



Joe Kaczorowski
Kazz Music Orchestra
(646) 621-0249
joe@kazzmusic.com
www.kazzmusic.com

How To Make an Informed Decision About Choosing A Band For Your Wedding

By: Joe Kaczorowski – Saxophonist and Director of The Kazz Music Orchestra

As someone who has been working with wedding bands both as a leader and a sideman since I moved to the New York City and Hudson Valley areas in 2001, I've had many opportunities to work with couples on planning the music for their wedding, so by this point, I'd say that I feel pretty comfortable about the process. However, if you're getting married, chances are that choosing and booking bands isn't something you do every day. So, it's natural that most brides and grooms aren't incredibly comfortable in knowing the right questions to ask or things to consider when booking a band. This article will provide you with insight into what you should be considering when choosing a band for your wedding.

The Importance of a Good Band

Ever been to a wedding where the music was bad? If you have, I don't need to say anything else. If you haven't, consider yourself lucky. It has been my experience that the things most often talked about after a wedding are the venue, the food, and the music. The music can absolutely make or break it in terms of your guests having a good time, so I'd say it's a pretty important decision to get right!

“How Much Do You Cost?”

Every wedding professional will tell you that this is almost always the first question that we hear. There are a lot of mediocre bands that are cheap, and there are also a lot of really good bands that charge in excess of \$10,000 to play at a wedding. There are also a lot of mediocre bands that charge a lot of money. The tricky part is finding a band that is a good value – one that sounds amazing, is priced right, and will be there to help you constantly through your planning process. That last part is really important, because the planning that you do up front with your band, venue, caterer, and wedding coordinator can really help to ensure that things flow smoothly on your wedding day!

Comparing Band Videos and Audio Recordings

There are a lot of standard songs that almost every wedding band performs, and any serious band should have videos, or at least audio recordings of some of those songs online. See if you can find a common song that the bands you are considering have all recorded. Then, do an apples-to-apples comparison between the bands to see what versions you like best.



Joe Kaczorowski
Kazz Music Orchestra
(646) 621-0249
joe@kazzmusic.com
www.kazzmusic.com

If you are considering a band that only has audio, but no video, one very important question to ask would be whether or not the band uses a set group of musicians (particularly singers), or a rotating cast of characters. With no video, it becomes easy for them to pull the old switcheroo on their clients since you can't actually see what the band looks like. There are agencies that use this technique all the time. If you see or hear a singer in a video that you like, ask to make sure that's the singer you're going to be getting at your wedding.

See the Band Live

The ideal place would be to see a band performing at a wedding, but this isn't always possible. You may occasionally get a couple that's OK with you coming to see your prospective band play at their wedding, but keep in mind that this may not always be possible. The big benefit to seeing a band at a wedding is that you can see how they work the flow of events for the reception, and also how well they keep the guests on the dance floor.

If that's not possible, see if the band holds monthly showcases, or performs at a bar or club regularly. These options usually leave plenty of time to talk to the band members, and to get to know them a little bit. Are they the kind of people you'd want your guests interacting with?

Some other considerations for when you go hear a band play live:

- Does the band stop after every song and take time between songs? This can kill the dancing in a hurry at a wedding. A good wedding band should be able to string songs together in the same way a DJ so that they're not stopping all the time.
- How loud is the band? Could you picture your grandma with her hands over her ears because the band's subwoofer is about to knock her wig off of her head? Or, do you think you'd be able to talk comfortably with guests if you were sitting at a table, or standing at a bar with them while the band was playing?
- Are they playing well-known hits, or are they playing obscure songs off of their playlist that only audiophiles are going to recognize?

“How Many Singers Do They Have?”

