

# Earl Cole Music

## WEDDING DJ MUSIC – SOME CONSIDERATIONS

The importance of reception music, live or pre-recorded, is often under-appreciated. People remember a few things about wedding receptions they have been to. They mostly remember the venue (especially the food & service) and the music/entertainment. They don't necessarily remember the floral arrangements, the table centerpieces, the chair covers, what the cake looked like or what the bridal party were wearing. They will, however, certainly remember the music if it's bad! Putting it simply, music can make or break a wedding reception. Interestingly couples are more likely to cut corners and compromise when it comes to reception music than on other wedding services. They will pay a premium for photographers and videographers and they won't hesitate to splash out on flowers or spend a bit extra on premium wines. Music & entertainment, on the other hand, seems to be much more price sensitive. Although not always the case, couples are more prepared to compromise on quality in regards to reception music in order to save a few hundred dollars.

### **DON'T FORGET – IT'S A PARTY FOR THE GUESTS!**

After the first dance/bridal waltz the party really begins – and it is a party – a party first and foremost for the guests. Music selections should be made accordingly. At every reception there will be a divergent mix of people of varying backgrounds, ages and musical tastes. The DJ music that is played during that part of the night should appeal to the wide ranging musical tastes of the guests. The importance of this can not be understated and is often lost on couples planning their reception. Picking music based solely or primarily on their personal likes or dislikes can often be a recipe for disaster. So too, for that matter, are music selections based on the personal preferences of the DJ! Although it is very much the couple's day, reception music should very much be about entertaining the guests. What's more it's not just about picking great songs. Some of the greatest songs ever recorded are floor clearers.

### **DANCEABILITY**

Danceability is the main consideration for picking DJ music. The primary concern of the DJ should be to keep people on the dance floor as much as possible. Slow tempo songs, no matter how good they are, are best suited to the wind down part of the night after the wedding couple leaves – or alternatively during dinner when guests are seated. Songs with a very fast tempo or that are rhythmically complicated will also clear a dance floor in a hurry. As a rule of thumb music should be between about 110 and 150 beats per minute. A speed of 120 – 130 bpm tends to work best but you don't want all the music at that tempo or it will become too monotonous.

There will always be 'serious' dancers who will want salsas and tangos etc. Playing such music will keep them happy, but everyone else will desert the dancefloor in their droves as they won't know how to dance to Latin style music. They will also be intimidated by those who can!

Remember, once the dance floor is cleared, it can prove very hard to fill it again. That is why song selections are so important.

### **STYLES AND GENRES**

Often the temptation for couples is to request music only from the genre(s) of music that they personally like. Alternatively couples may insist that the DJ avoid playing a particular style of music that they don't like. To reiterate, it is a party for the guests and there will be guests that will want to dance to the styles of music that couples may not want the DJ to play.

Some couples don't want what they call "clichéd" DJ music and will instruct the DJ not to play songs like the "Grease Mega-Mix" or "Dancing Queen". Although this is understandable, there is a good reason why DJs play those songs – because they are popular and people will dance to them. It's important to include a few of the very popular songs but sometimes DJs can be guilty of playing too many of them and being a bit too predictable. It's good to throw in some tracks that are a bit left of centre – as long as people can dance to them. Generally speaking DJ music selections for weddings should be on the conservative side. Some DJs can be too clever for their own good and play unusual, rare and cutting edge tunes that might work in a club, but not at a wedding reception.

Picking the right mix of songs is important. Throughout the DJ dance music part of the night the flow of songs should ensure that different styles and genres of music are joined seamlessly. It is best to try and keep songs of the same style in groups and join those groups with songs that sit between those styles.

## **START WITH A BANG BUT DON'T FINISH WITH A WHIMPER**

It is very important to start with songs that are guaranteed to get people up dancing from the get go. It is equally important, however, that the DJ does not play all the best music first and have the momentum wane from that point onwards. After 30 – 45 minutes or so of DJ music there tends to be a lull. People will want to have rest and enjoy a cup of coffee and perhaps some wedding cake. It is during this time that the DJ should play any 'high risk' songs that people may not want to dance to – and maybe some slower tracks. It is also a good time to do the tossing of the bouquet and/or the removal of the garter. I always suggest to couples that these activities be done when there is a lull in the DJ music.

## **DANCE MOVE SONGS**

The 'dance move' songs can really divide opinions. Some people love them and some people hate them. My personal view is that there should be at least one or two 'dance move' songs – like 'Nutbush City Limits', 'Timewarp' or 'Y.M.C.A.'. 'Nutbush' is a classic example of a song that some people simply loathe, but the fact remains that it is very popular and without fail people will dance it to – especially after few drinks. The key is to not overdo the dance move songs. Some DJs are guilty of playing too many of them. I must admit there are some incredibly tacky dance move songs that I won't play unless I'm specifically asked to (and I can't talk them out of it). The "Birdie Dance" immediately comes to mind.

## **DEAD AIR & VOLUME MATCHING**

Dead air, or silence/gaps between songs, is a cardinal sin for DJ music. The risk of this is greatest when couples decide not to use a DJ and play the music themselves with an ipod or compilation CDs. For those DIY couples playing music on a laptop or a PC will enable this problem to be eliminated with software that will allow cross-fading of tracks. iTunes, the most commonly used music playback software, has this facility. Individual tracks can also be mixed and EQ'd separately on iTunes to enable a 'set and forget' playback without having to adjust volumes on the fly. MP3s do vary a lot in volume, or 'perceived' volume mainly due to the normalisation process used to master recordings.

