

Choosing the Perfect Band for your Party: A Guide



Introduction

It can be difficult, expensive and stressful to organise a great party. Although I may be a little biased, choosing the right band is probably the most important decision you will make in creating an unforgettable atmosphere.

Over the years I have worked on organising a range of events, some small involving only one or two bands, to others dealing with a bill of over 15 professional bands, comedians and an on-site casino!

This guide is to help you through the process and to give you some advice and inside tips that you may not have considered to make sure that your party goes off without a hitch. After all, the last thing you want are any nasty surprises!

I hope this information proves useful, whichever entertainment you decide to book for your event.

Slim Si & the Band

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Choosing the Right Band

Booking a band can seem like such a big expense. You may not realise that out of the fee you pay has to cover all of these costs:

- VAT (if applicable)
- Van hire and fuel
- PA System and instruments
- Lighting
- Equipment insurance
- Equipment safety testing
- Public liability insurance
- Advertising
- Website
- Rehearsal costs
- Accommodation (if applicable)
- Office and administration costs

A professional band will also have to do a lot of extra work to make sure your party goes without a hitch. They will need to liaise with the venue, and discuss timings and logistics with you before the day. On the day of the party, they will need to load the equipment, drive to the venue and set everything up. All together, your party will require about 70 man hours of work. If you imagine what it would cost to hire a plumber for 70 hours, the cost of hiring a professional band starts to look very reasonable!

While there are many amateur musicians who will work cheaply for cash or free beer, would you want your party to be in the hands of inebriated amateurs not confident that they would actually show up on the day!

Top tips for choosing the perfect band

- Look at the band's website. Do they appear to be a professional outfit?
- Check their testimonials
- If possible, **try to see/hear the band live before booking;**

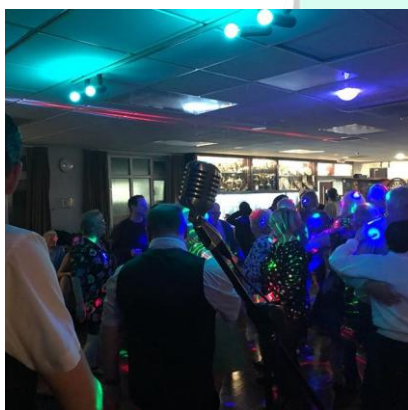
many bands can sound great with some studio tinkering

on a demo without being able to back it up at a live event,

and you'll never know how many 'takes' it took to achieve the

studio sound.

- Do they respond to emails promptly and answer their phone when you call?
- Do they issue a written contract and behave professionally in their communications?



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The Venue



Believe it or not, but there are many people who discover (to their horror) that their venue won't allow them to have the band they want.

Venues situated within a mile of a residential area often have strict noise controls imposed on them by local councils. These controls usually fall into one of the following categories:

- The size of band may be restricted
- Live music may be restricted after 11pm
- An electronic sound limiter may have been installed (see side panel on this page for more information on Sound Limiters)
- Certain instruments may be banned (e.g. live drum kit)
- The band may be forced to use a PA system (speakers and amplifiers) supplied by the venue with strict volume restrictions.

Every professional band should play at a volume appropriate to the event. You don't want a band that plays so loudly your guests can't talk to each without shouting. However, you do want a band to be able to play at a volume loud enough to create the right atmosphere for dancing. Some of the restrictions imposed by venues could make that impossible. Unfortunately, many of these conditions are contained in the small print of your venue contract and won't be revealed to you until after you have signed the venue contract. I think this is very unfair. If a venue has any entertainment restrictions they should inform clients of this before they ever sign a contract.

Sound Limiters

There are two types of Sound Limiters; the first simply measures the level of sound in a room.

A reasonable volume limit is 95 decibels (95db) while a limit below 85db could make it difficult for the band to create the right sort of atmosphere.

The other (more common) type of Sound Limiter not only measures the level of sound but also shuts off power to the stage if that limit is reached.

If your venue has this type of Sound Limiter you may find that some bands won't play at the venue as a sudden loss of power could damage their equipment and ruin the atmosphere of your party.

