

Choosing the Perfect Band for your Wedding: A Guide



Introduction

It can be difficult, expensive and stressful to organise a great wedding reception.

Although I may be a little biased, choosing the right band is probably the most important decision you will make in creating an unforgettable wedding reception. Your friends and family will remember the fantastic atmosphere that a live band can create long after they have forgotten about the food, the flowers or the bride's dress.

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 reception goes off without a hitch. I hope this information proves useful, whichever band you decide to book for your big day.

- Si & the Band



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, a professional function band 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 wedding goes without a hitch. They will need to liaise with the venue, learn your first dance and discuss timings and logistics with you before the big day. On the day of the wedding, they will need to load the equipment, drive to the venue and set everything up. All together, your wedding 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, you need to ask if you want your wedding to be in the hands of inebriated amateurs and you want to feel confident that they will actually show up on the day!

Allowing a realistic budget for a professional band is probably the best decision you could make to ensure that your reception is a success.

Top tips for choosing the perfect band:

- Look at the band's website. Do they appear to be a professional outfit?
- Look at their videos and listen to their audio demos.
- Check their testimonials
- If possible, **try to see (or hear) the band playing live**

before booking, as many bands can sound great on a polished studio demo, but not live up to it at a live event.

- 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?

Budgeting for the Perfect Wedding

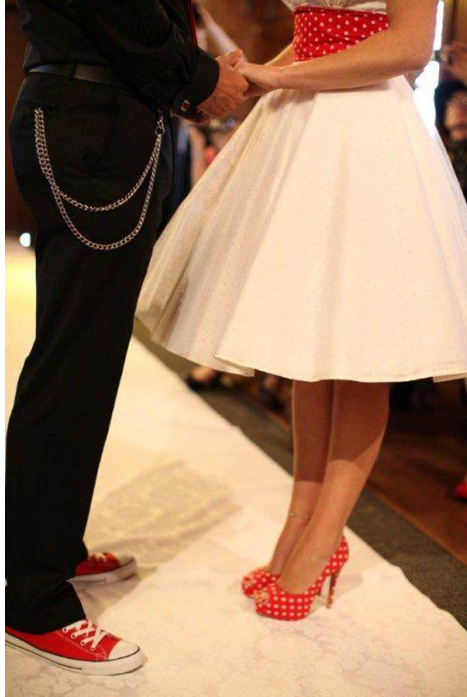
In an effort to create the perfect reception many couples often do too much. Casino tables, singing waiters, magicians, professional dancers and firework displays can often make a wedding feel disjointed and showy. It also adds unnecessary expense and stress dealing with so many different suppliers.

The best weddings happen when people use their budget to create a great party and not by trying to impress their guests.

With different entertainment going on in multiple rooms your guests won't have a shared experience of celebrating your wedding with you.

Make the dance-floor the focus of the party and boogie on down with your guests!

The Venue



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

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 wedding.

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?
If so, does this limit also apply to singers?
(Singers take up very little extra space and add little to the overall volume)
- Are there any restrictions on when live music can be played?
- What space is available for the band?(Most bands need an area approx 5m wide by 3m 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 leader who may be able to find a way to help solve the problem.



Set Times

If 2 live sets are to be played, the first set is usually performed soon after the meal/speeches.

The 2nd set is usually timed so that it ends 5 minutes before the reception is due to end (typically just before Midnight).

If a 3rd set is to be performed this is normally slotted midway between the first and last set.

Either side of the live sets the band will usually play recorded music through their PA system.

Many bands are also happy to play music from your iPod.

Unless you are experienced in selecting dance music suitable for a wide range of ages, it may be better to leave the selection of recorded music to your band.

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?

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.





Running Late?

90% of weddings don't run to schedule. Photographs are delayed because family members have gone missing, guests take longer than expected to sit down and speeches *always* run longer than planned.

Don't worry too much about trying to time your reception down to the last minute. An experienced function band will be prepared for delays and will adjust their breaks to make sure that you get the same amount of live music and the reception still finishes on time.

Keep them on the dance-floor!

The best wedding receptions happen when all guests have a great shared experience in one location. If at all possible, place the bar right next to the dance-floor. Don't give them an excuse to stop dancing!

A good band must understand that the people they are playing to are your guests. Their objective should be to create the perfect atmosphere for your wedding reception and to help your friends celebrate your marriage. 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 reception. Rock music may be great to listen to but may not always be appropriate for a wedding. 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. If you are planning a wedding during these times you should be booking your band at least 12 months before the wedding. Most bands will charge double the usual rate for a wedding on New Year's Eve.

Location

The distance from the band's base and your wedding 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. If you're working to a limited budget try to look for bands that are based within 100 miles of your venue.

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. 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 wedding venue may refuse to let them play. The same may apply with 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 your big day run without a hitch. Speak to the band manager 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 wedding. 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.

Checklist



When should the band setup their equipment?

If you need the band to arrive earlier than 6pm or stay after Midnight, there is normally extra cost involved as freelance professional musicians charge for their time.

If the band are performing in the same room that guests are eating, some couples worry that the band's equipment must be set up before the guests arrive.

From experience, it is not a good idea to have the band perform immediately after the meal and speeches.

Guests need time to allow their food to digest, freshen up and get a drink before they are ready to start boogying away on the dance floor. If you bring the band on too early, you may find that the dance-floor is virtually empty for most of the band's first set.

A professional and experienced band will usually setup immediately after the meal in 30-60 minutes and do so without any disruption to your wedding reception.

- 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" wedding band could ruin your big day.
- Book direct with the band to save on agency commission and book early!
- Speak to the band manager. Do they seem efficient and knowledgeable?
- Check that the band has the required Public Liability insurance of at least £5m.
- Check out the band's testimonials and references. Are they from a reliable source?
- Enjoy your own wedding and dance the night away!

We hope that this guide has been useful.



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