

Thoughts on choosing wedding music or “what type of wedding band is right for us?”

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After many years of performing in excess of seventy weddings a year I feel quietly confident in advising couples on the right wedding music for their celebration. A wedding band can come in all shapes, sizes and styles and should reflect something of the couple's personality and the type of day they wish themselves and their guests to experience. They can be used at various times of the day to change the tone of that particular portion of the proceedings. Some wedding bands can provide wedding music for all parts of the day. Jazz not Jazz has such bands on their roster of musicians and they are much in demand.

When can music be used in your wedding? Music can be used for the ceremony, for the drinks reception, during the meal and for dancing after the meal.

What type of wedding band would one use for the ceremony? Probably not a full band at this point. In a church an organist can play. He or she could be coupled with a flautist or a classical trumpet. Many people like to personalize the wedding music at this point and have a friend to play piano, a guitar or sing. We have been asked, many times, for a brass ensemble to provide the wedding music at this point and these bands have been most effective at creating a celebratory atmosphere as well as being wonderful at playing hymns for the wedding service. Two guitars playing light classical music for before, during and at the end of the service create a wonderful pastoral atmosphere. Being quiet they focus the guests attention for the service ahead.

We are now at the reception. The wedding party has arrived and champagne and Pimms is being handed out. Are you indoors or outdoors? Is it summer or out of season? If it is summer you will be outdoors enjoying the rain and gales so typical of the British summer! Your wedding music needs to be acoustic. The wedding band needs to be able to run in and out as the weather dictates!

A jolly jazz band is perfect. Stripy blazers, banjos and sousaphones. In all the years of playing and performing, I have found this type of wedding band never fails to put a smile on the wedding guests faces. The music they play is uplifting and happy. The tunes are well known, light and uncomplicated and the music can be played by three or four musicians in a small space with no electrics. An alternative is a saxophone led swing trio. Jazz not Jazz have two all girl jazz/swing trios who are both incredibly accomplished, are delightful company and very experienced in playing for wedding parties. Great bands playing great music. Again, available acoustically or with amplification depending whether they are to be used indoors or out.

Most importantly the music creates a wonderful ambience and backdrop for wedding guests to chat and catch up with old friends. The wedding band isn't doing a concert at this point, they are adding to the atmosphere. If the wedding is out of the summer season and the party is in doors, don't worry, these jazz trios/quartets can play very gently. Remember, Jazz Not Jazz musicians are some of the finest in the country and playing at a reduced level is no problem for them.

The guests have been called into dinner. You probably have an hour and a half to an hour and three quarters to eat and enjoy the speeches. The last thing needed is a loud wedding band playing. I would always stress a solo piano at this point if music is required at all. If you are having music after the meal then the pianist can be employed for both tasks. There is usually a reduction in price if this is the case. Some pianists sing and this can add a lovely flavour to the atmosphere at this time. For the speeches ask to hire a radio mike direct from us. It will invariably be a fraction of the cost of the hotels sound equipment and being wireless can be handed round.

Dinner is over, the speeches have ended. There is always a half hour hiatus while people stretch their legs, loosen their belts and retire to the loo! This is the perfect time for the evening wedding band to put up their equipment for the music for the evening. Which musical direction do you wish to go in? Do you want a wedding band to play swing and lounge music? Rat Pack? Music by Frank Sinatra and Jamie Cullum? Do you want Jump Jive or Salsa? Do you like music from the Blues Brothers film or from the Commitments?

My experience has been that the most successful weddings have incorporated elements of all types of wedding music. Remember, you have guests of all ages and tastes. For some Jamie Cullum is perfect. Others are soul fans and adore Stax, Motown and Seventies funky sounds. Music is a little like your favourite food. Too much of one type and you will be soon sick of it. Ring the changes. Have a wedding band that can play all styles. Jazz not Jazz have major representation for The Roadhouse Five, and they are such a band. They normally start with some quiet background swing. Playing Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin classics along with more modern artists such as Michael Buble and Jamie Cullum. In the first set your guests are still talking to old friends, meeting new friends and enjoying the day. The wedding music is probably still background ambience and adding to the happy atmosphere.

Set two changes this dramatically. Your guests are relaxed, they have enjoyed your hospitality (they have had a drink or two, let's not beat around the bush) and they are ready to party. This is the time for the bride and groom to have their first dance. Everyone is ready, gathering around the dance floor and ready to join you.

You will have discussed your first dance with the wedding band leader when discussing your wedding music requirements. Don't worry if the song is not in the wedding bands repertoire. If they are good, (dare I mention The Road House's Five ability in learning clients song requests?) then it should not pose a problem for the band. After the first song the serious business of celebrating gets underway. From now on you want a band that gets your guests up on the floor, keeps them there and has them yelling for more at the end of the night.

Lets recap and offer a few tips:

- (1) Wedding music can change as the day progresses
- (2) Get a wedding band that offers variety
- (3) Favourite styles of music for evening celebrations include Swing and Lounge, Rat Pack, Soul and Classic pop. Jazz not Jazz can supply a band that does one style all night or more often, offer a band that mixes all the different styles.
- (4) Get a band that can put cd's on between sets, you want to keep the atmosphere going when the band takes a break.
- (5) Should you feed the band? It is not expected but very appreciated when a wedding band is on site for most of the afternoon and evening and away from places that sell food. Tell us if it is not convenient and the band can make their own arrangements.
- (6) Let us know if you want a band for dancing and/or background listening. It has a great effect on the costings. Let us know where you are having your party as well. How big is the room? For the wedding music to be most effective it helps to know how many people you need in the wedding band. Size of venue and number of guests have a direct bearing in the size of the wedding band.
- (7) Is the fee you charge inclusive? Yes it is. Obviously we have a standard model. Most wedding band performances are with a five piece wedding band playing three sets of music over a four hour period. These will be priced at a standard rate. There are factors which add costs and these include: distance, number of extra musicians and extra sets.
- (8) Talk to us about your favourite music. The best way we can get a flavour of what kind of wedding music to play is by discussing what music and what style of band you enjoy. What cd's have you bought recently and which tracks do you like the most.
- (9) When should I book? As soon you find the band you like. Many people book wedding bands like holidays, a year in advance to avoid disappointment! I am still taking calls from people trying to book a particular band for their wedding on a Saturday in September this year. Usually the band in question has been booked up for months. Don't assume this is always the case though. Always check, you may be lucky!

I hope this has been of some help. People can sometimes underestimate the importance of the right wedding band playing the right wedding music. People don't go home extolling the virtues of the napkins or the flowers, the standard of the service or the commodiousness of the marquee. They instead, rave about what a fantastic band you had, how they played some brilliant numbers, how tired they are from dancing all night and how they wished it could have carried on for longer.

The Roadhouse Five

If you have got the impression we are promoting the abilities and virtues of the Road House Five in the course of this article you would be right! They are, quite simply one of the finest wedding/party bands in the country. Their level of musicianship is second to none. The list of stars they have played with as side men would take too long to write but include such big names as: Robbie Williams, Billy Ocean, Eric Clapton, Eddie Reader, Beverly Craven, Van Morrison and Phil Collins.

Their standard package comes with sound and light. Cd`s are played through the system when taking breaks. Every number is chosen carefully to get your guests up on their feet and dancing the night away. They can normally play your favourite song with some notice. They travel anywhere. This is a band of seasoned professionals who love playing together and love the music they play. They are authentic, committed, totally co-operative and great company. No taped backing is used, no complicated visuals take the place or distract from the high quality of the performance. All the playing is live and judged at a level suitable for the venue.

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