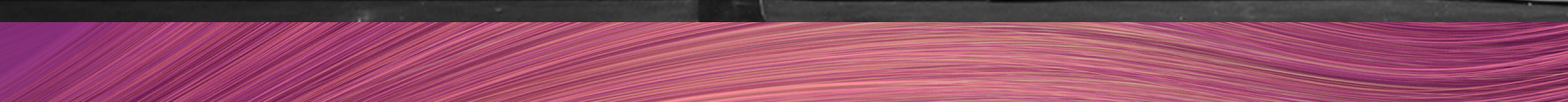
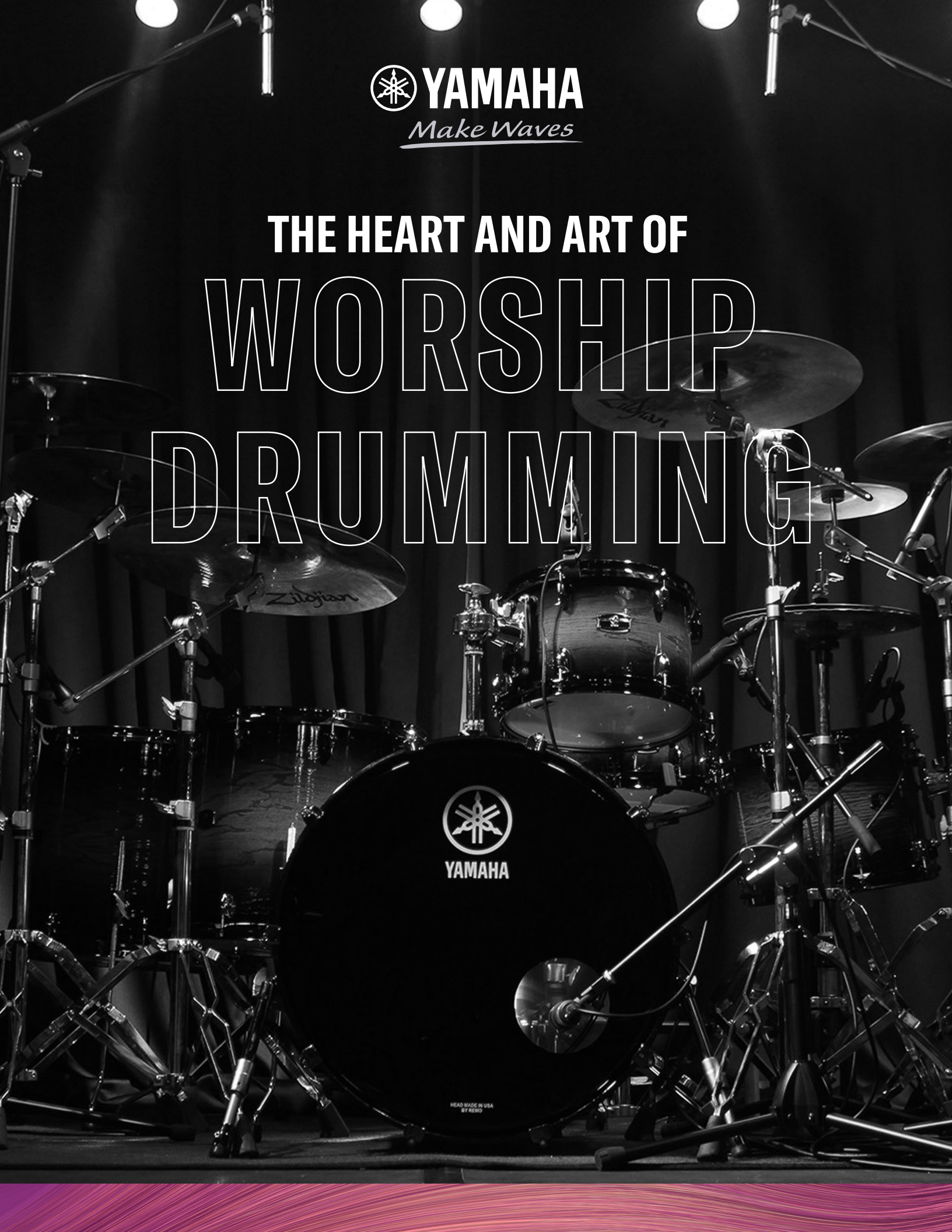




THE HEART AND ART OF WORSHIP DRUMMING



"I played my drum for Him, pa rum pum pum pum. I played my best for Him, pa rum pum pum pum. Then He smiled at me, pa rum pum pum pum, me and my drum."