## **REQUESTS**

Taking requests can be risky and most DJs will be reticent about doing so if they think the songs will be an abject failure. People are less likely to ask for requests if guests are up dancing to every song and really enjoying themselves. Even if they don't personally like the songs being played they also don't want to be responsible for breaking the momentum and clearing the dance floor with a song of their choosing. Often DJs will simply say that the songs have been hand picked by the bride and groom and that usually stops people in their tracks!

## **SOUND SYSTEM**

The quality of the sound system or PA system is extremely important. It's one thing to have great song selections, but that amounts to very little if the sound is poor. Do it yourself (DIY) DJ music is often let down by an inadequate sound system. Using one's hi-fi or home surround sound system just doesn't cut the mustard in most applications. In regards to professional DJs, couples should find out exactly what sound reinforcement equipment they will be using. The minimum requirement should be speaker boxes with 12" speakers (and horns) preferably coupled with a subwoofer. Some high quality 10" speakers will work well with a sub but will be inadequate on their own. There are some very good 15" speakers that do the job without any need for a sub but 15" speakers with a quality sub is a very effective combination. Obviously there are a number of other variables that will effect the sound (e.g the quality of the amplifiers, mixer and playback equipment). DJs that use laptops as opposed to CD decks & turntables should be using either a professional sound card or a USB direct injection box. Often they will only use the built-in sound card of the laptop. Not only is the sound usually poor, but earth hums/loops are almost always a consequence unless they have an external earth hum eliminator or they don't use mains power and just use the laptop battery.

## **LIGHTING**

Effective and varied lighting can add a great deal to the DJ music experience. DIY wedding music often lacks the visual appeal because couples don't give any thought to using effects lighting. Any DJ worth his/her salt should have good lighting. Couples should ask what lighting they have. LED lighting has become all the rage and because they are so energy efficient DJs can run banks of LED effects lights without having to use 3 phase power or risk blowing a fuse by using too many power hungry candescent lights. I personally use and love LED lighting.

## **SMOKE/FOG MACHINES & BUBBLE MACHINES**

Some/fog machines enhance effects lighting but can trigger smoke alarms. Be sure the first check with the venue before hiring or utilising a fog machine. Not all venues allow them. Similarly bubble machines are not permitted by many venues as there is a liability risk with having slippery bubble fluid on dance floors. The same applies for snow machines. Bubble machines can add a nice touch to the bridal party entry and bridal waltz.

## **HAVE FAITH IN YOUR DJ!**

If couples have chosen their DJ well they should put faith in the DJ's ability to entertain their guests. Good DJs play music week in and week out and are much better placed to put together play lists than wedding couples. Couples may think that they can compile the best mix of songs for the DJ to play but to be perfectly honest this is rarely the case. Of all the wedding vendors and suppliers it is DJs that couples tend to get most particular with, but sometimes it can be best to let them do their job without too much involvement. Having said all that couples will always have special requests for songs - most significantly the bridal waltz and bridal party entry music as these should always be their choices. To enable some fine tuning couples should request DJ play lists in advance of the wedding and DJs should be open to the alternatives put before them.

## **HOW MUCH SHOULD YOU PAY FOR A DJ**

The cost of DJs varies considerably and it is very difficult to make comparisons. At the bottom end of the scale you can expect to pay around the \$500 mark for a full reception package. At the other end of the scale DJs can easily cost upwards of \$1000. But what you get for your money will be chalk and cheese. To use another cliché its a bit like comparing apples and oranges. DJs are not homogeneous and choosing a DJ should not just be about price. The cost of booking a DJ depends upon a number of factors, namely:

**EQUIPMENT.** Some DJs have basic systems with cheap components and use minimal effects lighting. Others have spent thousands to ensure the best possible sonic and visual experience for their clients.

**SET UP & PULL DOWN TIME.** The more complex systems take considerable time to set up and pull down whilst the low end systems don't. Those DJs with complex rigs work harder and longer and should be compensated accordingly.

**REPERTOIRE.** Some DJs have invested considerable money in compiling extensive repertoires and others will be limited in the songs they can play.

**EXPERIENCE.** It's a well worn cliché but there is no substitute for experience. There is a huge gulf between the good and the bad and much of that comes down to experience.

**PERSONALITY & IMAGE** The personality of a DJ is important. They should be friendly and approachable towards you and your guests. Their image and how they look is also important. I have seen some DJs dress like a slob and exude minimal personality while others take pride in their appearance and look and act every bit the professional.

**CLIENT SUPPORT.** The good DJs will have face to face meetings with their clients and spend time in the lead up to weddings liaising with couples to make sure they have made all necessary preparations. There are DJs, however, that are reticent to engage with clients in the lead up to weddings.

**MASTER OF CEREMONIES.** Some DJs offer this service and some don't. Obviously those that do should charge more.

**'LIVE' ENTERTAINMENT.** There are a small handful of DJs that are also musicians and entertainers of which I am one. A mix of both live performance and pre-recorded music can add a great deal to a wedding reception. Those quality performers that offer live entertainment are, generally speaking, going to cost a bit more than DJs that just play music.

Good luck!

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