



Photo: Christiaan David



Imagine the opening night of *The Lion King*. The theatre is packed; there is a buzz of excitement. The conductor lifts his batten and the music fills the auditorium as the curtain sweeps open, but something is not quite right—somebody has forgotten to dim the lights and the moment is ruined.

The perfect wedding must have all the aspects of theatre and the bridal couple must hold centre stage. This is not as easy as it seems as a wedding is actually a complex order of events with many priorities which do not always work together. Not only must the wedding be choreographed, but one also has to manage the guests, the photographic session, the meal, and also some less than exciting formalities. All the 'actors' are amateurs, there is no dress rehearsal and the premiere is the last performance!

Let's take a look at the elements that will turn your wedding from the ordinary to the extraordinary.

Timing

Even the most 'laid back' occasion must be underpinned by a carefully thought out procedure of events. This will need to be carefully directed. If the venue has promised an 'in-house co-ordinator' as most do, remember these girls, though full of enthu-

siasm, seldom have the experience required. At many venues this is left to the MC. However any venue who considers themselves experts will not be willing to entrust this critical function to a stranger. You will need a strong and competent leader which the venue should provide. An extensive meeting, seldom less than one and a half hours with the venue, will be required to pull all the complex aspects together. At the close of the meeting, you should be confident that the venue understands the individual aspects and has the ability to manage this procedure.

At Oakfield this critical function is the full responsibility of the Maitre'd who will not only record everything, but also walk through the entire procedure with you. From the consultation with all specialists on the big day, the meeting of the guests in the car park, the separating of guests from the photographic party, to the moving of all the flowers and décor from the Chapel into the reception venue, the consultation with the musicians as to the entrance of the bride into the venue, the serving of the menu, the



Photo: Ryan Graham



Photo: Irene Quist



CANDLES
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management of lighting and the liaison of speakers – all of this is given to the Maitre'd who should have a team who are capable of managing the individual components. It requires teamwork between all parties who must understand the big picture.

A Dramatic Start

There are key moments in a wedding which require special attention, such as the entry of the bride to the church, the couple in to the reception and the first dance. For example, the arrival of the horse and carriage in to The Conservatory is amazingly

dramatic, but it must be accompanied by music at the right time. Likewise, if the carriage is used at the Chapel, the wedding march must start as the carriage draws away. The moment is ruined if the bride walks in full sight of everybody to the entrance of The Chapel and waits for the music to start. I strongly recommend a rehearsal with the music.

The Music

The music is so powerful and significant at functions that it deserves as much attention as the décor, the dress and even the



Photo: Patrick Furter



setting. You will need an expert with experience. You will need to spend a good deal of time with the DJ or band leader so that they can get to know you and understand the style and personality of your wedding.

The music plays on emotions and is the silver thread that draws all the elements of this romantic occasion together. It also brings together past and present to make the day richer than you could ever have imagined. As with the soundtrack of great movies, the music at your function should embody the richness of your relationship, the ebb and flow of the function and the storyline of the event.

Here are the key moments where music can make a difference:

On arrival at the venue, the music sets the mood and helps occupy time that often feels empty. As guests are entering the Chapel, great classical masterpieces are appropriate with some of the parent's favourite old pieces woven into the choice.

A hush needs to descend over the service to signal the arrival of the retinue with a dedicated song for the entry of the bridesmaids. This acts as a prelude to the special music chosen by the bride for her entry. This needs to be grand—the princess has arrived. Timing is critical. The music must always start before the bride is visible.

This is a challenge in the open Chapel where all the guests watch the arrival of the carriage. We solve the problem by allowing the bride to exit away from the Chapel. The music commences as the carriage draws away, to reveal the star of the day, as she commences her walk over the bridge and in to the Chapel. This part must never be hurried. The music will have a rhythm of its own, and with a little practice the bride will tune in completely and make her walk down the aisle a perfect moment. As opposed to recorded music, nothing is more moving than a solo or duet performance. This message of hope and love is always a highlight.

The musical storyline continues as guests await the arrival of the couple at the reception, where guests 'wait out' the photo shoot. Good food is part of the trick, but this is a challenging moment for the DJ or musicians. A good band is especially effective at this time as they can easily strike a rapport with both young and old to create the laid back, friendly atmosphere which will bring strangers together before the formalities begin.

