

GUIDE TO PLANNING THE MUSIC FOR YOUR WEDDING CEREMONY

When a bride-to-be envisions her walk down the aisle, she can imagine in great detail the dress, the flowers, the family and friends gathered to celebrate her marriage. Some sort of grand music accompanies her momentous day, but what is it? Is there an organ playing? Maybe a trumpet, or perhaps a brass quintet? For most brides, the dress, flowers and reception are things they have contemplated for much longer than they have worn an engagement ring. They may have even thought about what music they want to dance to at their reception. But for many people, music for a wedding ceremony can be difficult to plan. The style of music, how much music to include and where to place it in the ceremony, as well as who will play it and how to find these performers, are all on the list of topics to tackle.

The music you choose for your wedding will set the tone for the entire ceremony. From the prelude that people hear as they arrive, to the processional and the music heard during the ceremony, to the recessional and the music heard as the guests leave. The music has a powerful effect. A church wedding with organ music is what most brides picture as a formal, traditional ceremony. An outdoor wedding, accompanied by a brass quintet paints a picture of pomp and elegance. An intimate, romantic setting can be enhanced by a keyboard player and trumpet soloist. Wedding music should not only match, but also enhance the setting and style of the ceremony.

Never fear. The following pages will help you plan the various musical elements of the wedding ceremony, explaining how and where music is usually used. The various types of ceremonies and appropriate musical styles will be presented, as well as some advice on choosing music and hiring musicians.

THE LOCATION OF THE CEREMONY

The first consideration in choosing wedding music must be the location of the wedding. Church weddings have the option of an organ or piano in most cases. An organ can also be augmented by a singer, instrumentalist, or ensemble. A common combination for a more classical touch is organ and brass instruments, which never fails to catch the attention of listeners. If your wedding is going to be held in a home or in a reception hall, there may be a piano available, or your keyboard player will most likely be able to supply one for the event. If your ceremony is to be held outdoors, acoustic instruments (which require no electricity) are a practical option. If you plan to use amplified instruments, you must be certain that there will be a power source available. If a sufficient extension cord can be plugged into a power supply, an electronic keyboard of some kind can be used at an outdoor ceremony.

If you are planning on a church wedding, find out what guidelines the church has for wedding music. Some churches treat the wedding as they would any other worship service and require that all music performed at a wedding be of a sacred or religious nature. The clergy officiating the ceremony may ask to approve the song selections. Some churches treat the wedding as a private service and allow secular songs to be sung, while others may allow an instrumental version of a secular song with no lyrics. Make sure you understand your church's requirements before you begin to select music and hire musicians.

THE STYLE OF THE CEREMONY

After the question of location has been answered, the next question is one of style. A church wedding does not have to be formal, nor does a beachfront wedding have to be casual. Garden weddings can

be elegant or informal. The music you choose will help define the style of wedding you have created. If you are aiming for formal, classical music is a good choice. Pieces such as Pachelbel's "Canon in D" or Handel's "Largo" quietly announce a formal, traditional ceremony. If your preference is a more casual tone, try contemporary Christian songs such as "I Will Be Here" or "Love Will Be Our Home." If you prefer secular music, Broadway tunes such as "Unexpected Song," or popular songs along the lines of "Butterfly Kisses" or "Endless Love" may be just the ticket.

THE PRELUDE

Wedding music does not begin with the processional. The music that is heard as guests enter and find seats is known as the prelude. The prelude music usually begins about fifteen to twenty minutes before the ceremony, or perhaps only one or two songs for a very small wedding. Less prelude music is usually required for a small wedding than a wedding with several hundred guests. Prelude music serves several functions. It announces to guests that the ceremony will begin shortly, it sets the tone for the wedding itself, and it is a cue to the wedding party that things are about to get underway. It is also a way of formally marking the time in which guests are seated. Remember that for many of the family and friends in attendance, your wedding is something of a reunion. The prelude music is usually played at a volume that allows guests to greet one another without shouting or needing to whisper. Good classical choices for prelude music include Bach's "Air on the G String," and Massenet's "Meditation." Popular songs can also be played or sung as part of the prelude music.

THE PROCESSIONAL

Most brides choose two musical selections as processions for their wedding, particularly if they have more than one or two attendants preceding them down the aisle. In that case the attendants process to one piece of music, while the bride enters to another. The moment at which the music changes is the cue for the guests to stand and turn to watch the bride's entrance. In a smaller wedding, a single processional is perfectly appropriate. Some weddings also include a special piece of music during which the bride's mother and the groom's parents are seated before the attendants' procession. Among popular wedding processions are Wagner's "Bridal Chorus," Purcell's "Trumpet Tune" and Clarke's "The Prince of Denmark's March."

