

Wedding Day Secrets

Top tips for your perfect wedding reception

By

Derek Pengelly

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About The Author

Derek Pengelly is a Specialist Wedding DJ, Master of Ceremonies and Party Host. He is married to Carol, and currently lives and works, on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus. Derek started out as a mobile DJ way back in the sixties His career in music, developed alongside his “proper job”, in high street retail management, as well as a spell in a business development role for Vauxhall Motors.

In 1998 Derek and Carol started their own DJ agency, David Summers and Co, in Cheshire, North West England. Business grew as the couple earned a reputation for providing quality entertainment at affordable prices and the company quickly established itself as a supplier of services to quality venues in the area. However after a couple of years it was evident something was missing. There was a distinct gap in the market for a more personalised service. It was obvious to Derek that certain clients wanted more than what was on offer.

February 2002 saw Carol and Derek board an airplane and head over to the USA, in search of a better way to deliver mobile entertainment, especially for a Bride and her wedding reception. This was a journey which was to be repeated many times, as the couple built professional relationships with entertainers across the pond. Armed with new ideas, new skills and a passion for weddings Derek began making some changes.

Very quickly he began to establish himself as a Specialist Wedding DJ who cared about the success of his client’s wedding reception. Together with Carol they offered a premium service. This service was tailored to their client’s needs and resulted in fun and unique wedding receptions for their Brides and Bridegrooms.

More recently Derek has devoted a great deal of his time to mentoring and training his fellow entertainers. This has involved travel throughout the United Kingdom and North America. In 2004 he helped establish The National Association of Disc Jockeys [N.A.D.J] in the UK, and became its chairman later that year. In addition to writing and presenting a series of seminars and workshops about wedding entertainment, he has also written articles for Pro-Mobile Magazine. In May 2013, Derek’s commitment to sharing his knowledge, experience and expertise was recognised, by Pro-Mobile Magazine, when he was presented with a life-time achievement award.

Derek has attended hundreds of weddings. Weddings are special. They deserve the very best standard of entertainment; alas this is not always the case. Recently it has become evident that many venues, wedding coordinators and planners, have been undervaluing the importance of exceptional, personalised wedding entertainment. Somehow, the food, drink, flowers and favors have taken precedence. This situation needs to be reversed

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INTRODUCTION

I'm passionate about weddings. In my role of Disc Jockey, Master of Ceremonies and wedding Party Host I've attended hundreds of weddings large and small. A wedding is a unique family celebration. The Wedding Ceremony and Reception are a reflection of who we are and what lies ahead for the Bride and Bridegroom. In many ways the kind of wedding, and the style of the reception, is a social statement and as such, the pressure is on to create a bigger, better and different experience for the guests to enjoy.

The title of this book, "Wedding Day Secrets – facts the industry would prefer you didn't know", is possibly being a little unkind to professional wedding suppliers and advisors in the United Kingdom. It is a sweeping statement, and I apologise to those to whom the description does not apply. They are the exception which proves the rule.

I would also like to point out that keeping a secret implies there is a fact, which is being withheld, and not divulged. In many cases there is no secret to hide, for the advisor is blissfully ignorant, and totally unaware, of much of the content in this book.

I've met thousands of Brides-to-be at wedding fairs over the past thirty years. They invariably have a vision as to how their big day should be. When I've probed them further about their vision, it often transpires that, in order to transform their vision into reality, a great deal of planning will be required. Brides will often say things like "I want everyone to enjoy themselves", "the music has to be perfect", "after our first dance I want everybody on the dance floor" or "I want everyone to be up dancing all night long". All of these are easier said than done. Achieving each of these wishes requires more than trusting to luck and careful music choices. Where entertainment is involved, staging, production and direction, are critical for success. The old adage, "it's not what you do, it's the way that you do it, which gets results", has never been more true.

Within the pages of this book, I will share with you aspects of the different elements of a successful, fun and memorable wedding day. I'll illustrate many points, with practical examples taken from my own experience, and those of my colleagues from around the country. Some of the content may appear negative at first glance. It is not my intention to dwell too much on what I believe to be wrong, however I need to "tell it like it is", in order to demonstrate how things can be so much better, given insight and a little guidance.

I get very angry when a Bride is dictated-to by a venue. For some reason choice is becoming increasingly rare. It makes my blood boil when a Bride is told, "your first dance will take place straight after you cut the wedding cake at 7.00pm". What!

Why! Who says so, and on what basis has this decision been made? In my experience this could be another of those dreaded situations, where no one joins the Bride and Bridegroom on the dance floor, or worse still, many of the evening guests have not arrived, and therefore will miss this important and special moment.

Without wanting to sound patronising, “Brides don’t know what Brides don’t know”. It’s not their fault: they are simply being misinformed or manipulated, for the benefit and convenience of others. This book is intended to set the record straight and inform and empower Brides to stand firm and enjoy the wedding of their dreams. I only know what I know because I’ve seen or heard about hundreds of examples of Brides being badly advised, to the detriment of their guests’ enjoyment of this very special day.

The way weddings used to be

I can remember when weddings tended to be smaller and more intimate. Traditionally, all of the guests were invited to the ceremony and joined the Bride and Bridegroom for the wedding breakfast and stayed on for the evening party. This all-inclusive wedding ensured everyone was involved, and were a part of the celebration. The whole day flowed seamlessly and all of the guests were able to absorb the events of the day without interruption. The newlyweds would often depart before the end of the party, and guests would gather to “send them off” to a secret location where they would spend their first night together as husband and wife.

Changing times and economic pressure have created a totally different template for most Brides to follow in twenty first century Britain. Some weddings still follow the example above, but most do not. Nowadays, the celebration is often divided into two halves, the daytime and the evening. I can understand how this has developed, especially when you see how much the cost of feeding people has risen over the years. This new template for a wedding reception has also created a number of challenges. The time-line has now expanded. Formerly a wedding would, on average, be six to eight hours in duration. Today, a wedding may well be something in excess of twelve hours. This creates new challenges with regard to keeping guests engaged, and entertained, throughout the day. It also means that the guests who attend only the evening party are disadvantaged, because they lack the emotional connection generated earlier in the day.

The emergence of the evening reception has created a disjointed event. The addition of an evening buffet meal has also produced a number of challenges, especially from a logistical and entertainment perspective. There is a need for someone to take control, and his or her role is to join all of the segments together, in such a way as to engage the guests, and help them transition from one stage of the proceedings to another.

Recently, a growing number of professional DJs have been retraining, and seeking ideas and methods to unite the party, and entertain in more ways than simply playing music.

Filling a dance floor is the least of their challenges. They have chosen to take responsibility, to ensure a first dance is well received, and that all guests are encouraged to join the newlyweds when required to do so. More importantly, the new DJ / Master of Ceremonies / Party Host, will suggest ways other members of the bridal party can contribute to the memories of the day. He or she will also strive to reduce the effect of stopping for the buffet meal, at the very time the party is just getting started.

I have been working very closely with over a hundred wedding Party Hosts over the last five to ten years. Together we have looked at the way wedding receptions are celebrated in other parts of the world, most noticeably in North America and Canada. Their wedding receptions are very much like ours used to be. This is not surprising when you consider that most of their population originated from Europe. Some of the American weddings can be over the top, and a little too brash, for our tastes over here, however the concepts behind them hold substance. The challenge has been for me and my colleagues to adapt their ideas, and produce interactive introductions, and spotlight moments, which British people can embrace and enjoy. Fortunately, a lot of what goes into an American wedding, consists of ceremonies which originated right here in the UK and central Europe. It appears we simply forgot about them!

Read on and explore what really makes a wedding ceremony and reception truly fun, unique and memorable. It's not about us the DJ / Master of Ceremonies / Party Host; it's all about you, the Bride and Bridegroom, and the enjoyment of your guests. A friend and colleague, Dave Windsor, once said,
"Without memorable entertainment a wedding reception is little more than a very expensive dinner party".

Thank you for buying this book and being receptive to the ideas and suggestions within its pages. Congratulations and good luck. I wish you good health, wealth and happiness in your married life".

Enjoy!

Derek Pengelly [Also known as] DJ David Summers





Part 1

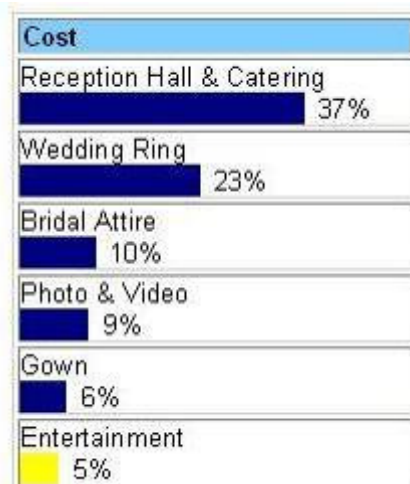
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The Best Kept Secret

What would you say was the most important item in your budget? Your bridal gown, the flowers, the venue hire, the food, the chair covers, the favours? The average cost of a wedding varies, so it is little wonder that so many figures are banded about. What is the average cost of a wedding in 2013? Recently I have seen figures suggested for an average wedding of £10,000, £15,000 and £20,000, but who wants an average wedding?

No matter what your budget may be, it is important that you spend your money wisely. These days there is increasing pressure to go one step further, and to out-do, or be better than, the previous wedding you may have attended.

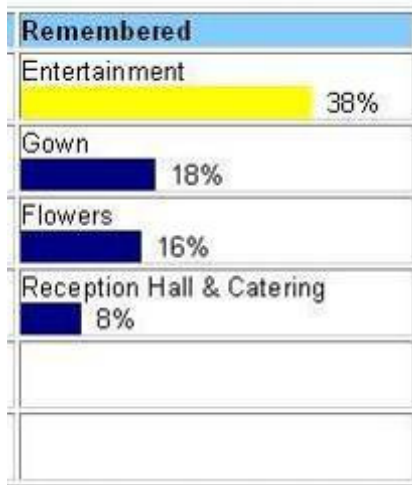
Many of today's weddings concentrate on "the look", and a great deal of the budget is spent on venue dressing, especially as more and more innovations are being offered by way of decorations and lighting. There are more and more service providers clamoring for a slice of the budget, and all of them suggest you must have the latest this, that or the other. It's very easy for the budget to run out of control, and to end up with money spent on items which will actually have very little impact on your guests' enjoyment.



Take a look at these statistics.

The percentages are taken from real Brides after following "advice" from wedding planners, venue event coordinators and service providers. This represents 90% of the budget. The other 10% was spent on other items, including the honeymoon. The biggest slice of the cake went to the reception venue and catering.

Below is another break-down of how real Brides wished they had spent their money after their wedding day. You will note that the reference to entertainment is the largest percentage appreciated or remembered by the guests. Entertainment includes things like string quartets for ceremony music, piano players for drinks receptions, wedding singers, Bands, DJs, chocolate fountains, casino tables, photo booths, etc etc.



Statistics surveyed after the weddings

- 72 % of Brides said they would have spent more time choosing their wedding entertainment,
 - Almost 100% said they would have spent more of their budget on entertainment,
 - During wedding planning, Brides said that their highest priority is their wedding attire, followed by the reception venue and the catering. Reception entertainment is among the least of their priorities.
 - Within one week of the reception, 78% said they would have made entertainment their highest priority,
- 65% of couples who chose a Band to entertain at their wedding said, if they had to do it again, they would hire a Disc Jockey,
 - Entertainment is **5%** of the wedding budget, but **38%** of the guests will remember the entertainment more than anything else.
 - *When guests were asked what they remembered most about a wedding after the Bride's gown and the wedding ceremony, 81% said entertainment!*

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I appreciate these are American statistics; however my own research, and personal experience as a wedding entertainer, is that there is no difference in the UK. To all intents and purposes, a wedding, especially one held in a multi-chain hotel, is little more than a very expensive meal. A wedding reception should be so much more than a fine meal.

A good friend of mine, wedding entertainer DJ/MC trainer and mentor of many wedding professionals, Mark Ferrell [www.markferrell.com] believes;

“A talented wedding entertainer is vital to the success of a wedding reception because a wedding reception is a party – and a party is, by definition, a function of entertainment. The duty of a qualified entertainer such as a wedding DJ/ MC is not only to keep guests engaged, included, and having fun, but also to capture imaginations, touch hearts, and skilfully remind them of the true meaning and purpose of the event.”

So there you have it in a nutshell. The biggest kept secret in the wedding industry is that entertainment is vital to the success of a wedding reception. Yet official advice and information places this way down the list of priorities. Why is this? Why should such an obvious fact be overlooked by so many advisors? In my opinion it’s because other service providers seldom see the whole picture. They concentrate on their product or service. More importantly they do not attend the wedding, and even if they do, they are not present for the entire event.

Think about this for a moment; most of the wedding budget is spent on presentation. The “look” of the venue, the table decorations, the flowers, colour schemes etc. How much importance is placed on the way you and your guests will “feel” on your wedding day? How much emotion will there be in the room? Will your guests laugh? Will they cry?

Entertainment is subjective and entertainment takes many forms. A wedding reception can often last twelve hours or more. Choosing the right entertainment to suit your style and personality is not easy. Maintaining interest and enjoyment throughout your wedding ceremony, drinks reception, wedding breakfast and on into the evening can be daunting. I don’t wish to be patronising. If the industry is withholding essential facts, then you, as a Bride-to-be, need help, and finding the right help is not easy.

Now before I go on, let me make one point very clear. Some venues, management and staff, and many wedding planners and coordinators, understand the importance of entertainment. Alas they are the exception to the rule. Most do not. In fact many are so stuck in their ways that any mention of new ideas, interaction or bringing in a specialist wedding DJ/Party Host will be like a foreign language to them.

This book will illustrate current thinking, and will provide typical examples, of what actually takes place at hundreds of wedding receptions up and down the UK every week. I will explain what is on offer, and more importantly, I will demonstrate a better way, and the reasoning behind the emergence of a new breed of wedding entertainer.

Over the last ten years a quiet revolution has taken place. You will have noted from the previous statistics that the majority of Brides believe that a Specialist Wedding DJ would have been the best option for their wedding entertainment, yet they chose not to employ one. Hindsight has proved to be perfect vision. Why wasn't the DJ an obvious choice?

Upon reflection I can see why a specialist wedding DJ would not be your first consideration. A DJ just plays music right? How would a DJ be able to engage with my guests and keep them entertained throughout the day? You only need a DJ for the dancing later in the day don't you? Well yes, that used to be the case, but in the last few years the Specialist Wedding DJ has evolved into something more than just music. He has re-trained and is using his knowledge of all genres of music, his public speaking ability, his technical expertise, and experience of attending hundreds of weddings, to create a new role as a Specialist Wedding DJ, Master of Ceremonies and Party Host.

All over the country, Brides are being empowered to sit down with this new breed of wedding entertainer; together they can create a fun, unique and memorable wedding reception, which their guests will be talking about long after the event.

A wedding ceremony, and the reception which follows, should be a celebration of the marriage. In my opinion, the joy and fun should start with the arrival of the Bride, and continue throughout the day and beyond. Why is it, that sometimes, the loudest noise in the room at a wedding breakfast is the clatter of the cutlery? How come we have to wait to the end of the meal, before we hear the toasts and speeches which contain the love, emotion and humour which touch the hearts and minds of everyone in the room?

In the rear of this book, and on the dedicated web site, www.weddingdaysecrets.co.uk you will find a list of suitably trained Party Hosts. They would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and be given the chance to demonstrate exactly how they can make a difference to your special day. Please pay particular attention to their testimonials.

However before you go thumbing through the back pages, let me take some time to examine what you, as a Bride may experience in the planning stages of your wedding. Let's take a look at what venues and event planners are saying, and what that actually means in reality. What follows is, in my experience, typical but not always the case. Some venues and planners care about entertainment and understand the importance of it, alas many do not.

At the very least, at the end of the day, reading this book and being armed with its contents, will enable and empower you, to ask searching questions of your venue and service providers.

Forewarned is forearmed as they say. Good venues will be open-minded and flexible with their clients. Others may be more rigid and totally oblivious to some of the subject matter in this book. In the past I have struggled to convince venue management that the concepts in this book will work, and that wedding receptions will be so much better for it. I'm happy to report that after the event, the management were convinced and not only liked what they saw, but positively encouraged their clients to use my services.

In the remaining pages of this book, wedding day secrets are revealed, together with hints and tips for a great wedding. I hope you find them as enlightening and rewarding as my Brides did.

This is how my clients remembered their wedding day. Is this how you would like to remember yours?

Karen & Peter Woodall

"From our first contact with you, through to the last thing on Saturday evening, you could not have done more to ensure the success of our special day. The music at all stages of the event was exactly right. The changing moods of the day's ceremony, through to the evening disco, were all captured perfectly. The formal and informal parts of the day were handled expertly and with good humour by Derek while Carol worked tirelessly, and with tremendous patience to ensure that the day went smoothly. As a consequence, we have been overwhelmed by the comments of guests, both at the event, and subsequently, many of whom have said categorically, that it was the best "do" they have ever been to".

2:

Your Wedding / Your Way

Relax

The secret to a great wedding is for the Bride and Bridegroom to relax and enjoy the day. Stress and tension are to be avoided. Every moment should be savoured and appreciated. The planning and organisation is finally over. Every detail has been meticulously considered and service providers know what is expected of them. When Brides look back at their wedding day they often remark that the day was a bit of a whirl, and flashed by in no time. I highly recommend you deliberately schedule “time-outs” during your wedding day. Make a point to find a private place, where just you and your husband can spend five or ten minutes alone. This will help you catch your breath, reflect on what is happening all around you, and prepare you for the next segment of the day. It’s also important that you spend a little time together, because, for most of the day, your guests will be demanding your attention.

Be Realistic

Even the best laid plans can go wrong. Remember the old adage, “If it can wrong, it probably will”. The fact is that many things can, and do, go “wrong” on a wedding day. Usually these are minor details, which do not impact on the enjoyment of the day. I could share dozens of examples of when minor hiccups have occurred during a wedding reception. The good news is that nobody noticed.

Only you know

Let me share an example of a minor mishap during a wedding. A Bride and Bridegroom had decided to rehearse a special dance routine, for their first official dance, as husband and wife.

