

Wedding Bells - Tips on Playing the Hammered Dulcimer at a Wedding

By Cliff Cole

Introduction

Dulcimer music is a lovely addition to any wedding. In my twenty-five plus years of playing the dulcimer I have played in many weddings. I have performed in multiple configurations; with my band DayBreak; in a duo or trio and as a solo player. I have played in the service, cocktail hours, as the main entertainment and as the contra-dance band. Every wedding I have played in has been a unique experience.

Weddings are generally fun gigs where you can earn good money while playing for an appreciative audience. However, they also can be stressful to play in and often require a good deal of preparation. Brides and grooms and their families often have high expectations for the music, especially during the service. Events are often filmed and recorded, so there will be a permanent record of any mistake you might make.

In this workshop we will discuss some ideas as to how to make playing your dulcimer in a wedding fun and fulfilling. Much of the content offered is common sense advice that is good to understand for other performance situations.

Working With The Bride and Groom

I have found that families who chose hammered dulcimer for their wedding music usually have good taste and are easy to work with. When it is possible I really like to meet with the bride and groom and play music selections for them. They also leave with a CD of my music, and understand where to find samples on the web. If you don't have music recorded, then you need to make one. It's really important for prospective clients to understand how you sound. Recordings should represent what you can pull-off easily in performance.

If you are playing in a service, make sure someone is in charge of communicating with you when the music should start and stop. Make sure you understand the sequence of the service. Make friends with the officiant; you are partners in the service. For elaborate wedding attending the rehearsal is beneficial. If that is not possible make sure you know the exact sequence of events. Don't worry too much if you make a mistake. It can happen; but try your best to get it right. I can't say that I have a perfect record, but I have ALWAYS been complimented on the music, and none of the miscues that have happened were a major problem. When there have been issues it has almost always been because of a misunderstanding in communications.

The Contract

A sample contract is at the end of this document. Please refer to it. A contract should be worded simply and state as many details as possible about the event. As stated above good communications is key.

Money is always the hard part. Make sure you understand your fees before you negotiate. You should always have a minimum price that you can't go lower than. Things like setting up a PA are an extra charge. You should also have travel fee over a certain radius. They might want you to learn new music for the wedding. You can decide to increase or waive fees depending on the situation. The client might want you to attend the rehearsal, so keep that in mind.

My advice is always start with a higher number, it is easier to negotiate down. Money negotiations are not easy; Some educating of the client might be required... Practice with a friend. Have them pretend they are a prospective client. Making money may not be as important to you, but keep in mind that your time and effort is worth something; you also represent all hammered dulcimer players and musicians..

The bride and groom are likely paying handsomely for the catering and flowers, not to mention cloths. Musicians are professionals too, and should receive a fair fee. I like to say that the music is free; there is a fee for getting there, setting up and tearing down.

Sound Systems:

In some situations you can play totally acoustically others require a sound system. I much prefer NOT having to bring sound equipment. There is no rule of thumb, but generally any wedding party over thirty to fifty people will require some sound reinforcement.

I have a full 12 channel powered sound board, speakers and microphone that I use for my band. I also have a small two channel portable system for other situations. Churches often have sound systems, but the quality of the sound can vary wildly, so if you plan to use a "native" sound system make sure you check it out. Is the sound man available on the service day? Is it locked up? Who has the key? I am generally MUCH more comfortable using my own equipment... Make sure that power requirements are mentioned in the contract. Bring an extension cord just in case... A three prong to two prong outlet converter should be in your kit too.

Tune Selections:

These are some tunes that I often play in wedding settings:

Blarney Pilgrim – Traditional Irish jig

Lord Inchiquin – Turlough O'Carolan

Wedding Bells – Cliff Cole

Give Me Your Hand – R. Dall

Brother James Air – Traditional Irish air

Simple Gifts - Shaker Hymn

Jesu, Joy Of Man's Desire – J. S. Bach

Cannon in D - Pachelbel

Haste to The wedding / Joys of Wedlock – Traditional Irish Jigs

Sample Event Contract

From: Dulcy Player; 555-222-2121-H; myemail@gmail.com

Type of Event: Wedding – Annie and Brad

Event Date: Saturday July 3rd, 2010

Time: 3:30

Location:

Deep Lakes Country Club

123 Country Road

AnyTown, Pa 99999

Band Configuration: Solo Hammered Dulcimer

Music Sets:

Set 1: Prelude music (15-20min); Processional Music in service (Cannon in D, Pachelbel) –

PA Required: Yes

Note: The band will bring a small PA system

Agreed Fee: \$250 – ALREADY PAID

Travel Fee: Waived

Deposit Requested: PAID IN FULL

Contact:

Annie McBride Cell: 555-215-1212

Event Contact:

The event coordinator is:

Cordy Nater

555-454-1122

Note: I require access to the event location two hours prior to the service

Other: Please designate a communication person and make a clear signal when to start the processional. A power receptacle needs to be in close proximity to the performance location. I require a shady place to play. (Event will be inside in the case of inclement weather.)

Signatures:

DayBreak (Clifford B. Cole):

Annie McBride::

About The Author

Cliff Cole purchased his first hammered dulcimer in 1985, from Sam Rizzetta. At the time he was playing drums in a blues band. Prior to taking up the dulcimer, he studied drums and percussion for ten years. Since the age of fifteen Cliff has played in numerous rock, blues, jazz, zydeco and folk ensembles. Folk instruments are where the heart is.

Cliff plays the hammered dulcimer in the family folk group "DayBreak," which has been together since 1989. They have made several recordings, including "Lost Cave" which was recorded live inside of Lost River Caverns in Hellertown, PA "Little Steps", and "Autumn Calling," which features many of Cliff's original tunes. They also have produced two Christmas CD's one named "Unity; Unique Music for Christmas" and a live Holiday concert recorded in December of 2002.

DayBreak's music is available on CD-Baby, iTunes and many other digital download stores found on the web.

Cliff also sometimes plays gigs with his lovely daughter, Emily Rose under the name of "Glass Roses", Emily has a strong, beautiful voice, which blends nicely with the dulcimer and guitar. They released a CD named Falling Wings. The CD feature's Emily's voice and some of her original tunes. Emily is now off to college (Mansfield University) and doesn't have as much time to play gigs with her dad.

Cliff's hammered dulcimer was made by James Jones. The full sized 2/16/18/7 instrument covers four octaves and has dampening pedal. For more information about James Jones instruments go to his web site: <http://www.jamesjonesinstruments.com>

Cliff lives with his lovely wife, Pamela, in Quakertown, Pennsylvania. He works as a computer hardware test engineer for the Q-Logic Corporation, which is located in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania.

Cranberry Dulcimer Gathering July 2011

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Cliff Cole -<http://www.daybreakfolk.com/> 215-453-1722