

How to light a worship band

In his latest article for *Worship AVL Asia*, **John Black** takes you through everything you need to know for lighting a worship band



For the congregation, the visibility of the band supports a lighting style or mood



Lighting the worship band can create a desired mood to subtly impact the experience



Many youth services use concert style lighting design as they try to create an exciting atmosphere

LIGHTING A WORSHIP BAND IS LIKE ASKING

a group of people what their favourite flavour of ice cream is. Chances are you will get a different answer from most of the people in the group, and the techniques used to light a worship band are likewise equally as diverse. Additionally, lighting possibilities – or limitations – vary depending on the resources and space you have available in your particular church. In the following article, I'm going to discuss a couple of guiding tips, as well as some practical applications, for lighting a worship band.

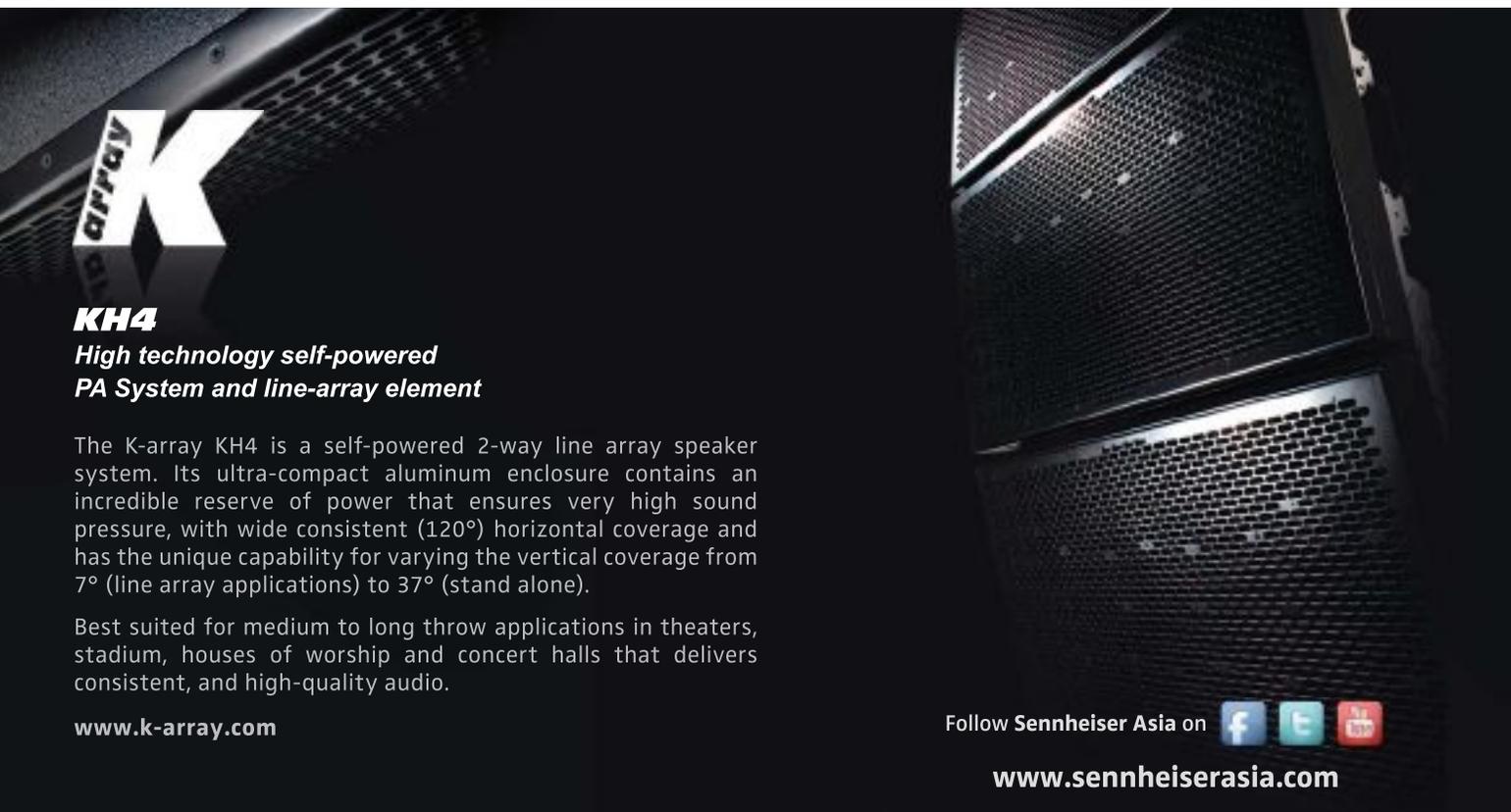
My hope is that you will find at least some of these helpful for you in your church.

A Matter of Perspective

One of the most important things when starting a lighting design is ensuring that you know both who and what you are lighting. This is especially true in a church setting where the worship band members may change monthly, or even weekly, as well as the setup of where the band is physically located on

the stage. As a church technical artist, it is usually easy to find out or see what the physical layout of the stage for a given week is going to be. You may have even been a part of a design meeting with a creative team responsible for creating the worship environment, and therefore have more insight into the service to be lit. All too often, however, planning for the worship environment can unintentionally neglect the needs of those actually on the stage.

