

Wedding Entertainment SECRETS - Paul Hurst



Paul Hurst

WWW.Barndance.co.uk

Please see the sadly now necessary 'small print' at the end before reading. Enjoy!

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Introduction

This eBook concentrates on some of the different entertainment options available to you on your 'Big Day'!

Although it concentrates mainly on the 'Period and Traditional' styles that my own company, 'Barn Dance to Banquet' specialises in, a lot of it - especially the section on eight questions to ask any band before you book them - will be relevant whatever style you decide to choose.

Also, the ideas for different parts of the day (page 22 on) could well give you ideas for any event.

Some ideas, tips and suggestions

General Hints & Tips

Always have a written contract

A contract will ensure that there is no doubt as to what you require, when, for how long and for how much. Ask to see details of insurance, and equipment checks. Some bands play mainly at private and corporate events, where it will not be possible for you to see them perform. They should however always be willing and able to provide a demonstration tape. Ask for a live 'demo', rather than something produced in a studio - you want to hear what you'll get in real life!

Directions

Provide your musicians with full and clear directions with a map if necessary. They'll be more relaxed if able to get straight to you, and won't have the excuse to drop into a pub 'just to get directions' on the way!

Safety

Check that your dance floor is safe, without holes or ridges to trip over, and is brushed out if necessary. If you have some fairly energetic dancing planned for the evening, do let your guests know so that they can bring suitable shoes / clothes to dance in.

Timings

Don't try to fit in too much in an event, particularly at a wedding where friends and family like to have time to talk with each other. A well-planned timetable will be able to cope with the almost inevitable over-runs.

Whose event is it anyway?

You are the boss. If you want something, ask for it. 'He who pays the piper calls the tune'. Bands have their own ideas about what to play, and how to play it.

If you are booking a group directly make sure you both have the same event in mind!

However, the performers will have far more experience than you at what works, and what doesn't - it will probably be well worth your while to at least listen to their advice...

Marquees

If you are having a marquee, don't forget to arrange for power for the band, and to make sure that the flooring is suitable for dancing. It is also good to let the band set up on the high ground if it is pitched on a slope, as this prevents them from getting trampled quite so much.

Co-ordination and admin

There are very few experienced best men, it can be very helpful to have an independent person co-ordinating between the different suppliers and performers; someone who is free to sort out any problems along the way and to keep things running smoothly. We have several excellent actor / musicians available who have played this part very well in the past and who are more than happy to dress in costume if you are having a themed wedding!

Speeches

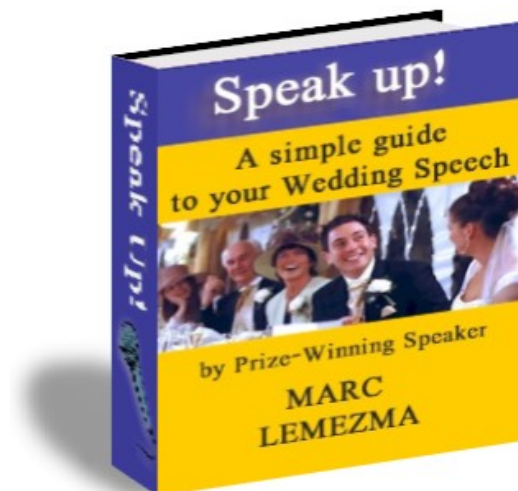
It is not unusual to have these before, rather than after the meal, so that those who don't enjoy public speaking don't have to worry all the way through, and can enjoy themselves along with everyone else.

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It is good to have a flexible timetable, and best if everyone is working to the same plan! At one wedding between two houses of equal dignity there had been some disharmony possibly a turf war had occurred as the venue was the groom's family's house. Both mothers had their own timetable; as these conflicted we had to split the difference and explain to both separately why everything was running late/early!

The normal delay is about 20 to 30 minutes by the time the speeches finish, although an hour is not that unusual this is not a bad sign at all, it just happens when people relax. An organiser once said that moving guests was as easy as 'herding cats'! Too relaxed can be a bad thing though, our current record is a three hour delay in finishing the meal and speeches due to the extremely lavish liquid refreshments served to the guests at lunchtime...

A friend has produced an eBook giving advice on speeches - click on the link below for a free copy



How to slim down your entertainment budget without cutting corners

Very few of us have unlimited budgets, so here are a few ideas to help you keep costs down - please contact us to discuss other options.

Does it have to be a Saturday? Fridays and Sundays are less popular, weekdays even more so. You may be able to book your performers and suppliers for less on these days.

Use one versatile group for longer, rather than two different ones.

Are you trying to do too much? Sometimes 'less is more', we have played at some very simple weddings that have had a lovely relaxed atmosphere.

With the wide range of ages often found at weddings, you may not want to have a disco all night, but would still like to hear some of your favourite tracks. Ask your band if they will play your own compilation CD (easy to make on a modern computer) through their sound system.