Some people think that if a band has five people that sing, that this is going to make the band that much more amazing. Here are a few perspectives on the number of singers:

- If there are five singers and they can all sing in harmony together, then you might be in for a treat with some great five-part harmonies. If they don't harmonize well, you might get a lot of unison backing vocals, where



Joe Kaczorowski
Kazz Music Orchestra
(646) 621-0249
joe@kazzmusic.com
www.kazzmusic.com

- it doesn't really matter if there's one person or three people singing the same backup lines.
- Some bands need five singers because each singer can only sing really well in one style. You should be able to see this just from watching a band's demo video. Odds are that each singer will typically only sing lead vocals for one or two styles of music because they just don't sound that great on other styles.
 - Rather than find a band with five singers that can only sing in one or two styles each, it can be a lot more cost effective to find a band with fewer singers, but ones that are more versatile and that can sound great in any style. From a cost perspective, the singers are usually the highest paid musicians in the band, so the more and more singers you add, the bigger and bigger your bill is going to be.

Band Marketing Tricks

"We feature a Grammy-nominated guitarist!" There are all kinds of tricks like this that bands will use to promote themselves that aren't really relevant to what you need for a wedding, which is a band that will get your guests up dancing and keep your wedding flowing smoothly. Do you need a Grammy-nominated guitarist? Odds are that your guests aren't going to walk out of your wedding talking about an amazing guitar solo on "Living On A Prayer" for years to come. They'll likely remember the singers, because they're the most identifiable "sound" of the band. So, you may want to ask about the singers' credentials, but you shouldn't base your decisions on what bands or artists people have recorded with. In the end, just because a band has played the Super Bowl halftime show doesn't mean that they'll be a great dance band for a wedding. At the same time, a band that doesn't need to have any huge credentials to really know how to work a crowd at a wedding. Keep the focus on the sound of the band as a whole, and how they will fit into your vision for your wedding.

Talk To Other Brides and Grooms Who Used the Band

If you've found a band that you like, ask them for some references to call. If they can't give you some names and numbers, then the band may not have much wedding experience. The same questions that applied to seeing the band live could be asked of these references too. Here are a few others you might also want to ask:

- What was the band like in terms of the planning process? How responsive were they? How organized were they?
- Were they accommodating in learning requests?
- What did you like most about working with the band?
- What did you like least about working with the band? (You need to hear the good and bad about every group... No group is perfect!)



Joe Kaczorowski
Kazz Music Orchestra
(646) 621-0249
joe@kazzmusic.com
www.kazzmusic.com

- Were they on time?
- What did your guests think of the band?
- How well did the band do while emceeding the wedding?

Online References

Every band is going to tell you how wonderful they are and highlight their best reviews on their website. But, what kind of reputation do they really have online? A lot of brides and grooms will write reviews of their vendors online after their weddings. Spend some time looking for your band on different wedding websites and see what people are really saying about them. Two of the most common places to look for reviews are Wedding Wire and The Knot. See what you can find!

The Planning Process

A good bandleader will be a huge asset to you in the planning process for your wedding. Planning involves a lot more than just figuring out what your first dance is going to be. A top-notch band will utilize a planning document that will make the whole process easy for you and lay out all of your key decisions, including a timeline, music requests, introductions and announcements (and phonetic pronunciations of everyone that will be introduced), as well as other key aspects of your wedding.

A well-organized bandleader will also share this document with your other key vendors prior to your wedding. It will be very helpful to your photographer to know that your speeches and toasts will be happening at a certain time, so that he or she doesn't run off for a bathroom break and miss all of the speeches! Ask the bands you are considering what they typically do during the planning process, and how they will work with your other wedding vendors prior to your wedding.

Ceremony and Cocktail Hour Music

Odds are that in addition to reception music, you will probably be looking for music for your ceremony and cocktail hour as well. A good band should be able to provide music for both of these aspects of your wedding. The band should be able to provide this music much cheaper than if you were to look to other musical groups, as the band will already be on-site for your wedding.

Most commonly, ceremony music is provided by the pianist from the band. If you are interested in classical music for your ceremony, there are a few things to consider:

- You may want to ask what sort of classical music background the band's pianist has. As a performer, classical music and reception music are very different styles in terms of performance requirements.



