

PLAYING AT WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS

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There comes a time in every piper's life when they will be asked to play at a wedding, funeral or even a formal party. There are many similarities between these performances, particularly with tuning.

The best advice I can give is to ensure that your bagpipe is going as well as possible and is played before you leave home. It is going to have to hold tune for some time and there are a few "tricks of the trade" to help.

Taking a booking

Usually someone will telephone or ask you personally if you will play at a wedding or party. Often a funeral director will call and ask if you are available to play at a funeral. You should get personal particulars, including a contact phone number (in case you need to call in the event of an emergency), the venue location, a date and time, details of the event and any special requests or requirements the client may have. There will usually be some tune requests or details of when you are required to play. Many ask for advice on what is commonly done. Remember to clearly establish a fee, any deposit required and where and when you wish to be paid. You may wish to get them to sign a contract. Write all details in a diary and do not forget about the event. These are major stepping stones in people lives that they will remember forever.

You do have a say in what you will do at the event! I remember many years ago being asked to play at an Italian wedding anniversary. The gentleman asked me if I could get him a drum majors staff so that he could walk in front of me with a glass of orange juice balanced on his head (no joke). I advised him I was a serious musician and would not be made fun of. He came to my house to run through the details of the event (highly unusual) and I had actually doubled the fee to discourage him. I ended up playing at the event and he was so happy he apologised for thinking I would accept his antics and later booked me to play at his daughter's wedding and his wife's birthday. They were the nicest people and I was looked after very well at every event. I could have turned up, had everyone laugh whilst he was the centre of attention and gone home feeling like an idiot.

Presentation

It is important to be well presented at these types of functions. Generally pipers are paid, and therefore we should be as professional as possible in how we present ourselves and how we perform. You should wear appropriate uniform; I wear normal kilted day wear, including a jacket (no matter what the temperature) and always wear a hat. Glengarry or Balmoral are both suitable.

Properly press and polish your uniform as you want to look smart in appearance. I always wear a hat when I am performing. I consider my presence and appearance as part of the

performance where appropriate. If I am positioned in a place where I appear as part of the ceremonial aesthetics, I will carry by bagpipe on my shoulder and wear my hat, whether in the church or not. If I am left to one side to wait to perform, I will lower my bagpipe and remove my hat if inside the church or chapel. I will also usually remove myself from view of the public (stand at the back of the church etc.)



Weddings

There are always variations to the standard format. Some churches have restrictions (such as no pipers inside the church itself), so you should ask that the format has been confirmed with the church. You should place this responsibility on the client, so that you do not become

embroiled in their disappointment and negotiations. Some may ask that you attend a rehearsal; I would suggest you could charge at least 50% of the usual booking fee to do so. Some ask that you later play the bride and groom into the reception, again you could charge an additional fee as it is very time consuming and usually involves waiting for a few hours.

The usual format is this:

- Play outside the church as guests arrive. (Light march sets are appropriate)
- And /or just play the bride from the car to the steps of the church. (A slower march or air is suitable)
- Play the bride down the aisle. (A slower march or air)
- Play whilst the register is being signed. (Many request Amazing Grace or similar, let them know you will play one or two sets as this process often takes a long time. It can get tedious as photos are taken. Do not position yourself too close as the photographer will want to be talking to the couple and giving directions).
- Play as guests leave the church. (faster light march sets, strathspeys and reels, jig sets etc. are appropriate, I would suggest 5-10 minutes maximum and position yourself away from the venue, where you can clearly be seen but not drown out everyone's chit chat).

Garden weddings follow a similar format. I try to position myself in a shady position, not too close to proceedings. I take into account the fact that I am background music at some points and a part of the proceedings at other stages, so I try to position myself where I think I will sound the best.

Funerals

When taking a booking ensure you know who you are talking to as they will be your liaison on the day. It may be a family member, so you will have to show appropriate sympathy and professionalism. It may be a funeral director in which case you can be more businesslike.

Again some will have firm ideas as to what they want, others may ask for guidance. There are many variations.

The usual format is this:

- Play the casket from the hearse into the chapel or play as the mourners and family arrive. (airs, hymns and slow tunes are appropriate)
- Play as the casket is lowered in the case of cremation. (Flowers of the Forest or Amazing Grace are often requested).
- Play the casket back to the hearse and then play at a graveside lowering in the event of a burial.
- Play as mourners leave. (Marches are appropriate, not too slow; this is when you perform for the "living", after the funeral is over. Sometimes a family related Piobaireachd is requested.)



Preparing your bagpipe

With most of these types of performances tuning time is limited and tuning during the ceremony is inappropriate. You should therefore ensure that your instrument is well set up and will hold in tune.

Play for a short period before you leave to ensure that everything is working and well set. Put your bagpipe down for a few minutes and pick it back up and play to ensure that it does hold.

When you arrive at the venue select the areas where you will play. Tune up in a similar atmosphere. If you are playing inside and you cannot tune indoors, pick a shaded/ sheltered area where you can tune up outside. Do not over tune your bagpipe. If you are only playing for a register signing and as guests leave the church or for a funeral ceremony, you may only want to tune for a few minutes. If well set your pipes will hold in tune. If you tune for 30 or

40 minutes they will change whist you stand around waiting to play and will never settle during the short performances.

If you have to play outside, decide if you will play in the shade or in the sun. If there is no option and you have to play in full sunlight and it is warm, try to tune in the shade and then play in the sun for short periods to acclimatise the instrument to the heat.

In the event that something goes wrong, it is advisable to continue playing in a professional manner. Fiddling with an instrument is not a professional appearance. Taking a set of small corks is a great idea to deal with an unruly drone or a reed that falls into a bag etc.

Summary

Get full particulars of the event, people involved, contact details and firmly establish a fee and time for payment. Always be polite, but be aware that you can offer suggestions and advice.

Know your instrument and set it up well prior to the event.

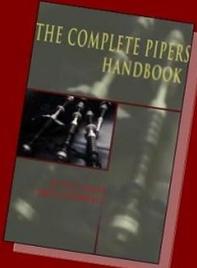
At the event, present yourself smartly, and perform professionally and appropriate to the type of event. Carefully consider and plan your tuning options and present with a nice sounding instrument. Select appropriate positions in which to perform. Do not get too close to the audience or participants in the ceremony if you have an option.

Remember that you are at these events in a professional capacity, so always act professionally. For that reason I tend to avoid joining in with the festivities at parties and weddings. I may gratefully accept hospitality, but will not remain to socialise. You do not need to be stuffy or rude, but I usually leave promptly after performing. These things are always up to your discretion though.

Always think about how you present to the audience and the position in which you will play so as to ensure that everyone enjoys your performance.

The most comprehensive guide available today for the set up, maintenance, refinement and performing of the Bagpipe is “The Complete Pipers Handbook”. Sales of this publication help fund the freely available school of piping website. Copies can be purchased here:

<http://www.schoolofpiping.com/handbook.html>



The Complete Pipers Handbook

Is a must for every serious piper. Never before has a more comprehensive guide been published. Maintenance, set up, refinement, tuning, setting up bands, performance psychology and much more!

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