Everything had gone well, on the day of the wedding they were step perfect. Just before they were due to perform their dance, my wife found the Bride in the ladies powder room. She was close to tears. What ever was the matter? She had suddenly realised that she would not be able to dance the routine as planned.

She had rehearsed wearing jeans, and of course her husband to-be had never seen her in her bridal gown. The dress was too tight! She couldn't make the steps. My wife quickly explained that while this was disappointing, it was not the end of the world. Only she and her husband knew about this special dance routine. What was needed was for them both to make the most of the situation, and compromise. The dance went ahead. It wasn't the routine they had rehearsed, but no one else in the room was aware of the fact. Guests applauded and cheered, and joined them on the dance floor part-way through the song.

The weather

If there is one thing you can't do anything about, and is therefore not worth worrying about, it's the weather. Most Brides dream of a perfect summer day for their wedding. Unfortunately perfect summer days are few and far between in the UK. The best advice I can offer is to have a plan B and even a plan C if necessary.

Photographers are troubled by the weather more than anyone. Good wedding photographers are used to dealing with changing weather. They will always have a plan B, C and even D. So I recommend you utilise their expertise. Many venues will also offer alternative locations for drinks receptions and photographs should the weather be inclement.

Exceptionally hot weather can also be difficult to contend with. Keep an eye on the weather forecast, and if you are lucky enough to experience a heat wave on your wedding day, be prepared. Simple hand-held, traditional fans are inexpensive yet very effective.

Hot weather can zap people's strength. Elderly people and children can be quite badly affected by high temperatures. Alcohol tends to be more potent when consumed on hot days. In hot weather a couple of noticeable changes occur. Firstly, the time-line slips. This is not surprising because people like to be outdoors in the sunshine. They like to linger over a drink and generally people are in a nicer mood. The sunshine lifts people's spirits. They have more time for conversation and genuinely want to make the most of every situation. Getting your guests indoors for the ceremony, wedding breakfast or evening reception can be quite a challenge.

If the time-line slips, don't worry. You can't compete with nature. I've known many occasions where a first dance was planned for 8.30 in the evening, but all of the guests were still outside. In high summer it can be 9.30 to 10.00 before it goes dark in parts of the UK. There is no point in rushing things. A good photographer and professional entertainer will want to make the best of this very special, "spotlight moment". If this means holding back, rescheduling and waiting until everyone is assembled indoors, so be it.

You don't have to do anything you don't want to do.

Some Brides decide they would prefer not to do a first dance. No problem. Sometimes couples have agreed to take part in a special piece of interaction like, "the Living Guestbook", and change their mind at the last minute. No Problem. It may be that nerves get the better of the Bridegroom or the Best Man and he decides not to offer a speech or Toast. No problem.

It's your day and you're among friends and family. Everyone present wants the best for you.

Do what is best for you. Your guests will be very understanding.

Sporting events – check your diary

Weddings are often planned months, or years, in advance. You may, or may not, be interested in sport, however many of your guests will be. It's a good idea to research what is scheduled in the sporting calendar for the day of your wedding. Even in this modern age, with digital recording, many sporting fanatics insist on watching events live.

One wedding I attended was on Grand National Day. A couple of large screens were installed in the foyer of the hotel. The wedding breakfast was planned in such a way, that a break was taken after the main course had been eaten. The guests watched the race and returned for desert and the speeches.

Large sporting events can also affect travel plans. If there are a number of your guests traveling large distances to be with you, they may be affected by hold-ups on motorways. Congestion in major towns and cities can also delay your guests. If your wedding is to be held in a town, or city centre, parking can sometimes be an issue, especially if a major event is scheduled to take place on the same day. I remember one wedding which was seriously affected by a charity marathon. All of the roads around the city centre were closed for four hours which prevented guests reaching the hotel before 2pm. The Registrar and the hotel staff were very sympathetic and versatile. The ceremony was delayed by an hour, after which, everything went smoothly.

It can be a long day.

Sometimes less is more. The temptation is often to squeeze as much in to every hour as is possible. During the planning process it often appears that there are not enough hours in a day.

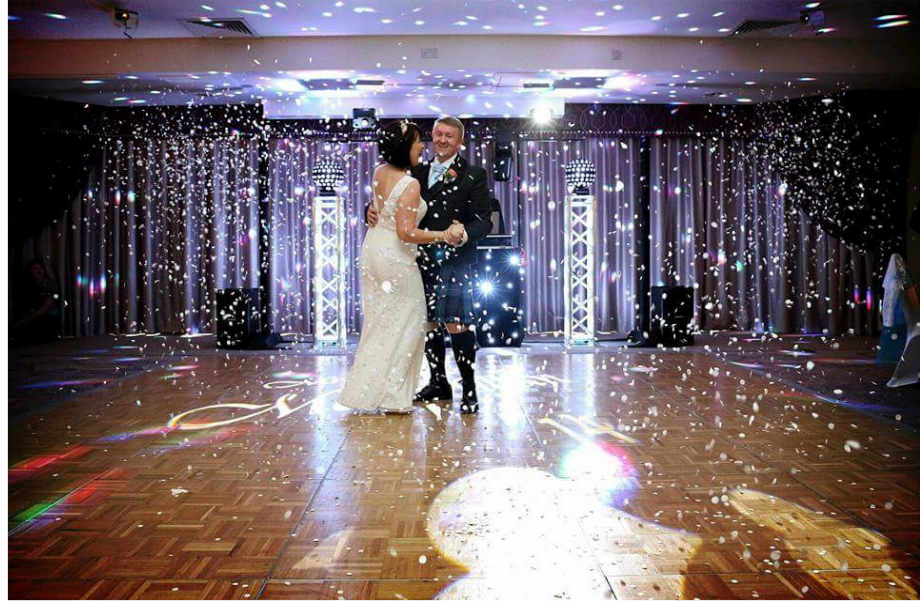
Depending on the time of the ceremony, you and your guests may well be up and about surprisingly early. All the activity, excitement and apprehension can take its toll. Add in the affects of good food, drinking and dancing, and you have a recipe for a lot of tired guests as the day draws to a close.

I often ask my Brides, “How would you like your day to end”. It may sound a strange question, especially as it is usually one of the first questions I ask. The answer to this question will determine, and shape pretty much everything which occurs during the day and evening. Planning in reverse, or starting at the end, helps focus the mind. It’s difficult to plan a journey if you don’t know where the destination is. If you know where you want to get to, it’s a lot easier to plan your route.

So if a Bride tells me she wants to finish on a high, with a full dance floor, I have to come up with a road map to make it happen. If she tells me she would like the evening to wind down gently, and almost fade away, I have to create a conducive atmosphere which allows this to happen naturally.







3:

Top tips for a stress-free wedding day.

In this chapter you will find lots of tips, all of which are provided by experienced Party Hosts who know what it is like to oversee the entire day. Their experience has enabled them to share some pearls of wisdom that will help you de-stress, relax and enjoy your wedding ceremony, wedding breakfast and evening reception. Each snippet of advice is accredited to the Party Host who submitted it. You can find contact details for all of the party hosts at the rear of this book or online at our dedicated website www.weddingdaysecrets.co.uk

1. Your wedding day will go so quickly so make sure at some point during the day you take time out with each other and say 'we've just got married today' because before you know it the day will be over ! – Phil Colbert
2. A romantic gesture by the Bridegroom would be for him to present his bride with a single red rose when she arrives by his side just prior to their marriage ceremony. – Derek Pengelly
3. "When choosing where you want to host your day, I'd urge you to consider the layout of your dream venue. So many receptions are spoilt by couples choosing a sprawling stately home with countless rooms and stunning grounds for your guests to lose themselves in. Having your guests spread out can have a really detrimental effect on your party.

Some of the best weddings I've worked at have been in marquees where the bar, food and dancing all take place in the same space!" –
Iain Baker

4. 'If you book a wedding Party Host you can confidently enjoy your day. You've done the planning, so relax and let us create the perfect day for you' – Phil Colbert
5. Once the wedding breakfast formalities are over, just spend about 20 to 30 minutes alone with each other. Go for a walk or to your room. Relax before the evening guests arrive. - Chris Burford
6. If you have chosen a venue with no or little accommodation, consider organising (not necessarily paying for!) a coach to pick up and drop off your guests from the nearest hotel(s). This way you will be guaranteed that lots of your friends and family will be helping you celebrate your wedding day right through to the end. –Neil Postlethwaite
7. "Making sure you have fun at your own wedding is the number one way to guarantee a GREAT party. If you want your guests on the dance floor...go to the dance floor." – John Beck
8. Don't book a coach or bus for your guests to leave before the end of the party. A great disco finish is best done with as many people present as possible. Schedule its departure allowing time for collection of coats, finishing drinks and saying goodbyes. If this means bringing the end time forward by 15 mins, this is preferable to a fizzled out finish. ~ June Gould (DJ June Cecilia)
9. Make sure your wedding dress is comfortable and you can dance the night away in it. Darren Tipples D J Sound & Lighting – Darren Tipples
10. At the vows ceremony, it's a good idea for the Bridegroom to choose the prelude music whilst waiting for his Bride to arrive. His own choice of music will help him to relax. – Steve Mitchell
11. At the vows ceremony, why not choose a song to be played during the prelude that will let you know your Bride has arrived safely. – Steve Mitchell
12. 'You are both the stars of your own show. Do not let anyone else tell you otherwise!' – Tom Norridge

13. Include your guests in your special day. One way to do this effectively is to ask them to suggest up to 3 songs each - pick one out of the list to be included either during the wedding breakfast or evening reception. You may find there are some real gems there within the explanations of why they chose a certain song that can really create a magical moment – Andy Collins
14. After getting ready, your hair done etc, send everyone out of the room take a “Selfie” in the mirror and repeat these words, “This is the best day of my life” – Mike Hackett
15. At the door to the church or venue, before walking down the aisle, STOP take and three deep breaths. This will calm you down before you proceed down the aisle. Once married DO NOT race back up the aisle. Take this time to acknowledge the guests assembled for your big day. CHERISH THE MOMENTS YOU CREATE. – Mike Hackett
16. Just before you walk through the doorway for your grand entrance, before the doors are opened, hold hands, look at each other, take a breath and savour that very moment. Share a kiss. – Martin Keogh
17. For civil ceremonies..... The song you have for your processional doesn't have to stop as soon as you reach the top of the aisle. This is a moment to savour, just before you are married. It is ok to let the song play out to its end, take this time to hold hands, look into each other's eyes, and then both have a look around to your friends and family. Talk to your celebrant and music provider about this idea. Your wedding day will fly through, it is nice to savour these moments! – Martin Keogh
18. Say hello to your guests early on so you can enjoy your day - Stuart Maclennan
19. Good Vendors get booked up fast. So put down a deposit and secure your Specialist Wedding DJ, Photographer, Videographer, Wedding Singer, Musician, Magician, Make-Up Artist, and Hairdresser. Get them confirmed in a contract and then be happy in the knowledge the key team are all in place. VERY IMPORTANT - This includes your Registrar. Registrars get booked fast and can mean you need to change the dates of all your vendors if the registrar is not in place. - Gary Jones
20. If you are a regular Karaoke singer and would like karaoke at your wedding reception, but you are concerned about the karaoke getting out of hand - have a cut off point and also suggest [request] in advance what songs you would like your guests to sing ...This way you get to hear those favourite songs that your friends, family and guests enjoy. – Glenn Nash
21. Smile and enjoy every moment - if things don't go exactly to plan, don't worry or feel disappointed as most guests may not realise. Make sure you enjoy the big day. - Ravi Apnabeat

22. On the hour, every hour, take time out and spend five minutes with each other to relish the moment. – David Summers
23. Check the sporting calendar for your big day; is there anything going on locally or nationally which might distract your guests –David Summers.
24. Meet the DJ in person who will be performing for you, don't just rely on a fancy website. Get a feel for how he or she interacts with you, do they inspire confidence? Do they listen to what you want? Can they give you examples of their work i.e. video's showing a circle of love finish or how up-lighting would transform the venue? But most importantly you have to like them; after all they can make or break your special day. - Paul Holmes
25. If it rains on your wedding day: don't worry - a wet knot is impossible to undo. - Harry Kilb
26. "A fantastic way to help guests get to know each other is to place a one line fact about each person on the back of their place card, and ask them to share it with the rest of the table, It could be the football team they support or the job they do, but making it amusing is the best way to get them socialising." - Gillies Alistair / "Hitched" Wedding Advice
27. "Your day will be amazing come rain or shine. You may get very stressed in the lead up to it, so relax - you are in safe hands having booked professionals" – Brian Mole
28. "Speaking in public is known to be terrifying; there is a term for it - Glossophobia! So, if you are to give a speech at a wedding, make sure you are prepared, relatively sober, and enjoy the experience. After all, the 'audience' consists of friends and family who are there to enjoy the day, and they want you to succeed, so there is no real reason to fear this. When booking my services, I will provide you with some excellent practical help so that you can prepare and deliver a speech to be remembered for the right reasons." – Brian Mole
29. Think about what you want your Bridesmaids and Ushers to do for you - get them involved with herding the guests for photos, signing the guest book and filling the dance floor! - Paul Taylor, The Party Host
30. Each take some time, before leaving for the ceremony, to record a short video for each other and save them for your first anniversary - Tony Murphy

31. "It may be a long day so your feet will thank you if you have a second pair of comfortable shoes to wear towards the end or when leaving." - James Ross

32. "Consider the children. If they're happy, then their parents are ecstatic and the day will be all the more joyous for you. Considerations can include personalised activity packs, prompt food, a play area and a children's entertainer for when speeches are on. Just a space to run about in will make a world of difference. Your Party Host will have many more ideas..." - David Newman

33. To the Groom/Best Man - Have a bottle of water under your chair at the front of the wedding ceremony room. Your mouth will thank you

To the B&G - "There are more ideas for a great wedding day out there than can fit in one day, so choose a few you love and make them work amazingly just for you, rather than trying to do too much." - David Newman

34. Ask yourself why? At each stage of the planning process question why you should be considering this particular idea, product or activity. On your wedding day remind yourself why you chose to share this idea, product or activity with your friends and family. – Derek Pengelly

35. Remember your parents [when appropriate]. Plan a special moment of thanks during your evening reception. Share the spotlight with them for a few minutes. This is often why the Father/Daughter dance and Mother/Son dance are appreciated by your guests. - David Summers

36. Don't panic if the time-line slips. All the very best weddings struggle to stay on track. Invariably people having a good time could care less about watching the clock. Only you, the venue and your host will be aware of any time critical features of your wedding day. Relax and let your Party Host manage the day. A well planned time-line will always have contingency built in. - Derek Pengelly

37. If you don't want to throw your bouquet; there is an alternative. I understand you may wish to keep your bouquet so why not arrange for an extra bridesmaid's posy or ask your Party Host to provide an artificial one. You can pose for photographs with your bouquet and switch to the other when it is time to throw it. - David Summers

38. Remember to eat! It's a long day; it's so easy to be swept along in the excitement resulting in a loss of appetite. You need sustenance as well as plenty of water. Relax and enjoy the food, you will be thankful that you ate later on in the evening when the dancing starts. – David Summers

39. Less is more. Sometimes it is better to finish the day on a high rather than allowing the day to fade and slip away. Do you want the day to finish with a bang or a whimper? Take a good long look at your time line and realistically estimate who will still be in the room at the finish. – Derek Pengelly

40. On your wedding day where will the party be?

No I am not asking you for the name of the venue! The question is more about the focus, without focus on your wedding day there could be more than one party going on at your reception.

Simply put, have you ever been to a wedding and wondered why no one was dancing even though the DJ was playing great tunes? Take a step back and try to remember where the Bride & Bridegroom were, if they spent most of the evening in the bar; well the party was in the bar.

Now the reality is that at every wedding reception there is more than one party going on. It may be parents or youngsters that have found a quiet place to chat. It could be the bar flies that are happy to stay there all evening, or it could be hot and some guests are outside enjoying a warm summer evening.

A great party Host/DJ can connect all these parties into one celebration through planning and staging. - Alan Marshall

4:

The Average Wedding

There is a lot of talk about the average wedding in the industry. What is an average wedding? Have you ever been to an average wedding? What was it like? Is “an average wedding” something Brides want? Who supplies average weddings and how much do they cost? Is an average wedding good value for money? Where do average weddings take place?

Lots of questions and no answers, which is not surprising, because the questions are flawed; the term, “Average” is subjective. It is impossible to measure. It is a relative term which requires a comparison with others, in this case, weddings.

I guess we could call an average wedding an, “OK”, wedding. Would an OK wedding be one where the venue was OK, but nothing special? Would an OK wedding be one where the food and drink were OK, but nothing special? Would an OK wedding be one where conversation was stunted and not flowing? Would an OK wedding be one where some of the guests danced, but not everyone? Would an Ok wedding be one where the guests go home happy, but not elated?

If you want an average “OK Wedding” you may as well stop reading now and put the book down. If you want a better than average wedding, a wedding which is memorable and unique, read on and make notes. It’s possible to create your perfect wedding day, with a little help from your friends. Your friends look out for you, tell the truth and stop you making errors of judgment. Sometimes it’s tough being a friend. For the remainder of this book, I’d like you to consider me as your friend.

If you are dreaming of a unique wedding, a good place to start is a unique venue. Even better if your chosen venue is privately owned and managed. Personal service and a commitment to exceed your expectations really do make a huge difference. Unfortunately such venues are few and far between and can often be beyond most Brides' budget.

If you are planning on holding your wedding reception in a local hotel which is part of a national or multi-national chain, beware. At first glance what they have to offer may be very tempting, reasonably priced and good value. You may have seen some of them advertising a wedding package for £1000? How can they do this? What do you get for your money?

Such hotels are usually patronised by business men and women from a Monday to Thursday, and are designed to offer a very corporate level of service and hospitality. The management and staff are often trained on-site, and frequently relocate to hotels owned by the group, as part of their career development. "This is all good news" I hear you say. Well maybe not.

This corporate market means standardisation. Chain hotels are OK, hotels. These hotels will seldom have a wow factor. Service will be OK. Accommodation will be OK. The facilities will be OK. So here is your challenge. How do you create a unique, fun and memorable wedding reception in an OK venue? Simple answer: contact one of our friends in the directory of this book. For a more detailed answer; read on.