This beloved Christmas carol beautifully illustrates the devotion and sincerity of the drummer boy, who offers what little he has—his drumming—as an act of worship and love. Though his skill may be simple, his heart is fully in it, and that is what truly matters.

Drums have a long and complex history. While they were originally used in battle, they have also evolved into deeply expressive musical instruments, capable of beauty, power, and nuance. They belong in a concert hall just as much as on a parade ground. But just as a drummer must adapt to different settings, they must also consider how they approach their instrument. If you're playing in a small space, you can't treat it as if it were an arena.

This raises an important question: *Are you a musician who happens to play the drums, or just a drummer?* True musicians explore the full depth of their instrument—not just rhythmically, but even melodically. Drums have a dynamic range that allows for both intensity and subtlety. Are you using the full breadth of your drum's potential? Are you refining your technique, mastering control, and embracing the finesse that great musicianship requires?

Skill takes time to develop, and investing in drummers, helping them grow into well-rounded musicians, benefits not just them, but everyone who experiences their music. I feel that the church should bear the cost of training our musicians and techs.

If you had to choose between two iconic drumming figures, the humble drummer boy playing with devotion at the manger, or *Animal* from *The Muppets*, known for his wild and untamed energy—which one do you most resemble? More importantly, which one do you aspire to be?

ADDRESSING DRUM VOLUME IN CHURCH WORSHIP

If your church is struggling with the sometimes unruly and overbearing volume of drums, this article will explore potential solutions—some of which you may have already tried.

However, the root issue may not be the drums themselves, but rather how they are being played. Instruments like drums and cymbals are inanimate objects; they do not control their own sound. Much of the responsibility falls on the drummer. It's important to ask: *Why are we on the platform, and for whom are we playing?*

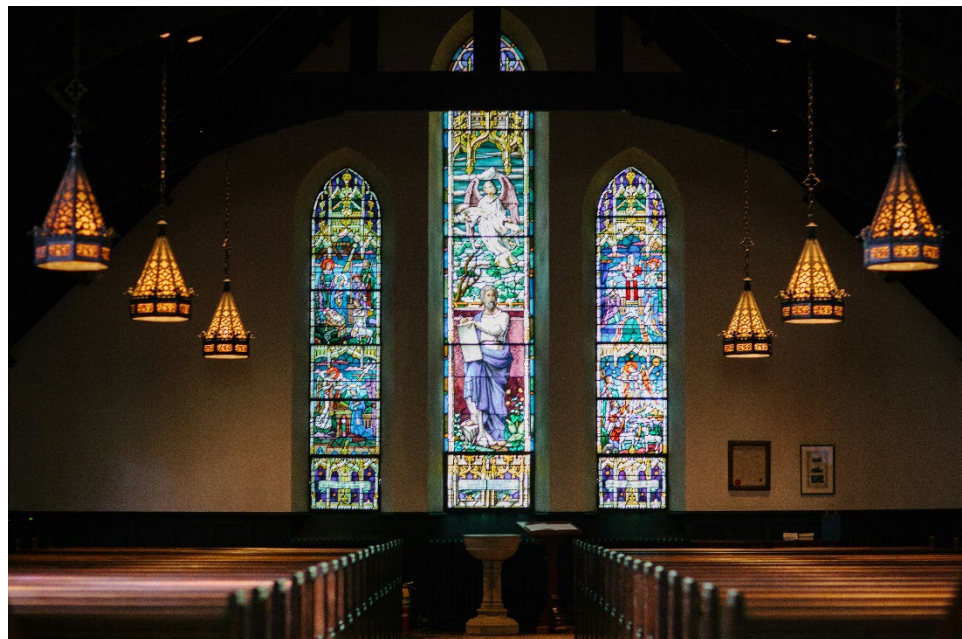
For too long, churches have attempted to manage drum volume through solutions that, in my opinion, are not always effective or appropriate. Some methods may not truly benefit the drummer, the church, or the overall worship experience, and in some cases, they may even make things worse in the long run.

Many churches use different strategies to balance the powerful energy of live drums with the need for clarity and a worshipful atmosphere. Below, we'll explore common approaches and their impact.

