



Choosing Music for a Wedding Ceremony

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This guide lists the places in a wedding ceremony where it is appropriate to have music with some guidelines for choosing what goes in those spots. The descriptions are specific to a large organ in a cathedralesque sanctuary, but the guidelines are general enough to apply to any ceremony.

Before the Ceremony

Prelude

Prelude music is up to twenty minutes, starting when guests arrive. The organist chooses these pieces - there is a variable amount of time and it is fundamentally background music. These selections need not be included in the program.

Seating of the Family

Can be a separate piece for the seating of mothers and grandmothers (one each). Traditionally, this piece is chosen by the mothers – perhaps a piece from their wedding or a favorite hymn. This is a nice spot to honor parents or grandparents who are no longer living or who cannot physically attend the service.

Start of the Service

Silence

A 10 second moment of silence helps focus guests' attention when the ceremony is about to start. This is also when the minister, groom, and groomsmen walk to the front of the sanctuary.

Chimes (opt)

Chime the hour on the organ, or play a traditional chime sequence if your wedding is on the half hour.

Bridesmaid Processional

This is optional. If you have only one or two bridesmaids, then there can be one processional including the bridesmaids and the bride. Two processions make sense if there are three or more bridesmaids, or if the church has a large sanctuary. This music also accompanies the flower girl and ring bearer.

I like having a subdued bridesmaids' processional contrast with a more grand bridal processional. If you choose a larger piece here, I hold back the volume during this processional and then give 100% of the organ for the bride's entrance.

Bridal Processional

During the Service

Possibilities: Accompanied solo, background music for lighting a unity candle, greeting families, receiving a silent blessing, signing wedding papers. Don't try to force music into the service unless it is something that you really want or involves a friend or family member.

Moving Music

The organist chooses something short and quiet when the bride and groom change configuration (i.e. moves from the base of the steps to the altar). A verse of a hymn (like The Gift of Love) – it is a short piece with an appropriate theme.

After the Service

Recessional

Starts when "I now present....." is announced and is played as the wedding party and families exit.

Postlude

Subdued background music while your guests are leaving the sanctuary. Chosen by the organist.