As a drummer and guitarist myself, communication and understanding between the church technical



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artist and the worship band members is imperative for the success of the lighting design. There are a number of fundamental questions that guide lighting design decisions with a better understanding of who is being lit. Does the worship band consist of volunteer musicians of varying skill levels, or are they professional musicians? Do band members read from paper sheet music or chord charts, e-music readers, or are their parts memorised? How does the worship band communicate with each other (in-ear monitor systems, visual cues such as hand gestures, or some other visual signalling system)? Knowing the answer to these and

MEET THE AUTHOR

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John Black, theatre manager for Seoul Foreign School

Crusader Live!, giving students the opportunity to learn and work with professional-level technologies in a demanding production environment.

perspective of the worship band members. As I mentioned before, the church technical artist must understand the members and communication methods of the worship leader and band. Let's say that instrumentalists are reading music from a paper score or chord chart. If a musician relies on reading from that sheet of paper, they will not be able to follow along if they can't read it. Additionally, if the worship leader relies on hand gestures to signal, for example, the repeat of a chorus, if that gesture is not visible to the other band members, they will not be able to know where the worship leader is wanting to lead the congregation.

Visibility of, and among, the worship band is therefore of utmost importance. The solution to this can be approached in a number of ways depending on the resources and capabilities of your church lighting system. It may be that you have available a music stand light for each musician and/or vocalist. If this is the case, these lights will provide the needed light for visibility of the music, allowing the church technical artist the flexibility of creating other lighting looks without negatively impacting the band's ability to read their music. Additional lighting for supporting the

other similar questions can help guide the lighting design process and ensure that when the worship band steps on stage for their first rehearsal (or service), their needs are met and any time spent by the designer up to this point has not been wasted.

Visibility is Key

Visibility is one of the four main functions of stage lighting and can take on a number of characteristics depending on the situation. I'm going to approach visibility from two perspectives. First, from the



Musicians who read music need to be able to see it



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band's communication method may still be needed, but they will at least be able to read their music. If music stand lights are not available, you may need to focus lights specifically to allow visibility of the music stands. Adding fixtures focused from a top- or slightly back-lighting position can help the worship band see what is on their stand, as well as any visual cues or gestures being used.

From the perspective of the congregation, the visibility of the worship band has more to do with supporting a preferred lighting style, or creating a particular atmosphere or mood. Some churches prefer for the stage to be uniformly lit throughout the entirety of the service. In these instances, providing adequate front-lighting for a general stage wash will suffice and allow all of the band members' faces to be seen.

Other churches prefer for the band to 'disappear', bringing them out of the focus of the stage and allowing worshippers to focus more on the act of worship. In these instances, the band may be set up far upstage, or off to one side. The lighting design



There are a number of fundamental questions that guide lighting design decisions

distracting to the congregation. Still other churches may look to create a concert-like atmosphere to engage their congregation, and may create a lighting design complete with moving light chases and effects during a worship set. In such instances, the lighting plays a more involved role in the worship environment experience and will look similar to attending concert events. Many youth services

other design aspects and functions of lighting design.

Simple Techniques

Once the right visibility is achieved, there are a number of simple techniques that can be used to effectively light a worship band. The application of selective focus deals with drawing attention through light to a particular person or object. It can be achieved through having a light 'on' in one area of the stage while 'off' in another to direct the congregation's attention. Selective focus can also be achieved through focusing a white front-light on an object while the rest of the stage is lit with a colour wash. The focus may be on the worship band leader, or it may be on an object on the stage. For example, when singing about the cross, it may be desired to draw visual attention away from the band and onto an actual cross located on the stage to connect the visible object with the words being sung. Selective focus can be achieved through any type of lighting fixture as it is achieved through the overall lighting look of the whole stage.

When a discussion comes up about lighting during a worship set, it most often has to do with creating a desired mood to subtly impact the worship experience. Moods are most easily achieved through the use of coloured lighting onto a backdrop of some sort or through back-lighting and colour washes on the stage. Most worship bands will be playing in front of a wall or backdrop of some kind. Focusing coloured lighting – whether conventional fixtures using gels or LED wash fixtures – focused on the wall or backdrop can create an effective visual mood associated with certain colours. When utilised, the colour of the wall or backdrop can be slowly changed in-between songs and,

without the congregation necessarily even noticing, support changing moods as the band plays through the worship set.

If your church is equipped with automated lighting fixtures, it is possible to subtly light the worship band and utilise these fixtures creatively without the need for fast movements and chases as is commonplace in concert lighting. The extended features of these fixtures – such as housing multiple gobos, colour mixing, and the ability to control pan and tilt for changing focus, give the designer creative flexibility that can only be realised by dozens of conventional fixtures. Gobos can be projected onto surfaces or in the air to create textures that further enhance the moods already being created through the colour wash. The ability to control the focus of these fixtures

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allows the use of each fixture to selectively focus on different people or objects throughout the worship set. Of course complicated chases can be programmed if that is the style of your church's worship service, but these fixtures can also be invaluable tools to the more traditional church service styles if they are available.

There are many other needs – such as lighting requirements for IMAG and or broadcast, church drama presentations, or overall mood of the entire worship environment – that also need consideration when approaching a service lighting design. The final design, however, should first and foremost support those who are on the stage – in this case, the worship band. The lighting should allow the worship band to effectively lead the congregation in worship, regardless of the production 'style' of the church. If that can be achieved, then you have successfully lit the worship band.



You may need to light certain things differently for IMAG

may consist of heavy back-, top- and side-lighting using a combination of colours and simple effects for conveying a particular mood while not drawing attention to the band itself. The worship leader may be front-lit for IMAG purposes and visibility when speaking, and the band will take on more of a subdued, perhaps even silhouetted appearance.

Many churches follow this method of lighting design for their worship band, using the lighting to enhance and support the mood that is trying to be achieved without being

follow this method of lighting design as they try to create an exciting atmosphere that is appealing to today's youth.

Whichever style your particular church adheres to, however, ensuring the worship band is able to effectively lead the congregation in worship should be the basis for any good worship band lighting design. The level of visibility needed by the worship band members will be the foundation for the design, followed by the visibility preference of the church creative team, and finally followed by



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