



Wedding Music Tips and Tricks

Choosing Your Band

A band's primary job is to bring joy to your celebration. The way the leader interacts with the other vendors, the guests, and the bride and groom affects the feeling of the event. They will be setting the tone for the evening through emceeing; introducing the wedding party, toasts, cake cutting, etc. You'll want to feel comfortable interacting with them. Here are some questions to ask yourself and the leader during the selection process:

- Do you like the band's demo CD? Does their song list reflect the styles and songs that you like? Will they learn new songs for you? Have them explain what you are listening to and what you would actually get.
- How do they personalize the wedding to your musical taste? What process do they use?
- How many weddings does this band do a year and how long have they been together? (Personnel does change. Are they honest about that?)
- What services do they offer regarding the planning of your wedding?
- How big should your band be? There are lots of variations, but typically 1-3 musicians for cocktails, 2-5 musicians for dinner and 6-14 musicians for dancing depending on the size of the room, number of guests,

styles of music you like and your budget. For example, when a band is playing Stevie Wonder or Earth, Wind and Fire, there are a lot of horns. When there are two female vocalists in the band, you can have two very different quality voices so Aretha Franklin, Madonna, Fergie, and Beyonce can all be covered more convincingly. That may not be in your budget but those are the kinds of choices you'll be making as you decide on the right size band for you.

- Are they flexible in the size and price of the band to fit your needs? Do they help you find what you want or quickly tell you that you need a 14-piece orchestra?
- What additional charges are there? Are the sound system, sound engineer, learning new songs, planning meetings, parking and meals for the band included in the cost?
- Do you want continuous live music? The band is usually given breaks throughout the evening and a CD or iPod is played during those times.

It's critical to pay attention to how you felt meeting with the leader of the organization. Did they listen to you? Were you comfortable with them? Would you trust them to set the tone at your wedding and run it effectively? If they are not in rapport with you during initial meetings, they won't be at the wedding either. You're going to want someone that will change styles on a dime or play softer if you ask. When you meet with the bandleader, you should feel how committed they are to executing your vision of your wedding.

Planning Your Music

After you've chosen your band, it's time to plan. The entire wedding planning process is most likely the biggest project you've taken on as a couple. Your life will be full of projects from buying a home to possibly raising kids, etc. Use this time to get to know each other and your style of teamwork. It's about discovery and the process as well as making decisions. If one of you loves the latest hits on the radio and the other loves Motown, the bandleader's job is to help you sort through that and create an evening where you both can completely enjoy yourselves.

Choosing Your First Dance

When selecting your first dance, many things are important to consider. When you hear the song, does it make you feel good, put a smile on your face, make you think of your partner? Bottom line, it should feel personal to you. The lyrics should also feel right or resonate with you. Every line of the song won't fit exactly with what you might want to say, but you should like the overall message and feel comfortable dancing to the lyrics. If there is a line that absolutely ruins the song in terms of a first dance, it can be re-written to fit the moment. A flexible bandleader will be able to work that out with you.

Also think about the circumstances of the first dance.

- How long do you want to be dancing in front of all your guests? "Stairway to Heaven" may be your favorite song, but eight minutes is a long time to be dancing to one tune. Find a song within the length you want, or work with the bandleader to adjust the song time by cutting down verses, playing the chorus again, etc.
- If you're learning a dance, make sure you tell the band how fast or slow you want the song to go so you aren't rushing or dragging. Send the bandleader an MP3 of the version you're practicing.
- If you have your heart set on a certain version of the song, say Ben Folds singing "The Luckiest", you can ask to play it on a CD or iPod.

Setting the Musical Pace of Your Event

Pacing music throughout the event is critical. Playing older styles of music, like jazz or classic rock, early in the evening helps to include the older guests. You can work out when to transition to more contemporary music in your planning meetings. There are some 80's-90's-2000's tunes that can work great in the first set and not scare off your grandparents. The bandleader should have a very clear sense of what both you and your guests want, and that will determine how the music ramps up. Some couples want to hit Lady Gaga and Kings of Leon right away, while others want to stick to classics early on and get crazier as the night goes on. Both can create a very fun party as long as you know your guests and that's what you want. The bandleader should be flexible enough to pace the evening the way you want while advising you on the pros and cons of different approaches so you can make an informed decision on the feel of the evening.

Planning the Reception Timeline

The bandleader should help you work out the timeline. There are many options for the flow of an evening. You will want to make a decision by what feels best to you.

A typical timeline may go like this:

- One hour of cocktails
- An hour and a half for dinner
- Three hours of dancing

Cocktails may last longer than an hour if pictures off site are in the plan. Dinner can be various lengths, depending on the number of courses. Dance time can be adjusted if you and your guests love to dance and party.

Another type of timeline is called the East Coast-style wedding. In this style, there is a flow between dancing and eating. The couple or bridal party is introduced, the couple does their first dance, and everyone dances for three or four songs. Then everyone sits for toasts followed by the first course. As salads are picked up, the bandleader invites everyone to dance for another block of songs. After the next course is served, people take their seats again and eat. You finish the evening with dancing. An East Coast timeline usually looks like this:

- One hour of cocktails
- Four hours for dinner and dancing with a full band

While planning your timeline, make sure to consider the special events that occur during the night and if you want music to accompany them:

- The entrance of the Bridal Party
- Father/Daughter and Mother/Son Dances
- Cake Cutting
- Bouquet and/or Garter Toss
- Religious Traditions (Prayers, Hymns, etc.)
- Bridal Party group dance
- Songs with special meaning to your group (school fight songs, sing-along songs like "Wonderwall" or "Don't Stop Believing", etc.)
- Do you have any musical family or friends who would like to participate? Talk to your bandleader about including them in the set list.
- Last song of the night

You can have songs for these events in mind or talk to the bandleader if you need suggestions.

At Your Wedding

The best bandleaders take responsibility for the success of your evening. They should notice important details like confirming the photographer is in the room before making any announcements such as introductions, toasts, and prayers or ensuring silverware is on the cake table before announcing the cake cutting. The bandleader should also be in good communication with the catering manager and other vendors to help with the flow of the evening. The foundation of every successful party is one in which everyone works together to enhance the flow and fun.

Here are some often-overlooked issues to consider before your big day:

- Delegate someone --your best man, maid of honor, a family member -- that will communicate with the bandleader throughout the night. They can let the band know if they're too loud, if you want faster music, etc. You are paying a lot for music and have the right to be happy with it.
- Seat the older people farther away from the band. Put younger people closer. That will be their home base for the evening and everyone will be happier.
- Have a good time! This is the day you've been dreaming about and working so hard for -- enjoy it. Let yourself get lost in the good time and in each other. Be joyful and celebrate.



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