



Creating the right soundtrack for weddings

Weddings in the UK are big business, with couples and their parents spending thousands of pounds on their big day. Organising a wedding is a very stressful event, in surveys it's up there with death of a loved one, divorce and moving house! What should be a very joyous occasion, is often overshadowed by all the little details the happy couple need to consider, coordinate and arrange.

Choosing a venue for both the service and the reception is a key decision for every bride and groom. Selecting somewhere which offers the right mix of facilities whilst creating the right atmosphere for their big day is paramount. Music is one of the key strands to run throughout the day, from the arrival of the first guest, to the service, into the reception & wedding breakfast with speeches, to the first dance and into the evening entertainment. Helping your guests by offering them all the AV facilities they need will make their lives easier and make them more likely to choose your venue over others.

Music is so important. Helping your guests to create the soundtrack for their special day is a vital part of a successful wedding. When we hear songs from the past they can stir up powerful emotions and transport us back in time. Like stepping into a time machine; you can feel everything as if you were actually there. The Bride and Groom might want to capture memories from special events at their wedding; music which reminds them of when and where they met, their first date or the proposal. The relationship between music and memory is powerful, which is all the more reason to get the right associations for every wedding day. Deliver this in the right way to ensure that wonderful memories of the wedding, at your venue, continue to be conjured up in the minds of the happy couple and their alike guests for many years to come.

What music and technology do I need to offer my guest?

AV requirements for a wedding will vary throughout the day and will depend on if your venue is licenced to conduct the wedding service as well as hold the reception. To help you to make sure that nothing gets missed, here is a helpful checklist to ensure that you, and any events companies or DJ's you may employ, have everything you need to make your guest's big day sound just how they want it to.

Specialist sound, light & video systems integrators

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(i) Ceremony music

Many of your Brides and Grooms may choose to bring their own music for their service. As such you need to let them know what format this needs to be in and ensure that you have a connection point in the main ceremony room to enable them to play pre, post and during ceremony music. This either needs to be accessible and easily operated by someone in the wedding party, such as an usher, or by a member of your staff if necessary. If the Bride and Groom opt for live music during the ceremony, you will also need to ensure that you have got microphones or power for instruments available.

In larger rooms a microphone and possibly an induction loop might also be needed to ensure that the registrar can be heard by all the guests in the ceremony.

(ii) Before and after the ceremony

Your Bride and Groom may request that you play their own background music either before or after the ceremony, during any reception drinks and possibly in the dining area where the wedding breakfast is served. Ideally all these rooms, if there are more than one, should be linked to enable the same music to be played throughout. This creates the same mood for all the guests, allowing them to all feel part of the same event.

It is possible that the Bride and Groom may request live music to be played after the service during the drinks reception, maybe a piano with or without a vocalist or even a saxophone or string quartet, so again microphones and power for certain instruments might be required in another area. Whatever the music choice, it's important that guests don't mingle in silence, as it can make people feel uncomfortable, equally the music that they hear needs to be appropriate, and played at a suitable volume, to ensure that it doesn't overpower their conversation.

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(iii) The Wedding Breakfast

From the toastmaster through to the speeches after dinner, it is key that everyone in the wedding party can hear what is happening during this equally important part of the day. A good speaker system in your main dining or events space is key to this, you deliver the same quality food & service to all your guests and they should also expect to receive the same quality audio.

Considering the all important speeches, make sure that everyone can be heard by ensuring that microphones are available if necessary. Some guests may be hard of hearing or some speakers might be too embarrassed or emotional to really deliver clearly throughout the whole of their speech. To help everyone, It is always best to have a microphone and suitable speakers on hand so that every guest can hear all of the proceedings and really feel involved in the day. The best and most aesthetic delivery of sound will always be from an installed ceiling speaker system that is specifically designed to cover that room. If you do not yet have this facility at your venue and the DJ is to be in the dining room after the wedding breakfast, it might be possible to use the DJ's speakers for the speeches. It's worth remembering however that these might not fit with the decor and ambience of the wedding breakfast and the sound will not be best balanced this way.

