



Wedding Reception Extraordinaire? Choose the right musicians!

*(An update of an article by my former agency partner and mentor,
Tony Boffa, published March 6, 1988, - The Maine Sunday Telegram)*

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“Excellence is not an accident!”

“Music can soothe the savage beast” the saying goes, but the wrong kind of music can produce them by the roomful!

Despite careful planning, no one can guarantee that your wedding reception will turn out exactly as you envision. But hiring competent professionals, sincere and sympathetic to your needs, can swing the odds in your favor.

Perhaps one of the most important ingredients is the hiring of professional musicians. In the 30-plus years I have been involved with special music events, I have compiled some guidelines that should be considered before hiring a musician or band. They are divided into non-musical and musical categories.

In the non-musical category: Will the musician(s) arrive early enough to set up before the first guests arrive, regardless of performance time?

Is the band leader accommodating prior to the reception? Will he or she call you prior to the event and “script” the day with you?

Is he or she prompt in returning calls and discussing the band’s responsibilities at the function? Anxiety usually runs high before a wedding and nobody needs a musician with a cavalier attitude.

Will the band members be clean, well-groomed and dressed appropriately for the occasion?

Is there an articulate member of the ensemble designated to emcee? Will that emcee do as little or as much announcing as you desire? I have found that people who request “no emceeing” usually have witnessed incompetent emcees at other functions and are concerned that this will happen at their reception.

Another non-musical issue is the length and frequency of breaks. A wedding reception is not usually a standard four hour dance. Flexibility is highly important when coordinating music with a meal being served and with a photographer or videographer trying to capture memories.

In the musical category, the keywords are “versatility and authenticity.” I have had requests such as: “We want all swing at our reception.” “Please play a lot of jazz.” “We’re really into progressive alternative”, etc.

Although great musicians can stay within these parameters, and it is obviously helpful and necessary for the musicians to know and understand your tastes, sometimes the wedding couple’s musical preferences are too focused on one group of guests. At any mixed-age group affair, the more people you can involve in the festivities, the more the ball gets rolling. Isn’t that what we really want?

Before you hire a limited musician/band or place musical restrictions on a versatile act, be fully aware of what you are doing, why you are doing it and who you might be unintentionally ignoring or alienating. A quality wedding music professional can easily discern the desires of your guests. Many times it is best to engage the right group, let go of the reigns and enjoy the ride!

Most bands you hear in clubs play a standard club repertoire. But the versatile function musician comes equipped with an extensive and broad repertoire, much more than is needed and/or used. Consider the need for dinner music. Sometimes that quiet background music serves to relax everyone, gets them talking (*not shouting*) at their table and sets the tone of togetherness for the rest of the event. For the first hour or two, non-intrusive ambient music may be a desired priority.

Think about ethnic music, dedications, guests who have traveled, birthdays, anniversaries. Can the musician(s) play songs appropriate to these situations?

How about the special dances with parents or grandparents that are often desired at such occasions? Is the band capable and willing to learn something you request? Will they sound authentic crossing different styles of music? It is always a plus to have literate musicians who read music, yet play with a “street” groove.

Also keep in mind that good function musicians are very spontaneous. If they see something happening, they can back it up with the right sound and songs. Many times it is that unexpected tune or event that gets people in a festive mood. Always remember that spontaneity is the key to good times. Great musicians capitalize on that.

Remember, the importance of your wedding day cannot be overstated. And keep in mind that the music and musicians are there to enhance the affair, not detract from it. Consider all the ideas and facts before hiring the musician(s). And once the choice has been made, don't wait. The best ones book far in advance, especially for the wedding “high season” (*in Arizona, approximately October - March*).

Finally, some of your best references for musicians come from club owners and event coordinators who have their own very good reasons for wanting to work with reliable music professionals. These people have seen more musicians/bands than anyone and know which ones are associated with successful affairs. Do your homework; inquire and hire. Then relax and enjoy one of the most exciting events in your life!



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He and his former business colleague and mentor, Tony Boffa, ran one the most successful music agencies in New England for over two decades. Gil now teaches and performs mostly in Arizona. Tony Boffa can be reached at [Tony Boffa Music](#) on Facebook and is very active in the Florida jazz scene.

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