The "look" of the venue can be taken care of by consulting an expert venue dresser. Many of my fellow Specialist Wedding DJs / Master of Ceremonies / Party Hosts work alongside local experts and can recommend one to you. Some of them supply venue dressing services themselves.

I appreciate choosing a venue is usually a very practical decision. It needs to be in a particular location, have room for all of your guests and be affordable. Not all venues are designed for weddings, and therefore many can be quite challenging, especially when you consider entertainment. In chapter one I shared with you the secret regarding the power of entertainment, and the fact that most Brides wished they had given more consideration to entertainment during the planning process. The aim; your aim; our aim; should be to ensure every part of the day is entertaining, in one way or another. Easier said than done; not really, at least not for an experienced Specialist Wedding DJ/ Master of Ceremonies / Party Host.

Let's get started.

What we need to be looking out for are statements and suggestions, which hint as being average or OK. I've listed below some suggestions. If anyone uses these comments during your planning consultations you need to question them further. What does the statement actually mean in reality? Ask for clarification.

We have a CD we use for your wedding ceremony music

Does this mean you have no choice? What if the CD skips or sticks?

You can provide a CD or I-Pod for your wedding ceremony music

Who will look after the disc or I-Pod? How will they know what music to play, and when to play it?

We have a CD we use for your wedding breakfast music

One CD will play for a little over an hour. The meal usually lasts longer than this. Will they change the CD or let it repeat. Can you supply your own choice of music?

You can provide a CD or I-Pod for your wedding breakfast background music

Once again you will need to know who is in charge and responsible for the music.

We have a “sound system” you can use

This could be a sophisticated professional installation or a portable boom box. Make sure you check it out before your wedding day. More importantly, ensure whoever is responsible for the music on the day is fully conversant with the “sound system”

Our Duty Manager will be your Master of Ceremonies

This could be an issue. Some Duty Managers are fabulous characters and have great personalities. Many are experienced and comfortable in this role. However it is true to say that many are not.

A lot depends on you, the Bride, and your personality, and how you envision your wedding reception to be. Another issue which may arise is, knowing who will be the Duty Manager on the day of your wedding. Venues often have two or three Duty Managers on their staff. Will you have a choice? Which one best suits your style?

In the past you basically had two choices, a Toastmaster or Duty Manager. One of our industry secrets is about to be revealed. You have a new choice. Your Party Host is specifically trained to fill this role. Would you rather leave things to chance or employ a specialist who will personalise your day and represent you in a style you are comfortable with?

You can't have toasts and speeches before your meal.

Ask why not. There may be issues with the time it takes for speeches. Admittedly some can go on for ever. There may be an issue with catering. Hot “starters” can be difficult to prepare when the chef has no idea when the first course is to be served. If it is a catering issue and you really do want your speeches before the meal, opt for a cold starter or soup.

The cake will be cut after the speeches.

Why? Your party, your way, you decide, with a little help from your friends.

We need at least an hour to reset the room for your evening guests.

Not much room for maneuver here. Work with the venue to minimize the down-time. Your Party Host will have some ideas to share about this.

The dance floor will be placed here and the Band/DJ must set up over there.

This is another case of why? A fresh point of view and a logical reason may result in a new positioning. One venue I worked at regularly always insisted the dance floor was placed at the far end of the room opposite the bar. This meant me positioning my DJ equipment at the far end of the room. In front of me was the dance floor, then the seating area for guests and finally the bar. My volume levels had to be high to reach everyone in the room. This made it difficult for guests to make themselves heard when ordering drinks.

I suggested I set-up along one side of the room, in the centre. The dance floor was positioned in front of me and the seating was arranged to my left, in front and to my right. My volume level did not need to be as high, and the guests could easily step onto the dance floor from their seats, which were now only a couple of meters away. This was much better. The bar staff were happy and the guests loved it.

The buffet will be served at 9.30

This is another case of Why? Take a good look at the time-line and work out if this time fits your plans. Stand your ground if it is not convenient. A good venue will be most accommodating.

You have an extended bar so the finish will be 01.00 or 02.00am

Once again, think about how you want your day to end, with a bang or a whimper? Less is more.

How far have your guests traveled? How many of your guests are staying at the venue overnight? Is there a group who will be leaving, by coach, at a certain time?

You have to use our resident DJ

Let's take a look at the increasing practice of insisting that you use the resident DJ for your evening wedding reception. Maybe we missed something over the years. Since when has a venue had the right to dictate to a Bride, and choose on her behalf, who will be entertaining her guests on the most important day of her life?

As in all cases there are exceptions to the rule, so I apologise in advance if I offend any full-time professional DJs who offer a personalised, unique and dedicated service via a hotel residency. The vast majority do not. Let me explain why this is.

It's not as though the venue insist on you having a specific Band or comedian. They don't say you must have this one single type of red wine. In fact the whole concept is beyond reason. How can they know what you like or dislike? How can one person deliver the right content of entertainment, night after night, to clients he hasn't even met?

Even if the resident DJ did agree to meet with every client before the event, surely as a professional, he would have to recognise that he or she is not suited to every client, and some of their expectations would probably be extremely difficult to manage. The resident DJ, in these circumstances, should decline the opportunity to DJ their event, but would probably not do so. So what does this tell us about the level of professionalism on offer by the venue and the resident DJ?

In truth the resident DJ is working for the venue not the Bride. At best he has divided loyalties, and at worst, he is not able to admit that, in an ideal world, he is not the DJ for the Bride. Somehow the venue has engineered a situation, where the Bride is expected to take the word of the venue that their DJ will do a great job. The reality is that the DJ will do an average job, because that's what happens when an entertainer works the same venue night in, night out. The tendency is to play safe and stick to the middle ground.

How do I know this is what happens when you are offered the services of a resident agency? I used to be one. I also ran an agency where my company provided DJs for weddings. Think of me as poacher turned game keeper. I've seen the situation from all sides. When venues are seeking service providers, the process is driven by price, and inevitably quality suffers.

Venues like the idea of resident DJs for a number of reasons. Here are some to consider. They are cheap. You can guarantee that in return for all of those bookings, the DJ has substantially discounted his usual fee; however you may be assured that the venue will be charging you more than they are paying their DJ.

Resident DJs do as they are told. They set up where the venue finds it more convenient to place him, and not necessarily where is best for a great party atmosphere. Venues are worried about the failure of a DJ to turn up, so they go for safety in numbers, and have the resident DJ provide cover just in case of illness or accident, which is good business practice. However the reality is that often you, the customer, have no guarantee exactly who will be DJing at your wedding reception on the day of your wedding. [Independent specialist wedding DJs and Party Hosts will have such situations covered and will always have a back-up plan for any situation.]

Preferred supplier DJs are a much better option

Some venues offer a preferred supplier option for entertainment. This is much better. Your choice may be limited, but at least you get the chance to make your own selection. I would strongly suggest you take the time to meet with two or three DJs before deciding on which one to employ.

I often see experts suggesting that you go and see the DJ perform at other weddings. This is not a good idea. How would you like a couple of total strangers to gate-crash your wedding in order to audition their DJ? Each wedding reception should be different. The music played, and the style of presentation will vary according to the client's wishes; so watching a DJ perform at another wedding may give you a totally wrong idea of what the DJ is capable of. Quality Specialist Wedding DJs will have video clips and testimonials to illustrate what they do, and more importantly, guarantee that they will exceed your expectations.

It doesn't make any sense to employ a wedding DJ without meeting with them. You don't engage a photographer or florist without having a chat, and sampling what they do, and how they do it. A DJ / Master of Ceremonies / Host is not a product, he or she is offering a service. By the time you have read this book, hopefully you will understand that there is far more to this service than turning up and pressing "Play".

The cost of a service is dependant on the time taken to perform the service, and the level of expertise and experience to do what is required. As with all things in life entertainment is no different with regard to "You get what you pay for". A cheap DJ is generally not very good and a good DJ is not cheap.

Sound Limiters

Sound level limiters are devices which are installed as a result of previous complaints about noise levels. They are insisted upon by local authorities. Sound limiters are set to automatically cut off the supply of electrical power once volume levels exceed a given point. If they are installed and set correctly they can be of little consequence, however a badly calibrated sound meter, or one set to trigger at too low a level, will spell disaster to any entertainment. There are many instances of entertainers refusing to connect valuable equipment to such systems, and I don't blame them. Serious damage can be caused to computerised products when the electrical supply is suddenly cut off. I've also been told of occasions when the sound limiter was set so low that it triggered when the guests were applauding the arrival of the Bride and Groom.

In the next chapter I will tell you more about the new breed of wedding DJ / Master of Ceremonies / Host. More importantly, I will show you what a difference it makes when someone takes responsibility. A wedding Party Host will ensure that the event, whether it's all-day or evening only, will flow seamlessly while you can relax and rest assured that he or she will take good care of your guests





5:

The Party Host

Unknown to most of the wedding world

Health warning!

What follows is not meant to shock or alarm you. It is meant to inform you and help you avoid situations which until now you are unaware of. Relax because I have solutions, ideas and advice which will guarantee your wedding day is amazing. Read on and stay positive, light is shining brightly at the end of the tunnel.

Strictly speaking the Bride and Groom are the hosts at a wedding reception. In certain circumstances this role may be performed by the Bride's mother and father. In reality both the Bride and Groom, and the parents, are so involved in the proceedings that hosting the event is not practical. So who will be hosting your wedding?

If you are holding your wedding at a hotel, or dedicated wedding venue, the management will appear to step into this role. You normally have the services of an event manager, and there will be a Duty Manager on hand during the day. Sounds good? Not really. Let me tell you some more facts the industry would prefer you didn't know.

In the lead up to your wedding day you will have the services of a dedicated event planner / coordinator who will be one of the venue staff. In an ideal world this person follows the process through from start to finish, however reality is often a different story. Wedding coordinators and planners change jobs frequently. It's not unheard of for them to move every twelve months or less. I have personal experience of one Bride who had no fewer than six coordinators over a period of eighteen months prior to her wedding day. Such situations also occur with senior management. The same Bride also had to deal with three general managers in the same period. I also used to provide services for a hotel in the north west of England where they had twelve general managers in ten years. None of this is very reassuring when a typical wedding can take a couple of years to plan and local venues can often be booked-up well in advance.

Do you see where all of this is heading? Venues book dates well in advance. Hotel employees move jobs frequently. This means continuity, and the delivery of promises made by previous staff, can sometimes not be fulfilled. Even when you have a shorter time-frame the situation can be less than ideal.

Often the venue wedding planner is either a part-time worker, or works nine to five on weekdays. She may not be there on the day of your wedding. If you're lucky there will be another employee to look after you on the day, however this role is usually assumed by the Duty Manager. Generally speaking Duty Managers do not work eighteen hour days. A typical wedding will see two Duty Managers covering the preparation and the hosting of your big day.

You should also bear in mind that the duty Rota is usually not known much before the week of your wedding, so it's unlikely you will know who exactly is looking after you on your wedding day. Looking after you, while concentrating on their biggest responsibility, which is food and drink, can result in conflicting priorities.

A Duty Manager has divided loyalties. He knows how much money you are spending on the meal and the beverages. He also knows how much profit this will generate for his employer. No surprise therefore, and quite right too, that he should be pre-occupied with such things. No wonder he has very little time to consider any aspects of entertainment. On the contrary entertainment can be a distraction and a hindrance. More on this subject later

So if the idea of allowing your wedding reception to be hosted by the venue staff is looking less than appealing who else could you employ to look after your guests?

Toastmasters

Let me begin by saying I have the utmost respect for Toastmasters. They do a fantastic job and fill the obvious gap highlighted a moment ago. Toastmasters offer a service which concentrates on the bridal party and guests. He or she is trained in etiquette and is a confident public speaker ideally suited to making announcements. A major part of the responsibility of a Toastmaster is to ensure the time-line is managed. In other words he makes sure things happen at the agreed time and that everything runs to plan.

Some Toastmasters can be a little too “straight-laced” and formal for some couples. Very often Toastmasters come from a previous career in the armed forces, and carry an air of authority about them. This is admirable, but sometimes this does not sit well with a more relaxed atmosphere, which the Bride and Groom may prefer for their wedding reception.

There are more relaxed Toastmasters out there, and if the idea appeals to you, then by all means contact a few and ask about their style of presentation. A good Toastmaster will cost upward of £300 for an afternoon. Many will charge considerably more, and are worth every penny. As with most things you get what you pay for.



Roger Knight from Somerset is listed in the directory. He is a qualified Toastmaster in addition to being a great wedding DJ and Party Host. His style is unique and adds yet another dimension to the art of hosting a wedding reception. With Roger you get the best of both worlds.

So far we have looked at the reality of what can happen at a typical venue [exceptions do apply] where entertainment does not figure highly in their list of priorities. Let me lighten your load and deliver some good news.

There is a new kid on the block. There is a new choice available to you. You can now choose from the growing numbers of specially trained, highly motivated entertainers who care passionately about the success of your party. Let me introduce to you, your Wedding DJ / Master of Ceremonies / Party Host, hereafter to be referred to as The Party Host.

The Party Host

How would you like a professional to meet and greet your guests? Someone who will engage them in conversation, answer their questions and attend to their needs. A Party Host understands that the Bride and Groom are looking for a stress-free reception. He, or she, knows the importance of being smartly dressed. The Party Host relishes the opportunity to be your representative at the wedding reception, and everything he or she does will be in accordance with your style and taste.

A Party Host will have done his homework. He will have met with you on a number of occasions to help plan the proceedings, and discuss a range of services which are designed to enhance both you and your guests' experience. The Party Host has a wealth of ideas which he will share with you to help create exactly the right atmosphere from the moment you arrive at your venue.

I have a saying, "It's not what you do, it's the way that you do it, which gets results"

Party Hosts know only too well what this means. Party Hosts have studied what makes a great wedding reception memorable. They know what works and what doesn't. They are not afraid to make suggestions and comments. They are driven by one goal, your peace of mind.

I mentioned earlier a list of things you would rather not hear from a wedding venue.

The Party Host has taken all of those sayings onboard. Each of those issues and situations have been analysed and addressed. A confident and professional Party Host can make a huge difference to your wedding reception. Let's take a look why this is the case.

More than just a DJ, a Party Host has developed many skills and talents often overlooked by the general public. Public speaking is second nature for many DJs. Many DJs just talk. A trained Party Host knows when to use the microphone for maximum impact and doesn't just drone on incessantly. Using microphones and sound systems for music playback is something they do every day. They have researched the role of Master of Ceremonies and this fits in very well with hosting a wedding reception.

A Master of Ceremonies or MC?

In the wedding industry a Master of Ceremonies is the person who makes the announcements, He is also someone who has an in-depth knowledge of the proceedings. He knows the order in which the bridal party form a receiving line, and who, according to custom, is first to offer a toast. He is also familiar with the origins of the wedding cake, and why it is cut and served as part of the wedding breakfast.

More importantly, a Party Host will endeavor to incorporate music into everything he does. His announcements will be enhanced by the energy and emotion which music creates. His programming skills, and extensive knowledge of music genres, will ensure that music played as background is personalised to your taste, and played at just the right volume.

Let me tell you more secrets the industry would prefer you didn't know, and how a Party Host can deliver a memorable service that you and your guests will enjoy.

6:

Civil Ceremonies

Venues need to try harder!

Earlier we mentioned the average, or OK wedding. Remember these are statements you need to be aware of?
We have a “sound system you can use”.

We have a “CD we use for your wedding ceremony music”.

You can provide a “CD or I-Pod for your wedding ceremony music”.

There are a number of issues which have not been thought through when a venue makes such statements. At first glance everything seems fine. You source your own music and have it played during the civil ceremony. Also please bear in mind I said, “It’s not what you do but how you do it which gets results”, well this is a classic example.

For a civil wedding ceremony you will need music while guests are entering the room and taking their seats. You will also need some music while they are waiting for the Bride to arrive. Once the Bride makes her entrance there will be a piece of music for her to walk down the aisle to, this is called the Processional. After the exchange of vows, time will be taken to sign the register, so a couple of pieces of incidental music will be required. Finally, the Bride and Bridegroom will proceed back up the aisle to a piece of music called the Recessional.

There are restrictions as to what music can be played at a Civil Ceremony. There can be nothing which has a religious connection. You can not use any music which makes reference to God. If in doubt, you should consult the Registrar before the day of the wedding.

So let's put that all together and see how it plays out in an OK wedding. First off, who is in charge of the music? Is it a family member or one of the hotel staff? What format is the music on; is it on CD, thumb drive or iPod? Is it duplicated just in case the CD skips or the mp3 files are not recognized? Is there a written list, in playing order, so that the person responsible knows what to play and when to play it?

Is this person familiar with the sound system and the controls? Is it a professional sound system or a domestic boom-box? Is the system capable of delivering a quality sound at the right volume? Does the operator know when to raise and lower the volume for dramatic effect?

Another aspect of "OK DIY ceremony music" is one of timing. Many tracks have introductions, or the actual chorus is a minute or two into the song. Have you thought this through? Your song may need to be played for a minute or so into the song to ensure that the chorus is heard as you arrive at your Bridegroom's side.

Does this all sound a little bit complex and daunting? Well it should, because to get everything right takes planning, production and direction by a professional, using professional equipment and custom-edited music.

I have seen with my own eyes hotel staff insert an unmarked CD, press play and get the wrong track playing as the Bride enters the room. I have heard the music play, and then suddenly stop, as the couple walk down the aisle. The operator then played the start of the next track, before starting the correct track, only for it to stop after a couple of seconds. Do you really want to leave such important aspects of your civil wedding to chance? Let me share with you a story of when I was a guest at my nephew's wedding a few years ago

The wedding was at a posh Cheshire Hotel. We arrived in good time and were herded into the bar and encouraged to have a drink. The wedding was due to take place at 2.30 and just after 2.20 I noticed that everyone was still in the bar chatting and drinking. At 2.25 on the dot a member of the hotel staff announced that we were to make our way to the suite for the wedding ceremony. All drinks had to be abandoned because they are not allowed in the room where the Registrar has authority.

