

All Night FUN

ENTERTAIN GUESTS FROM WEDDING CEREMONY
TO RECEPTION SAYONARA, AND THEN SOME.

Yes, it's the day you make your marital vows—but it's also one of the biggest parties of your life. And what is the most important element at a party? The entertainment, of course. From ceremony accompaniment to selfie stations to beats that get everyone moving on the dance floor, memorable wedding entertainment comes in many sounds, sizes and sorts. While you're choosing the right performers, emcees and interactive diversions for your big day, don't forget that you and your guests are in for a full day of celebration, with many phases. Keep guests entertained from start to finish, for a lively, lovely fete they will never forget.

writer CHERISE LUTER ~ *photo* NHAN PHOTOGRAPHY





Jonny Black
JONNY BLACK PRODUCTIONS
photo COMPOSURE STUDIOS

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CEREMONY STAGING

The most important portion of the day—can't have a wedding day without a wedding, after all—the ceremony is a perfect time for the bride and groom to give guests a first taste of their couplehood characteristics, and a glimpse of what is to come.

Scott Graham, composer, pianist, and owner of Scott Graham Piano, shares three things each couple should think about when choosing their ceremony music: “One, what ambiance do they want to create? Two, what are their favorite songs and at what point during the ceremony would they like them played? And three, what songs do they think their guests would enjoy hearing?”

The ceremony is a serious time, but it doesn't have to be solemn. Graham encourages couples to have fun with their song choices, especially during the pre-ceremony wait. “The music selections should get everyone excited to celebrate. Choose classics or today's current hits to entertain your guests for a livelier vibe, or select romantic classical or jazz tunes to add a level of sophistication to your event.”

COCKTAIL COOL

Once the ceremony is done, the cocktail hour is the time to get guests into a celebratory mood. Mixing and matching live music with a DJ is an updated way to entertain during this transition, suggests Jason Fajkus, vice president of DJU Productions. “A string quartet (three violins and one cello) and a DJ play music together. The DJ plays the beats, and the strings play the lyrics. It's amazing entertainment for guests, as it *is* cocktail music, but like they've never heard cocktail music before.” Fajkus also suggests a saxophonist if you want to add a little sexiness to familiar songs.

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Graham agrees that playing familiar tunes is the best choice to keep guests entertained while those hors d'oeuvre are being passed. "People enjoy it when they can recognize a song; they tend to sing along to it, which I've noticed is contagious. If the bride and groom give me free reign, I'll get some ideas from the guests. 'Linus and Lucy' (the 'Peanuts' theme) and the 'Rocky' theme are always big crowd favorites."

Making the transition from cocktails to the main bash is important, too. "If the cocktail hour is in the foyer, and the ballroom doors suddenly open, this is our opportunity to really set the mood," notes DJ, emcee and entertainer extraordinaire Jonny Black, of Jonny Black Productions. At this point, it's time to up the volume, but not too much—"We don't want to blast them, this is not a club," Black says—"but we do want to get on the mike and take charge, tell them what's going to happen, so they can enjoy themselves without worrying about it."

He also advises: "Right after this entrance is the perfect time for first dances. If you wait until after dinner, you don't have the full attention of everyone in the room. Also, remember, this is a very emotional part of the evening. It's a good idea to get the tears and emotions expressed and out of the way, to raise the energy level for the party."

For the ultimate in personalization, couples can have a song written just for them, for their first dance. When creating an original composition, Graham goes out of his way to learn as much as possible about the couple, so the piece reflects them. "When I compose a song for a couple, I like to tell their story. I start with asking questions about how they met, their likes and dislikes, their favorite places to visit, and what they

enjoy together as a couple, adding elements from their individual personalities to create a melody and turn it into a beautiful song to celebrate their union."

DINNER & DANCING

Dinner entertainment is sometimes overlooked, but couples should never opt for dead air, even while their guests are enjoying their meals.

"Some parents and older guests might not want to stick around through the wilder late-night partying part of the evening. During dinner is a great time to appeal to their tastes," Black says. "Go for slower classics, from the time when they got married. It's a great way to make that connection with everyone in the room." Because, if the celebrating is going strong later on, "and all of a sudden Mom comes and says to the DJ, 'Play Sinatra,' you've just lost the party atmosphere."

"Dinner music can be a nice variety of both upbeat and slower songs," adds Graham. "I like to play upbeat songs as dinner is being served or if there's a banquet table and people are lining up waiting to get their food. Then I like to slow the pace down a bit and play elegant background music during dinner. Romantic-style songs create a nice soothing atmosphere for dining and mingling. Guests should be able to recognize and enjoy the music in the background, while carrying on a nice conversation at their tables."

