

The Fun is in the Flow

The Best Arrangement for Reception Music

“The most fun I’ve ever had at a wedding...” “I danced all night, and my feet are hurting...” “What a unique experience...”

These are all comments that any wedding host would love to hear from his or her guests – and in the hands of an excellent band or orchestra, should be a guaranteed result. As an orchestra leader in Chicago and a producer of live music for special events, I’ve learned that great music and performance is only part of the equation. Equally important is a game plan that is well conceived and executed.

There are two fundamental ways to run a wedding. For lack of better terms, I call them the “banquet wedding” and the “ballroom wedding” styles. Each one has a different itinerary, and I prefer one much more than the other for the best result. Why? The fun is in the flow.

The Usual Way

The banquet style is probably what most people have experienced. Here is how it flows: After the wedding ceremony, the guests convene at a venue for a one-hour cocktail reception preceding the dinner and usually taking place in the foyer. Guests are then invited into a main room for dinner. After about 15 minutes, the bridal party and wedding couple are introduced into the room. This is usually followed by a welcome from the father of the bride and a blessing. A multiple-course dinner is served, and toasts are interspersed. Once dinner is over, the bride and groom are invited to the floor for their first dance, and the dancing portion of the evening begins. At this point it is usually around 9PM, and the guests have been together since the afternoon ceremony. Although this is a very traditional approach to the wedding flow, in my opinion it does not create the most fun and energy-packed experience.

The Ideal Way

The ballroom wedding (referred to by some as “East Coast” style) has a much different game plan, and in my opinion yields a much more engaging and exciting result. Again, guests enter the reception and the bridal party is introduced into the room. However, when the couple is introduced, they come directly to the center of the dance floor for their first dance, putting the immediate focus of the event on the guests of honor. Many

of my brides and grooms tell me that two minutes of dancing alone feels like eternity, so I recommend inviting the parents, bridal party, and remaining guests to join the dance. By the end of the first song, you will have a full dance floor. From here, a very high-energy dance set of 8-10 minutes allows everyone in the room to let loose in the spirit of celebration while again keeping the focus on the bride and groom. After this opening dance set, the energy in the room is bubbling.

Keeping the Flow

The ballroom style continues with the welcome and blessing, and then the meal service begins. Toasts can be conveniently dovetailed into the appetizer or salad courses before these courses are cleared. At most venues it takes about twenty minutes to clear the salad and serve the entrée, which is the perfect opportunity for a very elegant dance set. I like to start this set with the father-daughter dance. Since the opening set was very contemporary and high-energy, this set is a chance to show elegance and finesse by performing classic dance repertoire. This style of performance reaps great results and flows beautifully, but requires a high level of sensitivity from your band and bandleader. It is crucial for the band to perform music at an appropriate volume throughout dinner, allowing the guests to converse at their tables.

The Results

By the time dinner has been served, the ballroom-style wedding has offered guests the opportunity to dance, celebrate, and have fun. (In comparison, dancing at the banquet-style wedding will not even start until after the meal is completed; dancing becomes an afterthought, and guests will not be captivated on the same level.) Once dinner has ended, the bride and groom should be given an opportunity to address their guests, allowing them to thank everyone for attending. The rest of the evening can be dedicated to enjoying the company of loved ones and additional celebrating on the dance floor.

When an evening is flowing effortlessly, time seems to fly, and this makes it important to enjoy every minute. In order for guests to enjoy themselves, the hosts must enjoy themselves, so if the wedding couple and their parents are frequently on the dance floor, their guests will have an even better time. And remember: The fun is in the flow.

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