

Conjuring Up The Perfect Mix
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Let's be honest, to the non-DJ, what we do looks easy. We are just back there spinning things and twisting knobs right? FALSE! DJing is hard work and one of the toughest things we do is keeping folks on the floor by creating just the right mix of the perfect songs. One wrong song and the dance floor dies. It is one of the most difficult things to teach DJs that you hire because it naturally comes with experience. However, in this article, we will explore at least some mixing and music programming tips that you can incorporate whether you are a rookie or have been doing this for as long as I have.

The majority of what Bunn DJ Company does is weddings, so a lot of this article may be in "wedding speak". In terms of a typical wedding, they often break into four parts musically-cocktail hour, formal songs, dinner, and then dancing.

Typically, down here in North Carolina, guests arrive and mingle for about an hour and have some drinks and passed hors d'oeuvres. We call it the cocktail hour, some call it social hour. In any case, that's your first chance for guests to hear your music. Now, if you get an off the wall playlist from your bride and groom that has a lot of non-danceable stuff on it, this is your chance to possibly play it. However, make sure you clear that with the couple before doing so since there is a good chance they won't get to hear it since they are usually finishing up with photos. If you don't get requests from your clients for this time of the night, then I think a good mix is so important here. Yes, it is background music. Yes, people are talking louder than you are playing (or should be, be careful of your volume during this time). BUT, this is your first chance to make a good impression...to let the guests know you're a pro. I always mix all types of genres during that time period. I blend everything from Rat Pack guys like Frank and Dean to new crooners like Buble and then throw in some acoustic singer/songwriter cats like Jack Johnson, James Taylor, Van Morrison and even flavor it with some non-dance R&B or Motown grooves. During this time I'm not beat mixing, just playing around, having fun and creating an awesome atmosphere. The harder mixing comes later!

The second hour of a reception is usually taken up by the formal introductions (they usually pick that song) and their first dance and parent dances (again, picked by the couple). However, with dinner, I still feel like the music mix here is so important for continuing the good vibe of the night. During dinner, I play several of the artists that I mentioned above, but the songs aren't so upbeat and "swinging". I also add in a few of the more mellow guys I love like Ray Lamontagne. Again, be careful of your volume. These folks may be catching up on old times or getting to know one another for the first time. They don't want to be screaming at each other because the DJ is showing off.

After all of the formalities are done, dinner has been eaten, toasts have been delivered, cake has been served, it's time for you to show the guests why this lovely couple hired...because you rock! We all know that you are tired of some of the tried and true stuff like "Brick House" or "Love Shack", but just think, these people don't go to a wedding every weekend. They don't hear these classics on the radio. They will probably get into them, so go ahead and rock them (as long as they aren't on the "DO NOT PLAY" list.). Also, when I start, I start really mellow. For example, a good solid opener for me is "My Girl" by The Temptations. No matter what age you are, you know it, and it's not really too fast or too slow. I can then gauge the crowd right away if they are into it and I may run a whole set of four more songs from that Motown era ending the set with a ballad like "Unchained Melody" by The Righteous Brothers. Then, I may come out of that and go into something like "The Twist" mixed with "Runaround Sue". My point is that if you come out of the gate cranking "I Gotta Feeling", the old folks are going to simply leave. My theory has always been work the decades, in other words, build it from the 50s/60s all the way up to the Top 40 bangers by the end of the night. I'm not saying it has to follow that path exactly. You can certainly toss in something like "Billie Jean" in the middle of "Sexyback" or even "Bust a Move", but I think you get my drift.

And finally, if you can't beat mix, that's OK. In the mobile DJ/private event world, it's better to know what to play and when to play it than knowing how to perfectly beat mix. I've had plenty of killer DJs that worked for me that couldn't mix chocolate milk or their way out of wet paper bag. Whatever you do, DO NOT use someone's event as your practice grounds. Now go out there and rock 'em!