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Choosing The Music For Your Wedding Ceremony

by Elaine McDonald, Wedding music composer and publisher, [Truly Yours Music](#)

If you are like most brides and grooms, the music that will be played during your wedding ceremony is very important to you -- but you may not have a clue how to go about selecting it! Here are some guidelines for American weddings (customs vary in other countries).

An important factor in choosing your music is the setting for your wedding ceremony. If your ceremony will not be in a religious setting, you can choose just about any kind of music you like -- although you will want to stay within the bounds of good taste! On the other hand, if your ceremony will be in a church or synagogue, or conducted by a clergy person at another location, you will probably need to stay within guidelines set by the clergy person or the church.

Most religious denominations consider a wedding ceremony to be a form of worship service. For this reason, churches generally do not allow "secular" music (non-religious popular music) during a wedding. Some will allow secular music while the guests are being seated, but not during the ceremony itself. Check with the church where your wedding will be held for its specific guidelines.

How religious do the lyrics of a song have to be for a church wedding? Songs that make respectful reference to God (or to Jesus or the Holy Spirit in Christian churches) are almost certain to be acceptable. Many churches will also allow a song that does not make specific reference to a deity, as long as it focuses on religious ideals and values relating to love and marriage, such as faithfulness and mutual support.

A good starting point for selecting your ceremony music is to meet with the church organist or pianist. This person will probably be happy to play various pieces for you that can be used for the processional and the recessional. You may be allowed to select one piece for the processional where the bridal party enters, and another for the bride's processional. (If you can afford it, you might consider having a string quartet play your processional and recessional, as well as music during the seating of your guests.)

Most weddings include a vocal soloist singing anywhere from one to four selections during the wedding ceremony -- usually accompanied by piano, guitar or harp. A duet sung by a male-female vocal duo is often used instead of a solo, and can be very effective! You will probably need to hire live vocalist(s); many churches do not allow recorded music in wedding ceremonies, except perhaps recorded accompaniment for a live vocalist.

Appropriate places in the ceremony for vocal selections, depending on church guidelines, may include: (1) during the seating of the mothers or lighting of candles by the mothers; (2) immediately before the processional; (3) before the vows; (4) during the lighting of the Unity Candle; and (5) during the serving of communion to the congregation, if this is included in the ceremony.

Vocal music is probably the aspect of your wedding music selection where you will want to have the most personal involvement, since the songs include lyrics and you will want them to be especially meaningful for you. Where can you find songs with just the right lyrics that will be acceptable in a church setting? And preferably something you haven't heard at a hundred other weddings?

First, ask your vocalist or accompanist for suggestions. Have them show you their sheet music for the songs they suggest, and when you find one with lyrics you like, have them play or sing that song for you.

Before deciding whether the songs suggested by your musicians are really what you want, you should go to a store that sells sheet music and songbooks and browse in the wedding section. (Look for printed music rather than recorded music, as your musicians will probably need printed music to work from.) Chances are, you will find something that more closely expresses what you want to say than the songs suggested by your musicians. If you don't live near a store that sells sheet music and songbooks, or if you just prefer shopping on the Internet, take a look at the Truly Yours Music website, www.truly-yours.com.

Another option is to hire a composer/songwriter to write a special song for your wedding ceremony. There are several websites where these services are offered, including www.thesaxman.com, www.songforyou.com and www.truly-yours.com. Be sure to give the songwriter plenty of advance time before your wedding to complete the song.

I hope the suggestions I've provided here will help you find just the right music for your special day. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at songwriter@truly-yours.com.

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