The arrival of the couple should be dramatic, but often falls flat as the bride and groom wait tentatively at the door for the guests to stand and the music to start. Make the best of this special opportunity as you present yourselves as man and wife to the world.

The dinner music needs to build an atmosphere which embraces the theme of love as a platform for the speeches, the backdrop during dinner, reaching a high point with the first dance. Henk from Blast Music Specialists recommends that this be the father and daughter and that the first dance of the bride and groom be kept until a special moment, later in the evening when the bridal couple can sweep around the floor without inhibition and joined with enthusiasm by their guests. Help will be needed from the DJ to get the sequence of events fine tuned, so that the wonderful traditions all have their moment.

Discos are favoured at present, but if you want a real show bring on a band. Their music will be played in sets which encourages everybody to get on to the dance floor and still have the opportunity to chat. Special requests should only be accepted if they fit with the theme and if the hosts approve. Party lovers will always stay to the end. The wedding should not fizzle out, but rather end with a beautiful love song as a finale.

Finally have your DJ record all the special songs played at your wedding on to a disc. This will be the soundtrack of your wedding to be cherished for many years to come.

The Speeches

The speeches are as much a part of 'Showbiz' as the rest of your wedding and best of all it is free! Speeches should be taken seriously. Some believe that not everybody can produce a good speech, but this is not only untrue, but also a weak excuse. People tend to see a good speech as a talent and fail to recognise that good speakers understand that a good delivery will never succeed if the content is poor. If public speaking is daunting, the well prepared speech, if delivered with sincerity can be read verbatim and will still hit the mark every time. In the case of a complete emotional meltdown, which does happen, the MC can complete 'the speech' and save the day.

With regards to the number of speeches and the order, there are no hard and fast rules anymore, but it will need to be held together by the MC. He does not have to be the life and soul



Photo: Patrick Furter

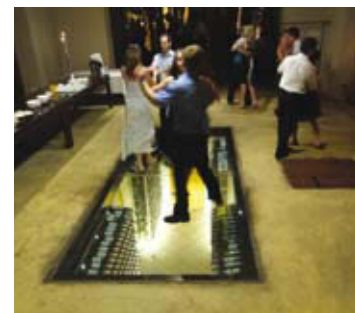


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of the party, but rather a diligent person who really cares more about the bride and groom than his own ego. Keep the speeches to less than forty minutes, failing which you need to break the speeches with a course from the menu. Ensure that EVERY speaker is allocated a time slot. Before finalising the procedure, double check that this time is understood and will be adhered to by the speaker.

It is obvious that poor equipment is going to be an embarrassment to the speaker and will spoil the moment. If adequate, we generally plug in to the DJ's music system and provide a high quality radio microphone of our own. This allows the DJ to moderate the volumes and reverb settings for each speaker's voice. The MC should also adjust the height of the microphone as each new speaker comes to the podium. This too, should be rehearsed and it is advisable for all speakers, where possible to do a microphone check before the function commences.

Your speeches should be a highlight, even if the speaker is not present. The best speech I ever heard was by a dad who simply hated speaking. Instead his recorded speech was one of the most moving speeches and certainly a highlight of his daughter's wedding.

The Lighting

This is a much neglected yet subtle aspect of every wedding, which few will notice when it is right. It is not difficult to under-

stand how it makes a difference, however, the venue will have to be able to provide the basic special lighting required. This will include the ability of all lights in the venue to be dimmed with special lights required for the main table and the podium. The podium must have lighting for the script, failing which all the lights will be turned on in the venue, ruining the atmosphere. If this is not provided, it may well be worth your while to ask the DJ or band to provide additional lighting.

Lighting needs to be soft and romantic, but also sufficient for the videographer and photographer to work without obtrusive additional lighting and flash. This is particularly important during the wedding ceremony. The 'colour' of the lighting also makes a difference in how skin tones are captured. (The very white light of the modern energy saving globes are the worst!) The ideal of course, is abundant natural light (not direct sun light). We have, for example, recently added large sky lights into the Chapel and painted the beams a gentle cream to match the excellent lighting in the Conservatory.

Candles offer fantastic lighting opportunities. With one hundred and fifty glass candles in the roof of the Homestead, the atmosphere is spectacular, but it does require specialised lighting for the main table, cake and band, who simply disappear without it.