If you haven't already booked your venue, ask the venue manager the following questions:

- Do you have any restrictions on the size of band?
- Are there any restrictions on when live music can be played?
- What space is available for the band?(Most bands need an area approx 5ms wide by 3ms deep)
- Can you provide a room for the band to change in and rest between their live sets?
- Are there any obstacles for the band bringing their equipment into the venue? e.g. stairs, restricted parking etc.
- If the venue has supplied you with a list of recommended bands check whether they receive a commission payment from those bands or their agents. This is very likely to influence their recommendations.
- Does the venue use a Sound Limiter? If yes, ask what type of sound limiter it is (see side panel) and what level it is set to.
- Does the venue restrict the use of a live drum kit?

If your venue imposes any noise or size constraints speak to the band.

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What Size band should I book?

The size of the band has no bearing at all on the size of your venue or the number of guests at your event.

Physical space

The elements of a band that take up floor space are the instruments and the PA system. As all bands need instruments and a PA system the only real difference in size is the number of singers who take up very little extra space. The difference in space required by a 4-piece band and a full 9-piece band is only 1 square metre!



Volume

The volume of any band is largely dictated by the drum kit. Every other instrument and singer is balanced to the volume of the drummer. Having additional singers or musicians in the band therefore makes very little difference to the overall volume.



A good band should understand that this is your party and not their concert. Some guests may prefer to chat and don't want to be drowned out by deafening music. A professional band should always keep their volume at a level that is low enough to keep your guests happy but loud enough to create the perfect atmosphere on the dance-floor.

What difference will having a smaller band make to the performance?

Some smaller bands tend to use recorded backing tracks to supplement the missing musicians and singers. A backing track can never truly replace the energy and sound of a live musician. As such Slim Si and the Smokin Aces never use backing tracks, and the sound is representative of original Rock n Roll (where quite often the band was no bigger than a 3-piece).



Hiring a smaller band will not save space or reduce volume.

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A good band must understand that the people they are playing to are your guests, not their audience. Their objective should be to create the perfect atmosphere for your guests, and for the reasons you have chosen the style of music that they play. They should make each performance personal to you and put the maximum amount of energy, enthusiasm and dedication into every performance no matter how many functions they have performed at that year.

Which style?

The style of music is crucial to creating the right atmosphere at your party. Rock music may be great to listen to but may not always be appropriate to appeal to all of your guests, and may not get people up and dancing and enjoying themselves. Classic Rock n Roll music is a favourite that appeals to all ages.

Book Early

Good bands get booked up early. Peak dates for function bands are Fridays and Saturdays between May and September and the last two weeks of December. Most bands will charge double the usual rate for a party on New Year's Eve.

Location

The distance from the band's base and your party venue will have an impact on the price the band will charge. If the band need to travel 3 hours or more to reach your venue they will also add the extra cost of fuel and overnight accommodation.

Book Direct

If at all possible try to book directly with a band rather than through an agency. Not only will this make communication more efficient but it will also save you 15%-20% commission that the agency normally charges to the client.

Insurance

A professional function band should have at least £5m of Public Liability insurance and many venues now insist on £10 million. This is a legal requirement in the event of any unfortunate accidents or damage that may be caused by the band or their equipment. If your band does not have adequate insurance your venue may refuse to let them play. The same may also apply to Portable Appliance Testing. Check this before booking.

Admin and Communication

A professional function band should have at least one person responsible for handling all of the administration and planning of your wedding. There are many bands with excellent musicians and singers but disorganised and slapdash when it comes to making the arrangements necessary to make the night run without a hitch. Speak to the band leader and try to get a sense of whether they act in a professional and organised manner.

Set Duration and Timing

Most bands will perform for either 2 sets of 60-70 minutes or 3 shorter sets of 40-45 minutes for a typical party. Although many clients feel it would be better to have the band performing continuously for the entire duration of the evening this is not recommended or practical. Several hours of energetic live music can be too much for people to listen to without a break.



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Checklist



- Decide on the atmosphere that you want and choose the band that will help you create it.
- Speak to your venue manager and make sure that they can accommodate the type of band you want.
- Don't go for the cheapest option. An inexperienced or "cheesy pub" band could ruin your event.
- Book direct with the band to save on agency commission and book early!
- Speak to the band leader. Do they seem efficient and knowledgeable?
- Check that the band has the required Public Liability insurance
- Check out the band's testimonials and references.
- Enjoy your own party and dance the night away!

*We hope this guide
has been useful*

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