MUSIC DURING THE CEREMONY

Once the prelude is over and the bride, groom and all of the attendants are at the front of the church, the ceremony begins. There are several spots in the ceremony where music is traditionally inserted, although there is great flexibility in making these choices. Many people place a piece of music before or between the readings. A piece of music is often heard during the lighting of the unity candle. If there is a sharing of the peace included in the ceremony it is often accompanied by music. Music may also be included during communion, during the signing of the marriage document, or during the offering, if those events are a part of the ceremony. Some people also include a piece of music immediately after the exchange of vows.

The music heard during the ceremony itself is usually somewhat contemplative in nature, reflecting the seriousness of this moment in the lives of the couple. "Ave Maria" is a piece commonly heard during a traditional Roman Catholic wedding ceremony. Bach's "Bist Du bei Mir" or Malotte's "The Lord's Prayer" are other traditional sacred choices for all denominations of Christian weddings. (For Roman Catholic weddings, you should check with the priest about using Malotte's "The Lord's Prayer." Some priests object to it because it includes the Protestant version of the prayer.) If you include popular songs in your ceremony,

appropriate choices might include "Longer," "Grow Old with Me" or "Till There Was You." You may choose to have the music within the ceremony performed by a vocalist with accompaniment, or just as an instrumental. If you choose a pop or country song to be heard during the ceremony, remember that it will not be your favorite recording you will be hearing. Choose something that you can imagine being performed by the musicians you engage. "Just the Way You Are" may be the song you have in mind for the lighting of your unity candle, but the rendition given by the church organist and a local singer may not be quite what you were expecting. Before you begin inserting music into every nook and cranny of the ceremony though, remember that this is not a concert. People have come to celebrate your marriage, not your taste in music. Also keep in mind that the bride and groom and entire wedding party will be standing there during each musical selection.

THE RECESSIONAL

The bride and groom enter most wedding ceremonies separately, often through different doors. When the ceremony is over, they pass through the gathered family and friends arm in arm and exit together. The symbolism of this is simple. The two individuals that entered the ceremony alone are now bound together, leaving together to begin their married life. While the prelude music was kept at a volume comfortable for conversation and music during the ceremony was serious and contemplative, the recessional is often a joyous announcement of the marriage. In many ceremonies the recessional is preceded by a round of applause for the newlyweds. It is a good idea to inform the musician of the final words that will be spoken in the ceremony and whether or not applause is expected, so that they may begin the music right on cue. Some popular recessionals include Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Beethoven's "Ode To Joy" from *Symphony No. 9*, and Mouret's "Rondeau."

THE NON-TRADITIONAL CEREMONY

You may opt to hold your ceremony somewhere other than a church. Art galleries, museums, a lovely home, university halls, country clubs or reception halls are among common choices. Although the setting may be nontraditional, many couples choosing such a setting still use a fairly traditional format for the ceremony itself. You will probably use music in many of the same ways as someone with a traditional church wedding. You will likely want to have music playing as your guests find their seats, and you will want a processional and recessional. You will probably want to use some music within the ceremony, particularly if you are going to light a unity candle. And of course you want some sort of music to announce the end of the ceremony.

An outdoor wedding can be as formal or informal as you would like to make it. If you decide to add music to an outdoor ceremony, pay attention to a few simple details. If you are going to hire musicians to use electronic instruments or amplification of any kind, make sure you can provide the electricity they require to power their equipment. When planning an outdoor wedding, think in terms of portable instruments. Pianos do not fare well when parked on a grassy hillside. A portable electronic keyboard will be much more suitable. Bear in mind that certain acoustic instruments like harp, violin, cello, flute, classical guitar and many others depend in part on the reverberations of the room in which they play for their sound. A lone flute in a park on a breezy day will be difficult to hear. Unpredictable factors such as wind and rain falling on the tent that shelter the ceremony can make it very difficult to hear not only the musicians but the vows you exchange as well. Instrumentalists will also be concerned about the weather conditions likely for an outdoor ceremony. Electronic equipment will not fare well in the rain. Heat, humidity, and cold can all have detrimental effects on certain instruments and their sounds. The sun beating down on a harp or any

stringed instrument can actually damage the instrument. While brass instruments are not adversely affected by poor weather conditions, it's still best to keep your musicians under cover or in the shade.

THE MUSICAL SELECTIONS

Once you have determined the location and style of your wedding, you are ready to begin selecting music. If you are going to be married in a church, the church organist is a good starting point. If you have no clear ideas on what you might want to hear, the organist can be a tremendous resource. You can set up an appointment, usually after a church service, when the organist will be able to play through some of the music he or she has used for weddings in the past. Feel free to take notes and ask questions. If you have a song or a piece that you feel strongly about including, bring along a copy of the music and have the organist or pianist play through a little of it to give you an idea of what it will sound like.

