

Setting The Mood - Some advice from the pros on whether a live band or DJ is right

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It has the power to inspire the guests at your wedding reception to get out on the dance floor and boogie.

It has the power to make your first dance as husband and wife emotional and unforgettable. It can be used to set a quiet, romantic mood during dinner and to create memorable moments on the dance floor that your guests will recall for years to come.

So choosing the person or people who create the soundtrack for one of the biggest moments in your life is an important decision. Music can make or break a party, and you need to find performers who understand that, whether they are DJs or bandleaders.

The first major decision you're likely to make when planning the music for your reception is whether to choose a band or a DJ. The major distinction between the two begins with price. DJs can range anywhere from \$300 to \$1,200, whereas live bands can cost more than \$2,500. But before you decide on price alone, consider the possibilities.

Live it up: When you're throwing an elegant affair like a wedding reception, little else compares to the thrill and electricity that a live band can bring. The interactive nature of live entertainment can add a personal touch to your event.

Think about it ' a great vocalist can sing your favorite love songs to you during your first dance as husband and wife. Live singers and musicians have a flexibility to be creative and personalize their performance for you. For example, bandleaders can research alternatives to more traditional wedding songs, or they might even explore a bride and groom's relationship to determine what song would be most fitting for their first dance together. This flexibility and interactivity creates an aesthetic that your guests are sure to remember.

Size matter: Once you decide to hire a band you will decide what kind of band will be best for your event. With the plethora of performers out there, this can be a daunting task. You can narrow down your search a bit by determining the size of your reception. The number of guests, the size and shape of the reception area and the acoustical makeup of the room may help you decide whether you want a duo or a trio providing music or if you want an eight-piece band.

Keep in mind that even if your affair is small, with 60 guests, you don't have to sacrifice great sound. Many three and four piece bands can enhance their sound by using digital sequencing. Some power duos and trios also know how to produce music that will fill up your reception hall, despite their smaller size. If you're hosting a larger event, the size of your band can grow from the traditional, four-piece band to something larger like a 12-piece band or orchestra. It all depends upon

your personal taste, your budget and the effect you want to create at your reception.

Searching for style: In addition to determining the size of the band, you'll want to look for a band that is versatile enough to perform the songs you know will be hits at your reception. Consider what kind of a sound you're looking for ' swing, jazz, classical, rock or a mix of everything ' and seek out bands that can perform in those musical genres.

It's best to stick with professional musicians who aim to have a great band ' not just a great wedding band.

Professional bands will typically offer you a broader repertoire of songs than a band that moonlights on weekends at weddings.

Reach out for recommendations: Once you've decided what size and type of band will suit your reception, you'll want to know which local bands come highly recommended. To find out, talk to vendors in the wedding industry in your area.

Ask managers at respected hotels and reception halls, florists and other associated with the local wedding scene which bands they would recommend. If the several of the same names keep popping up, you'll know where to start making calls.

Seeing is believing: After you have a few band names to pick from, it's time to start making appointments to see bands that appeal to you in action. Whether it's a rehearsal or a performance, being able to see the band you're considering as it performs is one of the best ways to judge it. You'll get to feel for how the band members interact and for how well they perform which will be helpful when it comes time to make a decision.

If you can't see the band in action, ask for a CD or a videotape of a performance, or better yet, arrange a personal meeting with your prospective bandleader. You'll be able to better gauge the band's talent and style.

For economy and convenience, you really can't beat the effect that a polished DJ can bring to your wedding reception. While generally lower in cost than a live band, DJs offer you variety, versatility and many of the same qualities that a live band can.

Variety ' the spice of DJ life: One of the advantages of hiring a DJ is that you and your guests will have access to an extensive collection of music, ranging from wedding favorites that you hear all the time to the more obscure.

Whereas a band may not know how to perform less popular tunes that might appeal to you or your guests, a DJ is sure to have a broad repertoire that will include lesser-known artists. This can make it easier to handle requests from your

guests.

While you or your spouse-to-be may have eclectic musical tastes that can be accommodated more easily by a DJ, remember to not get too carried away choosing music that suits only your own tastes. Most likely, your guests will run the gamut of age, and so their musical tastes will greatly vary. To keep a party going, most DJs will recommend a mix of music to keep guests involved in the festivities.

Original hits, original artists: In addition to their broad repertoires, DJs offer you the comfort of knowing that the music will be performed as it was originally recorded. You don't have to worry about a band taking artistic license with one of your favorite songs. The music is heard exactly the way you and your guests remember it. A DJ needs to take a break, he or she can prepare a mix that will keep the songs going until the break is over.

Choose your own DJ: When you decide to hire a DJ, you will have to determine if the DJ's style will suit you and your guests. DJs can come to your event equipped with extras like lighting, plasma screens with live action video of your guests, dancing and party favors. Additionally, DJs offer differing levels of interactivity with guests. Some serve as a sort of master of ceremonies during the wedding reception, and will do everything from announcing your bridal party to getting your guests involved in the dancing to handing out party favors like Hawaiian leis. Others take a more subtle approach, allowing the bride and groom to be the stars of the show.

Again, seeing is believing: As with a band, it's best to see a DJ in action before agreeing to hire him or her. By observing how he or she runs a party, you will know what to expect when your big day arrives.

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