We all piled in and grabbed our seats, and within no time the Bride was walking up the “Aisle”. I had been aware of some kind of “musak” being played as we entered the room, but there had not been any discernable change or increase in volume to announce the arrival of the Bride, other than the Registrar’s instruction that we should all stand.

The ceremony began. The formalities were completed, vows exchanged and the rings presented to their respective fingers and there you had it, “Man & wife, you may kiss the Bride” They signed the register, had a few photos taken and then they proceeded back through the congregation and we were invited to join the happy couple in the Bar.

All too frequently, in my opinion, it seems that a civil ceremony is little more than a business transaction, signed, sealed and delivered in no time at all. Surely there must be a better way. There is!

The Party Host Civil Ceremony Service

Picture this. A professional sound system and Party Host positioned discreetly in the room where the wedding is to take place. The Party Host understands that he is not allowed to speak until after the wedding ceremony. He has a plan up his sleeve. This Party Host has explained to his client that by doing things a little differently, the occasion will take on more meaning and be a more memorable experience for both them and their guests.

Let’s begin with seating the guests. Would it not be better for them to be invited into the room earlier, and shown to their seats? While this is going on, wouldn’t it be a good idea to play music specially selected by the groom? The groom needs to be in the room early so that he can check documents with the Registrar. This music will be his opportunity to send a message, through his music choice, which will create the atmosphere for what is about to happen.

The Groom will have chosen four or five pieces of music to cover the fifteen minutes or so required to seat the guests and complete the formalities. This music will also enable him to relax while he is waiting for the arrival of his future wife. There will be a secret signal, shared only by the Bride and Bridegroom, which will indicate that the Bride is about to enter the room. This “Secret” will be a special piece of music, which when played, will tell the groom that his future wife is here and that she is about to enter the room. The next piece of music to be played will be the Bride’s choice. This music is her “Entrance”, and the one to which she will walk up the “Aisle”, after the Registrar has asked the congregation to stand. The volume levels will raise and fall, at the appropriate time, to add dynamics to the event, and will have been agreed with the registrar beforehand. All it takes is eye-contact and coordination.

Our Party Host will have asked his client about suitable music for the time when the register [marriage schedule] is signed. Once again volume levels can rise and add emotion to the proceedings. Once the formalities are completed and the volume again is lowered, to allow the registrar to say a few final words of congratulation, and the inevitable, “please stand”, the final rousing “Recessional music” can be played. This choice may be traditional or something whacky. I would encourage clients to go with their hearts, and select something which makes a statement about them. It is, after all is said and done, their big day.

Now, and only now, can the Party Host speak and, as usual, less is more. “Mr. and Mrs. Williams would like to invite everyone to join them outside in the garden for drinks and photographs”. Job Done: So much better!

If you decide to use a Party Host to provide your civil ceremony music you may want to think about these suggestions. What about having a theme running through your music selections? I can remember two occasions when a couple selected Beatles music and another when the theme was Disney film favourites. [This couple had two little girls, who were infatuated with all things Disney-related so it only seemed right to indulge them when it came to their parent’s wedding ceremony].

Example play-list – Beatles Theme

Track1 “Girl”: Track 2 “Something”: Track 3 “Till there was you”: Track 4 “Here comes the sun”: Track 5 [Last tune before the arrival of the Bride] “And I love her”

The Processional “All you need is love”: Signing of the register “When I’m 64”: Signing of the register “With a little help from my friends”

The Recessional “She loves you”

If you need help selecting music for your wedding a colleague of mine has published a great guide filled with suggestions, hints and tips to help you through this process. **Mark Parker – “Your wedding music – getting it right”** You can order his book from www.amazon.co.uk

Top Tip

You may also wish to consider having your vows recorded. It’s very simple to do. This is something a videographer will do, but what if you are not videoing the ceremony? A wedding Party Host has the technical expertise and the equipment to do this. It may even be a good idea to think about playing the vows later in the day, maybe in the evening, for guests who were not present at the ceremony. The vows can also be reproduced, and given to the Bride and Bridegroom as a memento of their special day.

If you are marrying outdoors, or if there are a large number of guests, think about asking your Party Host to “Mic you up”, and relay your voices through his professional sound system, so that everyone can hear what is being said. It is a shame to think of your guests straining to hear what is going on at the front, when they are seated all the way at the back. Remember, unless you are used to projecting your voice, people will struggle to hear what you have to say, especially as you will have your back to your guests for the wedding ceremony.





Tomfoolery
Box



7:

Civil Partnerships and same-sex marriage

Recently the UK government has moved to change the law regarding same sex or “Gay / Lesbian” weddings. Previously Civil Partnerships were offered by the state but these were found to be lacking from a legal perspective as they did not offer the same legal status as heterosexual marriages

Same-sex marriages have been legal in England and Wales since 13 March 2014. Scotland introduced legislation in the autumn of 2014. Ireland voted for same-sex marriage in May 2015. Northern Ireland has so far failed to introduce same-sex marriages; they continue to only recognise Civil Partnerships.

So much for the legalities – how does a same sex wedding differ from a heterosexual one?

Recent experience indicates that there are two schools of thought on the subject.

No Difference

Many couples just want the same as their heterosexual counterparts. They love their partner. They want their relationship to be acknowledged in law and wish to celebrate their union in the presence of their families and friends. Many do not want a fuss made of their sexuality. They just want everyone to be happy for them and accept their relationship for what it is, as one would for any other relationship.

Totally different

Some couples recognise that what they have achieved, and are celebrating, is their individuality. They wish to have a day which is totally unique and, for want of a better description, a “loud and proud event”. These couples do not want any parallels with a conventional wedding reception and they will often go to great lengths to ensure that their day is totally different.

The ceremony

The ceremony itself can vary; many Gay Grooms choose to walk hand in hand down the aisle with their partner while Lesbian Brides often prefer to walk down two aisles from different directions.

Wedding attire is also a challenge for some couples. Men often opt for a simple Morning suit or Tuxedo. About fifty percent of Lesbian Brides opt for the traditional Wedding dress while their partner opts for a smart trouser suit. Many lesbian couples choose to both wear traditional Bridal Gowns. A small number prefer to both wear suits.

What do we, as Party Hosts call you?

This is very often the most important consideration for any entertainer or service provider employed by a Gay / Lesbian couple. There is no tried and tested convention in place and even if there were people are free to decide how they should be addressed. Generally the safe option is simply to use first names at all times. It is also important to check if common terms like “happy couple” are appropriate and if so, not overused.

Set the atmosphere

A Party Host is dedicated to turning dreams into reality. He, or she, needs to fully understand a couple’s vision and what their expectations are for their wedding ceremony and reception. Communication is vital, as is detailed planning. Your Party Host is there to help communicate your thoughts to your guests and to involve them so that they feel included and special on the day. In many respects this is no different from a heterosexual marriage.

Toasts and Speeches

Decide in advance who will be speaking. It may just be a few words of thanks from the couple or a close friend or two. In some instances it may be perfectly acceptable to hear from the parents. Work it all out in advance and enjoy the moment.

Cake cutting

There may or may not be a wedding cake. If there is a wedding cake it will provide a photo opportunity and could be turned into a fun moment especially if the couple choose to serve each other a piece of the cake.

If the whole idea of the big white cake does not appeal to you why not opt for individual cakes. Handing out a small cake to each guest is a traditional gesture of thanks which would be most appreciated by your guests.

First Dance

You may or may not wish to have a first dance. Generally speaking most couples do opt for a first dance. Choose a special song with an appropriate lyric and let your Party Host create a unique introduction to set the right atmosphere.

“We don’t want any traditions, no speeches, no cake and no first dance”.

Your party, your way is fine, however if you strip out all of the traditions what will you replace them with? How are you going to keep your guests focused and entertained so that they stay and feel included instead of excluded, bored and intent on leaving as soon as possible?

Trivia quiz

During the wedding breakfast organise a trivia quiz to stimulate your guests, engage them in conversation and provide facts and entertaining anecdotes about you, your partner and your life experiences.

Make a video

This can be a mini “this is your life”. Create a fun and funky film or Romantic “love Story” that tells how you met and what you share in life. Have the film shown on a big screen at an appropriate moment. Finish with a short statement saying how you expect to feel on your big day and include a special message to your partner.

No first dance

How about a full-on family dance? Maybe introduce props like inflatable guitars, saxophones and microphones to create an instant “party time”. Is there a special song from the past which you and your friends dance to without fail? Work with your party host to identify what will work with your guests.

Firework displays.

If you want to add a touch of class and excitement why not organise a surprise firework display. Everyone loves a good firework display especially if it is unexpected. Work with your party host so that he can spring the surprise at the right moment and maybe have some inspiring music ready to compliment the display.

Dance-off competition

A dance-off competition works really well at most wedding receptions so there is no reason why you can't have one too. Setting males against females in a dance competition is always fun. Shaking a wicked hip to classic dance tracks will create excitement and pump energy into the room; even non-dancers are entertained just watching how competitive it can get.

Music selections / themes

As with most things in life stereotypical impressions can be difficult to shift. Does a Gay / Lesbian marriage conjure up images of The Village People, The Rocky Horror Show, Gloria Gaynor, Petshop Boys, Bronski Beat, Frankie Goes to Hollywood, Donna Summer and George Michael?

Do you want your party to be over the top and to reflect your sexuality? Just how many of your guests share your sexuality and how many are straight? This is a decision only you can make. Many same-sex marriages are attended by guests who, as a whole, do not differ from that of a heterosexual wedding so why should the music program be any different? If there is any doubt the best policy is to leave the music selection to your Party Host and encourage him or her to take requests on the night. However, it is always a good idea to advise your Host of any potential favourite tunes which are likely to be played.

And Finally

However you choose to celebrate your Civil Ceremony, Gay wedding or Same-sex Marriage the important thing to do is relax and enjoy the day. You can't please everyone so you need to ensure that you please yourself first, and that your friends and family will be happy for you whatever you decide. There is no right or wrong way to celebrate your union. In many respects you have a blank canvas on which to create your own masterpiece. Do your research; ask for advice from the Party Hosts in this book. Choose service providers who are experienced and comfortable working for same-sex couples. Most importantly cherish this day, the start of your new life together.

8:

The Venue

Your choice of venue is going to be vitally important from an entertainment point of view. The physical structure, floor plan and geography of the building can seriously impact on how the celebrations flow, or not, as the case may be. Let me share with you an example or two.

The Country House Hotel

Country house hotels are very popular choices. They are often oozing with charm and character and are perfect backdrops for a relaxed and intimate wedding reception. Photographers tend to love this type of venue, as there are countless locations which produce fantastic images and great shots, both inside and outside the main house.

Larger Country Houses will have spacious rooms, and do not generally present any challenges for entertainers. Smaller country houses are a different story. I have hosted many a wedding in houses where the grounds were beautiful, the décor was exquisite, and the food was sumptuous, but the flow of the day was severely impacted by the size of the rooms and the lack of functionality of the venue.

In one such house the dining room was upstairs on the first floor. The room itself also had a dividing wall, which meant half of the guests could not see the bridal party, which was not ideal, especially when it was time for Toasts and Speeches.

Downstairs, guests were expected to make use of three rooms, a bar, a library and a lounge / morning room. The latter is where the dancing took place, and where the Band or Party Host was expected to perform. Unfortunately there was no seating in this room at all, and very few places to deposit your drinks, other than on window sills. This fragmentation meant that guests were segregated throughout the evening celebration. Most congregated in the bar, while others would find seats in the library. Some would wander into the entertainment room and maybe have a dance or two, before returning from whence they had come. Needless to say this is not an ideal situation. Not if you want your guests to collectively enjoy themselves and feel included in the event.

I can totally understand why a Bride would want to have her wedding reception in a small country house, however from an entertainment perspective, such a house as previously described, is a nightmare.

Imagine the scene for the first dance. In order for all of the guests to see the dance, and be a part of it, they all need to assemble in the lounge. This meant people had to be physically rounded up from the four corners of the building and herded, into a very small space before the Bride and Bridegroom could be introduced. Too many people blocked the doorway, making it almost impossible for the couple to make their way inside. Finally, the scene was set, and the dance began. Family and friends joined them for a second song choice, which went down really well. Unfortunately, it was not long after this that people began drifting back to the bar or the library, where they were more comfortable, and as a result, the dancing for the remaining part of the evening was sporadic to say the least.

On a more positive note, I'm happy to report, that the venue described previously, has now erected a marquee in the grounds, and logistics are now very much improved. Brides can enjoy the "wow factor" of the house, set in the picturesque grounds, while guests can dine together and be entertained as a single entity.

Top tip

If the bridal party and guests can be accommodated in one single space, everything works so much better. It may sound obvious, but why would you want your guests to leave the room, to go to a bar in another part of the venue, and possibly miss out on a funny or romantic moment. Once again, from an entertainment perspective, entertainers need to be able to read the audience, and gauge reaction, to what they are doing. How can your entertainer / host keep people engaged and entertained when most of them are not in the room?

Modern Hotels

Generally, but not always, modern hotels are built with corporate entertainment and wedding receptions very much a part of their business plan: This is good from a space and functionality point of view. This also means they can tend to be a little bland and lacking by way of a wow factor. Interestingly, this abundance of space can present some interesting challenges to entertainers. In nature a vacuum needs to be filled, so it will come as no surprise to know that, even in this type of venue, logistics and management of the event can be challenging.

I don't know why it should be, but when a DJ and a Band are booked to perform together, it's always the Band that takes up the most space. The DJ ends up squeezed into a tiny area and is expected to be grateful. The Band is more important right? They are the stars of the show. Well this may, or may not, be the case. What I do know is this. The Band will probably be playing for no more than an hour and a half to two hours. The DJ will usually be playing for four hours or even longer. The DJ usually starts the night and finishes the night. This means the Band will have packed up and gone long before the DJ.

Ironically, it is usually the DJ / Master of Ceremonies / Party Host who is the star of the night. His music program is more flexible. He or she can adjust to the needs of the audience. Requests from the dance floor keep guests dancing, happy in the knowledge that their music is being featured. A good DJ / Master of Ceremonies / Party Host will carry the night, and will keep the focus, not on him, but on the Bride and her guests.

Top Tip

When planning your entertainment consult with you entertainer about where exactly, they are expected to set-up. This needs to be done sooner rather than later. Ideally, you should agree with the venue management who goes where. This needs to be a process which involves the entertainer, and it also needs to be documented, with copies given to all parties. I can't tell you the number of times I've heard of, when entertainers turn up on the day only to be told, "No you can't go there, you'll have to go here". Inevitably "here" is not practical. The location of your entertainer is absolutely vital to the success of their performance. The entertainment is a focal point, and the entertainer needs to be in the best possible position to connect with the audience. When it comes to this very important aspect, it is the entertainer, and not the venue staff, who know best.

Marquees

I love wedding receptions in Marquees. There is something very romantic about celebrating a wedding in a tent. Everyone is under one roof, or should that be canvas? The entire space works well, bar, catering, entertainment and even if guests escape outside, they can still hear what's going on. The atmosphere in marquees is very often very intimate, helping people relax and enjoy the party without any undue stress, other than maybe wondering where the toilets are.

There are a couple of issues, which once again, very few wedding professionals will share with you, when it comes to marquee weddings. Two main areas of concern are flooring and power supplies. If a Bride asks the supplier of the tent, what kind of flooring is provided, the answer can be ambiguous. I've worked in marquees where there was no flooring at all, only the grass beneath my feet. Others have had a kind of straw matting, while many have been boarded. The boarded floors have varied tremendously, from simple plywood, laid on the grass, to wooden pallets, forming a base with plywood on top, and finished off with a green carpet covering. An entertainer needs a level and stable floor to set-up his sound and lighting system. On numerous occasions I have experienced sloping ground, and floors that float and move, as you walk across the surface, none of which is acceptable.

Power supplies can also present a challenge. Most entertainers will need a power supply that is not shared by any other user. A generator generally provides power supplied in Marquees. Unfortunately this power is also needed for the caterer and internal lighting requirements. If the power is also shared by the bar, the refrigerators, the ovens, and the dishwashers, all kinds of problems can arise. The worst-case scenario is that the power trips, cuts out and everyone is left in the dark. Less serious, but still a problem is when interference is reproduced through the sound system. This interference is caused by pumps and switches, or other items, using the same power supply, and it is totally unacceptable when playing music or using a microphone.

Top Tip

A professional wedding DJ / Master of Ceremonies / Party Host will always insist on a site visit before your wedding day. He will need to satisfy himself that the services made available are satisfactory. This is for his peace of mind and your protection, in order to guarantee everything runs smoothly and according to plan. Your entertainer / Party Host will, more than likely, want to set up his equipment as early in the day as possible, and will require good access for his vehicle, to avoid carrying heavy equipment any further than necessary.

It's also a good idea to be mindful of your neighbours. Sound travels long distances in open air. I once had the police called to a marquee. They had received a complaint about the noise from a villager who lived two miles away. There was nothing but farmland between the marquee and his house, so even though the volume levels were not particularly high, they were loud enough to be heard some distance away. If you are aware of people living nearby it would be best to warn them in advance. I would suggest sending them a note, or a card, forewarning of what is to be expected on the day, and mention the time the music will end. If all else fails, why not send around a bottle of wine, as a gesture of appreciation, to those most likely to be affected by loud music or people leaving in the early hours.

Castles

This fairytale location and venue for a princess, will certainly deliver the wow factor. Providing entertainment services in such a setting can be most rewarding and satisfying. Helping a Bride transform her dreams into reality is very much what a Party Host longs to do.

Very often Castles have a number of concerns regarding the use of service providers. You may find your choice of Party Host is restricted due to the need to protect the delicate and fragile fixtures and fittings within the building. It's quite possible that the acoustics in a castle are not very good for amplified sound, which may well be a problem for some entertainers. In these circumstances less is more. In other words, volume levels need to be kept slightly lower than usual, in order to avoid the sound bouncing back off the walls and sounding hollow. This is less of a problem for the new line-array type sound systems produced by Bose and FBT [other manufacturers do them too]. It would be advisable to check out any potential issues regarding acoustics when you make your entertainment choice.

