

*music & Entertainment*UTTERLY
ENTERTAININGLET'S GET THIS PARTY STARTED—
AND KEEP IT GOING STRONG.

A wedding is a celebration of two lives coming together to form one rockin' relationship that will stand the test of time. But while the vows might be powerfully heartfelt, sometimes wedding entertainment can lack the passion of the moment—and leave guests feeling a little...unloved. Remember, your wedding is a celebration not just of your marriage bond, but also of the gratitude and affection you feel for the people who have come—some from very far away—to witness and revel in your sacred union. Give them something special, something to enjoy in the moment and remember with joy for years to come, with entertainment that delights the ear and excites the heart.

writer CHRISTINA CALDWELL ~ *photo* SELECT STUDIOS





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COCKTAIL MELODIES

After the ceremony, the cocktail hour is your guests' first impression of what is to come the rest of the night. As you're swept away to take photos, and taking a breather with your new spouse before the craziness starts up again, your guests—many of whom will be strangers to one another—likely will be gathering in a room without you. It's up to you to break the ice, even if you're not there in person.

Great cocktail-hour entertainment can do that, says Allyson Levine, vice president of sales at powerhouse entertainment firm Bob Gail Special Events, with offices in Los Angeles and Las Vegas. The company provides or produces entertainment for hundreds of weddings, corporate events and milestone celebrations each year.

While the cocktail hour might be about, well, cocktails (Levine suggests livening up the party with a signature drink that represents you as a couple, or two signature drinks that represent the bride and groom individually), those libations aren't nearly as fun without entertainment to accompany them.

Starting with sweet, soft tunes and moving into more jaunty numbers when you're ready to make your grand entrance, it's important to make sure the cocktail-hour music flows smoothly, says Scott Graham, a well-known Houston musician-composer who has played more than 2,600 special events in his career, including countless cocktail hours.

"The cocktail-hour music can be a nice variety of more upbeat and lively music, like standards and today's current hits," Graham says. Ultimately, the cocktail hour is about loosening up the crowd for the festivities to come.



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RECEPTION REVELRY

Television-reality-show “bridezillas” often try to plan every tiny detail of their wedding and reception—making pretty much everyone around them miserable (including, frequently, themselves). The best way to make sure you actually enjoy your own wedding is to leave the entertainment to the experts, especially when it comes to music.

“The best way to plan is not to plan,” says Brian Pincus, vice president of Bob Gail Special Events. “Our bands have enormous repertoires and are highly skilled at keeping their finger on the pulse of what is happening in front of them. They evaluate what song is appropriate from one moment to the next as the evening naturally evolves.”

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father-daughter dance, or which song will accompany your first dance as a married couple. So do make sure to communicate your desires for these important numbers to your entertainment provider. For the remainder of the entertainment, though, "It's all about blending the classics with modern twists," says Jonny Black, owner of Houston's popular Jonny Black Productions. Where rap was a popular genre for "dance party" weddings of yore, Black notes, more Top 40 and indie rock selections are being seen for 2014. "A few years ago, the bride was maybe a little more urban," Black says. "The music is definitely changing [for 2014] to more of a Top 40, hipster culture."

For any entertainment company, adds Walter Suhr, bandleader for Houston-based Latin-music ensemble Mango

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Punch, it pays to have great energy, and to really “click” with the wedding client. “The most important element to a bride is to have a fun party, and they hire us because they like the personality of the band,” he notes.

Mango Punch’s Latin flair might not mesh well with a vintage-chic wedding,

and Scott Graham’s piano stylings might not work for a large, dance-heavy bash. It’s all about matching the right music to the right event and the right entertainer to the right bride and groom, Graham says.

“Before my events, I schedule a meeting with the bride and groom

or event planner to get some ideas about what music they would like to hear and what they are expecting their guests would enjoy,” Graham explains. “Then I gather the music and prepare personalized songbooks, pulling sheet music from my library so that I am equipped with a large variety of music for all my events.”

“When traditions such as the bouquet toss and the cutting of the cake are planned to coincide with the natural breaks of the band, the music will flow with more energy,” Suhr says. “I have been able to really engage the guests on the dance floor when the wedding coordinator plans her timeline taking our sets into account. Plus, it also allows me to be master of ceremonies for the bouquet toss, the toasts [and more].”



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GO WITH THE FLOW

A new and exciting trend that has popped up recently is the incorporation of photo booths, games and other non-traditional activities to keep guests excited and engaged with the fête.

“These elements can be fun, as long as they are planned in a way that does not step on the evening’s flow,” Levine says. That means not taking the focus away from the dance floor, but rather adding the elements as extra fun to an already lively event.

The evening’s flow greatly depends on the band’s mood, and as a wedding performer, Graham really feeds off his audience. While some bands might be turned off by requests, he welcomes them and hopes they turn his selections into a game of their own. “I feel that live music is evolving more and more at weddings. The music can change from upbeat and fun to classic and romantic in an instant, and live music adds extra emotion and expression for everyone to enjoy,” Graham says. “People often prefer live piano music for a more elegant atmosphere, or simply to provide a nice ambiance. For me personally, I enjoy it when people are playing ‘name that tune’ along with the music or putting in their requests for specific songs.”

At the end of the night, brides and grooms are going to be spent. A mix of excitement, release from pre-wedding stress, and long hours of dancing, can lead to exhaustion. So when your guests still want to party the night away, it’s time to give them a subtle hint. The right entertainment can do that, including high-tech elements and music selections.

“We have been incorporating LED walls into the staging of our events, which provide infinite opportunities to tie in aesthetics and unique

technology,” Pincus says. Not only are LED walls a modern way to bring soft, clean-looking light to the event, but they can be amped up for electrifying dance numbers and toned down as the hours tick into the early morning.

Black suggests candlelight and soft room lighting for early in the

reception, but as the evening progresses and guests imbibe a few drinks, colored lighting, strobes and “lights that pop” can be incorporated into the mood. When the bride and groom begin to tire, the wall’s effects can signal the perfect ending to a most entertaining evening.

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