

Creating Transitions in Worship and Praise Music

by Mark Hayes

One of the most important elements of creating a worship flow are the transitions between choruses, especially if they vary in tempo and style. In this edition of Improv Notes we will explore how to create smooth transitions in those situations.

Creating transitions between songs of differing time signatures is easily accomplished by beginning the new meter on the last note of the preceding song. The new meter is established by the piano while the congregation holds the last note for one or two measures. Make sure that the transition harmonies do not clash with the last melody note. In Ex. 1, I have used two popular praise choruses, "How Majestic Is Your Name," and "Great Is the Lord," both by Michael W. Smith. Notice that the transition chords are based on the I and IV chords in the key of C. Ritarding slightly before the tempo and time signature change at m. 3 helps prepare the listener for the change.

Ex. 1

G/F C/E F G7sus G7
rit.

Oh Lord God Al - might

3 *a tempo*

C F/C CMaj7 F/C C F/C

y.

6

CMaj7 F/C C Dm7 G7 C

Great is the Lord, He is ho - ly and just, By His

There are many approaches to connecting up-tempo songs. If there is no key change involved, then a quick direct transition like Ex. 2 is preferable. This sustains the momentum of the medley. Notice that the turn-around chord in m. 5 clashes with the pick-up notes to the next song, "He Has Made Me Glad." Using an A7 or V chord is not the best choice because the C# clashes with the D in the melody on the 4th beat. The G/A chord in m. 6 is a better choice, complementing the melody notes throughout the transitional measure.

D D/C# G2/B D/A

Ex. 2

I will sing of the mer - cies of the Lord for - ev - er; I will

3 Em7 A7 D G incorrect measure A7

sing of the mer - cies of the Lord. I will

6 correct measure D G D G/A

I will en - ter His gates with thanks - giv - ing in my heart; I will

In Ex. 3 I have used a similar up-tempo transition with a modulation. In m. 4, notice the step-wise motion in the bass line that sets up the modulation. It's best to prepare the modulation with the V7 chord of the new key. In this case we are going to the key of E minor and B7 is the V7 of E minor. Be sure and observe the rest on beat 4 of m. 5. It adds a "breath" to the transition and gives the audience the cue to come in. A quick break like this, while keeping the tempo, sets up a next song quite well. Use rests to your advantage. If you are playing with other instruments such as guitars or drums, make sure they observe this rest so that the transition sounds clean.

D D/C# G2/B D/A

Ex. 3

I will sing of the mer - cies of the Lord for - ev - er; I will

Em7 A7 D Am6/C B7 B

3

sing of the mer - cies of the Lord. *no rit.*

Em

6

Sing un - to the Lord a new song,

Ex. 4 shows a variation of the transition in Ex. 3. Since you are changing keys as well as songs, you may want to establish the new minor key for a few measures before the congregation starts to sing. Adding ms. 7-8 provides a good intro so people can get the style, tempo, and key feeling. Notice there is still a nice break before the entrance in m. 8, which serves as a "breath."

Ex. 4

D D/C# G2/B D/A

I will sing of the mer - cies of the Lord for - ev - er; I will

3

Em7 A7 D Am6/C B7 B

sing of the mer - cies of the Lord. *no rit.*

6

Em

Sing un - to the Lord a new song,