

Your wedding entertainment options - Toby Oakley



My clients often say “**this is the first time I am booking a DJ, I don’t know what to look for**”, so in this article I have listed all the things you need to consider when booking live entertainment for your event.

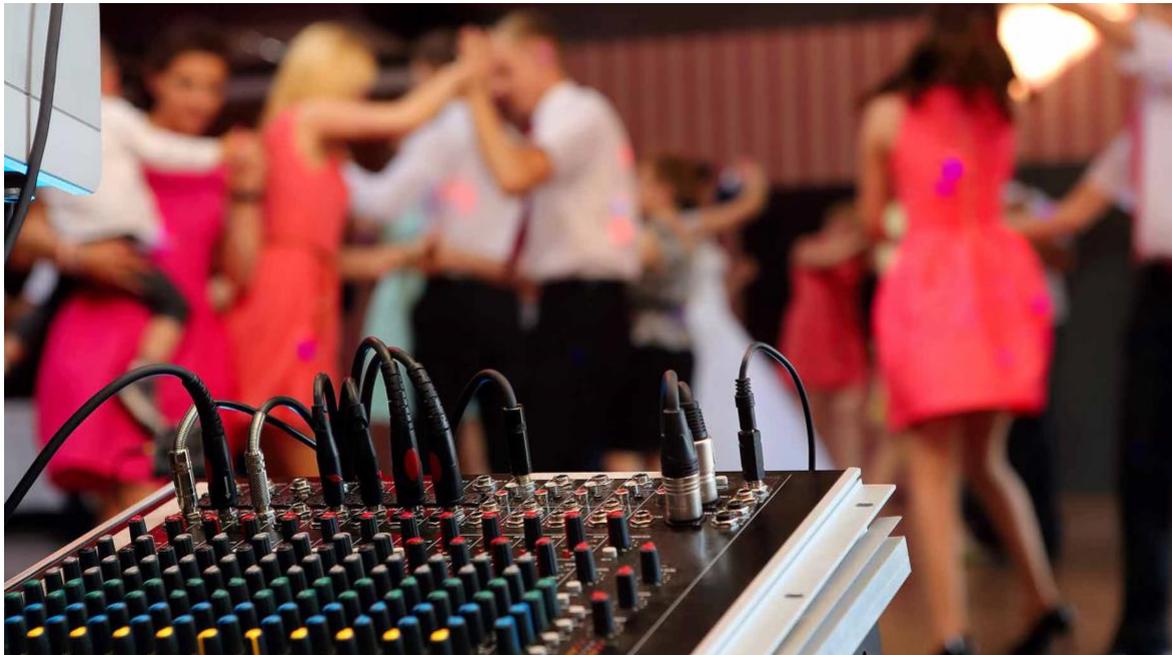
1: Your main choices:

DIY disco: £250 - £450 (You collect/set up):

The DIY route can enable you to craft your own playlist and have the music you want at your event, saving money in the process. It is commonly provided by an AV rental company or even just a speaker you have at home. It’s important that it is set up by someone that knows what they are doing because you have the potential for things to go wrong (especially mixer settings). This option works well in a function where everyone likes the same genre (such as a 21st birthday) & is often not suited for mixed events such as weddings because you have such a diverse range of ages & musical preferences, as well as a lot of other things going on (first dance, cake cut, bouquet, buffet etc).

Get someone that is experienced to craft a playlist (such as a wedding DJ) because music is very subjective & you don’t want Mr Brightside or Bohemian Rhapsody playing during the buffet (for example). Charge your device, put it on airplane mode & lock it in a cashbox because the overriding disaster of every single DIY disco is when the guests start changing the music every minute or so resulting in a mess of genres & an empty dance floor. Also

make sure the mixer is eqd' properly & also hidden from guests. Set it at a nice volume at the start and then adjust it appropriately (as ears adjust to it), but don't fall into the pitfall of thinking that more volume = more people dancing as it won't work.



Usually you will have to collect, set up & operate the system yourself. Then get someone to deliver it back a day or two later. Companies offer delivery & an experienced engineer, but if you want premium sound & lighting it's often cheaper hire a budget DJ!

Premium musician / duet (£400 – £800):

This is also a very cost-effective way to bring a live music element to your event, especially for a wedding as you can often have them for the ceremony, drinks, meal & evening also. Having said that unless they are very good your guests (and you) may be sick of them by the end of the day as they can be very limited on what they can do & play & sound 'samey'. I think most guests would even get fed up of Ed Sheeran after 6 hours of him strumming a guitar & singing. Some solo acts can often replicate a band with backing music & percussion so can adapt as the day goes on and change the pace a bit. A very good solo act or duet will not be a cheap option either so my advice is to search the pub scene, as they are often very seasoned & charge less money, but carefully vet them as they might not be suited to a formal event.