Other venues

Barns, Village Halls, Golf Clubs, Leisure Clubs, Country Clubs, Night Clubs, Social Clubs and Pubs all cater for wedding receptions in one form or another. My advice is to always ask what restrictions, if any, may affect your choice of entertainment. Remember too that very few of these establishments will have heard of, or be aware of, what a Party Host does, and how he or she can add significantly to the success of your wedding reception. Talking of which, why don't I explain to you exactly what a Party Host can do for you and your guests?





9:

Drinks Reception & The Wedding Breakfast

Whether you married in Church, at a registry office or at the reception venue it is customary to have a drinks reception or “cocktail hour” prior to sitting down for your first meal as a married couple. This meal is called the Wedding Breakfast.

Very often some kind of low-key entertainment is provided for this time of the day. A chilled-out, relaxed atmosphere is usually created by employing a saxophonist, acoustic guitarist, harpist, piano player or similar. Music is used as a backdrop while guests mingle, chat, absorb the atmosphere, and maybe pose in a photograph or two, with the Bride and Bridegroom.

You will be busy. Your photographer will demand your attention, and there will be little time to chat to guests, even though they will do their best to attract your attention. There is only a limited amount of time allocated for drinks and photographs, which puts a great deal of pressure on photographers to deliver the shots they need.

This is where a Party Host can be a real asset. Firstly, he can have a small sound system set up and playing any type of music you desire, from light classical, through to smooth jazz or tunes from the movies. The choice is endless and yours to decide upon. Secondly, a big advantage of this kind of host service is making announcements. Your Party Host will be able to use his microphone to help the photographer assemble his next group, and ensure that no valuable time is wasted looking for guests who may have wandered off.

Once the photographer is finished it will be time for the Wedding Breakfast. Before you all go in to dinner a decision has to be taken as to whether you want a receiving line or not?

The Receiving Line

There are points in favour and points against receiving lines. Traditionally this is the first real opportunity for a Bride and Bridegroom to meet and greet their guests, or put another way, for the guests to congratulate the Bride and Bridegroom. Some of your guests may well have had a chance to talk with you during the drinks reception, but the majority of them will not. The receiving line is usually made up of the Bride and Bridegroom, both sets of parents, the best man and chief Bridesmaid, [matron of honour]. Essentially The Bridal Party, which would normally be seated at what is usually referred to as “The Top Table”.

One of the issues associated with receiving lines is that of timing. If you have a large number of guests, and they all take a minute or two to talk to each member of the receiving line, it can take thirty or forty minutes for everyone to pass along the line and enter the dining room. This is probably why some venues and planners discourage receiving lines.

I would argue that a receiving line is necessary, as it sets the tone and mood for the rest of the day. If time is an issue, I would suggest that the receiving line is reduced, to include only the Bride and Bridegroom. If this is done, it should take no more than fifteen to twenty minutes for guests to be greeted and seated.

Receiving lines are a great way to usher guests into the dining room in an orderly fashion. After congratulating the Bride and Bridegroom, the guests will consult the seating plan, and then make their way to their table. Once the guests are seated, it's time for the Bride and Bridegroom to be announced into the room. Hold your breath, the party is about to begin.

The venue Duty Manager as your Master of Ceremonies

To call yourself a “master” of anything means you need to be knowledgeable and an expert in your field. A Master of Ceremonies therefore needs to have researched, and be fully conversant with, ceremonies associated with a wedding. I'm afraid to say that where the Duty Manager takes on this role this is hardly ever the case. As always, there are exceptions to the rule but these are few and far between.

Maybe I'm being a little harsh. I know many of my colleagues work regularly at venues where a member of staff is called upon to make announcements. Thinking about it a little more, I have no issue with this. If a Bride is told a Duty Manager will introduce you, all is fine. It's the description of “Master of Ceremonies” which is under contention.

More and more venues are employing professional Toastmasters to look after wedding parties. Not all Brides like the idea of such a formal style of overseeing the proceedings. Party Hosts can now provide an alternative. Brides need to be educated and informed as to the choices available to them.

It's not the intention of this book to be disrespectful to venues or their staff. It is my desire to explain a different approach to this part of the wedding day. Times are changing. Technology is evolving. Party Hosts are filling a gap in the market. Their services should be seen as another choice and not as a replacement for other service providers; The Party Host can often work alongside Toastmasters and Duty Managers. There is no reason why the skills and talents of all three can not be utilised in harmony.

If choice is readily available, and service providers recognise, and appreciate, the skills and talents of each other, all will be well and good. Most importantly, situations like the one that follows will be avoided.

Not long ago I was installing some up-lighting into a venue dining room. I was completing a final check prior to the arrival of the bridal party. It was half an hour before they were due to enter the room. I overheard the Duty Manager talking to his assistant, a young girl I knew who used to be a wedding planner. Apparently the chef was throwing a tantrum in the kitchen and the Duty Manager felt his presence was required in the kitchen, so guess what happened next? He told the young girl that she would be announcing the Bride and Bridegroom into the room, something she had never done before in her life. What does that tell you about the venue and their commitment to providing a Master of Ceremonies?

Another day I was talking to a Duty Manager who took great delight in showing me marks on the top of a doorframe. These marks had been created by repeated blows with a pair of spoons, which he used to attract attention, prior to announcing the Bride and Bridegroom into the room. He would strike the spoons on the frame and say, "ladies and gentlemen, please stand and welcome the Bride and Groom". That's it, nothing more or less. No first names, no last names, nothing personal, just a dry basic announcement. The sad thing is he thought he was good. Now I suppose if you didn't know any different, what else would you expect?

There is a much better way of being introduced, and now there is a very real alternative to a professional Toastmaster and the venue Master of Ceremonies. The Party Host is here and willing to help make your day special and memorable.

The Party Host

He or she has evolved from a background of playing music at hundreds of weddings. Your Party Host has undertaken formal training, attending seminars and workshops, to learn about traditions associated with weddings and wedding receptions. They also care passionately about the involvement and enjoyment of your guests. They understand that not everyone at a wedding is a dancer, but all enjoy music.

Music creates emotion and adds energy to a situation. Your Party Host will use his vocal skills, music knowledge and understanding of what makes a party a success, to enhance your guests' experience.

Party Hosts understand they are not the centre of attention it's not about them; it's about you and your guests. Many use the very latest, state of the art professional sound systems, which are smaller and less formidable-looking than they used to be. They appreciate that a modern Bride, and many venues, strive to create a more sophisticated look for their clients. Gone are the untidy cables and bright lights blinding your eyes? Lighting is now more discreet and coordinated to create a more sophisticated and enjoyable experience both on and off of the dance floor.

Whether you require entertainment for the evening reception or the entire day, your Party Host will want to meet with you and help you create something unique, which your family and friends will remember long after the day has passed.

Let me explain what they do, and more importantly, how they do it.

A Wedding Breakfast with your Party Host

As your guests enter the dining room your Party Host will have suitable background music playing at an unobtrusive volume. He will be using a discreet sound system, which does not detract from the surroundings, and takes-up the bare minimum amount of space. He will introduce himself to your guests and explain what is about to happen.

Depending on what you have planned, he will then proceed to introduce the bridal party, [optional] into the room, followed by the Bride and Bridegroom. Generally, your Party Host will want to try and personalise every introduction for maximum effect. Rather than a very dry, "please be upstanding and welcome the new Mr. and Mrs. Evans" your Party Host is likely to do something like this.

First of all there will be a music playing selected by you both. The sound level may start low and begin to rise when your Party Host will announce, "Ladies and Gentlemen, who would have thought, a few years back, when Karen and John met on a blind date in the restaurant of this very hotel, that we would be here today, welcoming them as husband and wife. It's my pleasure to introduce to you, Mr. and Mrs. John Wilkinson". The music will rise; people will stand, applaud, and cheer spontaneously, as you and your husband enter the room and make your way to your seats.

Obviously this is just an illustration of what can be created with a little imagination and carefully scripted introductions. The passion and energy is created by selecting the right music, and delivering the words with the right inflection, to create an announcement that reflects the Bride's wishes. Announcements like these can be very sincere and emotional. They can be light hearted and humorous. They can be pitched at any level you desire. The best thing about them is they are about you, and they set the scene for the kind of wedding breakfast you want your guests to enjoy. Take a look at this next example.

Nina and Rob's Grand Entrance

Not all entrances need to be grand; however sometimes doing something a little differently can produce amazing results.

Nina and Rob decided they wanted to have their speeches and cake cutting ceremony as soon as they entered the room. The idea was to get everyone involved from the outset by giving their guests something to witness and be a part of. They wanted "It must be love" by Madness to be played as they entered and crossed the room, to where the wedding cake was waiting for them. They would then proceed to join their family at the top table, where Nina was to make a short "thank you" speech, before I introduced the father of the Bride for the first of the toasts.

I had already warned the Duty Manager about what was to happen, and he came up with a really good idea. He arranged his waiting staff in a line, along the path from the doorway to where the wedding cake was positioned. I played the lengthy musical introduction to the song as I explained, on the microphone, what was about to happen.

As I announced, "everybody stand and welcome Rob and Nina, the new Mr. & Mrs. Evans" the chorus line "it must be love, love, love" echoed around the room on cue as they made their entrance. Guests applauded and cheered, the waiters popped the champagne corks, as the Bride and Bridegroom made their way past, and on toward the cake table.

They then proceeded to cut the cake, and served a piece of it to both parents, as I explained the story of why we have a wedding cake, and what it represents. [More about this later in the book]

After the cake cutting ceremony, Rob and Nina joined their family and friends at the top table, and excitedly thanked their guests for coming and helping them celebrate their marriage. Speeches were next, and the whole room was alive with laughter, as tales were shared. Heartstrings were tugged, and a tear or two shed, when a sentimental father of the Bride shared memories of his little girl, looking as beautiful as she did on that very special day.

Rob delivered a well-rehearsed speech, which was short and thoroughly delightful, while the Best Man did his best to entertain, with stories about the Bridegroom, which Rob would have preferred to have gone untold.

Needless to say it was all done in the best possible taste and everyone, including Rob, could appreciate the funny side to these tales. By the time the meal was served, the room was bristling with conversation, as the guests made comment about what they had just experienced. The party was well and truly underway!

Music can play a big part in your wedding breakfast. No longer do you have to listen to the same old CD or tape the venue play day in day out. Your Party Host will have spent a great deal of time consulting with you about what should be played. More importantly, he will be able to constantly monitor the sound levels to ensure people can hear the selections, without them encroaching on conversations.

Some Party Hosts have a number of ideas that will help stimulate conversation and focus attention on your special day. This is one of the reasons why I strongly recommend you meet with a couple of Party Hosts, before you finally decide upon which one to represent you. All of these entertainers are individuals with different personalities. Some will be a better fit than others. It's most important that you like and trust your Party Host and that he likes you.

Interaction can take many forms. Some interaction can be very minimal and understated, while others can be very loud and proud and in your face. Some people are very reserved and shy, while others are extrovert and up for a party. Your Party Host will work with you, to deliver your entertainment in a way that best suits you and your family.

Toasts and Speeches

The good thing about employing a Party Host is that he will be able to provide microphones for the family members who are making the speeches. This is not always necessary, however even in relatively small rooms, some people will struggle to be heard, especially if they are not used to public speaking. Microphones are often essential if your guests are particularly vociferous, and the general level of ambient noise is quite high.

Your Party Host will have made sure he knows in which order the toasts are to be delivered, and by whom. He will also have checked the correct pronunciation of the names of people to be introduced. Nothing is left to chance. The aim is to ensure everyone is relaxed and able to enjoy the experience.

I mentioned previously that you have a choice of when speeches and toasts are held. There are advantages and disadvantages to both; however my personal recommendation would be to opt for before your meal. There are a number of benefits to having your speeches first. People making the speeches may be nervous, and will be anxious during the meal. The content of the speeches will also reveal interesting topics for conversation once the food is served. The major disadvantage of speeches before the meal is that people may be hungry, and some speeches can go on for quite some time.

10:

The Wedding Cake

The cake is usually cut during the wedding breakfast. This often takes place after the speeches. If you stick with the traditional timeline, and have your speeches toward the end of the meal, the cake cutting will form the last part of the wedding breakfast.

However, there is a trend at certain establishments to leave the cake cutting until just before your first dance. This would mean cutting the cake in the evening. It is not unusual for a venue to suggest that you cut your cake twice; once during the wedding breakfast, and then again in the evening. This can make sense, as the evening guests do not usually see the cake in its entirety, let alone, get the opportunity to see it being cut.

Currently, wedding cakes are seen as symbolic, and tradition dictates every Bride should have one. In fact some communities go to great lengths to ensure that the cake is a significant focal point of the room. Over the years the historical significance of having a cake appears to have been forgotten. The cake was never intended to be a work of art. It was intended to be eaten and seen as a gesture of thanks.

Why the wedding cake has been reduced to little more than a photo opportunity is beyond me. Do you know the significance of a wedding cake? Why have one in the first place and why do you cut it?

The story behind the cake

The origin of the wedding cake can be traced back to Roman times and beyond. The cake present at a Roman wedding would bear hardly any resemblance to a cake seen at a wedding today. The original, "Cake", would have been made from Oats, Barley, Wheat or Bran. It would have been more like a loaf of bread rather than a cake.

There are numerous explanations, or meanings, associated with a wedding cake: here are just a few for you to consider.

In Roman Days the cake was actually crushed or broken over the head of the Bride. This was seen as a symbol of fertility as the ingredients of the cake had been grown from seed. The ingredients were rare and expensive commodities so the cake also represented wealth and prosperity. Any remaining crumbs would be offered to guests, as a token of appreciation. The same hold true to this day. It's only recently that exotic fruits like Raisins and Sultanas have been found in European kitchens.

Over the years the offering of cake at a wedding reception has been seen as a gesture of gratitude. This expensive confectionary would not normally have been found in the homes of the majority of people. It was seen as extravagant and a thing of luxury. Sharing the cake, and even providing individual boxes, so it could be taken home, was a way of ensuring guests received something of value when attending a wedding.

Icing is also a recent addition to the cake, and so too is the decoration which goes with it. The whiteness of the icing is meant to represent purity. Maybe we should leave that reasoning for another time?

The Wedding Cake can be, and should be, more than just a photo opportunity. The "Serving" of the cake is a significant part of a Wedding Reception that alas has been forgotten. Here is a suggestion of how the cake should be featured as part of your special day. Wedding Party Hosts are more than willing to present this spotlight moment for you. How many times will your guests have witnessed something like this?

The Wedding Cake Ceremony

Imagine standing behind the cake table with your husband. In front of you is your wedding cake. To one side is a plate, a knife and a serving knife. The knife is held by both of you; your husband's hand on top of yours. Together, working as a team, you cut a piece of cake and place it on the plate. You now have a number of choices.

Option1

Your husband offers it to you and you accept it. This represents the husband as the hunter-gatherer of old. Serving the cake to you is meant to say, "I will look after you and feed you from this moment on".

Option 2

You cut the single piece in two and offer each other a piece. This represents an equal partnership and that you will both look out for each other in the years ahead.

Option3

You cut one or more pieces and then take and present them to parents or grandparents as a token of thanks and gratitude.

Your Party Host will provide a narrative to the guests while this is taking place so everyone is informed and understands why. This spotlight moment only takes a few more minutes than a simple cutting, and "pose", which most photographers are familiar with. Wouldn't your wedding day be better remembered if your guests witnessed a traditional cake cutting and serving, accompanied by the explanation?

Part 2:

The Evening Reception



11:

Get The Party Started

The evening reception is a modern creation. It is borne of necessity. As families get smaller groups of friends, colleagues and acquaintances grow larger. In this section we will examine what makes a good reception party. We will also look at some of the “advice” on offer from experts, and yet again, I’ll be sharing the secrets which some of the industry would prefer you didn’t know.

In a typical UK wedding, it is customary for there to be a break in the proceedings after the end of the Wedding Breakfast and the commencement of the Evening Reception. This is usually to facilitate the repositioning of tables and chairs, as well as placement of a dance floor. It is also the time when any entertainment suppliers are expected to set-up any equipment they may need. The time required to turn a room around varies; an hour, to an hour and a half, is pretty typical.

The time an Evening Wedding Reception starts is pretty much guesswork. A lot depends on the time of the Wedding Breakfast and the length of the speeches. It is not uncommon for a Wedding Breakfast to overrun, and encroach into the evening time-line. I can remember arriving at a venue, on numerous occasions, only to be told that the room was still occupied and I had to wait. The best-laid plans can, and often do, go awry, especially when people are enjoying themselves!

A typical time-line would go something like this. Start time at 7.30pm and finish at midnight. Within the four and a half hours a number of separate activities will take place.

Evening guests will arrive.

A first dance will take place.

A father / daughter, mother / son, and or, a family dance will be featured.

A buffet meal or light supper will be served.

Entertainment will be provided in the form of a DJ, Band, Comedian, Singer, and Magician etc

There may be other forms of entertainment such as casino tables, chocolate fountains, photo-booths, fireworks – the list of options is endless.

It would be fair to say that the evening reception, in most peoples' eyes, is seen as the party. I've already declared that I would prefer the party to start as soon as the Bride arrives to be married, however let's stick with this typical example for the moment.

One of the biggest errors made, when trying to plan the evening reception, is estimating the time when all guests will arrive. If you send invitations to fifty couples, with a time of 7.30pm you can guarantee some of them will not arrive before 8.30pm, or even later.

Some people are not comfortable arriving early; they don't want to be the first on the scene. Others may have things to do before they can get to the party, like arranging baby sitters. Either way, the fact is that it will take at least an hour for you to meet and greet fifty couples who start arriving at 7.30pm. In other words, it will be at least 8.30pm before you should think about your first dance or serving any food.

I wish I had a pound sterling for every time a Bride and Bridegroom have said to me, "we want to get our first dance out of the way as soon as possible". I've also seen, and heard of, situations when advice has not been heeded, and first dances have taken place too early in the evening. Inevitably this has resulted in very few people wishing to join-in. Polite applause and best wishes, are not the same as being surrounded and cheered-on by your guests.