Joe Kaczorowski
Kazz Music Orchestra
(646) 621-0249
joe@kazzmusic.com
www.kazzmusic.com

- Does the venue have a piano on-site? If they do, and you'll be using it for your ceremony, make sure you work into your agreement with the venue that the piano is to be tuned the week before your wedding. Having beautiful ceremony music played on an out of tune piano will take the beauty out of the music in a hurry.
- If you're not familiar with classical music selections, ask the bandleader. They should be able to recommend some common wedding pieces. If the pianist is well-versed in classical music and you're looking for something a little less traditional, ask the bandleader or pianist for other recommendations outside of the norm, and then to listen to them online.
- You don't have to have classical music played at your ceremony. Your ceremony musician should also be able to play instrumental versions of more contemporary pop music as well.
- If you are getting married in a church, keep in mind that many churches may require you to use their organist, and that many churches may not allow secular music to be played at the church. Find these things out before booking your band's pianist to play for your ceremony.

For the cocktail hour, a good band will probably give you several different options for music. The most basic would likely be a solo pianist or guitar. Most cocktail hours don't have anything more than a jazz trio at their largest. In nearly all cases, there are no drums used at the cocktail hour. One thing to remember is that during the cocktail hour, you'll want your guests to be able to talk without yelling over each other. So, ask the bandleader to keep the music soft and light for the cocktail hour.

Band Breaks

Some bands are going to take a break every 45 minutes no matter what. Others will provide continuous music the entire night through – even providing a solo instrumentalist during dinner for you. Others may take a few strategically-timed full-band breaks. If you're going to be paying thousands of dollars for a band, you should probably try to gauge how much music you're actually going to get out of the band. Ask the bands you are considering when they will be breaking. If it sounds like too many breaks, then talk to the leader and see if you can work out a compromise.

Insurance

Any serious band is going to carry an insurance policy. If the band tells you that insurance isn't necessary, or that they don't typically carry a policy, this may be an indicator that they're not very actively involved in the wedding industry, as this is becoming an increasingly common requirement for bands.



Joe Kaczorowski
Kazz Music Orchestra
(646) 621-0249
joe@kazzmusic.com
www.kazzmusic.com

The policy that many venues require of bands is a \$1,000,000 liability policy that basically covers the band in case one of their PA speakers falls and crushes a bridesmaid, or in case the groom trips over the drum set, or in case the band somehow trashes and destroys the venue.

A Note About Wedding Music Agencies

There are many wedding music agencies that represent a variety of bands. The prices quoted by agencies will include what is typically a pretty hefty agency fee. This fee can easily be at least 20% of the price, and is usually well over \$1,000. The agency fee will typically far exceed what any musician in the band will be getting paid. This fee will cover the agency's time for working with you on the planning process for your wedding. With some agencies, you may have little or no actual interaction with the actual band until right before your wedding.

Agencies use several selling points:

- Access to premium bands – It is true that many premium bands are booked through agencies, and this is really what much of the premium you will pay will go towards – being able to access these premium bands. However, there are also many top-notch bands that do not work through agencies, and these groups can potentially save you thousands of dollars if you can find them.
- Agencies have access to a network of substitute musicians in case one of the musicians in the band you have booked is unavailable at the last minute. This isn't a great selling point, because any good musician in any band should have a half dozen names that they can recommend in a pinch to fill in for them, so don't let agencies fool you into this being something that only they are able to offer.
- Agencies are fully insured. We already discussed that any serious band that is very involved in the wedding industry should have their own insurance policy. So, this isn't a great selling point.

Conclusion

Finding the right band takes time and research. There are many great bands on the market. You don't have to pay \$10,000+ to get an amazing band for your wedding. In fact, some of the bands that cost half as much as those bands are twice as good in my estimation. So, don't assume that the more expensive a group is, the better they are. Use your eyes and ears. Listen to the band. See how they interact with people. Talk to other people who have used the band. Then, decide which band is right for you and your budget. Enjoy the music!