

# Choosing Wedding Music

(Taken/adapted from CatholicWeddingHelp.com)

“He who sings prays twice,” St. Augustine said. The Church calls music a “necessary” part of the liturgy because it helps the assembly pray together more vibrantly (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1156; cf *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 112). If it is done well, this special form of prayer unites the whole assembly together in one voice and becomes a window onto divine beauty. Here's a step-by-step guide to choosing Catholic wedding music with that ideal in mind.

## I. Work with Your Parish Music Minister

In most cases, couples work with their parish music minister to choose music that is beautiful, appropriate, and within the realm of possibility. I can direct you to a range of possible selections (see section V below), assist you in finding musicians, and help you obtain reprint permission from the copyright holder (if necessary). As we work together, keep the following points in mind:

- Although couples usually have wide latitude in choosing the music for their wedding ceremony, the celebrant may "veto" your selections for practical or liturgical reasons. In a sense, the whole Church participates in your wedding liturgy, so it's important to ensure that the music is prayerful.
- I am happy to help couples prepare for their wedding, but keep in mind that a wedding musician is a contracted position, meaning separate from the music minister's role. I am often busy with regular music ministry duties, so I am not always available for hire. As such, doing some advance preparation before our initial meeting and being flexible with your schedule will help in the planning process.

## II. Three Criteria for Choosing Catholic Wedding Music

The Church keeps no official list of “approved” wedding music, but it does offer three criteria for liturgical music that can be applied to your choice of wedding music.

- **Is it prayerful?** The purpose of any Catholic liturgy, including a wedding liturgy, is to give glory to God and to sanctify (make holy) the worshipers. Your wedding music should reflect that purpose; in other words, it should help the assembly to pray and to give thanks to God for your marriage. The criterion of prayerfulness is one reason why popular music—including some of the "classic" wedding marches taken from secular operas—is often not permitted.
- **Is it accessible?** In other words, will the assembly be able to sing along? In Catholic worship, the assembly (everyone attending the wedding) is not an audience, passively watching events unfold at the altar. Catholic liturgy calls on the assembly to actively participate in the prayer of the Church, including its sung prayer. Doing so is one of the most powerful ways your friends and family can express their love and support for you and your spouse.
- **Is it beautiful?** Beauty is a window onto the divine (*Catechism* #32), so it is not surprising that the Church calls for the music used in its worship to be beautiful. This criterion is obviously somewhat subjective, depending on personal tastes and local culture. Whether your music is beautiful or not may depend less on the particular selection than on the skill of the musicians who sing or play it. A hymn that seemed ho-hum the first time you heard it in church might have great potential in the right hands.

## III. Find Musicians

As a general rule, you should check with your parish first before asking or hiring anyone to sing at your wedding. It is advisable to find musicians *before* you choose the music for your wedding. For one thing, your musicians can help you choose great music and create a beautiful arrangement for it; at the very least, you want to make sure your musicians are capable of playing or singing whatever you choose.

Where will you find the musicians who will lead the music at your wedding? One possibility is to tap into your parish's music ministry. Another possibility is to invite musically talented family members or friends to provide music; or you might just hire professional musicians. If you go with these last two options, it is ideal to choose people who are already familiar with the Catholic liturgy and liturgical music. It's important to remember, however, that wedding musicians are contracted positions, which means rates and fees vary. Having a set budget will more than likely influence which option you choose.

#### **IV. Decide when Music Will Be Used in the Wedding Liturgy**

Strictly speaking, music isn't necessary for a valid Catholic wedding, but it is strongly encouraged. You have some latitude regarding just how much music to have during the wedding and when to have it, depending on the form of wedding you choose.

#### **V. Choose Songs, Hymns, and Other Music**

Finally, start looking for songs, hymns, and other music for your wedding. You might want to look beyond the limited repertoire of your parish's hymnal; there is a wide range of beautiful liturgical music, including music written specifically for weddings, that many parishes do not regularly use. Below is a list of songs that are part of my repertoire, which is a good starting place for choosing your wedding music. If you have a song in mind that is not included on this list, you will need to check with your hired musician(s) to determine if he or she is capable of playing that song. (NOTE: All music selections are subject to the celebrant's approval.)

All Are Welcome	In Christ Alone
All Creatures of Our God and King	Jesus, Messiah
Amazing Grace	Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee
Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)	Lord, I Need You
*Ave Maria (Franz Schubert)	Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
Be Thou My Vision	Miracle of Grace (Bread of Life)
Beautiful One	O God, Beyond All Praising
Behold the Lamb of God	On Eagle's Wings
Blest Are They	On This Day, O Beautiful Mother
Breathe	One Bread, One Body
*Canon in D	One Thing Remains
Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing	Panis Angelicus (Lambillotte)
City of God	Prayer of St. Francis
Doxology	Remembrance (The Communion Song)
For the Beauty of the Earth	Sacred Silence
Gift of Finest Wheat	Servant Song
Grace Flows Down	Set Me As a Seal
Hail Mary, Gentle Woman	Sing of Mary
Hear Us Now, Our God and Father	The King of Love My Shepherd Is
Here I Am, Lord	The Servant Song
Holy God, We Praise Thy Name	These Alone Are Enough
Holy, Holy, Holy	Ubi Caritas
How Deep the Father's Love for Us	When Love Is Found
How Great Thou Art	You Are My King (Amazing Love)
I Have Loved You	Your Grace Is Enough

\*Instrumental pieces