

# Oceans

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Reharmonization options from Ed Kerr's "Create Don't Just Copy" class at CMS Northeast 2014

In my "Create Don't Just Copy" class at CMS Northeast 2014 in Buffalo, NY, we used the great song "Oceans" as our material in exploring ways to reharmonize a phrase or phrases of a familiar song. Below you'll find several of the examples we created during the class. Each line represents an optional way you might harmonize the first line of the verse. The first verse says "You call me out upon the water, the great unknown where feet may fail". After the chord charts below you can read some of my thoughts on when you might use these chord options in your worship times.

This 4 bar chart (A) shows you the chords of the original song.

	Bm	A/C#	D	A	G
A					

In these 4 bars (B), I explored a change to the harmonic rhythm, the rate at which chords change. You'll see that I played the G2 chord for the first 2 bars. In bar 4, rather than playing the G chord seen in example A above, I played a Bm7. The note in the melody at this point is a B, so the Bm7 supports this melody well.

	G2	A(add4)	Bm7
B			

In these 4 bars (C), we started getting a little further from the original chords. Several notes are shared between the Em7(add4) and G2 chords seen in measure 2 below. The F#m7 in measure 3 below is an interesting dramatic color for the lyric "the great unknown".

Lots of common tones: The Em7 and G2 share several notes: G A B and D. If you're using a pad sound for these chords, play GAD in your right hand (starting with the G just below middle C) and play an E 2 octaves below middle C with your left hand. When you then move to the G2 chord, only change the E in your left hand, preserving the common tones in your right. Beautiful.

	Em 7 (add4)	G2	F#m7	Bm7
C				

In example D, we created a walk up in the bass, E F# G A, and increased the harmonic rhythm. By featuring this faster harmonic rhythm, changing chords every 2 beats rather than once per bar, the impact of this walking bass line is heightened.

	Em7	D/F#	G2	A	F#m7	Bm7
D						

In example E, a suggestion from someone in the class lead to us trying the E/F# in bar 3. This is a non-diatonic chord, a chord outside the key of the song, D major. Let your ear be the guide as to whether this chord is something you'd use, but it's something the class found interesting and I wanted you to see this option. For you theory heads, note that E/F# has a dominant feel, serving as a 5 chord of Bm. Note, too, that we use a Bm, not a Bm7 after the E/F#. This further supports the dominant feel from the E/F# to the Bm.

	Em7	D/F#	G2	A	F#m7	E/F#	Bm
E							

All of these progressions suggest to me the possibility of repeating the 1st line of the verse several times rather than singing through the entire verse. In the class I demonstrated this option, suggesting that repeating this line isn't something you'd do early in the arrangement. Let's say you've sung verse, chorus, verse, chorus and bridge using the familiar chords. If you want to venture into a time of more "free" worship you could follow the A chord that ends the bridge with the new chord progression shown in letter B above, for example. I had the class sing the first line of the verse, "You call me out upon the water, the great unknown where feet may fail". Since we'd naturally sing the 2nd line immediately after it, I gave a verbal cue to the class to sing that first line again. This is something you'd want to do if you use these reharmonizations the way we did in the class. Also, be sure and let your media person know that at this point they should only display this line of the song. That's another way to be sure that your congregation will follow you in this new section.

At this point, what you do with this section is up to you. As a worship leader myself, I have found that sometimes repeating a single line or phrase of a song can be a way to help the listener (*and me, and the team*) really grasp the content of a song. In this case, let's say you finish the bridge of the song and decide you're ready to begin using some of these progressions. Rather than sing right away, I might say something to the people like, "We're going to sing a line from this song several times now. The lyric speaks of God calling us out onto the water, into unknown areas, places that are unfamiliar for us, perhaps frightening for us. But He's also inviting us to call on His Name, keeping our eyes on Him, not our circumstances." You get the idea. Then as you begin singing the first line from verse 1 again and again I'm confident that you will begin to sense a new richness to these powerful words. I know we definitely did in this class session.

As a class, we agreed that using the above progressions in this order worked really well: Play phrase B twice, then play C and then D. Once you reach phrase D you'll feel the energy building. Perhaps the drums would crescendo throughout this phrase and carry us into a Chorus. You might choose to do what Hillsong United often does in their arrangements, bring this chorus way down dynamically, subito piano to use a classical term. This is a very powerful musical effect and a very powerful way to return to singing straight through a chorus. Consider, too, using this drop in dynamics to begin this free worship section. If you're coming out the bridge, let's say, you've probably built your volume substantially. Thin out the texture to just pad and acoustic guitar, for example, as you begin repeating line 1 of the verse and then you'll have the potential to build hugely as you repeat B then play C and D. Be strategic about when you add the instruments in that had dropped out after the bridge, too.

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