The reason why the timing of a first dance is so important is down to human nature. People need time to relax and unwind. They need to be given time to get in the party spirit: in more ways than one. Alcohol plays a big part in any party. Unfortunately, not everyone is a party animal and some people are quite shy. Drink can loosen inhibitions and enable people to let their hair down. Sad but true.

Here is another fact you may not appreciate. Only about a third of people at a wedding reception are going to be party animals. Another third of your guests would not normally be drinking or dancing on a Saturday Night. Even fewer would be in a party frame of mind if you marry on a Friday or a Sunday. The final third are neutral. This group is open-minded, and if the atmosphere and the entertainment are to their liking, they will soon slip into party mode.

Where will the party be?

This is a question which many Party Hosts ask. It's not a trick question. When a Bride is asked this question it is natural for her to repeat the name of the venue. When asked the same question again it's not unusual for her to appear confused or puzzled. I have to admit that repeating this question is teasing the Bride. The point of this questioning is to get the Bride to focus on what happens during a wedding reception.

Whether she likes it or not, the Bride, will be the centre of attention throughout the day. This is even more evident in the evening. If a Bride is content sitting at the bar, guess where her friends will be? If the Bride and Bridegroom are smokers, and they spend a lot of time outside smoking, guess where their guests will be? If a Bride likes to dance and spends most of her time on the dance floor, guess where the party will be?

The point I'm trying to make here is that a great party needs a focus, and at a wedding reception the focus is on the newly weds. Many Brides often say that they don't want a fuss and that the party should be a chilled affair. This I can understand. After the stress of planning the wedding and going through the ceremony, I can relate to the fact that all she wants to do is relax and enjoy the party. Some couples even decide that they don't even want to have a first dance.

I can't stress enough that you will need to work closely with your Party Host in order to strike a balance, to achieve the right kind of party, which bests reflects your personality. Party Hosts will listen to your concerns, and will work with you, to create a party with which you are comfortable. Your Party Host will have many suggestions which will help maintain the focus of the party in keeping with your dreams. Parties can be relaxed and sophisticated. They can also be fun and funky. Receptions can be wild, and crazy, or a mixture of styles. The key to creating the perfect wedding reception is for your Party Host to understand you and your likes and dislikes. A Party Host needs to build a relationship with his client, so that on the day, he is acting in their best interests. Everything a Party Host does should be as a representative of his client, and you should be relaxed and confident in his ability to deliver what you want.

Setting the scene

Dressing the venue for the evening reception is important. Creating a wow factor need not cost the earth. Remember, once the ceiling lights are turned off or dimmed, people will only be affected by their immediate surroundings. Table design and dressing can enhance the event, and personalise the party for the guests seated around them. Centerpieces can often be a focal point and the subject for conversation. Lately the choice of centerpieces has become even greater thanks to the introduction of battery powered LED lighting. These lights offer a really attractive alternative to traditional candle tealights.

Talking of lighting, one of the more recent additions to venue dressing is that of LED up-lighting. It's now possible to have lights that wash the walls with colour. These new lights can change their colour instantly, and be programmed to fade or transition between a variety of colours. This means that a Brides' colour scheme can now be used to create an entire room to compliment her choice. This lighting can also be used for great dramatic effect during your first dance. Ask your Party Host for more information about this exciting new development.

Dance floors have also changed in the last couple of years.

It used to be that you only had a choice of a polished wooden floor or maybe a black and white chequered floor. Nowadays you can have an all white floor or an all black floor. There are also sparkly-lit floors and LED lit floors which offer an endless choice of colours, either static or changing. These new floors are proving to be really popular and they certainly add a touch of glamour to the party. Dance floors can be supplied by venue dressers, some Party Hosts or independent specialist companies.

Less is more

Usually, Brides will determine what kind of entertainment to offer their guests based on past experience of attending other weddings. In some cases, Brides will be influenced by their wedding professionals. When it comes to entertainment I would say this; less is more. There is a temptation to try and pour a quart into a pint pot. [Giving my age away with that analogy] If you try and introduce too much entertainment, especially if it is located in different parts of the venue, it will serve to fragment the party.

As a working DJ, I have struggled on a number of occasions, when guests have been distracted by Casino Tables or Bucking Broncos and Chocolate Fountains. There is nothing wrong with introducing this kind of entertainment into your Wedding Reception. All I ask is that you understand how this will impact on other activity. In other words, the timing of your first dance and the serving of any food should be considered when using diverse entertainment. Don't expect a full dance floor while other entertainment is being offered elsewhere in the building.

If you are thinking of live music, remember to bear in mind that the fantastic Band you saw at the local pub a few months back, may not be suited to a wedding reception.

Once again I could recount a number of instances when a Band has died on stage at a wedding reception. It wasn't the Band's fault. They did what they did because that is what they do. Some Bands, it goes without saying, are very good. For a Band to be well received at a wedding they need to be versatile, and be able to play a wide range of music.

Exceptions to the rule apply. I've seen some specialist Bands do really well, however this depends on how well known they are to the audience. On the other hand, many a Band has made me, the DJ, look brilliant. It's a common occurrence for DJs to save the night.

A good Party Host will have a wide selection of music and will play to the audience. He will keep the dance floor busy, and keep energy levels high, right up until it's time to finish. More about Wedding DJs and Party Hosts later

The Buffet

The buffet can have a major impact on the evening. Generally, but not always, dancing is not a good idea while food is being served. Health and safety policy in some venues, will insist that dance floors are cleared when food is being served.

The timing of the buffet is critical. If the food is served too early it won't get eaten. If it is served too late, it can seriously disrupt the flow of the evening, and encroach on dancing time. Once again the timing is very much guesswork. Consult not only the venue, but also your entertainers, to work out what time is best for you. Remember this. If a venue says we always serve the buffet at xxxx time beware! To me, this says that the suggested time fits better with their routine, and especially with the time they need to employ the catering staff. This is your party and you should be able to have it your way.

The Finish

Knowing when to finish the party can be tricky. Many venues have extended licensing for drinking and dancing. It is not unusual for Brides to be offered a bar closing time of 2.00am or later these days. I would respectfully suggest that this is not a good idea. If you take into account the time you got up in the morning and all of the preparation before your wedding, how long do you think you will last before exhaustion sets in? The same is true of your guests. How likely are they to be still up and dancing after midnight?

It's much better to finish a party on a high with everybody involved, than it is to be left to fade into obscurity. If you send your guests home wanting more, they will remember the party as an outstanding success. Remember the last time you went to a concert, how did you feel as the curtain came down?

12:

Your First Dance

Traditionally your first dance as husband and wife signals the start of the dancing, and the end of the “Formal” part of the day. Some Brides and Bridegrooms relish the idea of being in the spotlight, for three or four minutes, while others are quite shy.

Generally your photographer will want to capture this memory, as will your guests, and the videographer, if you have one? In my opinion, it is important to make sure that this dance is presented in such a way that everybody is involved and aware of what is happening. Sometimes this moment can be understated and poorly managed, resulting in guests not being aware of what is happening. Difficult to imagine I know, but very often I hear stories of the first dance going almost unnoticed.

I’ve met Brides-to-be who have shared their experience of weddings that they have attended where “Nobody danced”. I find it hard to believe. However they insisted it happens. I can also put this down to a disconnection between the DJ or Band, and the lack of preparation and staging prior to the first dance.

Timing of the first dance is very important. There is a window of opportunity, which will depend upon the time-line. Generally speaking, the time for the first dance is when all of the guests are in place, and everybody is relaxed and happy. If the wedding is one where everyone is present for the Wedding Breakfast and Evening Reception, then sooner rather than later, is a good time. If you are having a split day, with a separate evening reception, and expecting a significant number of extra guests, then later in the evening is preferable.

Top Tip

Once you have consulted with your Party Host and decided on the right time for your first dance, stick to it. Ensure your photographer knows and understands what time your dance will take place. It is not uncommon for photographers to pressure Brides into bringing forward the time of the first dance. Why they should try to do this is beyond me. I know many of them are contracted to photograph the first dance, after which their work is done. [The cynic in me is saying an earlier first dance is to the benefit of the photographer and not the Bride]. Please remember that time-lines have a habit of slipping. If people are having a good time, no one will want to rush them. Very often the best weddings run late. Your photographer needs to understand this and be flexible. Make sure this scenario has been discussed and that your photographer is happy to accommodate your wishes.

There is a formula that needs to be followed to generate a great reaction to your first dance. Communication and staging are vital. First of all, the entire bridal party need to know what you intend to do. Some couples prefer to dance throughout alone. Other couples decide they would like to be joined by their guests part-way through the song.

Your Party Host understands how to guarantee the end result. He or she will offer ideas on how your wishes can be achieved. What follows is one example. Each Party Host will have his own way of achieving what you want.

The first thing required is an announcement of intent. A ten-minute warning will prepare guests for what is about to happen. The Best Man and Bridesmaids should be aware that their responsibility is to make sure the rest of the bridal party is gathered together. Another announcement should be made three or four minutes before the agreed time. By now the bridal party and the photographer, as well as all of the guests, should be in the loop and expecting the first dance.

Finally, your Party Host will introduce you onto the dance floor, for your first official dance as husband and wife. He may, for even greater effect, ask you to re-enter the room or position yourself in a far corner. Bringing you into the room or having you walk through the room to the dance floor prolongs the moment and adds atmosphere and excitement. It is also a good idea for there to be a change in lighting while this is taking place. People only take-in ten percent of the spoken word, so adding a change of lighting will help underscore what is happening. The final ingredient to a successful introduction is the choice of music. The choice is endless. Your Party Host will have loads of ideas. I often use a traditional fanfare followed by the "Bridal March". I've also been known to use the theme from "Star Wars" or "Superman". You may wish for more classical piece of music. Whatever you feel comfortable with, will work for you. To recap; communication, lighting, music and positioning will result in an introduction to a first dance which everyone will be aware of.

Once you are on the dance floor and ready to go it's a good idea to pause for a moment. This is when your photographer will want a couple of shots and no doubt your guest will too. It can also be a nice touch if one of you takes the opportunity to thank the guests for being there.

This doesn't need to be a full-blown speech, a simple, "Thanks for coming, enjoy yourselves, and mine's a vodka and tonic", is all that is required.

Some venues often believe that this is a good time to cut the cake, either for the first time or once again for the evening guests to see. This can work and there is no right or wrong here. Again preparation and communication is the key to success. If the cake is to be cut, then the venue staff should be ready to remove the cake once the cutting is over.

Now we are ready to start your special music selection for your first dance. The choice of music should be one of significance to you. If you choose to dance to this song entirely alone this is fine. However if you wish for the bridal party to join you, they need to be familiar with the choice of music. This is also true of any second or third choices you may have. It's difficult to persuade people to dance to a tune they do not know. In fact, the reverse is true. If people recognise a tune in the first ten seconds they are more likely to dance to it.

I would always recommend building the atmosphere when it comes to first dances and family dances. Usually the purpose is to encourage the guests to join the Bride and Bridegroom on the dance floor. This process also needs to be staged and produced and directed by your Party Host.

Very few Brides appear to be aware of the tradition of Father and Daughter dances or Mother and Son dances. I'll come back to them in a moment. Meanwhile let's take a look at building the dance floor during and after a first dance.

If the intention is for the Bridal Party to join the Bride and Bridegroom mid-way through their first dance, this is what I would suggest. Ask your Party Host to introduce both sets of parents [if applicable] by name. The more personalised the introduction the better. "Would John and Sue Jones please join Paula and Paul on the dance floor" is better than saying "can the parents of the Bride please join Paula and Paul on the dance floor"?

Likewise the same is true for the Best Man and Bridesmaids. If first and last names are used it creates a more personal and intimate atmosphere. Introducing the Bridal Party in this way also introduces them to guests who may not know who they are.

If the first dance is Bride and Bridegroom only; the second dance needs to be something similar to the first. Keeping the tempo the same lets the transition flow more easily. Once again I would advise selecting a song that is well known. Introducing the bridal party, either collectively or individually will be your choice. Most importantly the Bride, Bridegroom and Bridal Party all need to remain on the floor for the third dance. This is the dance where we would like everybody else in the room to join in.

The third choice of music may well be similar to the second. I suggest this as mentally the guests expect this to be a fairly low-key kind of dance. Something slow to mid-tempo will be safe choice.

Songs like “My Girl” by the Temptations or “Can’t Take My Eyes Off Of You” by Andy Williams fit this slot perfectly. However you may wish to use this third dance to crank up the atmosphere and really get the party started. In which case “Get This Party Started”, and “I Gotta Feelin’” may well hit the spot and transition into a more dynamic atmosphere. All of the music choices should be made in consultation with your Party Host. He or she will have the experience and the expertise to know what will work and what won’t.

Father and Daughter dance

This is a nice touch and goes down really well. This dance provides an opportunity for the Father of the Bride to have one last special dance with his daughter. It can often be a very poignant and emotional part of the day. A father and daughter dance is not for the feint hearted. If a father chooses a meaningful song you can guarantee there will not be a dry eye in the house once it is over. Alternatively the song choice may be humorous and comical, depending on the relationship between the two of them. Song choices of, “My Girl”, “I loved her first”, and “Butterfly Kisses” spring to mind. The timing of this dance is up to you. Traditionally it follows the Bride and Bridegroom’s first dance. It also works really well as a pre first dance song. This transition works really well. Imagine, as the song comes to an end, the father hands his daughter to his new son-in-law and they start their first dance? Magical!

Mother and Son dance

This is where the Mother of the Bridegroom dances with her son. This dance traditionally takes place after the Father Daughter dance, except when the previous example is followed.

Sometimes this dance can take place simultaneously with the Father and Daughter dance depending on the song choice. A typical example of this would be the song “You raised me up”. Either way, there are plenty of music selections that work for this dance. Once again please take advice and decide what works best for you.

Custom Edits

Here is something very special indeed. Your Party Host may be able to record your vows, either in advance, or live on the day. It’s possible for him to make a custom edit of your first dance and drop your words into the song where appropriate. This may be by way of introduction or during an instrumental break. Imagine how your guests will react to this, especially the ones who were not fortunate enough to be at your wedding ceremony? The same kind of sound drop can be used for a Father and Daughter dance. All it takes is some careful scripting and editing. Of course, for best dramatic affect, this kind of project needs to be kept a secret.

Your Love Story

I have held this suggestion back until last. This is something very special. It can only be accomplished by a very small number of professional Party Hosts in the UK. I believe, when done well, this can be a spotlight moment, which really is, unique. This idea requires your Party Host to narrate how you met and fell in love. The story will reveal the path you have both taken and your journey together so far. Your Love Story can be the introduction to your first dance, so that everybody gets to know how you arrived at this moment in time, and can share your joy.

The whole process of staging a first dance, followed by special dances or a family dance, has but one purpose. It is to focus on the Bride and Bridegroom and their families. This part of the day unites them and sends a message to the remaining guests. Asking guests to join you on the dance floor is to invite them to a part of the celebrations. A Party Host will care about how well this is achieved. Creating the right atmosphere at this crucial stage will set the scene for the rest of the evening.

The evening Reception is now well and truly underway. The challenge now is to keep everyone engaged and the party rocking. More secrets await you.







13:

The Buffet

The buffet can in my opinion, be best described as a necessary evil. Evening Receptions will require some kind of food to be served. How much you need to cater depends on the number of guests. The number of guests who have been with you all day and those who are only attending in the evening can complicate calculations. Things like what time you ate earlier, and just how hungry everyone is likely to be, are difficult to gauge. In the old days, venues would allow you to make a guess and cater accordingly. Alas those days are gone. Unless you are employing an independent caterer, or catering yourself, venues tend to insist that you cater for 100% of your guests. Their fear is of not providing enough food. They would rather there was food left over rather than there not being enough. I understand this and so too does your Party Host. Therefore a plan of action is required, to ensure that the buffet is featured, and presented, in a way which makes the most of the time, effort and cost taken to prepare and serve it.

The timing of the buffet will affect the dancing. The job of the Party Host is to minimise this effect and use it to his or her advantage. Some venues will insist that the buffet is served at a set time with no deviation. Other venues will be more flexible. Generally buffets tend to be served around 9.00pm to 9.30pm give or take fifteen minutes. This means the timing of the first dance and family dances will revolve around the time of the buffet. Many first dances will therefore be performed at around 8.30pm.

In some instances, especially when the time-line has slipped, and things are running late, the first dance may well not take place until after the buffet. This could be at 10.00pm or even later. A good Party Host will work with the venue and will be prepared for any eventuality. Either timing will work as long as your entertainer has a Plan B as well as a Plan A.

The logistics of serving a buffet can be quite complicated. Some venues will manage the way the food is served while others will simply leave it to you. There is nothing worse than a buffet being, “opened” and nobody visiting the buffet table.

Top Tips

My first tip is that the Bride and Bridegroom should officially open the buffet. This requires your Party Host to make an announcement, which invites you to open the buffet. I would also suggest that the Bridal Party is also encouraged to join them at the opening. This way, everybody in the room will see what is happening. It will also mean that the most important people get to eat first. It also encourages others to join-in knowing that they are not the first in-line.

Encouraging the remaining guests to visit the buffet table can be done in various ways. A general announcement may work. Some venues will expect guests to be called forward table by table. This gives the Party Host an opportunity to introduce ideas which entertain, and select which table has earned the right to visit the buffet next.

The Living Guest book

Maintaining the party atmosphere during the buffet can be both challenging and rewarding. I'll share something with you called “The living Guest Book”, other entertainers refer to it as “Pearls of Wisdom”. The idea is to keep your guests entertained at a time when there is no dancing. This piece of interaction is designed to maintain focus on the Bride and Bridegroom while introducing some of the guests to others who may not know who they are.

Most Brides are familiar with the idea of a guest book. It is usually placed on a table, and guests are invited to record their sentiments about the day, and leave their best wishes. If you ever looked closely at one of these guest books, you'll notice that the first couple of pages are really interesting and creative. Unfortunately, as you get further into the book, the messages get shorter and shorter, as people run out of ideas as to what to write.

To introduce the Living Guest Book, your Party Host, will wait until everyone has got their food and are sitting down. He will then explain what is about to happen. “Ladies and Gentlemen; while you're eating, we thought it would be a good idea if you were to offer some advice to the new Mr. & Mrs. Jones, to help them start off their married life on the right foot. On the table in front of you are some advice cards.

