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Thursday, February 17, 2005

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Setting the Mood with Music

*By Lesa Albert*



It can be subtle or dynamic, in the background or center stage, but the entertainment you select for your wedding can play a surprisingly important role in making your big day a memorable one.

It's the entertainment that establishes the overall feeling of the

ceremony and reception, DJ Lloyd Lively says. "And the overall feeling of the event is what leaves an impression," he says.

Lively is the vice president of the Greater Houston Area Mobile Music Association (GHAMMA), a professional organization for DJs. He encourages couples to make entertainment a high priority when planning their wedding. In other words, Lively says, select your entertainers carefully, line them up far in advance and set aside a reasonable amount to pay for their services. Lively advises couples to budget ahead for DJ entertainment. "Don't budget us last; put us closer to the head of the line," he says.

One of the first steps in the planning process is deciding what type of entertainer or entertainers you want during the course of your big day, as well as wedding related events like the rehearsal dinner. "You want to make as tasteful a wedding as you can within your tastes and budget," says Dave Zeger of Dave Zeger Entertainment.

"Once they know what kind of music they want, couples can utilize Web sites to screen performers," Begnoche says, an office staff member with the American Professional Musicians Association (APMA). Most sites today feature sound clips, bios, critiques, and song lists. Couples also can request sample CDs. If they have time, it's always a good idea to hear the band perform and watch it interact with the audience.

"For the ceremony, look for experienced musicians who can do a quality job providing your music. They should be professionals who can work closely with you or your wedding coordinator. Performers with wedding experience should know how to take cues as to when to begin

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the processional,” Zeger says.

An experienced wedding performer also should be prepared for the unexpected at the ceremony. If something throws the day off schedule, the musicians may have to play seating music for an hour or longer. “It’s like playing a little recital,” Zeger says. “You just have to roll with the punches.”

Remember to consider your ceremony location and its entertainment policies. “Every church is different,” Zeger says. “Most are happy to have outside musicians and groups. But some are very strict about who performs and what they play.” Some congregations forbid secular music; they will require the couple to run their song selections by their music director.

Couples who want an outdoor ceremony will need to make special accommodations for their musicians. “Some musicians absolutely refuse to play outside,” Zeger says. In most cases, they’re concerned about the health of their costly instruments. String instruments, which are made from wood held together with animal-hide glue, can be especially vulnerable to Houston’s harsh summer climate. “The humidity can make them fall apart at the seams, but that’s rare,” Zeger says.

If you do go with an outdoor ceremony, be sure to provide your musicians with a shelter for shade and plenty of drinking water. And have a back-up plan in place – don’t let weather surprises ruin your day.

Whether they are indoors or outdoors, instrumentalists will need armless chairs for their performance. Depending on their equipment, they may need provisions for shielded power cords near a power source. Most musicians provide their own music stands, Zeger says.

It helps to put thought into where you physically place your musicians during the ceremony, Begnoche says. Consider the effect you want to create. Do you want the music to be prominent or in the background?

After the ceremony, increasing numbers of couples are hosting a cocktail hour before the reception. Couples may want to have entertainment during this time, too. “Sometimes they use jazz or Dixieland bands, which is a nice change of style,” Zeger says.

For the reception, couples can employ any number of entertainers. Some people hire one group to provide listening music and another for the dancing. “As far as bands go, people usually prefer variety bands who can play Top 40, ‘80s music, disco, Big Band standards...You want to play to a wide variety of ages,” Zeger says.

“A strong variety band continues to be the most popular choice for receptions because they can play to all ages and musical tastes,” says Susan Criner of Gulf Coast Entertainment. “The best ones are supple enough to move from a jazzy cocktail set to a restrained dinner set to high energy dance music. Our clients can trust their bandleader to call the tunes based on the pace of the party and mood of the crowd.”

The ability to provide variety is one of the main reasons people opt for disc jockeys at their weddings. But variety only is part of the package, GHAMMA President Olyn Taylor says. “In most cases, a band is not trained to be a master of ceremonies,” Taylor says. “The DJ knows how to assist the bride with the order of events and coordinate with the photographer, videographer and banquet hall. It’s the DJ’s

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responsibility to make sure everything flows smoothly.”

Criner adds, “Most groups are more than happy to introduce the bride and groom as they have their first dance, introduce the wedding party, and make announcements throughout the evening. If desired, many reception bands will invite the wedding party on stage to be part of the show.”

These guidelines apply to hiring musicians as well, Begnoche says. And if you do hire live musicians, remember to consider their needs at your reception. Allow for musician breaks for 10-15 minutes on the hour. Zeger recommends providing a break room so musicians have a comfortable place to go and are less likely to mingle with guests. Couples are not obligated to provide food, but most musicians appreciate water or non-alcoholic drinks. Couples can use break time to make announcements, or they can arrange for taped music to play during those periods.

Dancing was a huge part of the wedding of Nicole Mazaro & Brian Richardson. The couple entertained their guests with several Latin dances choreographed by Andrea Cody of Wedding Dance Houston. “Dancing was a huge part of my wedding,” says newlywed Nicole Fleming. “Of all the things I remember most about my wedding, having fun dancing with my family and friends was one of the most memorable. Matt & I spent hours picking our favorite music, so we could keep our guests entertained.”

Ultimately, couples who plan well and keep a line of communication open with their entertainers will have a positive, relaxed experience on the day it matters most.

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