With the rise of multimedia, do you have a projector and screen to enable photographs to be shown to the guests during the speeches? From baby photos to selected images from the stag and hen parties, your wedding parties may want some visual cues to help them deliver their speeches, (and jokes), sharing images and memories. This may be something that you use an external events company or the DJ for, as many DJs now use video screens to show video clips and pictures, but either way it may well be something that you are asked if you can provide.

Using digital signage can help to direct guests around your function spaces and signpost what is occurring in different areas as well as helping to personalise the event to help to celebrate the day.



(iv) After dinner entertainment

Although a playlist can be very personal and work to create a mood as background music during the drinks reception or the meal, it is very difficult to predict which songs will work well at what times during a party.

As an ex-DJ, I would urge you to encourage your Brides and Grooms to hire a professional DJ or entertainer. For a DJ, a wedding reception can be one of the hardest gigs, as the audience you have to engage with is truly diverse: from grandchildren to grandparents, ballroom dancers to ravers and everyone in between! Pleasing everyone and keeping the dancefloor full can be a real challenge, but when you get it right it's very rewarding.

A good DJ will be more than someone who just plays a compiled playlist, they should read the crowd and respond to their mood and dancing preferences, cracking appropriate jokes and creating a memorable party atmosphere along the way, which a predefined playlist just cannot achieve. A real professional will mix selected tracks in with the dancing so that it means something to the Bride and Groom and yet the rest of the crowd, who may be too young or too old to remember your special tracks, can still have a great night.

As a venue owner you need to see how you can make the DJ look like part of your venue for the day to come together seamlessly.

In an ideal world you would have the DJ set up prior to the ceremony and reception drinks so that the set up is not seen, although with some venues resetting rooms for dancing after dinner this can be harder to accomplish. If this is not possible, think about hiding the DJ equipment behind a curtain or screen or even under table cloths so that the turnaround is faster and boxes do not have to be carried through the venue, breaking the mood of the day which everyone has tried so hard to create.

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(v) What is better, owning or hiring?

There are certain items, which as a quality venue you should own, to ensure that they are available to offer your guests at all times, but other equipment you may wish to just consider hiring. The table below should help you to prioritise your choices.

Items	Use	Own?	Facilitate?	Hire?
Speakers in dining & events spaces	Speeches & background music	Yes, this should be a minimum requirement	N/a	N/a
Radio Microphone	Enabling speeches in any location within events spaces	Yes if demand is high enough	Yes	If you find the use of this is infrequent then hiring makes sense
Music player socket, input in function space	Play ceremony or pre and post ceremony music	Yes, this socket should be located in a logical place for guests and or staff to connect and play back music	Yes	N/a
DJ equipment or Band equipment	Wedding evening party	No	Yes, allow for the use of power sockets, set up space, limiters, etc	Yes, hire in a professional from an agency or from the Bride and Groom's personal experience
Screens	Best man's speech, memory images, etc	Yes, if you have enough storage space and regular use of these. They can also be used as meeting screens.	Yes, allow for power sockets around the venue and possibly rigging/flying points	Yes, hire from local events or AV providers as and when the need arises. This allows you to hire a screen appropriate to the size of the event.

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(vi) Managing music volume

If wedding guests are also staying at your venue make sure that where possible you place the guests most likely to be disturbed by a noisy DJ at the other end of your venue, put the best man and bridesmaids in the bedrooms over the dancefloor, as they are most likely to need to change or freshen up and are most likely the last to bed! If this is not possible, try to work with the DJ to maintain a sensible noise level. Limiters can be fitted and the Environmental Health Officer may insist on these, but try to avoid this route if you can as they can create a poor guest experience, causing the sound to cut out just as the party gets going which equally may mean that the DJ will not want to play your venue again! Some sound limiters have a traffic light system, which if managed correctly enable the venue manager and or the DJ to see when the music is getting too loud and to take action to address this gradually and in a controlled way without actually killing the ambience of the evening.

By considering all of this you really should be well on the way to helping your prospective Brides and Grooms create the perfect soundtrack to their wedding. With music being so closely linked to evoking memories, getting it right through for your guests will mean that you can create the very best memories of their special day at your venue.

For further information about AV equipment and installations for weddings and all other events please call [CGA Integration](http://www.cga-integration.co.uk) to discuss how to make the most of your venue.

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