

Perfect harmony—

Reception music completes
wedding day on sweet note

MONICA M. WALK
SPECIAL TO THE REPORTER



Vows have been made, rings exchanged, and toasts made to the newlyweds.

Family, friends and the happy couple are now ready to celebrate the union with an energetic party, usually filled with music and dancing. The wedding reception is officially on.

Creating that party-of-all-parties requires the bride and groom to have a vision for their post-wedding celebration, and to work with entertainment professionals to bring it into focus.

Finding music pros generally happens through word-of-mouth, attending other wedding receptions, getting recommendations from reception hall staff and florists, or investigating local advertisements.

Planning an evening of music includes many choices, beginning with: Live, or Recorded?

Live excitement

DJs have dominated the wedding reception scene since the late 1990s, says local musician and Holy Family Community director of liturgy and music Paul Thelen, who played receptions almost weekly through the early '90s. Along with his talented daughters, Thelen still plays at wedding ceremonies, and during wedding cocktails and dinners.

"I think people are used to hearing their favorite songs performed by the original artists on recordings," Thelen said. "People are now conditioned to automatically think DJ when planning a wedding, and don't even know there are other options."

Jane Shirek, of the five-piece variety band The Downtowners, wants brides and grooms to know live music is a reception option in Fond du Lac, and that many musicians are listed on the website of the Fond du Lac Musicians Association.

Along with bandmate husband, Bob, Jane Shirek takes pride in The Downtowners offering of a wide range of musical styles, including Big Band & Swing, '50s-'60s Rock, Jazz & Blues, Polka and Old-Time music, Country, Latin, Ballroom and Ethnic music. Combined, the group members play a total of 13 instruments and all five sing.

"Bob is good at reading the crowd," she explained. "We play a variety of styles, and whatever the crowd responds to, we play more of. Our goal is to keep the crowd there as long as possible, and we are usually successful. Seeing people live onstage adds to the excitement of the night... five live people can communicate better with the crowd than just one."

Vast selection

While a DJ generally does work the reception alone, those working for a company have back-up staff and equipment on call. The DJ brings along a vast selection of music recorded by original artists, sound equipment, and often special lighting effects and multi-media montages of the wedding couple to accompany the music.

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Record Entertainment

Many are also willing and able to lead dances, and all usually perform an emcee function, making announcements as needed or requested.

"We sit down with the bride and groom and let them tell us what they want. We offer some advice, but it's their reception, not ours," said Paul Millard, booking agent for Fond du Lac's Record Entertainment, founded by Terry Davis Holzmann in 1983 and sporting the tagline, "All the music and all the fun."

While trends in music change a bit, Millard finds certain reception basics remain firm.

"Grand marches are still popular... and if there is crowd involvement (in a song), it remains popular," he noted.

The reception generally begins with a mix of well-known music from the '50s through '70s, and Millard estimates that up to 80 percent of the music is well-known by most guests. Newer music usually is played later in the event.

And rather than the traditional, steady stream of special dances strung together, an evening of general dancing may be punctuated by the grand march, the couple's first dance, the father-daughter dance, and the mother-son dance.

"The DJ keeps things on track," Millard noted.

In their emcee role, DJs may also coordinate guest participation, such as calling for the newlyweds to kiss. Rather than just the traditional "clinking" of drink glasses, attendees now may have to sing a love song, tell a story about the couple, or make a hole-in-one on an indoor putting green before the couple will pucker up.

Technology trends

The delivery of recorded music at receptions has changed more drastically than the music selected for the event. Where DJs once brought records, cassettes or CDs, most music now is downloaded as electronic files and played via laptop computers on sophisticated sound systems.

Both Record Entertainment and Matt's DJ Service purchase downloaded music and pay royalties in order to own the rights to put the tunes on system hard drives.

High-end, current equipment is the hallmark of Matt's DJ Service, according to general manager Matthew Nehring, who founded the company in 2003 as an offshoot of Nehring Entertainment.

Matt's DJ Service has won the Reporter's Readers' Choice "best wedding DJ" category for three years running. A signature grand march entrance is a draw for many clients.

Matt's DJ Service runs music through disc jockey programs designed for computers, outfitted with exceptional sound cards. Emergency backups with the complete music library are supplied via iPad, iPod touch and classic iPods.

"We are the only ones in the state of Wisconsin who can say we provide concert quality, touring-grade audio speakers by GBL," Nehring said. "We use the same wireless mics as on the last season of American Idol. All of our equipment is company owned, and I personally maintain it and make sure it is 100 percent operational."

Nehring's company also offers concert quality lighting, including lasers, LED, white diamond lights and Global lights, which project an image on the dance floor. High quality photo montages set to music selected by the wedding couple and created on Mac pro desktop computers like those used at Universal Studios are another option. A multi-media option also is available from Record Entertainment.

"I believe when a client books a DJ, they are paying for a service and the DJ needs to be a piece of that night. People should spend time picking out their entertainment," Nehring said. "We believe it is the most important part, other than the wedding itself. We strive to keep the dance floor full. At the end of the night, when the bride says it was good, that makes it all worthwhile."

For more information or to contact the reception entertainers in this article:

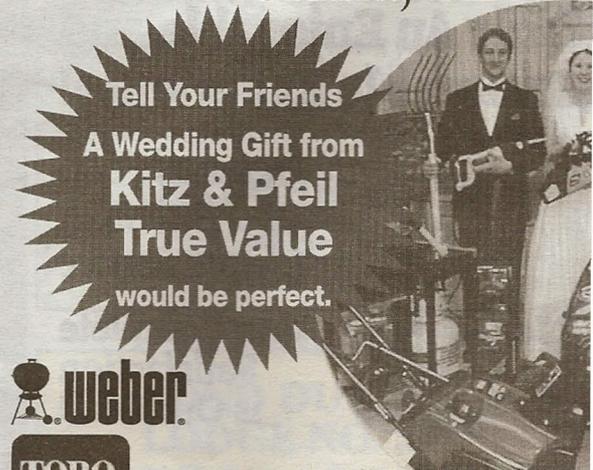
The Downtowners:
www.sites.google.com/site/thedowntownersband
or 920-921-1167

Fond du Lac Areas Musicians:
<http://sites.google.com/site/fdlmusicians/> or call Pete Runde
at 920-921-2000

Matt's DJ Service:
www.mattsdj.com
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