us put songs in keys that are better for the congregation. No one wants to come to church on a Sunday morning and hurt themselves while singing. We need to remember that most congregations are going to be comfortable between an A below middle C and 4th line D on the treble staff. This means we can't always play songs in the key they are recorded. If a song recorded by a super tenor recording artist is best translated to an awkward key on the guitar (but that key works best for the congregation), then the use of a capo will make that song much easier to play.





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