You'll notice there is a sentence which starts off "to have a long and happy married life, the one thing never to do is....." or "to have a long and happy married like the one thing never to say is...." There are four examples of the cards on the table. All you have to do is complete the sentences".

Your Party Host will go on to explain that this advice may be something offered to them when they got married. It may be something they learned for themselves, the hard way, once they married. The advice can be sincere, humorous, risqué or very often down right rude. People who complete the cards need to add their names in the space at the bottom, and indicate their relationship to the Bride and Bridegroom. This enables the Party Host to identify who the aunts and uncles are, as well as the work colleagues and old school friends.

The guests are told that they will have ten minutes to complete the cards. They will then be collected and the best of them will be read out to the Bride and Bridegroom, publicly, before the dancing begins once again. Once all of the cards have been collected the Party Host will quickly review them. Anything too rude is rejected and saved. An even proportion of the funny, sincere and slightly rude is ideal. Once a dozen or so cards have been selected your Party Host is ready to share the advice with the guests. The remaining cards will be saved and presented to the married couple at the end of the evening.

The use of a radio microphone enables your Party Host to visit the tables as he announces the name of the person on each card. Sometimes, the card has been written in the name of another person, without their knowledge. This can be very funny, and a little embarrassing, for the person named on the card. It's the job of the Party Host to know just how far he can go with the humour without straying into areas of bad taste. This is also true when it comes to reading aloud the advice on offer. Anything dubious is better coming from the author. Your Party Host will encourage the person who wrote the advice to read aloud over the microphone, what was written. It's a good idea to always finish with sincere advice from a close family member, and thank the married couple for being good sports.

By the time this piece of interaction is over, people in the room will know more about their fellow guests and the Bride and Bridegroom. Your Party Host will also remind guests that if their advice was not read aloud, it was probably too rude to share. However, all of the advice will go into a presentation folder, and be given to the Bride and Bridegroom later. So next time they are invited round for coffee, beware. The folder may well be sitting on the coffee table and their advice might well come back to bite them!

The Shoe Game: [Mr. and Mrs. or who knows who the best?]

This is something that is catching on in the UK. It is another piece of interaction which fits in well with the time taken-up by the buffet. There are many examples of the shoe game to be found on YouTube. This “game” when properly presented can be very entertaining and insightful. Done well, it need not take up more than five minutes. Done badly, it can be a little tacky. The secret to a successful shoe game is staging and asking the right questions.

This is basically a version of the “Mr. & Mrs. game. The idea is to find out how well the new Bride and Bridegroom actually know each other. The Party Host will ask a series of questions and both the Bride and Bridegroom will answer simultaneously by holding up either a ladies shoe or a man’s shoe. The Bride and Bridegroom will be positioned on chairs, which have been placed on the dance floor back to back. They take off their shoes and swap one of each with each other. They should now be holding one each of his and her’s shoes.

The Party Host will ask a question. The Bride and Bridegroom need to answer the question by holding up the shoe that best fits the answer. There are a number of examples and variations on this game to be found on You-Tube. Take a look and then adapt what you see to suit your needs. The humour and fun come from the hesitation and agreement, or disagreement, revealed by your answers. Your Party Host will have a comprehensive list of questions guaranteed to test your knowledge of one another.

How well do you know your future husband?

How would you answer these questions?

“Out of the two of you”

- who made the first move?
- who's the better cook?
- who said "I LOVE YOU" first?
- who has the wackiest family?
- who's the better driver?
- who's the faster driver?
- who spends the most time in front of a mirror?
- who is in control of the cheque book?
- who wears the trousers in the family?
- who is in charge of the remote control?
- who spends the most time getting ready to go out?
- who will be doing most of the gardening?
- if you haven't already... who is most likely to break wind in front of the other first?
- now that you're married, who will be the first to say... "Not tonight"
- who's the better kisser?
- who will be the first to fall asleep tonight?
- who has the smelliest feet?
- who steals the covers more?
- who popped the question?
- who says "I love you" the most in one day?
- who talks more?
- who's most likely to use up all the hot water?
- who's most likely to get lost?
- who's most likely to ask for directions?
- who's the one to make up after a fight?
- who's the one that started the fight in the first place?
- who's the most likely to wake up grumpy in the morning?
- who's most likely to wake up with a hangover in the morning?
- who's most likely to be running late?
- who spends more money?

After the Buffet it's time to get back in dancing mode. What better way to start the dancing than with a group of girls on the dance floor. The best way to assemble a group of girls is with a bouquet toss. So let's bring on the Bride.

14:

The Bouquet Toss

Bouquet Toss:

This is a good way to kick-start a dance floor. I tended to use this straight after a break for a buffet meal but it can be used anytime. Your Party Host will invite all the “single” ladies onto the floor. For the purpose of this interaction the marital status of the female guests should be ignored, as many women as possible should be invited onto the dance floor. The more the better: The Bride should be positioned at one end of the floor and all the other women lined up along the opposite side. Something suitable and appropriate should be played like “Girls Just Wanna Have Fun” or “All the Single Ladies”. Any men who may have cameras should be invited to come and join the fun and get some good shots. Ideally the Bride should pretend to throw her bouquet so that the photographers can get a good shot of the bouquet about to leave her hands. This exercise is then repeated. An artificial bouquet can be substituted if the Bride does not wish to throw her own. This time the photographers focus on the line of catching girls. The Party Host will count down 3, 2, 1. Watch the girls scramble to catch the bouquet. A big cheer and round of applause for the girl who caught it will follow and then a lively, “girly”, tune will be played to keep all of the women on the floor. In folk law the girl who catches the bouquet is deemed likely to be the next married. Congratulations!

The Garter ceremony:

Proceed with caution this is not for the feint hearted. If you're a young Bride and Groom who are up for a party then this can be very entertaining. The basic idea is that the Bride is wearing a garter underneath her dress and that the Bridegroom is invited to remove it in front of the assembled guests.

A chair is placed in the centre of the floor and the Bride sits down. The groom is positioned in front of her and he kneels down. Your Party Host will then explain that the Bridegroom is expected to remove the garter. To make the task more difficult he can't use his hands. Sometimes he may be blindfolded. The Bride can choose to assist her husband by raising her dress, just enough to reveal the garter, and protect her modesty. She can also extend her leg forward a little so that the Bridegroom can reach the garter without too much trouble. Once again some suitable music should be played to add dynamics to what is happening on the floor.

Toss the garter.

Once the garter has been retrieved the Bridegroom may wish to toss the garter to a group of assembled single men. This is basically the exact same routine as in the bouquet toss with the roles reversed. Again, a suitable macho tune should be played while the men wait to catch the garter as it flies through the air.

Finally the guy who caught the garter should be invited to place in on the leg of the girl who caught the bouquet. The folk law here is that they will be the next couple to be married. This is where things need to be handled diplomatically. The Party Host will have no idea as to whether the girl is comfortable with what is about to happen. If she is OK with this then fine. If she is not, then the Party Host will simply encourage her to extend her arm so that the garter may be placed there and not on her leg. A lively piece of music will be played for the men and women to dance to. "Girls & Boys" by Blur usually goes down well.

Full on Interaction

Simply the best party pack: [A guarantee that everyone will dance!]

Sometimes a Bride will say something like, "I want a fun party with everyone on the dance floor". Easy to say but not easy to achieve as many a DJ has found to his cost. The Party Pack is a very effective solution. I should stress that this will not be to everyone's taste. When first introduced to me I thought "No way" "not at a wedding reception. However I am happy to say I was wrong. What follows is a description of a type of interaction that can only be explained as explosive. When deployed correctly, it is almost like turning on a switch.

Simply the best party pack is a "party in a box". The box comprises a selection of novelty items like inflatable guitars, saxophones and microphones together with tambourines, maracas and a selection of party hats and glittery boppers and wands.

One hundred and sixty eight items are included to which we added a Hawaiian Lei for every guest.

Now there is nothing unique about using inflatable props etc, to add a bit of fun to a party, however in this case, “it’s the way which we used them”, which gave us our desired result.

Your Party Host will insist that all of these items are kept a secret. Only the bridal party will be aware of them. The evening reception will begin in the usual way, with the atmosphere being built slowly. The first dance will be as romantic and personal as it is expected to be. Your Party Host will still encourage the addition of a Father / Daughter dance or maybe a “Family” dance. Either way, up to and including the end of these dances, nobody will have a clue as to what is about to happen.

Imagine the surprise and astonishment, when a high-energy track like, “La Bamba” is played, alongside an invitation to the guests “To come join our party”. An army of helpers including venue staff, Bridesmaids and Groomsmen will distribute the party pack among the guests. Mature, booted and suited men will have an inflatable guitar thrust into their hands. Women will be given their beachcomber hat and maracas. Guys will be seen wearing their sunglasses and “Blues Brothers Fedoras”. The music selections will continue with a set of, dare I say, cheesy party tunes. A Blues Brothers medley, followed by “Surfing USA”, “Rockin’ all over the world”, “Let’s twist again” together with requests generated from the guests, who will, by now, be going crazy. There is video available to prove this actually happens.

The Party Pack has never failed to ignite the room and create a frenzy of activity on the dance floor. The sight of all the guests, adorned with Hawaiian leis and all those props, is amazing. Instantly people become aware that this is a fun party. It’s a celebration in every sense of the meaning of the word. Everybody is guaranteed to have a good time!

I still don’t fully understand why this works so well. Logic would say that it shouldn’t, but it does. Any fear that the guests will shy away and refuse to accept the props as they are offered are unfounded. Your guests will love The Party Pack.

I guess the best analogy I could think of, which I used when explaining the concept to potential clients, was that of a family Christmas meal. What makes a Christmas meal so different from any other meal? It’s probably the Christmas crackers, which make a bang when pulled and reveal their contents. The family wears their silly hats, and read the corny jokes found inside, while trying to identify the novelty gift which flew over the other side of the table. The seasonal music is playing and before you know it everyone is in the moment and enjoying the occasion.

The same is true of the party Pack. It may not be to your taste however, in my experience, not once did it fail to get everyone onto the dance floor.





15:

Play-lists

Recently there has been a trend toward Brides supplying quite lengthy play lists to their Wedding DJ. I'm not sure why Brides should feel the need to do this. I would guess that this may be more prevalent when the Bride has not met the DJ, and has been unable to discuss her music preferences with him or her.

I'm puzzled as to why anyone would hire a professional service and then try to tell them what to do. Maybe the fact that many mobile DJs are not perceived as being professional has something to do with this. You wouldn't hire a professional photographer and then tell him, or her, what shots to take, and what order they were to be taken in? The professional photographer will know what is best for you, based on his knowledge of the location, and the conditions on the day, such as the quality of daylight.

You wouldn't book a Band and then tell them what to play. Likewise you wouldn't book a comedian and tell him what jokes to tell. Spontaneity is a vital ingredient when it comes to live entertainment. It's no different for your DJ, even though he is playing recorded music.

Most DJs welcome play lists. A play list will help a DJ get a feel for his audience before the day of the wedding. A good play list will point him in the right direction, which is all he needs. The best play lists are those that consist of about twenty to thirty popular dance tunes which everyone will know. If this list is varied and covers different tastes of music it will become the main building block, musically, for the evening. A good wedding DJ or Party Host will use his knowledge and experience to add to the list songs which he believes will compliment your choices.

Less is more. On average a DJ will play no more than fifteen to twenty songs in an hour.

A typical wedding reception may require four or five hours of music content. If you insist on giving your DJ too many requests his head will be stuck in the list, when he should be concentrating on reading the audience.

What your DJ does not require is an extensive list of a hundred or more songs. He definitely doesn't want a list of songs and an instruction to play them in a specific order. No professional DJ would ever dream of selecting every song before playing music at a live event, let alone a wedding. [The exception to this rule would be a club DJ who is booked to play a specific set in a short time period]. Your Party Host knows only too well that the guests will determine what is played, because they will be encouraged to make requests on the night. These requests will fuel the party. For every request received, your Party Host will have his own choices, which will build on what is being requested. This is why he only needs a short list of requests prior to the party. Your Party Host is looking at the list to see the genres of music preferred. He is also looking at whether the music is current or if it reflects a particular era.

If you have a specific theme to your party, or would like the music to be "different", I would suggest you work closely with your Party Host to come up with the right balance. Music selection is subjective. What you like may not be to your guest's tastes. Sometimes your choices may only be appreciated by a small number of your guests. Two heads are better than one. Obscure music and lesser know tracks need to be balanced with more popular choices.

Do not play list

This type of list is very important. It's also just as important to be very specific with this list. "No cheesy music", doesn't tell your Party Host anything. Everyone has a different notion as to what cheesy music actually is. It may be that you would prefer your Party Host to avoid songs with actions or dance routines associated with them. In which case list these songs by artist and title, to avoid any confusion. Personally I regard cheesy music to be seventies disco. You may be thinking cheesy music is "old Skool" music. Everything is subjective, so don't leave any room for error. Be specific, but also be prepared to reassess your decisions on the day. It is not uncommon for one of your guest to request something on your do-not play list. Make it clear to your Party Host that these songs are non-starters, or allow him to approach you on the night, if he feels there is enough demand for a specific tune.

The Juke Box or I-Pod Wedding

A growing number of Brides have explored this option over the years. An I-Pod is merely a modern-day personal Juke Box. I guess people who opt for this alternative have a very strong reason for not hiring a DJ or a Band. I don't believe the reason can be one of cost, because hiring professional sound equipment, getting it delivered, set-up and then collected after the event, can often cost more than hiring a cheap DJ.

I may be wrong, but it could be something about control. Loading an I-Pod with "your music" will guarantee that only your choices will be played. This is fine if everyone at your wedding likes your music. It may be that you have thought about this, and asked your guests to submit their choices in advance. So now, the I-Pod contains something for everyone.

The flaw in this reasoning has already been mentioned. There is no way a set play list will work at a live event. Setting the I-Pod to play at random won't work either. Somebody has to be in charge or else chaos will ensue. Tunes will be repeated as guests become dissatisfied with what is currently being played. Too many people will want their choice "next". Believe me when I tell you that a Party Host spends a great deal of his time fending off unsuitable requests. He also has to be diplomatic, as almost every request these days seems to be accompanied with, "play it now"!

16:

Live Entertainment

No DJ required – we have booked a Band.

Live music can really add a great atmosphere to the party. There is something about live music that can add an extra dynamic to the party. Most Bands, but not all, tend to specialise in one genre of music. Will the majority of your guests like that genre? If you know of a professional Band that understands some of the challenges of playing at weddings, you should have a good time.

There are a couple of factors that you need to be aware of when booking a Band. Some Bands expect to be listened to, as in a concert, rather than danced to. They may have a slower set at the beginning of the evening and a more lively set later on. How will this fit into the flow of the night? Will the Band introduce themselves and their music selections or will they simply play one tune after another? Will there be gaps in-between tunes or will one song immediately follow-on from the next?

Specialist Ceilidh Bands are still as popular as ever. If your guests enjoy this kind of community dancing this could be a good choice. I'm sure my Scottish DJ friends will agree that this music often helps make the party swing.

If you decide on a Band as your main entertainment, what will happen before and after their performance? A Band will usually play for a limited time. How will your guests be entertained between sets or after the Band has finished?

A Band and DJ working together

Sometimes a Bride will decide that she wants live music. I have to admit, even though I've been a mobile DJ for over thirty years, nothing is better than a good live Band. A good Band can take your quality entertainment to a whole new level. Let's take a look at what you should be looking for in a Band.

A Band should be professional. They should also conduct themselves in a professional manner. By this I mean they should turn up on time, and be set-up and ready to play when required. Unfortunately I have worked with so many Bands that treat a wedding reception like a rehearsal. The last thing you want is for them to take forever to set-up and starting late.

The sound check is, I agree, important. It does not, however, need to consist of half a dozen tunes. It certainly should not be used to play across or play over your DJ's music. Alas this happens far too frequently.

A good idea is to provide contact details to both the Band and the DJ in advance. This will help both of them sort out logistical issues before the wedding day. The Band should also make available to the DJ their play list. Knowing the set in advance will ensure that the DJ does not duplicate, and potentially detract from any of their songs. This is where an anomaly comes to light. Bands often have set play lists whereas DJs do not. The reason for this is simple. A Band will play for no more than forty minutes to an hour before they take a break.

Live artists, like singers, know only too well that attention spans are short. It is virtually impossible to hold an audiences' attention over a great length of time. This is why they will take a break and often split their performance. Some may insist on performing one single spot. A live performance needs balance. Fast songs need to be interlaced with slower tunes. This provides contrast. A Band will often work toward a big finish, often saving their best material until last. All true professionals will want to leave their audience wanting more. It's no different at a wedding.

Your DJ needs to know what the Band's last song is and be ready to play immediately they finish playing. The last thing you want is for there to be a pause in the proceedings or "dead air". A Party Host will be ready to thank the Band and get the audience to show their appreciation in the traditional manner. A smooth transition from live music back to disco music will keep the night flowing and the dance floor full.

A Band who also DJ during breaks

This may sound like a case of sour grapes but believe me it is not. There may well be Bands out there that can do this. I am yet to be convinced. Generally, Bands that make such claims are saying that they will play disco music during breaks. There is a big difference between what they do and what a professional Party Host does.

One of the differences will be in equipment. The Band will usually not be using specialist DJ equipment. They will simply be playing music through the Band's sound system. Lighting may also be an issue. However the biggest potential issue will be the standard of experience and expertise of the Band/DJ. Once again the Band/DJ may be competent, but by no means will he or she be an expert in weddings. I'm sure this subject will be controversial. I can hear the outcry. There will be Band members up and down the country who insist they do a good job. I beg to differ, or put another way, I believe a Bride deserves to know exactly what she is getting for her money.