Once the dining is done, it's time to let loose and pump up the volume, and have your DJ or band play songs that *you* love, along with high-energy music from your backgrounds and cultures (Indian bhangra, Latin salsa, a Jewish hora, etc.). For a fun club vibe, turn the lights down and let guests help themselves to glow sticks and cocktails illuminated with LED ice cubes. So cool!

GETTING INTERACTIVE

Props, games and interactive entertainment have become ubiquitous elements at wedding receptions. Couples have even incorporated them into their cocktail hour for a little pre-game warmup. They add another layer to the merriment and give guests who may not be keen on dancing a chance to get in on the fun. One of the newest trends in interactive entertainment has been the incorporation of social media.

Photo booths are now "fully connected social-media photo stations," says Fajkus. "Guests can upload to Facebook, or text or email themselves their photo. Also, by using Instagram, they can take a picture anywhere, hashtag the photo, and it will print out at our photo station printer. It's a great way to take pictures anywhere at the event and have them print on site."

Interactive entertainment is not just a sideline to dance-floor action. Couples can opt to have a dance floor that reads and responds to dance movements, Fajkus says. "So a bed of roses can be displayed on the floor, but as guests dance across, the roses will push out of the way and a monogram or any image or video can be displayed underneath. The floor has over 175 different applications, so no matter the theme or layout, the interactive projection will wow guests as it moves when they move."

And don't forget your younger guests! "Kid-friendly DJs are a great way to entertain young guests with music and contests such as hula-hoop, limbo and line dancing," notes Delores Messer, president of Adams & Green Entertainment. "Bubble machines and video games are also a huge hit with kids, as well as clowns doing balloons, face painting and small magic tricks." And for captivating entertainment

with an educational twist, Adams & Green offers a one-hour “Mad Scientist” show—fast becoming a favorite for parties with young guests in a range of ages.

THE GRAND FINALE

Once the last glass of bubbly has been poured, it is time for a fond farewell—but not a low-key one. A well-chosen song and a little production magic are the perfect recipe for a memorable sendoff.

When choosing a final song, make sure it is consistent with the rest of the day’s mood. “Glad You Came” by The Wanted is terrific for couples with a passion for pop, “Time of My Life” by Bill Medley and Jennifer Warnes—also known as the “Dirty Dancing” song—works well for a nostalgic feel, and for couples looking for a bona-fide classic, “Save the Last Dance For Me,” sung by Michael Bublé, is a surefire hit.

For major impact, Fajkus suggests a dramatic element such as a fireworks show (especially if the event venue is located on a body of water), a display of Roman candles shot across the exit pathway, or a release of floating lanterns, thought to bring good luck and prosperity.

Black’s last bit of advice: “You want to end on a high note, with a big bang. We discourage couples from having parties that last longer than five hours, so that everyone stays until the end. Whether it’s a slow or fast song, we are always going to get guests on the floor for one last hoorah, then send them off for the evening. That way, the majority of guests are present, and the sendoff pictures are awesome.”

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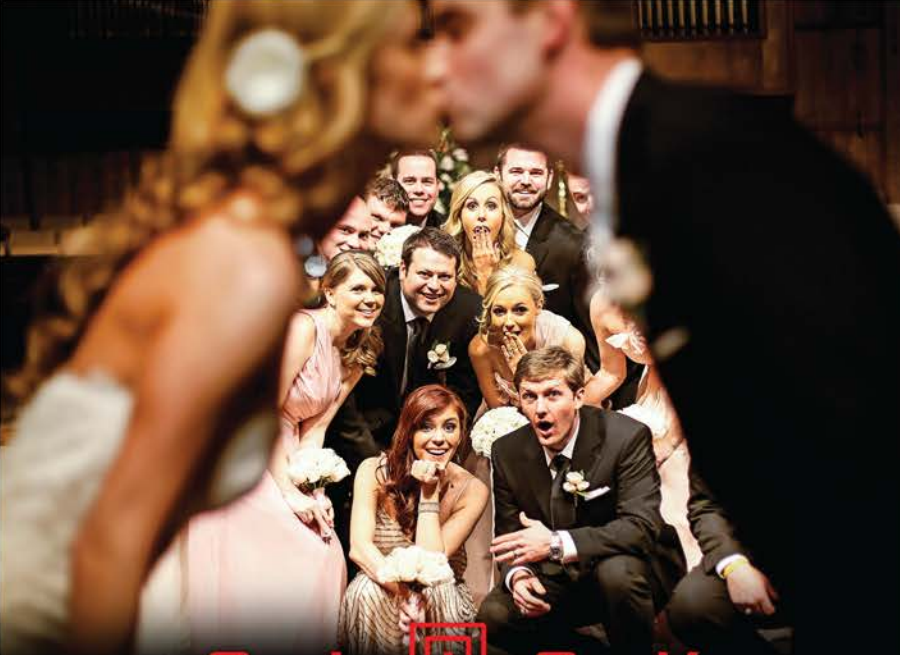
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