

PLANNING MUSIC FOR A CHURCH WEDDING

Planning music for a wedding, let alone all the other details of the ceremony itself, can seem a daunting task. But music, in whatever form, plays an important part in the service, and can make a huge contribution to a joyful occasion.

You may also find our downloadable checklist useful as you plan for the big day. (*The timeline is a guide only; the earlier you can book the venue and musicians, the better.*)

First things first

So, where are you going to get married? It may be a church where you've been worshipping for a long time, or where you went to Sunday School as a child. Whatever your choice, it's worth finding out whether the church is accustomed to hosting weddings. Some churches are very popular, with a number of ceremonies taking place one after the other on busy Saturdays in the summer. Such places are well practised at making sure everything goes smoothly on the day, but their busy schedule may affect what you can and cannot do for your special occasion. For other places of worship, a wedding might be a rare and special event.

- Go to a Sunday service, so that you can hear the musical set-up (instrument(s) and musicians) for yourself.
- You may well have some musical ideas, but be realistic; Widor's *Toccata* sounds brilliant on a large organ, but it can be a bit of a challenge even for a proficient organist – especially on a small instrument in desperate need of renovation!

1. The initial meeting with the minister or priest (Twelve months before)

The church authorities should be helpful and welcoming, and will help you plan your order of service. This will normally follow a set pattern, with appropriate 'slots' for musical items such as the hymns. At your initial meeting with the minister or priest, ask about the situation regarding the organist at the church, and at this early stage, ask to arrange a meeting with him/her. whether the church has a qualified organist in post and the nature of their employment contract. It is also worth asking about the availability of a choir; a good choir can do much to lead the singing of the hymns and add considerably to the musical impact of the service.

If you want something out of the ordinary, consider whether this might be possible, and whether the necessary musical resources and expertise are at hand to make sure your event is memorable for all the right reasons!!

You will need to ask about the following:

- **All fees**, including those payable to the church, musicians and verger, and for the marriage certificate.
- **The order of service**, including the placing of musical items.
- **Filming the ceremony**. There will be an extra cost here, including a possible facility fee to the church, additional fees to the organist arising under the Copyright Patents and Designs Act 1988 (see below), musicians, as well as the charges to cover a copyright licence fee on any music and poetry readings you include that are still in copyright.

2. Book the organist (Twelve to six months before)

Weddings can be an important part of a church organist's work, and many enjoy preparing for and playing for them.

It's important to check exactly what fees you need to pay. It is not uncommon for couples to ask a friend to play for their special occasion; in this situation a fee may still be payable to the resident organist as part of his/her employment agreement with the church. This is a frequent occurrence, and you should be given clear advice by the minister on this.

It's important to establish at the outset the nature of the organist's contract with the church, which may include the automatic right to play for **all** weddings and other services. Because of this, a fee may still be payable to the resident organist, should you want a friend to play for your special occasion. This is not an unusual occurrence, and you should be given clear advice on this.

Additional fees may be payable to the organist if you want to film your wedding; depending on the nature of the employment contract between church and organist, this can be up to 100% of the initial fee. Employment practices and arrangements vary greatly from church to church, so it's worth asking at an early stage to avoid any awkward situations later. Such fees cover recordings *solely* for domestic and private use. Special copyright arrangements may need to be made if you pay someone to record your wedding, whether sound and/or video.

It would be a good idea to have an initial discussion about the church's musical forces, including choir or music group at the church, and talk about choices of music (see below). If you are considering bringing in a soloist or other musicians, it is a good idea to do this at an early stage.

You will need to ask about the following:

- The organist's contract
- Musical forces
- Possible musical choices

3. Book choir and other musicians if necessary (Twelve to six months before)

By and large, churches are used to accommodating the choices and preferences that couples make, so long as they are suitable, of course, for what is a religious ceremony. You may want to bring in a soloist, an instrumental group or choir, or even a friend to play the organ (see above). If you're stuck, ask local organists; they may well know of a local choir or group of competent singers who could lead the music at your ceremony. Regarding fees, this is very much a free-for-all; £50 per singer in an outside choir is not unknown, but this is by no means a guide price!