Premium DJ (£500 – £800):

This is the most common option, especially for weddings because a DJ not only plays music but they are often also very good at organising formalities and delivering key announcements in a very professional manner. When the subject of DJ is brought up a lot of people imagine the cheesy school disco or outdated 'Dave double decks' at your friends 30th, but the industry has moved along considerably in the last 10 years. Also a lot of people's experience of mobile

DJ's have been from witnessing the budget end of the market, but be careful because anyone can buy fancy equipment, create a stunning website & start selling their services, but at the end of the day a busy dancefloor comes down to playing the right music at the right time, which can only be learnt through years of hard work & experience.

A lot of modern DJ's also provide a range of audio-visual extras available so you can create a WOW factor & save money in the process. This is my set up at Rhinefield House, the client has added in an LED floor, letters & a backdrop.



Premium Live band (£800 - £1500):

Nothing beats live music & a good band is so brilliant for a formal function. Bands are the most expensive option because you are paying for a number of people, so the budget is split 4, maybe 8 ways. Also, they are also professionally trained musicians so it's a skilled job. Not everyone likes bands or live music & even if you have a good cover band, hearing the same voice & musical accompaniment could get a bit tiring after an amount of time.

Firstly, work out what sort music you want, such as general party covers, funk/soul classics, 80's electric, Ceilidh etc. The one main liability with a band is that you are relying on multiple people to arrive at your venue and set up, so a good band will have provisions in place as a result of illness or traffic etc. Other things to look out for is whether they provide a decent lighting system & how much space they will take up and does the venue have any problems with noise levels.

Premium band & DJ (£1,200 - £2,000):

Having a band and DJ is the best of both worlds really, but it's also a lot more expensive. The beauty of this is that the DJ is often (but not always) a lot better at managing any formalities (such as first dance), delivering announcements because the band are often stuck in one place & concentrating on playing their instruments.

The DJ is usually the supporting act to the band and will often play background at the start, intervals & the end, which really mixes things up & caters for all the guests tastes. If you come across a 'band that DJ's' double check that they will have a trained DJ and not put on a background set during their intervals & ask them if they will DJ until the end of the night.

This is an extreme example of DJ/band combination at Careys Manor in 2019. They also had a duet for first dance and I hosted the night, managed the lighting and DJ'd the last 2 hours. That's another DJ (Mr Switch) & his orchestra.



Other entertainment?

You will probably come across & consider other forms of entertainment for your event (especially a wedding) & they can add a tremendous amount of fun for you & your guests as well as a lasting memory. Your main options are photobooth, casino, fireworks, singing waiters, Magic, Misc food services etc.

It's a good idea to keep all your entertainment in close proximity as your guests will spread out & it won't look at busy, this is especially the case with larger venues & guests numbers

under 80. We often work with a photobooth & casino in the same room and it works wonders. Obviously, this is not applicable to the fireworks!!

2: Entertainment that suits you & your venue:

Think long and hard about what your guests will like, but more importantly what you like. Also, what entertainment you want with regards to your venue character & layout? If you are getting married in a small rural hotel with only 50 guests, then a DJ is probably a good option. If you are getting married in a field, under a tepee with 150 guests then a decent band might work better?

Also try to match your entertainment to your theme. For example, if your event has vintage theme in a character property a DJ/band that is more laid back, with a more subtle setup might be appropriate. If you are getting married in a uber chic city venue you might want some uber cool entertainment that can really pack a punch.

3: Do your research



The internet is amazing isn't it? Over the years I have really watched things progress and now any entertainment supplier can set up a website & generate leads in the same day – for FREE!

Obviously, you need to be careful, don't casually browse suppliers' websites, really have a good look beyond the bling and see what they have achieved and what they are currently

doing & don't go cheap or book 'on the day' at a wedding fair, as you might get what you pay for. See if the DJ or band have a social media account & try and find videos of them in action. A good artist or DJ will (or should have) real reviews from real people (as opposed to quotes), this could be on their website, Facebook page, google places etc. so my advice is if you can't see any evidence of their work & you haven't had a direct recommendation - move on.

Also ask friends, family, your venue & online via groups & forums what is available. Be very careful, especially when getting advice from strangers, as their idea of a good DJ might not be yours. Often, it's just a friend they know and have never seen them live; which is especially the case with local Facebook groups! Also, double check with your venue recommendations as they may have an affiliate relationship with their suppliers, thus they are selling their service in exchange for money & not necessarily because of their talents. If you have a DJ included with your venue package, ask what commission they are taking from the DJ & how much they are paying them net because you may be paying £450 and getting a £200 DJ!

