

I Love That Song, I Just Can't Sing It *Break Forth Canada*

The Challenge – Many modern worship songs involve melodies that cover a very wide range. The verse is often in a low register, moving to a significantly higher register for the chorus. It can be a very real challenge for our congregations to sing these songs, since the range of the song will not be practical for many in attendance.

A test – Have one of your female vocalists sing the song. You'll probably find that the verse is singable in this key, but the chorus will probably be challenging for her. If that's the case, you can be fairly confident that the same will be true of the ladies in your congregation as well as many of the men.

The Options –

- 1 • Present the song as written and accept the fact that some people will observe rather than sing because of the vocally challenging range.
- 2 • Give yourself permission to adapt the “key centers” for the verse and chorus so that both sections settle in a more practical vocal range.

An example – One of my favorite modern worship songs, a song full of rich Scriptural imagery, is “Sweetly Broken” by Jeremy Riddle. It's recorded in the key of B. The verse has a small melodic range, from B to D#. The chorus takes a big jump up, beginning on F# above the verse's D# and hitting an E as its highest note. So, the overall range of the song is an octave and a fourth.

The Process – “Sweetly Broken” by Jeremy Riddle © 2005 Mercy/Vineyard Publishing

Determine the vocal range of the original verse

Key: B maj **Low note:** B **High note:** D#

Determine the vocal range of the original chorus

Key: B maj **Low note:** F# **High note:** E

Vocal range of original: Octave and a 4th

Next - Determine a key that would be more comfortable for whichever section is proving too high.

Verse: **Key:** C maj **Low note:** C **High note:** E

Chorus: **Key:** G maj **Low note:** D **High note:** C

Vocal range with adaptations: Octave

Now - Put your theory caps on and arrange a transition (pivot) chord between the two keys.

Hint: Besides looking for pivot chords, look for common tones, notes that are part of a chord in both keys. If you find such a common tone, play it during the pivot moment when you change keys.

Hook ‘em, Dano – Bad joke, sorry. Create an instrumental hook to use for the intro. After the first chorus, use that hook again to return to the key of the verse. Example shown in “Sweetly Broken” handout.

Note – You may notice that I haven't manipulated the key of the bridge. That's because in most cases I've found that a key that is comfortable for the chorus will also be comfortable for the bridge.

Another note – If the chorus of the song you're working with starts with a pickup phrase, this principle might not work. The songs that have worked for me involve melodies in the chorus that either begin on the downbeat of the first measure of the chorus or after the downbeat.

Other titles to consider:

You Never Let Go

Majesty (Martin Smith)

Came To My Rescue

I Was Blind



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Worksheet for Adapting Song

The Process – Determine the key and the vocal range of the original verse.

Key: _____ **Low note:** _____ **High note:** _____

Determine the vocal range of the original chorus

Key: _____ **Low note:** _____ **High note:** _____

Vocal range of original: _____

Next - Determine a key that would be more comfortable for whichever section is proving too high.

New Verse Key: _____ **Low note:** _____ **High note:** _____

New Chorus:Key: _____ **Low note:** _____ **High note:** _____

Vocal range with adaptations: _____

Now - Put your theory caps on and arrange a transition (pivot) chord between the two keys.

Hint: Besides looking for pivot chords, look for common tones, notes that are part of a chord in both keys. If you find such a common tone, play it during the pivot moment when you change keys.

Hook 'em, Dano – Bad joke, sorry. Create an instrumental hook to use for the intro. After the first chorus, use that hook again to return to the key of the verse. Use the space below to write out that hook, either with notation or a description.