4. Choose music and provide copies (Four months before)

While you will want to choose suitable music that you both like and is meaningful, it's important to involve the congregation in some good hearty singing! It's useful to meet the organist with either a piano or even the church organ at hand, so that you can discuss and hear musical ideas. Here are a few thoughts:

Hymns:

- Choose familiar hymns. As Lindsay Gray implies on the RSCM website video, it's embarrassing if the congregation doesn't know the hymns, but wonderful to hear a congregation in full voice! Depending on your guests' singing abilities (!) there's usually room for two or three hymns, or some other suitable musical item. You might like to consider a rousing hymn of praise at the beginning. Places where you might include a hymn are:
 - At the beginning – after the arrival of the bride
 - In between the readings (or a musical item other than a hymn)
 - After the Exchange of Vows and before the prayers
 - After the prayers and before the signing of the registers

Coming in and going out:

- 'Here comes the bride' (Wagner's Bridal Chorus from *Lohengrin*) has been a traditional favourite for decades, but there are plenty of other pieces which announce in no uncertain terms that the bride has arrived. See the music listing on the RSCM web page for some musical suggestions, both for the procession of the bride, and the joyous departure at the end; you will need to discuss these with the organist. The processional should be fairly short, giving enough time for the bride to process up the aisle and 'land', and for bridesmaids et al to move to their places. The favourite for the Recessional is often Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March' (from '*A Midsummer Night's Dream*'), but there are plenty of splendid alternatives, not all of which are as difficult to play as Widor's *Toccata*.

Other musical opportunities:

- Before the service. Arguably it's best to leave a choice of suitable music to the organist; with guests arriving, some of whom perhaps won't have seen each other for a long time, there's probably plenty of excited chatter! If you have a particular favourite tune, it's perhaps best to leave this to a quieter point during the service. Of course, the bride won't be around before the service to listen either.
- Between the readings. An anthem or a psalm sung by a choir or soloist, or a suitably contemplative instrumental item.
- At the signing of the registers. Plenty of opportunity here, for that special piece to be performed! Do choose something appropriate; the various settings of *Pie Jesu* are beautiful but the words are taken from the Requiem (Service for the Commemoration of the Dead).

Special choices of music need to be discussed thoroughly; some organists may feel equal to the task of learning a new piece, but some may only be comfortable with a set repertoire. It is important to talk to the resident organist in good time before the service.

Providing music copies

It is the couple's responsibility to provide and pay for any copies of music not in the church's or choir's possession; photocopies of music that is still in copyright are illegal. They place the church and performers in a difficult position. Music copies can be ordered online through the RSCM website www.rscm.com/shop or email: musicdirect@rscm.com. Our staff will be happy to advise.

Check copyright arrangements for music and hymn texts

Copyright fees can be payable for the reproduction of hymn and other texts in orders of service, as well as music notation. Many churches pay a blanket fee to Christian Copyright International Ltd (CCLI) www.cclic.co.uk to cover reproduction of words in orders of service. Check whether the church has a CCLI licence. If it does, you will need to include the church's CCLI licence number on the rear page of your order of service. Some words

(‘Morning has broken’ is an example) are not covered by this licence. In addition, there are rights issues involved when church ceremonies are filmed. *More advice is given elsewhere on this page.*

5. Prepare a printed order of service (Two months before)

The church should be able to provide you with a standard order of service from which you can prepare a first draft. (See the example on the RSCM web page. The Church of England website also has a very useful tool for devising your own order of service online – see link on the web page.)

It should include the ordered sequence of events, the words of hymns, the titles of readings and names of readers, the text of any prayers, especially those needing a spoken congregational response, and the Lord’s Prayer (particularly if you’re using a shortened or modern version). And talking of versions, there are some different versions of some well-known hymns; it’s very important to liaise with the church on this. It’s always good to include the names of the hymn’s author and the composer of the tune, eg: ‘Words: Charles Wesley; Music: SS Wesley’. It should also include details of any other musical items during the service (check this with the organist and other musicians), and the names of musicians taking part.

It’s important that this is circulated to minister and musicians for any suggested tweaks and amendments, and even any unwitting errors; one order of service was printed including the hymn ‘Lord of all hopelessness’!! It has been known for there to be several updates before a final version is produced.

The church may be able to recommend a local printer who can reproduce your order of service quickly and efficiently.

6. Rehearsal arrangements (One month before)

If you have booked visiting musicians, they will need some rehearsal time in the church, even if it’s on the day prior to the wedding ceremony itself. Obviously this needs to be arranged with the church authorities to take place at a time when the church is comparatively quiet. Some thought will need to be given to parking space for cars, refreshments for musicians, and the availability of changing areas. A quick supportive phone call a few days beforehand of the ‘everything OK?’ variety to those responsible for the music at your wedding is always appreciated.

7. Payment of fees (Two weeks before)

All churches and musicians will require payment in advance or on the day itself. If you’re paying fees by cheque, many churches will set a period prior to the wedding so that the cheque can be cleared. If you’re employing the services of outside musicians, their fees will be separate from those of the church. Such fees do not cover flowers or wedding stationery.

8. Enjoy the music

Yes – enjoy the music! All the preparation has been done in advance – so relax and be uplifted by the music during the occasion. Hopefully you’ll have chosen music that everyone can appreciate and join in with. Even if your musical requirements are modest, good communication with those providing the music throughout the whole process is vital.