

## **PLAYING FOR WEDDINGS: GETTING STARTED**

**Think of yourself as a professional.**

**P**laying for weddings can be quite fulfilling, or it can be a nightmare! It is a great way to move your playing to a professional level, help finance your dulcimer habit, or just have an opportunity to share your music with other people. It is definitely hard work and a very important part of the ceremony so be sure to approach this in as professional a manner as you can.

**Have a clear plan of what you will offer.**

**W**edding services are provided by a variety of professionals and you will be one of them! To keep from being run over by the wedding process, think through exactly what you have to offer. Brides are now spending time on wedding planning websites and buying wedding music CDs. They often have no idea what is suitable for your instrument so you have to be the one to guide them. You'll get requests to accompany singers, perform orchestral music or pop songs! So before you get caught up in that, you need a statement of exactly what you have to offer. Decide if it will be Celtic music, hymns, standard classical pieces or whatever you wish to offer. Write up a description of your services or post it on your webpage. Generally, 1/2 hour of prelude music is suitable. Church ceremonies can be one hour or more, non-denominational, outdoor weddings can be 20 minutes in length. Since most of my weddings are the latter, I quote one hour to cover the prelude and ceremony music. For church weddings, ask about the expected length of the ceremony before quoting a price.

**Set your fees and don't undercharge for your services!**

**Y**ou will be providing a valuable service so determine what you will charge. If you feel you are not at an advanced level, set a minimal fee which is still in line with other musicians in your area and be specific about what you have to offer. You might match your fees to other folk or classical musicians, depending on which type of music you will play. Classical musicians are probably charging higher fees. If you are just getting started, you can even offer prelude music and a special piece for within the ceremony while leaving the processions to someone else. Don't play for free or extremely reduced fees unless it is for a friend or charitable event. That suggests that you don't value what you do and generally doesn't get you anything but requests to play for more low paying jobs!

*Donna Germano*  
*www.classictouchmusic.com*

**The repertoire:  
lists and sound  
samples.**

**Be able to look  
away from your  
instrument.**

**H**ave a specific plan for the music you will offer. It is perfectly appropriate to state that the prelude (or all) of the music will consist of music in your current repertoire. Work on a few well known wedding pieces so you will have somewhere to start. Over time, you can develop more specific repertoire for weddings. I prefer not to list all the pieces that will be played in the prelude as you never know how long things will take. I let the brides select pieces for seating of parents, entrance and exit processions, and sometimes an instrumental for during the ceremony. Write a list of pieces you will offer for each of these purposes. As soon as possible, work on recording short segments of these. You could have them on a webpage, or burn them to demo CDs for the bride to review. It will save you so much time if they can pick from music you already know, rather than stressing you out with requests that might not be possible to play on the dulcimer. You also want pieces that are easy to end as the bridal party reaches the location so you are not playing on for several minutes after they get there! And most importantly, you will need to be able to look away from your instrument to check on what is going on! You will probably have people giving you cues for when to start pieces and you also need to look up and judge when the wedding party will reach the designated spot. Wedding directors have told me stories of musicians (with all instruments) who don't look up from their music, leaving them waving madly with no one responding! So keep the music you play fairly simple as you are learning this whole process. The timing and coordination are the hardest parts of the process.

**Wedding  
Directors and  
“Wedding  
Directors”**

**P**lanning the event well can save you a lot of stress! However, there are plenty of things to go slightly off on the actual day. This is where you earn your pay! I review the plan for the ceremony and wedding music selections by phone or email these days. I hardly ever have meetings or attend rehearsals because I have learned those things just soak up your time. But do whatever makes you comfortable as you play for your first few weddings. Have someone assigned the responsibility of cuing you if you are playing for processions or “seating” of family members. Don't let them give you a “starting time” for the processions. You never know when there will be delays. A delay is actually the norm rather than an unusual event! Someone needs to have the responsibility of waving to you or in some way letting you know when it is time start any selected music. There are real wedding directors, but there are also

# *Donna Germano*

*www.classictouchmusic.com*

friends and family members filling that role. They may or may not have any ability to carry out those responsibilities so be ready for that! I had a wedding director shrug and throw up her hands when everyone started entering at the wrong time so I was on my own to fit the music in with the bridal party's entrance. Some people feel it is important to work with church music directors out of courtesy or to help things run well. So check with your bride about that for church weddings. I also like to talk to the officiant before the wedding to be sure there have been no changes and to verify the last thing he/she will say before I play the recessional piece.

**Have a  
written  
contract!**

**Get your  
money!**

**D**on't forget to have everything written down in a contract that you will both sign. Be specific about times, instruments to be used, a deposit to hold the date, and when final payment is to be made. Most wedding vendors request at least a 50% deposit with the balance due before the wedding day. There is nothing worse than chasing around for your check at the wedding! For outdoor weddings, specify if you need shade, that you won't play in the rain, and that you need a level performance space of a specific size. (I arrived for one wedding to find chairs placed on a hillside, and holes dug in the ground so the back legs of the chairs would be lower. This was the "level surface.")

I hope that isn't a discouraging introduction to playing for weddings! With over 50 weddings a year for the past 12 years I have had a lot of ups and downs. But all the couples got married and I got paid! Playing for weddings has become an important part of my income.

I'll be glad to write more about any of these topics if people are interested. My main goal is to help you enjoy playing your instrument and to help be sure you are treated as a professional with a valuable talent to add to the event. You can increase your overall playing skill as you deal with all of this and playing for weddings can be a very fulfilling addition to your playing experiences.

Visit my website and check out the following pages

**Wedding Music Samples**  
**Plan Your Wedding Music**  
[www.classictouchmusic.com](http://www.classictouchmusic.com)

Donna Germano  
[www.classictouchmusic.com](http://www.classictouchmusic.com) dgharp2@hotmail.com