Past experiences, what has worked, what hasn't!

The 'worst' wedding we have ever played at was one where no expense had been spared - it was almost as if a competition was being held to see just how much could be packed into one day. As is normal, the timetable started to 'slide', but there were no gaps left - the string quartet was playing still when we were supposed to be setting up and sound checking; the DJ was due to come on pretty much when we started our first number. There were two best men, both of who were pretty much out of action by the time the evening started; confusion reigned supreme!

The Eight Questions to Ask a Band

- Avoiding the cowboys
- Protecting your guests and yourselves
- Remember your event for the right reasons

Booking a band or group can be worrying and expensive. I've worked with and in bands over the last quarter of a century. Hopefully this information will be of use to you, and explains why some bands are so much cheaper than others!

These are the Key questions you need to be asking:

How good are they?

What guarantees do they offer?

Is their electrical equipment legal?

Are they insured?

Who are they working for?

Are they flexible?

Are they 'fun'?

What 'back up' do they have?

How good are they?

I've met some frightening cases over the years - callers who bully and belittle their audience, people in bands just because they are family members or own the sound system and/or van,

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musicians who have become 'jaded' over the years who just want to know where the bar is, and when they can go home.

There are also excellent musicians who have no sense of time keeping, or who become 'prima donnas' on stage.

You can often tell how 'serious' or committed a band are by looking at their equipment. My by own ground-breaking system was designed by the expert and sound 'guru' Ian Warrener. Few bands spend £2,345.00 just on their amplifier and speakers alone, or £645 on a top of the range mixing desk!

Although the better bands usually only play for private and corporate events, making it hard to see them in action, it should be possible to see a video, hear a tape or CD and read comments from past clients - for examples of what you should expect to see, there are some comments from our clients on:-

www.BarnDance.co.uk/clients-comments.htm

What guarantees do they offer?

It seems only fair that the client should not have to bear the risk of guaranteeing how a group they don't know will perform at an event the liability should be on those providing the service.

You should be offered a 100% money back guarantee by the band or agent to prove that they believe in themselves, and have confidence in their performance.

Is their electrical equipment legal?

It is a requirement of both Health and Safety legislation and the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989 that ALL mains powered electrical equipment is checked and tested by a competent person to comply with Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) standards. As well as being the law, it is also common sense. Many bands either ignore this, claim it doesn't relate to them or simply lie and claim that their gear has been tested when it hasn't. This can put you, your guests and the venue at risk, as well as the band.

A schedule of tested equipment should be available, and all tested equipment will be marked with green and white stickers. There are more details on our web site, as well as examples of highly dangerous items found during testing.

www.BarnDance.co.uk/health-and-safety.htm

Over the years I have been testing equipment, I have not yet found a single band that did not have at least one fault the first time their equipment was checked.

Why not agree, in writing, that you can inspect equipment used? If any amplifier, mixing desk, mains lead, transformer - ANY piece of mains powered electrical equipment over a year old is not PAT tested, YOU CAN WITHHOLD THE FEE! If they cannot agree to this, you should use extreme caution and ask why this is a problem. It is also worth asking about the age and quality of the sound system, and what back-up is available in the event of failure.

Are they insured?

Again, a matter of common sense as much as anything else. Musicians in general do not tend to be the richest members of society, and are unlikely to have assets to match the million pounds worth of cover I ask for as the minimum. For your piece of mind they should hold third party insurance in case of accidents. There has been a trend to encourage the public to sue for all sorts of personal injury; if you plan to host an event it would be wise to obtain written confirmation of insurance beforehand, just to protect yourself.

A good agent will ensure that all performers will have cover, and should be able to provide written details.

I know groups who would not dream of driving without insurance or a valid 'M.O.T.', yet who refuse to insure themselves or test their gear!

Who are they working for?

A strange question you may think, but there are many part time musicians who just play for a bit of fun and regard Saturday night as their night out playing what they want to. I've met those who actually play rock music, but who have to call themselves folk rock musicians to get any bookings. Others spend hours rehearsing wonderfully elaborate and very clever arrangements and sets of tunes, which they will play regardless of what is actually required.

All of these performers have the same thing in common - they are working to THEIR agenda, not yours.

Please do be sure that the performers will do what YOU, the client want - book the most suitable group and make sure they are fully briefed as to what is required.

Are they flexible?

Imagine a sunny summers wedding day. Rather than go into a hot stuffy hall or marquee, your guests decide to sit outside instead. I've met two types of bands. The first stay inside, cross their arms and say things like 'Why did they book a barn dance band if they didn't want to dance? No skin of our nose etc'. The best ones offer to play un-amplified acoustic tunes outside as either background music or a mini concert until it is possible (if at all) to go inside later on.

