



The BackTrax Band

Tips and Advice When Hiring A Band

Hiring a band for your event can be a daunting event for many people who often only do so once in their lives. In addition, even if one does everything right, your event can still turn out badly. Given this, we think that the following advice might be useful to those you might be considering or in the process of hiring a band. It might even be useful to those who hire bands on a regular basis. So, read and consider the following before hiring a band:

Why Hire A Band?

- Live music is always an excellent choice. The songs may be familiar, but the arrangements will also have their own uniqueness. If you want the songs to be just like the radio, hire a DJ.
- If guests don't enjoy dancing, they can enjoy watching the musicians play.

Identify Your Needs

- Bands come in all styles, sizes and configurations. Determine the kinds of music you would like played at your party and the age of the guests attending.
- Most bands play a little bit of everything. If your event is pretty generic and you're comfortable with a band that plays many different styles then it's a good idea to hire a group of established musicians who play together on a regular basis and who know many different kinds of music.
- If you're planning a party that requires ethnic musical selections or novelty music you may not be able to expect this from a regular party band. You can always combine two bands and use the ethnic group part of the time and the variety band the rest of the time. Mixing a DJ and live band combination is also a great way to cover all the bases. Just choose the one person you want to act as the main liaison or emcee. Work out a time line so both groups or entities know where they fit into the program.

Identify Band Alternatives and Select A Band Carefully

- Ask for a song list or repertoire list and compare to what you need/like.
- Watch videos, listen to demo tapes, inquire about the personnel of the group, ask questions and interview carefully. Taking notes is a great way to compare after you've interviewed a few different vendors.
- Look for performers who are fun, excited, sensitive to the crowd, and open to your suggestions. Identify several bands and arrange to watch or listen to them before hiring them.
- Sometimes it's easier to select a band from an entertainment agency or party planner due to their experience with many different groups. They should be able to offer you a variety of bands or musical styles to select from and give you suggestions as to what will work best for your particular event. However you can probably cut a better deal with the band directly so don't be afraid to contact individual bands or musicians. You will also be able to stay in closer contact with the person who will actually be working at your party.
- Don't over shop. When selecting anything from carpet to music you can over do it and end up in a dazed haze of confusion. Start with the best choices in the higher price ranges then interview a few lower priced vendors. Compare and choose based on your needs and how they're being met.



Hire A Set of Professionals – A Band With Experience

- Hire a band that has played wedding receptions before - they will be familiar with the flow of events and can serve as emcees.
- Select professionals who sincerely care about your event and want to see it successful. If your emcee or musical contact person is jaded, insensitive and too busy to answer your questions then don't think twice, just move on.
- Consider having a formal contract with the band that specifies information about the event, what expectations you for them, what fees are to be paid, etc.
- The most important word of advice....don't be afraid to pay more than you budget. Most people do not budget enough for entertainment and cut corners. The entertainment is one of the most critical elements of a successful party. The entertainment keeps people happy and having a good time. Don't skimp. You'll be glad you hired the best.

Identify and Communicate Expectations For the Band

- What is the attire of the event? Are guests wearing tuxedos, beach attire, suits and ties, formal gowns, or shorts and tank tops? The musical entertainment should reflect the theme and style of the event. The musicians should dress according to the theme.
- Be clear about the kinds of attire you would like to have your entertainers wear. Don't leave it up in the air and find out that the band showed up with jeans and t-shirts for a company dinner party.
- If there are certain songs that you want performed, make your song selections from the band's song listing and return it to your musical group. If your song isn't listed, ask the band leader if the band can learn it for your event. Don't over select; allow the band the flexibility of reading the crowd and selecting songs or medleys that they know will work well for your party. If the group is a specialty band or ensemble then you should just let them pick the kinds of music they'll play. You probably won't know the names of the songs anyway.
- Use a contract to communicate your expectations for the band.

What Should Happen the Day Of Your Event

- Have the band arrive at least 2 hours prior to the time you want them to begin playing, and check their availability to play overtime.
- Most bands will require a down payment prior to the performance. However, do not pay them the balance of the contracted amount until the performance is over. This allows you to hold the band accountable for their work during the scheduled performance time.
- Several hours before the scheduled event, call the band leader and confirm all the details. You might want to do this the day before your event.

Band Setup

- Don't under estimate how much space a band needs to setup. A 5 piece band might need a space that is 30 to 35 wide and 8 to 10 feet deep.
- Direct sunlight is a problem for many instruments. If it's too hot outside the equipment can overheat and malfunction in the middle of your party. Guitars go out of tune and instruments don't sound as good due to the effects of the heat. Always provide shade for your musicians.



- Don't water your lawn the day before the party and especially not the morning of your party. Microphone stands placed on wet grass can cause shocks to the musicians who sing and play instruments like guitars. If there's any chance of rain don't expect them to play outside and wait to get rained on. Water on a piano keyboard is the equivalent of spilling coffee on your computer keyboard.
- Electricity is important for most musical groups. Usually there is never a problem when a band shows up to play at a hotel or banquet facility. The catering department selects the location for the musicians to play in and most times it is near an electrical outlet. It's a good idea to rent a generator if you have any doubts about the integrity of the electrical available at your party site.
- Unusual locations, warehouses, yachts, picnic grounds, vacant buildings, etc. can pose challenges for bands in regards to their electrical needs. To avoid any problems please make a sight inspection and actually check the electrical receptacles to make sure they all work. Find out what the wattage requirements are for the band and insure that your event site has that kind of power wattage available. This evaluation should also include a representative from the musical group.
- Consider providing band members a place to change and freshen up after they have unloaded and setup their equipment.
- Remember, that for a 4 hour function, the band at minimum will have traveled for 1 hour to reach your location, spent 2 hours setting up, played for 4 to 4.5 hours, spent 1 hour tearing down and packing up equipment, and spent another hour driving home.

The Performance

- Each venue or location that a band plays in is unique. Make sure that you are assertive in letting the band know about volume, unclear vocals, etc. so that they can correct the problem. Often, the band is not aware of problems you might hear or see.
- If band members are acting inappropriately, using inappropriate language, etc. get the attention of the band leader and have him or her correct the behavior immediately.
- If desired, request some kind of taped or CD music during break times so the ambiance of the party remains. If you want continuous music then the band will need to make arrangements to adjust their price accordingly since breaks are a standard in the industry.
- If you're worried about covering the newest and most current music you can request that the band bring CD's to play during any breaks or to enhance their performance. Most bands today provide break music or have CD's available should guests request something that's not in their repertoire.
- If you hire a group for two hours they may request a break in the middle. Bands that play for a full reception or party will need several breaks. Consider offering beverages and food to band members.

Emcee Function

- Not all musicians make good leaders. Always interview the person in charge of the musical group, or the person who will act as your emcee. Build a rapport with this individual and explain to them your entire program. A true professional will give you a questionnaire to fill out or at least ask you a series of questions about the order of your event, people to introduce, activities, speeches, special requests, musical styles to play, etc.
- A band leader can make or break your party because this is the person who keeps it all together. A good leader will watch the flow of your event and guide guests through the evening with smooth transitions between things like the first dance, toast, interactive dancing or other traditional activities.

