

## CUE THE MUSIC

*Think of musicians as your hired musical hands,  
there to convey the feelings and emotions of your special day*

by Barbara-Sue White

The live music at your wedding is handmade. It should reflect your taste, interests, and the level of elegance or informality you wish to convey to your guests. You may wish to vary the mood with more formal music for your ceremony and cocktail hour and to lighten it later.

Because the music is being played for you, request any particular pieces within the music range of the groups you are hiring. If you have chosen a popular song to be sung at your ceremony, check with the person officiating to confirm that it is appropriate. Andrew Lloyd Webber songs are welcome in some places and taboo in others. Churches and synagogues have varying rules, and you might consider the answer when choosing both the venue and the music.

We musicians should be able to play almost anything for you within our range of music. Asking a string quartet to play hard rock would be a challenge, and most pop groups have a heavy hand with Mozart. However, in addition to Vivaldi and Bach, a classical group should be able to switch to Strauss waltzes, Gershwin, Joplin rags or show tunes if requested for the reception. If a special piece isn't in the repertoire of a group, a piano version can usually be adapted.

Sometimes music is chosen to honor certain guests. A song played originally at the wedding of a relative might please these special guests, especially if you mention that a particular composition is being played for them.

For the ceremony itself, sometimes practical considerations, such as the length of the music and number of bridesmaids, can affect musical selections. Pachelbel's "Canon in D" lasts 6-8 minutes, depending on the tempo at which it is played. If you request it as your processional but you have only a single bridesmaid and the aisle is only a few yards long, you will be at the altar before four measures are played.

But the question is, how important is a particular piece of music to you? If you've grown

up dreaming of floating down the aisle to Pachelbel, then float by all means. Perhaps your musicians could start the music a few minutes before your procession begins, you could space the procession to increase the time, and the music could be shortened.

Processional music should end shortly after the bride reaches the altar. A local trio was once asked to play to the end of the Pachelbel because the bride and groom wanted to hear the entire canon. A fine idea in theory, but after about a minute, quizzical glances from the congregation suggested that they thought the musicians were blind and hadn't noticed the bridal party patiently in place.

Several compositions work particularly well for processionals because they are written in four bar phrases which can neatly be concluded when the bride is in position. These include the "Trumpet Voluntary" by Jeremiah Clarke, often attributed to Purcell, or the "Trumpet Tune," really by Purcell. Both pieces are joyful and festive, neither needs a trumpet and works well with strings or organ.

If you wish to be traditional, consider Wagner's "Wedding March" and Mendelssohn's famous music from "A Midsummer Night's Dream." The Wagner is rarely used at Jewish weddings, but some families insist that it is the only music that makes a wedding "real." Again, choose what is right for you.

Sometimes a church includes its organist as part of the package. A highly effective combination is to use strings or a flute and strings for the pre-ceremony music. If they then join the organ for the processional and recessional, it is a pleasant surprise and pulls out all the stops.

Your pre-ceremony music should begin shortly before your first guests arrive. Guests allow extra time to find a wedding location, and if music is audible when the first people arrive, they feel warmly welcomed. Often 20-30 minutes before the announced ceremony time is advisable. Musicians should continue to play without breaks until a given signal by the person in charge to break into the

processional or pre-processional music. Weddings often start a little late: Aunt Matilda is a bit tardy, or there are other minor glitches. If there is a break in the music, congregations wonder what the problem is, but if the music continues, they are rarely aware of the time.

If your guests are comfortably seated indoors, you may wish to lengthen the ceremony with a song or instrumental selection, perhaps to accompany candle lighting. Make any specific requests or suggest the desired mood and let your professional musicians take it from there. Outdoor weddings in variable weather or with standing guests are best when short, sweet and without musical interludes.

A wedding ceremony ends with a burst of joyful music which is most effective when carefully timed. A kiss followed immediately by the recessional is a strong closing to the ceremony and beginning of married life. Some prefer a benediction or the introduction of the newlyweds. Whatever you choose, make it clear to your musicians and ask the person officiating to stick with it.

At one Catholic wedding, the kiss was the agreed cue and the musicians began the Mendelssohn with a fanfare as directed. But the priest raised his hand, the musicians stopped mid-phrase, and he offered a benediction. The quartet then restarted the music, but when the priest again raised his hand, they halted while he urged everyone to attend the reception. A wedding is sacred, but the ceremony has theatrical aspects and should include as few surprises as possible.

Ask your musicians to play until the last guest leaves the ceremony area. An organist who stops abruptly after the wedding party has departed ends on a less than harmonious note. If the recessional is short or there are many guests, the musicians could follow directly into a second or third piece. Members of the Princeton String Quartet often play the cheerful "La Rejouissance" from Handel's *Royal Fireworks Music* followed by Beethoven's "Ode to Joy."

Some couples use humor even in their ceremonies. We were once asked to play for the

wedding of a Princeton University couple who had spent their undergraduate days watching *Dr. Who* with their friends. They requested strictly classical music until the recessional. Then they provided the theme from the *Dr. Who* TV series. Not ideal for every wedding, but the laughter at this particular wedding fit the bill. Others ask for a childhood or ethnic favorite at the reception.

Musical groups take breaks of different lengths. Some classical musicians take a brief 10 minutes off in two hours while some bands stipulate 20 minutes out of every hour. If breaks are long, you might make tapes of your favorite music to supplement the live music. Tapes might also be considered if you use a classical group for waltzes and light dancing but want more "with it" selections to please a variety of guests.

Wedding parties sometimes choose a classical group to play a half hour before the ceremony and through the cocktail hour. If they are being replaced by a DJ, consider keeping your live group for the first dance. Try to audition your DJ at another event or offer suggestions about the amount and type of patter and the desired volume level. You will be very busy at your wedding, and so ask someone else to make musical suggestions.

Every musical group tries to offer a mix of music which they hope will please you. They welcome suggestions, and if you want more Cole Porter or show tunes, ask your musicians to switch. Sometimes a return to classical music later in the reception can be a refreshing change.

Shop around for the type of music, the quality and the prices for your wedding music. Any group should be able to provide an audio cassette or CD. Also consider the dress of a group, for this is also part of the total impression. Confirm arrangements with your musicians during the week before the wedding. Everyone will sleep better.

It is your wedding, and you should plan the music to reflect the moods of your ceremony and reception. We musicians are your hired musical hands, and we are there to enhance your perfect day.

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