There was a power-cut at a rural barn before one event, so the client set out some candles and we gave a three and a half hour performance of songs, tunes and dances with no sound system do check that any group you engage will have the ability and willingness to make the effort to find solutions to a situation.

Another example - my own band, when setting up for a medieval banquet, noticed that the bridegroom was still laying cutlery even though he was due to leave for the service. We took over from him and finished setting up our gear later. Although not our job, we do try to treat an event as a whole performance, it was the obvious and sensible thing to do.

Are they 'fun'?

Some traditional performers regard themselves as guardians of a secret and ancient mystery. They insist that dances are performed correctly down to the last step, coming out with lines like "Come on, this is your heritage we are teaching you".

There are dance callers who can make the evening a very grim affair, blowing whistles, clapping hands and sending everyone back to their places like a primary school teacher!

We have found that usually audiences simply want a light-hearted fun event, where anyone regardless of age and ability - can join in, and which doesn't slow to a crawl with long and over-complicated dances being taught. Callers should enjoy their job, and be able to communicate this to the audience.

Back up

A good band should be able to call on a wide range on musicians to try to provide cover in case of illness or injury. Some bands have very fixed arrangements, and are unable to work with others in the event of a key member dropping out.

I hope that this guide has been of help. If you would like any other information please feel free to contact me on the numbers below.

P.S.

Don't forget that the best groups usually go first who ever you decide to book it is better to be safe than sorry and get them under contract before someone else does!

Are you too late to book a group? Make a quick no obligation check by filling in the online form at

www.BarnDance.co.uk/contact-us.htm

Barn Dances, Country Dances, Ceilidhs

Customers' Opinions

"Everyone remarked on what a good idea it was and what a great time they had. One young couple said it was the best wedding they had been to as they had only been to receptions that have had a disco. Other remarks were Best wedding reception we have been to, the band was great; barn dancing is such great fun. I was helpless with laughter! The barn dance was great. Once again, thank you so much for making Clair and Marks special day that bit extra special."

"Brilliant! We hardly noticed the band setting up very professional. The performance exceeded all our expectations. The band sounded great + with Malcolm created a vibrant + fun atmosphere which we will never forget. Compliments from guests are still rolling in! You really made our day special. Malcolm did a great job of getting people on the dance floor! Some of our friends who went pale when we mentioned barn dance (Sat night clubbers!!!) didn't leave the dance floor all night well, just for a pint of Harveys to get their energy back!! We would have no hesitation booking with you again. Just got to find a reason for a party! We will recommend you to anyone we know who's after a barn dance."

"The performance on the night was faultless. Everything went very smoothly and the bride and bridegroom had a fantastic evening! Many guests commented on what an excellent band."

"The sound of the band was exactly what I had imagined (Scottish ceilidh). The caller was superb - friendly, outgoing and very good at coaxing people up onto the dance floor without being bossy and annoying!"

"Enjoyed the walk thro the rooms at the beginning to encourage people to join in. Loved the mix of dances. A very memorable evening and a high-light to the wedding. Thanks again Paul it really was a lovely way to finish off the day apart from the church service it was the best part of the day."

“Excellent a very good band with a caller who kept the impetus going throughout the evening. You really made the evening. Additionally (unlike a disco) people could actually hold a conversation.”

“... great atmosphere created by the music and dancing. The band was brilliant and the caller kept it all fun for the guests. You managed to involve everybody. There was a real sense of everyone being happy and relaxed.”

“As far as we were concerned it was just perfect! Everyone commented on how much they enjoyed themselves. The whole thing encapsulated the mood of the day. Well never forget it.”

“Although there are specialist events for experienced dancers of particular dance styles, these notes refer to the more normal event that anyone can enjoy.”

For more comments, please go to

www.BarnDance.co.uk/clients-comments.htm

Ceilidh, country dance, barn dance, 'hop' -

These are all names used to describe events ranging from gentle dances for those challenged by age or physical condition, to the frantic 'bop' where experienced dancers merrily fling themselves (and each other) around the floor with nary a thought for personal injury.

Instruments vary from those found in medieval times such as bagpipes (And not just highland pipes) and hurdy gurdys to modern keyboards and electric guitars.

Anything which the players can get their hands on and which suits their individual styles. The tunes come from traditional sources - England, Scotland, Ireland, America and The Continent as well as from modern times. If it works for a dance, it'll be used.

In general, a barn dance should provide a chance for everyone, regardless of age and ability, to have a good time. Dances are chosen to challenge but not baffle. By the time they have sorted out what to do the audience should be well and truly mixed together.

Experience is definitely not a requirement.

Why Should I Want One?

Simply to have a memorable and fun-filled event you and your guests can talk about for years to come. An event for the young and old alike. For the fit and not so fit. Not only is it becoming a special event in itself to have live music, the progressional nature of many dances makes them a wonderful way to mix people together.

