

Planning Your Wedding Music

Teamwork can be effective and efficient. It can, however, also be tiresome and aggravating. Planning for a wedding is a prime example of when teamwork can be either a help or a hindrance. In order for the wedding to go smoothly, communication between different “team members” needs to be ongoing and open. Key members are the couple to be wed, the minister, and the organist. Others involved include the photographer, food service, and those assisting with the wedding.

How does one begin planning the music for a believing wedding? A great starting place is the pamphlet, “Planning Your Christian Wedding,” published by the LLC, which briefly touches on all aspects of a believing wedding and provides a good foundation for further discussions with the pastor and organist. The pamphlet instructs that a Christian wedding is a “solemn worship service” and this is the basis a couple should use when planning the music for their wedding. It also emphasizes that a couple consult their church organist, so the accompanist can help to select suitable music. Organist Karen Johnson (Minneapolis) reflects that “music is a huge part of a wedding, and it’s worth considering carefully when planning the wedding program. Many couples don’t realize until the ceremony how beautiful it sounds to hear the singing and to feel that the whole congregation is supporting them in prayer at their wedding.”

With weddings occurring frequently, and in some congregations, almost every weekend, there may be a strong desire by those getting married to create a wedding that stands out from all previous weddings. Pastor Randall Herrala reminds believing couples that, “The wedding is unique because it is your own wedding. You are the people that make it unique.” There is no need to sacrifice good Christian taste for uniqueness whether it is in music selections, dress, decorations, or any other aspect of the wedding.

Minneapolis organist Karen Johnson also echoes those thoughts, encouraging couples that “it’s good to use the old, the familiar, the pieces known to be tasteful and appropriate. Sometimes people wander into strange territory in the quest for something unique. Couples need to remember that they are what will make their wedding unique and special—no other wedding will ever be the same as theirs!”

The LLC pamphlet also addresses the issue of music in good taste: “Wedding songs that are not in our hymnal may be used if they are carefully selected and in good taste. The use of so-called popular music does not belong to Christian weddings. Even in the rare instances when such music and its lyrics are not offensive, they are so foreign and strange to God’s congregation and the spirit of the Christian wedding that they cause unrest and offense” (Planning Your Christian Wedding, LLC).

Organists’ Thoughts Regarding Weddings

How can an organist help plan the wedding?

“Organists are usually aware of the order of the service and where and when music is used. The organist can offer suggestions for pieces to be used for processional and recessional music.”

“It’s usually the bride who comes to discuss the music, but it is nice if both bride and groom come. It would be nice if the couple didn’t have a specific list ready but rather come with some ideas and suggestions and an open mind. It would be good if they ask the organist what’s in his or her repertoire and what the organist can and likes to play.”

“If the couple has some certain music they want the organist to play, it works best if they take care of purchasing the music for the organist in time for the organist to practice and learn it before the

wedding.”

What are some of your favorite wedding marches to play?

“I don’t have any favorite pieces, but I like to play Bach music and baroque-style music.”

“I’ve always enjoyed playing “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring,” because it’s a beautiful piece of music based on a familiar tune. A couple trumpet tunes by Purcell and Clark are also favorites of mine because I like the ceremonial, festive air about them.”

What other suggestions or thoughts do you have for couples planning a wedding?

“As an organist I’d welcome a little restraint from couples who see their wedding as a place to hear all their favorite pieces. This often leads to a succession of short, unrelated clips of music that can sound busy and disjointed—and it really keeps the organist hopping!”

“An organist often spends up to an hour and a half or more playing at weddings. Discretion with pre and post-wedding music is appreciated. I feel 15 minutes prior to the wedding is sufficient.”

“I’d like to meet with the couple at least a month before the wedding to give me enough time to practice if there is new or unfamiliar music.”

“Remember that even though the wedding is a very happy and festive occasion, it is also a sacred event. We need to take care that the spirit of the occasion is not lost in a myriad of trivial details.”

Cara Simonson