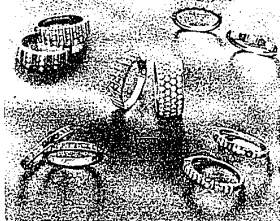


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## Music to wed by: Choosing a band

So, you don't know what you want, but you know what you don't want in a wedding band. Not on anyone the Shonze Brothers could copy. Ditto on anyone copying Twisted Sister. And you definitely don't want anyone to play "Proud Mary."

Like any other aspect of planning a wedding, choosing the band or a disc jockey requires some shopping around. Detroit-area booking agencies, specializing in music for such occasions report that about eight out of 10 customers choose bands they've heard at someone else's wedding.

However, for those who don't have the faintest idea about which band to hire, there remain several ways of attacking the problem.

Booking agencies, which can be contacted by looking under the "entertainment" heading in the Yellow Pages, offer a fairly quick way to survey and secure a likely prospect.

They arrange for clients to preview a band by listening to a cassette, viewing a video tape and/or setting up a time they can see a group perform on stage or in rehearsal.

"We won't sell a band without the customer seeing it," said Jerry Patlow of Jerry Patlow & Associates, Detroit. He arranges for clients to see a band in rehearsal or on stage.

Others, like Entertainment Consultants of America Inc. of Plymouth, allow clients to view video tapes of a band before sending them out to see a live performance. If the client likes the band's video tape, Entertainment Consultants informally holds that band for the clients until they can view a live performance.

But before the clients can listen to a band, agents generally ask questions to get an idea of what kind of music would satisfy them.

"If they tell me they've seen 17 groups and want to see more, I don't want to deal with it," Patlow said. "It's like going to car lots and kicking the tires. They're not serious. Usually, I'll send them out to see a band and if they don't like what they see, I tell them that I don't think we have anything for them."

"I prefer those people go somewhere else," said Dennis Harlan, president of Entertainment Consultants of America.

However, serious shoppers should keep in mind that most bands specializing in occasions such as weddings, generally play top 40 tunes augmented by a limited repertoire of polkas and ethnic specialty tunes.

Before booking a band, take into consideration how formal the wedding will be. You may want to request the band members wear tuxedos and gowns.

Consider atmosphere. Do you want a couple of guitars and an electric organ? Or do you want a horn section? Do you prefer a male or female vocalist?

"Don't consider only the price. Consider the performance. People remember it long after they've forgotten the bride's gown," Harlan said.

If there are songs and medleys that are unsatisfactory, specify which tunes you don't want to hear. "It's not unusual these days to write a contract specifying that the band shouldn't play 'Proud Mary,'" Harlan said. "Celebration" is coming in at number two."

Prepare for sticker shock. Plan on spending the area average: \$650-\$875 for a five- to six-piece band. In general, band fees range \$500-\$800, according to Detroit metropolitan area booking agencies.

For that amount, they'll play for four 45-minute sets separated by 15-minute breaks. They'll arrive at the scene of the reception two hours before the celebration begins in order to set up. Clients are expected to alert banquet managers that the band will arrive early.

A couple on a tight budget might want to consider hiring a disc jockey to spin records. For an average price of \$700-\$900, they'll provide four hours of recorded music. Some include a light show, according to Patlow.

Entertainment should be booked between six months to one year in advance. As a rule, May through September are popular months for weddings and thus are booked earlier than the winter "off-season."

Before you see a band or sign a contract with an agency, don't be too shy to inquire if it's licensed. Harlan advised. Dealing with a licensed agency decreases your chances that it'll fold before the wedding, leaving you without a band or your deposit.

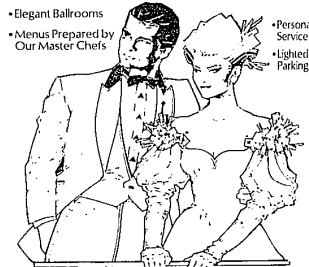
However, if you're determined to book a band without going through an agency be sure the group has been together for at least two years with steady key personnel. Bands have been known to fall apart weeks before a wedding date, according to Harlan. Especially since you're booking them ahead of time, you want some assurance of stability in the band. Check out their references.

Harlan also advises asking if band members have day jobs. He believes that if they do, chances are good they'll stay together longer.

And whether you make the deal on your own or go through an agency, before you plunk down your deposit, make sure you know what happens if the band is unable to honor the date, if the wedding's canceled, or if the date changes.

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