Go and see them live, which is especially the case with bands, but not so much with DJ's as they will often play at private events. Obviously, the best scenario is to book a DJ or band at an event you have been too, but a DJ that rocked your friends 30th, might not be very good match for your wedding!

4: Get some quotes

Yes, I know, shopping for dresses & planning your honeymoon is a lot more fun, but spend a few hours on Google & several mugs of tea later - your done! When you have 3-4 favourites get in touch with them for availability & a quote. Make sure that you include your venue, date & your musical preferences. You can add a bit more information such as guest numbers, access (stairs etc) & times. The more information they have the easier it is to give you a quote. Sit back & relax.



5: Pick a budget

I have put this as number 5 because a lot of people budget for the entertainment before they know what they want or need. The evening entertainment is a huge part of your wedding and as it's often at the end it leaves a lasting memory for you & your guests. It's crucial to book the best entertainment you can afford, rather than setting a very low budget to start with & having to book a cheaper option or cut costs elsewhere to accommodate for it.

See if you can get a deal of some sort, which might result in a drop-in price, but may result in a slightly stripped-down service, which is not always beneficial. A band (for example) may say "OK I can discount by £200 but I will have to drop the sax & trumpet players", which for a soul band may really impact on the music. A DJ may cancel the LED uplighting, which is an awesome visual addition! Deals for weddings are also very much date related, so you will have far less movement if your wedding is on a Saturday in July, opposed to a Thursday in Jan!



Get a package if possible. The more you buy the more you get & as I have said most DJ's (Including me) provide a huge range of other extras that you might not know about, which may result in a considerable discount overall. Are you booking a toastmaster, LED dancefloor, photobooth & a speaker system for the ceremony music? Well a decent DJ can do all of that at a highly professional level at a much cheaper price. It's the same with musicians, if you book them for the ceremony music, drinks, meal & evening you can really save a lot of money & really enhance your wedding day.

6: Arrange a meeting or just a chat on the phone/email & ask some of the following questions

A: How long have you been in business, how many functions do you do a year?

It's all very good being in the business for 20 years, but if you only do 1 wedding a month on average there is a good chance that they may not love what they do or take it seriously. A seasoned & passionate band or DJ will deliver on the day.

B: Are you a specialist for my event?

A DJ that you have seen in your daughters 18th might not necessarily be the right fit for a 50th birthday or wedding, so make sure that they are capable & able to adapt to your needs.

C: Have you played at my venue before & will you liaise with the venue or make a site visit?

A good supplier will most probably been to or may have worked at your venue, which is gold as they may be on first name terms with the staff & also know the quirks, not to mention access & set up procedures.

D: Do you have Public Liability insurance (PLI) & a portable appliance certificate PAT?

Insurance protects you and your guests from any personal damages, but it may also be a legal requirement of your venue insurance. All professional musician or DJ should have these if they are operating electronic instruments & heavy speakers etc.

D: Can I formulate a list of music & can guests make requests on the night?

This is a bit more DJ related, but bands often have huge repertoires to choose from, which is fabulous. A good modern DJ should also be willing to take a request list from you as it will give them an idea of what you like, so they can provide a personalised service.

E: Can I meet you, do you offer phone, online video or in person consultations?

These days there is very little reason not to meet with a client. That way you can ask them questions, but also gain familiarity, which pays dividends on the day. It's also a lot easier to

gauge their abilities and style, but also gives them the opportunity to ask you relevant questions (such as times, formalities) and provide invaluable advice.

F: What equipment do you use?

The two main things to look at are sound and lighting. Make sure that the speaker system is appropriate for your event because a large marquee will need a larger sound system (as its technically outside) compared to a small hotel function room. Also, the number of people in your venue will absorb sound, so a large room with 150 people will need a larger sound system than the same room with 50 people. Try and watch videos of them in action to gauge the lighting and effects & ask them what else they can offer.

G: Do you provide a written contract?

H: Will it be you who is Djing on the day?

This is not such a problem with bands, but you really need to know who is providing your entertainment before paying out any money. This is especially the case with in-house package DJ'S and agents as you don't want to pay £500 and get lumbered with a £200 DJ!!

I: Do you have provision if something goes wrong?

A lot of things can go wrong, but a good supplier will have thought about this & made provisions to carry on as if nothing happened. The main thing to ask is 'do you have back up equipment with you on the night', such as a separate PA system or laptop. Ask your band where their members are coming from, do they carry breakdown cover & what happens if you one of them is ill on the day.

J: What makes you different?

