



*in the* **Mood**

... FOR THE BEST RECEPTION MUSIC

CLOSE YOUR EYES AND THINK BACK TO THE last great wedding you attended. Did you dance all night or just sip wine while a string quartet played on? Were you soothed by the music or enticed to find a partner and hit the dance floor? Most of all, did the music work its magic to enhance the mood of the celebration?

If you answered yes to the last question, the music was probably a perfect fit for the reception. And that means the bride and groom were successful in selecting just the right musicians, a crucial aspect of wedding planning that can literally make or break a party.

And this is one party you definitely don't want to ruin with a few sour notes, so concentrate on hiring the very best musicians

you can find to step up to the microphone. Start early and listen closely to what your friends honestly say about the band that played at their reception, and to your fiancé who whispers over and over "I will NOT do the Macarena." Consider what the two of you really like and the style party you've planned and then take an honest look at your reception site. Don't try to squeeze an entire orchestra into a tiny space, for instance, or expect a single pianist or violinist to fill a large space with song.

Then think about the time of day. If you'll be celebrating over lunch or brunch, you may not waltz or swing, but instead enjoy melodies from a piano, harp or string trio. Cocktail receptions later in the afternoon with guests mingling and moving about are great venues for quartets or combos, while a

## YOUR FIRST NEWLYWED STEPS

Ready yourself for reception dancing with these tips from the experts at Arthur Murray International.

1. Practice in the shoes you'll be wearing. If you learn to foxtrot in a pair of flats but wear heels for your wedding, the difference may take you by surprise!
2. Start as early as possible. Three to six months to learn some new steps is ideal.
3. Practice often — wherever you can, even in the kitchen or living room at home.
4. Include parents or other wedding party members in the dance preparations. It's fun and a great stress reliever.
5. Select a song you want to use for your first dance. Make sure the band or DJ has the music.
6. When choosing a dance, consider what you'll be wearing. A floor-length gown could be tricky for the Salsa, but perfect for an elegant waltz.
7. If your honeymoon involves a cruise or resort, have your lessons include a variety of different dance styles so you're ready for the fun!

formal dinner almost always includes dancing, the ideal time for a great band, orchestra or DJ equipped to do the seemingly impossible — to entertain young and old alike.

Susan Taylor of the Susan Taylor Band in New York City says that appealing to a wide range of ages comes with the territory. "Great songs are hits for a reason, and I play the best songs recorded by artists of many different musical eras." That keeps everyone happy.

When shopping around, Taylor advises couples that a bandleader should be willing to meet with the bride and groom and introduce them to the band via a CD or a tape and pictures or even a video. "I discourage clients from trying to micro-manage the music for the wedding. If they let the bandleader know generally what kinds of music they like and don't like, the leader will combine that knowledge with expertise in reading the crowd and keeping the dance floor packed," she says. "A good leader knows how to pace the evening."

Although music trends come and go, the goal for reception entertainment is to keep it simple and keep the party going. A few favorite traditions continue to flourish, notes Taylor, and most people still honor the custom of the first dance together, and despite some complicated family relationships these days, enjoy the chance for a father/daughter dance and a special twirl around the dance floor for the groom and his mother.

"Sometimes a stepfather or aunt will stand in if the parent is not present. I usually play one song for both, calling up the father and the bride first," she says. What are some of her most

popular requests for that special first dance? "I would say classic songs from the 30s and 40s, such as "Our Love is Here to Stay" or "Just the Way You Look Tonight," along with newer classics such as "Can't Help Falling in Love" or "Let's Stay Together," says Taylor. "When an artist is currently on the charts, we do get requests."

Once you find professionals who play your style of music and make you feel comfortable and you've listened to the actual musicians, who will entertain at your wedding (insist on this upfront), put the details in a written contract. If you've talked and listened but don't feel totally in tune, move on. Here are a few more tips as you shop for the perfect sound:

- If you have two groups, like strolling musicians for dinner and a band afterwards, make sure they coordinate their schedules.
- Should you feed the reception musicians? *Emily Post's Weddings* says yes. Arrange it with your caterer beforehand.
- Do see a potential band in action first, but remember a nightclub band can be much different from a true wedding band — you need someone who can work with the crowd and change gears quickly if needed.
- Swing and Salsa are good intergenerational dance favorites; plan a variety of tunes, from Big Band to today's popular hits.
- If you plan to incorporate ethnic dances into your celebration, be sure to mention them when you consult with the musicians.
- Ask how many breaks the band will take and how often. Will there be taped music during the breaks? The standard rule is one break per hour, lasting from five to 10 minutes.
- Make sure the musicians aren't rushing away from your party to make another engagement. Check their schedule for that entire day.

One final thought: ask the musicians you are considering how *they* would describe their style. If it fits with your own, you'll make beautiful music on your wedding day! ❖

*Martie Emory*