DRUMS AND THE SANCTUARY: FINDING BALANCE IN WORSHIP

Before we place the responsibility for sound levels solely on the drummer, we must first consider the space in which the drums are played. A drummer may have complete control over their dynamics, but if the room's acoustics work against them, even the most skillfully played rhythm can come across as overpowering or lost in the mix.

The sanctuary itself plays a significant role in shaping the sound of the drums. In a large, open space, such as a traditional cathedral, the natural reverb expands the sound, making the drums feel bigger and more powerful than intended. Each strike of the snare or crash of the cymbals lingers in the air, blending with the next beat, creating a wash of sound that can be overwhelming. On the other hand, in a smaller room, sound waves have less space to travel. Instead of a grand, spacious tone, the sound bounces quickly between walls, creating a harsh, cluttered mix that can be difficult to control.



The materials within the sanctuary also affect how the drums behave. Hard surfaces—wood, tile, stone, or glass—reflect sound, causing it to ricochet throughout the room, making every drum hit seem louder and more intense. Conversely, softer materials, such as carpet, padded chairs, and heavy drapes, absorb sound, reducing echoes and helping to tame excessive volume.

Even the height of the ceiling influences the way drums are perceived. In a high-ceilinged space, sound has more room to disperse, softening the overall impact. But in a sanctuary with a low ceiling, the sound becomes trapped, unable to escape, which results in an overwhelming concentration of volume. Similarly, the shape of the walls matters. Flat, parallel surfaces allow sound waves to build upon each other, creating lingering echoes that muddy the clarity of the drums. Textured or angled walls, however, break up these reflections, allowing for a more natural and balanced sound.

Where the drum kit is positioned on the stage can also drastically change how it interacts with the room. If placed against a wall or in a corner, sound bounces off those surfaces, amplifying its impact before it even reaches the congregation. However, when positioned more centrally on an open stage, sound disperses more evenly, creating a better blend with the other instruments and voices in the worship setting.

For churches struggling with drum volume, there are solutions beyond simply enclosing the drummer in plexiglass. Acoustic panels can be strategically placed to absorb excess sound without completely silencing the natural energy of the drums. Rugs under the drum kit help control low-end resonance, preventing excessive reflection off hard floors. Hanging fabric or sound baffles in key areas can soften harsh echoes, creating a space where the drums enhance rather than overpower the worship atmosphere.



The goal is not to stifle the drums but to shape the space around them so that they contribute to the worship experience in a way that is dynamic yet controlled, powerful yet inviting. When pastors, worship leaders, and drummers take the time to understand how the sanctuary itself influences sound, they can work together to create a balanced environment—one where the drums are not a problem to be solved but a powerful instrument of praise.

SUMMARY

Rather than just focusing on the drummer, consider how the sanctuary itself shapes the sound. Small adjustments to the room's acoustics can make a big difference in controlling drum levels while still allowing for a full, dynamic worship experience.

THE DOWNSIDES OF DRUM SHIELDS IN WORSHIP SETTINGS

Many churches use acrylic or plexiglass drum shields to reduce drum volume, blocking direct sound waves from reaching the congregation and other musicians while maintaining visibility. However, what many don't realize is that these barriers often do more harm than good. The problem lies in how sound interacts with reflective surfaces like glass.

Think of a mirror—just as light reflects directly back, so does sound. When a drum shield reflects sound waves, those waves bounce back to their point of origin. If the drum kit is miked, the microphones will capture both the direct sound from the drums (such as snare, kick, and overheads) and the reflected sound from the shield. The reflected sound reaches the microphones slightly later, causing phase issues that result in a smearing effect—making the drums sound unnatural, muddy, and less defined in the mix.

While drum shields may seem like a quick fix for volume control, they often introduce more audio challenges than they solve. Considering alternative solutions—such as proper mic placement, acoustic treatment, and drummer technique—can lead to a much more balanced and natural drum sound in worship settings.

Many sound engineers are more upset with how the cymbals affect the nearby vocal microphones. Perhaps using cymbal shields would provide a better solution, leaving the drums to sound more natural. Another idea would be to use darker cymbals or ones that don't produce a plethora of harsh frequencies.



There are several other downsides to screens, which is why they shouldn't be on the top of the list for reducing drum volume:

- **Isolated Sound:** Shields cut off some of the natural reverb and ambiance that add richness to drum recordings or live performances. Drums might sound too dry or unnatural unless reverb is artificially added.