If you are using a brass group or adding a trumpet soloist, you can do much the same thing. You may be able to arrange a time to hear the musicians perform. Dutchess Brass also has sound bytes available on their website, www.dutchessbrass.com. You will find listed some selections of music they are most often requested to play. If you want to have a specific tune performed you may have to pay the group to arrange it for their instrumentation.

HIRING MUSICIANS

Where does one go to find qualified musicians to perform at a wedding? Again, the best place to start, if you are planning a church wedding, is with the church organist. Some churches require that couples use the resident organist; others will allow you to bring in someone else if you prefer. It is highly recommended that you use the resident organist of the church where your wedding ceremony will be held. Not only will they be the most familiar with that particular organ, they will most likely also know the typical program order for the ceremony of that church. The organist you hire may know some musicians who perform for weddings. Keep in mind, however, not all musicians are of the same caliber. A trumpet student from the local high school may not give the professional performance that you will want for your special day. Bridal fashion shows are great places to pick up business cards, not only from musicians and booking agents, but from bridal shops, florists, bakers and other businesses involved in weddings as well.

If your best friend had a wonderful brass quintet at her wedding and you would like the same ensemble, ask for the name and telephone number of the group's contact person. Your friend will be flattered and the musicians will be glad that one performance led to another. You should also pay attention to any horror stories you hear about musicians and weddings. If you hear that a group was unreliable or disappointing, take down the name and avoid engaging them. You may also find sources in the bridal section of your local newspaper.

Auditioning music for your wedding sounds like a lot of intimidating work, but it is an important part of the process. Never assume that someone who owns an instrument can play it well, or in the style that you are looking for. Listen to a demo tape or compact disc, visit the group's internet website if they have one, or ask for dates when the performer or performers will be playing so that you can go and hear them. This is a particularly important step if you are not sure just what a brass quintet will sound like. Before you make your final decision, make sure the musicians are willing and able to play the sort of music you want to hear at your ceremony. Not all groups will be willing to arrange a song for their instrumentation.

Do not assume that the musicians you hire will know your religious, cultural or family wedding traditions. Give them a written order of the service complete with cues so that they know what to expect and know exactly when to begin and stop playing. This will prevent awkward pauses in the ceremony. If you are also using your church organist the additional musicians will be able to get their cues from him or her.

Once you have decided on the musicians, you should expect to sign a simple contract. Remember that this is a business for the musicians. The contract is there to protect you as much as to protect them. Make sure that all fees, any requests for specific pieces of music, the time the musicians are expected to arrive and the time they will be free to go are all stated clearly in the contract. It is not a bad idea to include a clause stating that in the event of emergency or illness the musicians will be responsible for their own replacements. The morning of your wedding is no time to go off in search of a soloist.

Most musicians will ask for a deposit in advance of the ceremony in order to book your date, with the remainder to be paid the day of the wedding. Some may ask for two checks up front, one a deposit that may be cashed on the day it is received, the other one postdated to the day of the wedding. These are things that should be addressed in the contract. Indicate the type of dress you prefer for the musicians. Suits and ties for the men and dresses for the women are fairly standard. For a formal, evening wedding you might prefer formal wear, but expect this to cost a little more. Likewise, if yours is to be a very casual wedding, with guests in casual attire, let the musicians know this as well. Make sure you have a telephone number to reach the musicians in case anything changes. Also make certain that they have numbers at which they can reach you should there be a question.

Having musicians in the family can be both a blessing and a curse. If you have a sister who sings you might feel obligated to have her perform. If you have a young instrumentalist in the family you may be expected to have him or her play. Incorporating family members in your ceremony is a wonderful way to make it special and memorable for all. They may be terrific musicians; then again, they may not be. It has to be your decision whether or not they will be a part of the ceremony's music. A simple way of avoiding conflict, if there is someone in the family who has volunteered their musical services, is to find a different role for them in the ceremony. Perhaps the singing sister would be happier as one of the attendants. The young instrumentalist could be asked to do one of the readings. Perhaps their performances can be saved for the reception. A little diplomacy goes a long way in avoiding hurt feelings and keeping you in control of your wedding plans.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Remember, this is *your* wedding day and the music you select is to enhance *your* ceremony. Just like all other aspects of your wedding, you should be involved in making the final decisions for your ceremony music. Try not to let yourself be overly influenced by outside persons unless, of course, that is the way you want it to be. This includes family members, friends, and other wedding participants. Listen to their opinions and thank them for their help, but you sort out the good from the bad and make the ultimate verdict. In addition, many consultants and other wedding professionals may have some terrific ideas, but remember that they work for you. Don't do what they tell you simply because you want to avoid an awkward conflict and it is the easier way out. Do exactly what you want the way you want it done. In the future you will look back on your wedding day remembering it to be the perfect, special day that you always wanted it to be.