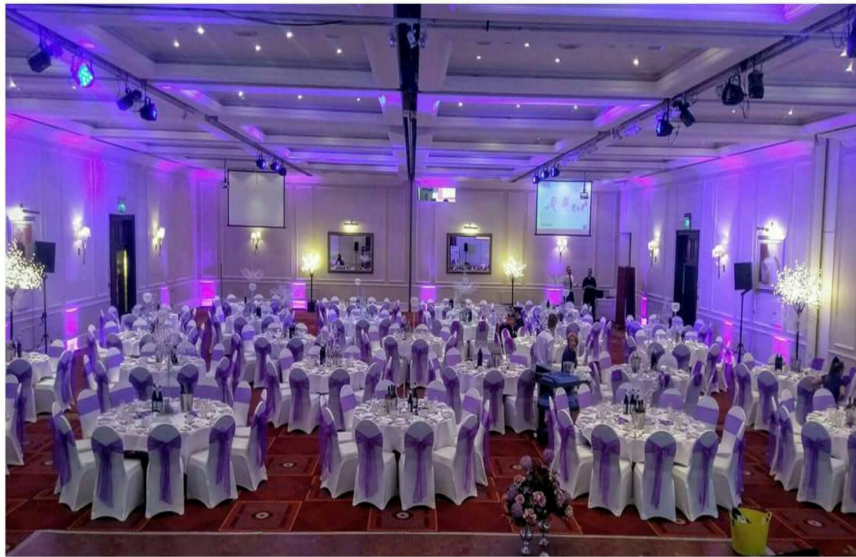
I can't see a Party Host wanting to play second fiddle to a Band. A Band member who plays music during a break is unlikely to understand the relationship between the Bride and her guests. Most likely he, or she, will play music in sets, which are played at more or less every party. I've worked with a number of Bands who also claim to DJ. It may well work at other types of parties but not, in my opinion, at a wedding reception. It doesn't take any great talent to press play. It takes a great deal of talent and expertise to musically satisfy guests at a wedding.

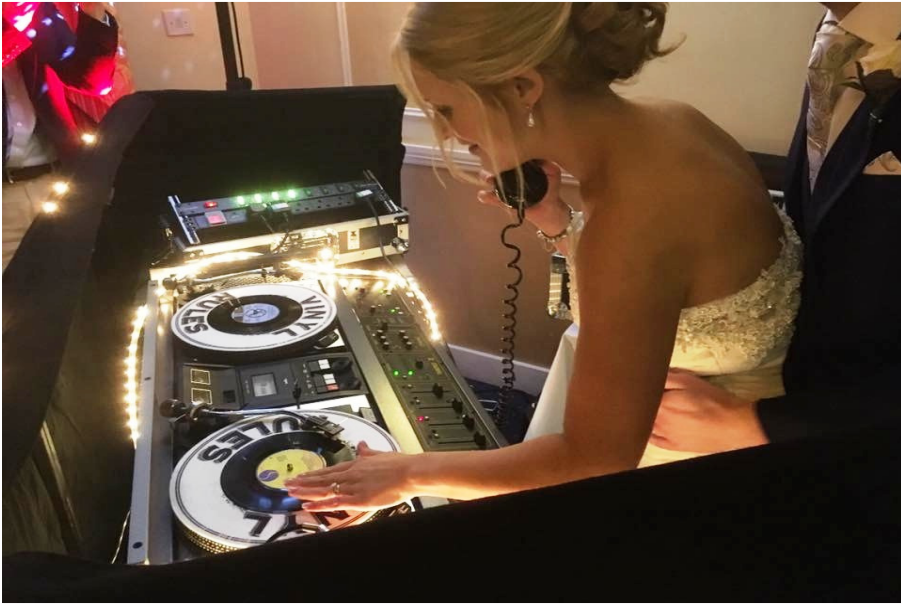
Solo Artists and Duos

Solo artists and duos come in all shapes and sizes and cover many different types of music genres. Generally these artists fit much better with mobile DJs. Often, but not always, they use more compact sound systems and therefore take up less space. This works really well because space is nearly always an issue when Bands and DJs are expected to share an area. A DJ working with a solo artist will very often share equipment in order to save space. Maintaining the visual impact of the DJ and artist is often easier and there are fewer issues to resolve between them. Many such artists portray themselves as "Tribute acts" which are very popular. This often creates a good contrast between the DJ's music selections and those of the live entertainment.

Magicians, Comedians, Caricature Artists etc

Whatever choice you make with regard to "other entertainment" please remember that someone needs to be in control. The Party Host will take responsibility. He will work with you to ensure your guests get the most out of what is on offer. Setting the stage, and making introductions, will help keep everyone informed and engaged.





17:

Questions to Ask a Party Host Before You Hire Them

1. How long have you been a mobile Disc Jockey?

This will give you an indication as to how experienced your entertainer is. I would suggest that a good Wedding DJ will have had to have performed at least thirty or more weddings. Experience alone should not be seen as a guarantee that the DJ will be anything other than average. After all he or she could have been doing the same thing badly for ten years, compared to someone who has been delivering fantastic entertainment for only a couple of years.

2. Can you provide original references?

Original references are a good indication as to the quality of service provided by an entertainer. More recent references are a good indication that he is keeping in touch with modern trends and music genres. Video testimonials are very powerful. They help you to not only see how happy the client, is but also to hear the enthusiasm in their voice. Likewise, a fake video testimonial is easy to spot.

3. Will you be willing to play requests and discuss music selection with us?

As mentioned previously this kind of two-way communication is vital for the success of the party. A Party Host will want to know as much about your likes and dislikes as possible.

4. Can we meet you?

In my opinion this is where true professionals really shine. There is no other method for a Party Host to show you what he does differently. You wouldn't dream of telephoning a high street store and asking what dresses they have and how much are they? Or more specifically you wouldn't be able to make a valid comparison without seeing the dresses, feeling the quality and trying them on. Even the best looking dresses look good on the rack, but may not suit you when worn.

Meeting your entertainer will confirm if he, or she, is the right "fit" for you. Let's face it if you like someone, it's easier to do business with them. The same is true of your entertainer. If he likes you and gets along with you, he will be determined to do a great job for you. You really do need to feel comfortable with your Party Host. Most Party Hosts will need to meet with you on at least two, if not three, occasions before he has every detail covered and is confident nothing is being left to chance.

5. Do you use Professional Equipment?

Don't get too hung-up on the tools; however do confirm that your entertainer has the right tools for the job. Many Party Hosts have invested substantial amounts of money to ensure the equipment not only sounds right, but also looks good too. You will be amazed at how technology has changed the size and shape of speaker systems recently. LED lighting effects are also helping create fabulous atmospheres in venues.

6. Do you provide backup equipment at my event?

This is crucial; in fact it is not only back-up equipment that needs to be on hand. All professional DJs will carry a back-up system. Most will have two or three methods of delivering music playback. Just as importantly, you should ask your entertainer what his plan B is? What happens if he is taken ill? What if his transport breaks down on route to the venue? A professional will have thought through every eventuality.

7. Do you provide a written contract?

A legal contract is your only security. Things do happen despite the best plans. I can't believe the number of DJs out there who do not contract themselves to their clients. You can rest assured that Part Hosts associated with this book will have a fair and balanced contract available for your protection.

8. Are you insured?

Good question: Insurance won't prevent accidents but it will help resolve the after effects. Insurance is peace of mind. Plain and simple: Public Liability insurance [or PLI] is the bare minimum requirement for a professional entertainer. Many venues will insist on seeing proof of insurance before letting a DJ or Band onto their premises.

9. How much time do you need to set-up your equipment?

This is useful to know especially if time is tight on the day. Sometimes it may be prudent to have your entertainer set up earlier in the day. This may involve an extra charge but is worth it to avoid unnecessary delays later on. Early set-ups are a good idea for marquees and venues that have room to accommodate the equipment without detracting from the smooth flow of the proceedings. Many DJs prefer to set-up early as this takes the pressure off. They are more relaxed and able to change into their stage-wear at their convenience.

10. How will you be dressed for our occasion?

Generally the answer to this question should be "How would you like me to be dressed". Most Party Hosts will be prepared to fit in with your dress code for the wedding. This can be smart-casual or formal. Many prefer to wear a Dinner Suit [Tuxedo] while others will have custom stage wear. The most important point here is that your entertainer is smart and presentable while representing you on your special day.

11. Do you belong to a professional organization or trade group?

Belonging to a professional trade organisation or group will not necessarily make your entertainer any better than one who does not. However membership of such organisations can provide a support network. These organisations offer training and a network of fellow professions available to assist in emergencies. Currently there are only two officially recognised, not-for-profit, DJ associations in the UK. They are "The National Association of Disc Jockeys" and "The South Eastern Discotheque Association".

There is also a commercial organisation "The Alliance of Mobile & Party DJs". This organisation also operates "The Wedding DJ Alliance". There are also numerous on-line groups and forums to be found within the realms of social media.

12: What specialist training have you undertaken?

This question will separate the men from the boys. As technology has improved and equipment has become more readily available, everybody and their son suddenly believe they can DJ a party. At the other end of the scale, there are far too many DJs who believe they know all there is to know, and that they don't need to attend training courses.

Unfortunately a DJ's ego can be bigger than their talent. The Directory in this book contains only people who have attended formal training events. I know them all personally. I can recommend each and every one of them. They have either attended one of my training courses or those run by my good friends Mark & Rebecca Farrell. All of the training referred to is designed to enhance the DJs performance and level of service. Some Party Hosts have also attended drama and improvisation classes.

The Party Hosts understand what makes a memorable wedding reception. They understand your need for peace of mind. They promise to exceed your expectations. In short, they are like no other Wedding DJ you have met before.

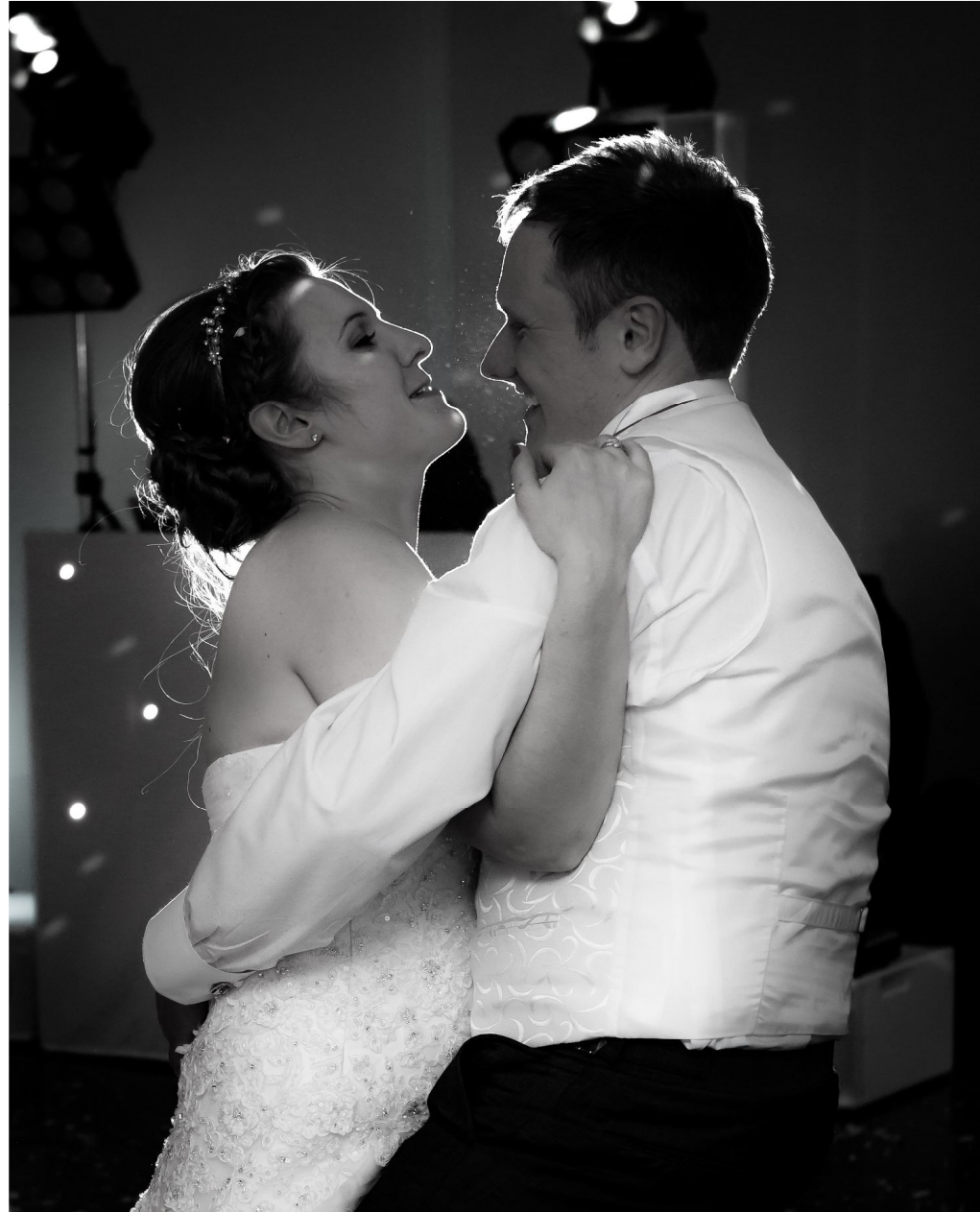
13: How much should I pay for a Party Host?

This is the \$64,000 question? The answer depends on how much you value the success of your Wedding Reception. The Party Host's fee will be for his professional services, which commence at your first meeting, and carry on until long after your guests have gone home. You are not paying for five hours on the evening of your wedding. Most Party Hosts will spend something between, twenty and forty hours in preparation and performance time for your wedding.

Supply and demand also influences how much a Party Host will charge. His fees will rise as his popularity increases. Certain dates are more popular than others. Booking sooner rather than later will save you money.

I'm reluctant to mention typical prices that you may encounter. What I would say is all Party Hosts are unique, and therefore it is impossible to make comparisons based on price alone. Generally speaking, I would not be surprised to find Party Hosts charging at least two or three times more than an average disco. Some Party Hosts are charging considerably more. What they charge is directly proportional to the enjoyment of your guests. They would not be able to charge such amounts if they did not deliver what they promise to do.

I would remind you of the statistics in chapter one. Is it not better to spend a little less on flowers, chair covers, table decorations, favours and food in order to provide outstanding entertainment for your guests?



18:

Destination Weddings Married Abroad.

The temptation to escape the United Kingdom and jet off to another country can be very attractive. I know, because that's exactly what my wife and I did nine years ago. We married in Paphos, Cyprus, and enjoyed the experience so much that we later moved to the island. We now provide entertainment services for Brides who come here to get married.

I have contacts with professional Party Hosts in many parts of the world. Over the years I have built relationships with entertainers in the U.S.A, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. We all share the same motivation, passion and desire to create memorable weddings for our Brides.

Dress code;

Think seriously about the climate in your destination of choice. I see so many bridal parties suffering in the heat of a Cypriot Beach Wedding because they are inappropriately dressed. There is no air conditioning on the beach! My colleagues in Florida report similar situations over there. Morning suits and waistcoats may be traditional, and look good in the photographs, yet they are not practical when the temperature is thirty degrees centigrade, or above, in the shade.

Smart, tailored shorts and white shirts can look really good. Brides don't need big dresses with lots of layers. Shorter, simpler styles look really great and also help keep a Bride cool. Dressing comfortably will help you feel relaxed and enable you to enjoy the ceremony so much better.

The Ceremony;

The wedding ceremony abroad can be quite different from a ceremony in the UK. I would urge you to do some research and find out what exactly constitutes a wedding ceremony in your chosen destination.

Here in Cyprus the ceremony is quite short. It is not uncommon for the whole event to be over inside ten to twelve minutes. Why not add some of your own personal vows to the ceremony. Maybe a guest can add a reading to the proceedings?

Location;

Destination weddings offer a choice as to where you get married just like in the UK. Do you want a church wedding? Usually this will require you to prove your membership of a particular faith before this is allowed. You may also be required to be resident in the country for a certain number of days before the ceremony can take place.

Hotels often have purpose built chapels, or designated areas in their grounds for marriages. Some even offer beachfront locations. Whichever spot you choose to marry in you should try to get some video footage of a typical wedding before making your final decision.

How many guests will be at your wedding?

Getting married abroad need not be a big event. It's not unusual for a couple to fly off and marry simply because they don't want the stress and strain of a wedding in the UK. It can also be difficult convincing family and friends to travel and spend the time away from home.

If you want as many of your family and friends as possible to be with you at your wedding you need to plan ahead. Many people have to book holidays with their employers a year in advance. Others may be restricted as to when they can go on holiday. School holidays are also the most expensive times to fly abroad.

Small and friendly;

Most of my wedding receptions here in Cyprus are for groups of between twenty to thirty guests. The vast majority of receptions are held outdoors. Typically a Bride will marry in the late afternoon or early evening. Photographs will be taken and often sunset shots will interrupt the wedding breakfast.

Check out the menu;

Eating a meal in a warm country is different from a meal in the UK. The pace of life, because of the heat, is a lot slower. A meal is very much a social occasion and is therefore not to be rushed. It's not unusual in Cyprus for a meal to take two hours or more to complete. If you add the time for speeches this can often mean a first dance will not begin until two and a half to three hours after sitting down.

My advice is to do your homework, relax and go with the flow. Don't expect your guests to be dancing all night. The heat and humidity of a foreign country can make people lethargic. Alcohol can also have a debilitating effect. Drink plenty of water and let things develop naturally. People will dance when they are ready to.

Tour operators and local hotels and restaurants will all have ideas to share with you. If it's possible, I would always recommend you make a short inspection trip to your chosen destination before you make a final decision. This will add to the cost but it will help you get it right from the outset.

Back in the UK

Many Brides opt for a post wedding reception once they are back in the UK. If you like this idea, ask your Party Host to help with ideas for the party. This is most important. There is a potential for your guests to feel excluded for the celebrations because they were not with you on the day you married. You need to recreate, as much as is possible, the atmosphere of your wedding day.

Top Tips for your UK party;

- Wear the clothes you wore on your wedding day and encourage people who were with you to do the same.
- Use photographs in a montage and have them shown on a big screen for your guests to enjoy.
- If you have video of the wedding ceremony, maybe play this just before your first dance. This will help your guests relive the moment.
- Include some music from the country where you married in your play list.
- Perhaps include in your meal or buffet, one item of food from the county where you married or a local specialty drink, for your guests to enjoy.



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My Thanks

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