- **Loss of Audience Interaction:** In live settings, the energy and connection between the drums and the audience might be diminished because the sound is blocked or redirected by the shield.
- **Live Performance Impact:** Shields can reduce the natural projection of the drums into the audience space, making the drums sound muted, muffled, and more distant. This forces the reliance on microphone amplification to provide the correct volume.
- **Inconsistent Monitoring:** The drummer may not hear the same level of energy or resonance that the audience or recording system picks up, requiring monitors or in-ear systems for accurate feedback. Being dependent on a monitor is not the same as being present and listening in the room.
- **Acoustic Experience:** Enclosures can alter the drummer's natural acoustic experience. Being inside a shielded environment can make the drums sound different to the drummer than they would in an open space, which may affect their playing dynamics and feel. If you must have the drummer in one of these contraptions, please make the ceiling high enough so the drummer does not feel restricted.
- **Temperature and Space Issues:** Enclosures can trap heat and reduce ventilation, making the drumming environment physically uncomfortable. Limited space may also restrict movement or instrument setup. Keep a wide enough swath of space around the kit to reposition microphones and cables.

MIC PLACEMENT LIMITATIONS

- **Constrained Setup:** The use of shields or enclosures may limit how microphones are positioned. This can compromise optimal mic placement for capturing the best tonal quality of each drum or cymbal.
- **Mic Bleed:** While the shield reduces the overall volume escaping the drum area, microphones still need to be carefully placed to minimize bleed from other instruments, which can be harder in an enclosed environment.

AESTHETIC CONSIDERATIONS

- **Visual Barrier:** Drum shields or enclosures can obstruct the visual appeal of the stage setup and block the audience's view of the drummer. This reduces the overall aesthetic of the performance.

THE HIDDEN COST OF DRUM ENCLOSURES IN WORSHIP

Drum shields are one thing, but full enclosures take isolation to an entirely new level. While they might help control volume, they come at a price—both literally and figuratively.

Imagine a drummer locked inside a fully enclosed room. Sure, the sound is contained, but at what cost?

The drummer is now completely cut off from the rest of the band and the congregation. They have no idea how loud or soft they're playing in relation to the room, the worship team, or the atmosphere of the service. Yes, you've gained control, but you've also disconnected the drummer from the very worship experience they're meant to be a part of.

And then there's the financial cost. Some of these enclosures cost more than a high-end drum kit—money that could be better spent investing in musicianship and sound engineering solutions.

SO, WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES?



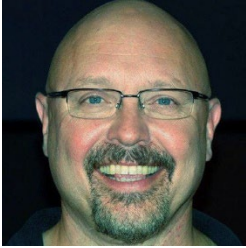
- **Dynamic Playing Techniques** – Training drummers to control their volume naturally by using softer strokes, lighter sticks, brushes, or rods. Mesh heads are another way of mitigating the level. How much are you willing to spend to make things better? How about investing in people instead of plexiglass? Even if you're willing to spend \$1,000 on a shield, that same money could be used to invest in training, acoustic treatment, or better tools for the team.
- **Acoustic Treatment & Sound Dampening** – Strategic use of carpets, foam panels, and drum mutes to absorb excess sound without trapping the drummer in a box.
- **Electronic Drums** – If you can find a drummer who is willing to play an electronic kit, it offers numerous advantages over a traditional acoustic kit.

At the end of the day, volume control shouldn't come at the expense of connection. Instead of isolating the drummer, we should focus on solutions that allow them to be an active part of the worship experience while maintaining a balanced sound.

The goal is to maintain an engaging and immersive worship environment while ensuring clarity and comfort for the congregation.

I want the drummer to be able to worship with us, don't you?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Doug Gould is the CEO and Founder of Worship MD and has been a Pro Audio and Music Technology industry veteran for nearly 30 years, serving in management roles at Shure, Tascam, and E-Mu Systems. Doug has served as a worship leader, musician, and sound tech at various churches throughout his career.

Over the last 18 years, Doug has been a very effective presenter at hundreds of worship conferences throughout North America and beyond, focusing his experience on consulting and teaching.

Doug can be reached at worshipmd.com or by email at doug@worshipmd.com. You can also find him on Facebook at facebook.com/officialworshipmd.