Every band, singer, DJ or live artist is different in some way to the next supplier, so it's worth asking them what they can bring to the table that sets them apart. It also puts them on the spot a little, so you can gauge their authenticity too.

8: Book, receive a contract & pay a booking fee

Relax for now. Your hard work is done.

9: One month prior to your event:

About a month before your function, it's worth sitting down with a drink and really working out what music makes you tick, but bear in mind the subjective musical tastes of your guests also. I always get a list of 10-15 personal tracks from the bride & groom separately, which

gives great clarity to what you want, plus another 20 odd tracks for the guests, including some slower/relaxed tracks & some for the end of the event.

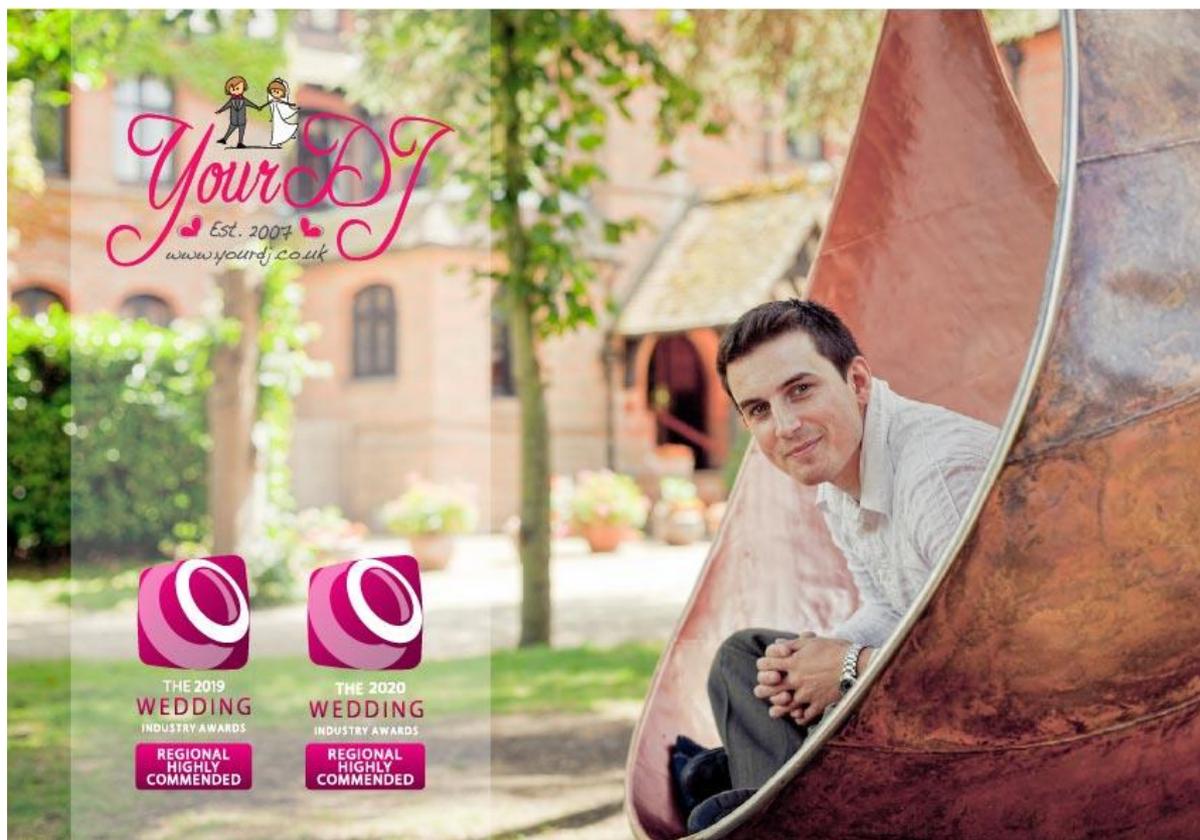
If you're getting married you may also have to consider ceremony, background, grand entrance & the music for the meal. It's very nice to set a theme for the day & even link some of your ceremony music in to the evening.

More detailed information on music planning: <https://yourdj.co.uk/music-ideas/>

If possible, arrange a meeting with your DJ band or performer & make sure that they have all necessary details. This is also a time when you possibly have to pay the balance, so make sure they send you their bank details etc.

10: On the day:

On the day, relax, have fun and share the moment with your loved ones knowing that all your hard work has paid off.



Hopefully this has been useful for you, If you are interested in booking me as your wedding DJ then please do fill out the form below for a brochure, pricelist & a list of my favourite local suppliers:

<https://yourdj.co.uk/hampshire-wedding-dj-prices/>