You can hold one even with a group of total strangers - they will soon become acquainted!

Unlike a 'disco', there is no need to worry about who you are seen dancing with - Auntie Maud and Cousin Zob, the Managing Director and the Cleaner; all can end up as partners. No one need feel excluded; almost anyone can join in.

Your event will be led by a 'caller' - a central figure to teach and guide the dancers along as necessary. Finding a good caller is the secret for a great evening. They will select the right dances according to the general abilities and wants of the audience and encourage people along without patronising them.

Choose your caller with care - there are those that change from mild mannered recluse to a mix between Victorian headmaster and drill sergeant from hell once they set foot upon stage! A good caller will make your event, a bad one (and there are a great many of these about) make it memorable for the wrong reasons.

What Will I Need?

A suitable venue

Anything from a village hall to stately home will do nicely. In the past we've played in the above as well as in pubs, barns, restaurants, castles, kitchens, car parks, town squares (French and English), on ships, in ships, on, in and under the English Channel and once even on a bridge over the M25 (don't ask!). If weather permits, an outside dance can be great fun.

Power

If a sound system is required then we'll need access to one standard, 240v three-pin power point. Something to bear in mind for outside events.

An audience

Please bring your own - we can't help you on this one. It is a good idea to tell them about the dance in advance. Guests may want to bring suitable footwear and clothing to change into if dressed up for a more formal part of the proceedings.

What to avoid

There can be a temptation to 'theme' an evening very strongly to suit one group of guests. If you want to have fiendishly complicated and long 'speciality' dances (such as the 'Eightsome Reel') because you know that some of the guests are already experienced dancers.

Do please realise that this will probably be very divisive - it will become very clear who the experts and beginners are. These dances can take ages to teach, but the inexperienced will still get the wrong - annoying the experts.

A convoy travels at the speed of the slowest ship; going for 'fun' simple dances that are quick to teach and suitable for all,

regardless of age or ability keeps the 'pace' of the evening flowing.

"A Band is a Band, is a Band....."

Only in the same way that a car is a car is a car! Good musicians tend to have better and more reliable instruments and equipment. It may be possible to postpone a dance because the amplifier has blown up, but how do you feel about your event?

A group with a professional attitude will have third party liability insurance.

The Health and Safety, and Electricity at Work regulations require that ALL mains powered electrical equipment that has been tested to comply with 'P.A.T' standards. Most groups don't bother, claim that the regulations don't apply to them or just resort to bare faced lies and assure you that everything is in order. Groups should have a schedule of tested equipment, which will all be marked with green and white stickers. This includes amplifiers, mixing desks, mains leads and multi-sockets, transformers and lighting - anything with a three pin plug MUST be inspected and tested. Always ask for written proof of testing, if the band say they will bring it on the night then 'forget', just arrange to withhold payment until written confirmation is received, that should work!

All this results in a higher cost, but there are however ways to work to a tighter budget without having to sacrifice safety, peace of mind or quality.

Saturday nights in the summer are always heavily in demand, a move to another time will give you more choice between performers, or else remember to book well in advance.

For smaller events a reduced band will cost less and also keep the ratio between musician and dancers balanced.

All that being said, at present rates (summer 2006) it is still possible to get a top three-piece band including an excellent caller and sound system as described above at a peak time for less than £600.

**Bands tend to know what they are worth,
and charge accordingly.**

As with most things in life, "you pays your money and takes your choice..."

Medieval Banquets, themed events

Minstrels, Jesters, strolling players - even fire eaters and falconry displays. Select the entertainers you would like for your event, anything from just a wandering minstrel to a full package complete with decorations, table centres, 'Master of Revels / 'Lord Chamberlain and sound system.

Customers' Opinions

Below are a few of the comments received in the past, for an updated list, please go to

www.barndance.co.uk/clients-comments.htm

"Excellent musicianship + repertoire. Very entertaining + made the whole evening a success. The medieval music repertoire was superb as was the array of instruments + the diverse talents of the musicians. ...the success of the musicians + caller in getting people to dance, + the sheer exuberance of the music + enthusiasm of the players. I will recommend you to anyone seeking entertainment for their event. Keep up the good work!"

"Your unique music and the costumes really made for a 'complete experience'."

"Dear Paul, please thank your team of entertainers for me who performed at my wedding. They did a brilliant job and could not be faulted. Jester - very proactive - worked hard. Minstrel - a delight to the ears. Falconry - excellent."

"The Lord Chancellor was excellent in getting everyone to participate, and into the spirit of the event. Many staff members said that they would not normally have joined in, but the atmosphere was such that they did not feel embarrassed, or likely to be embarrassed. Thank you for a great evening."

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"It was all very professional and they organised us very well. Everyone enjoyed the whole evening. Thank you for all your help."

"Dear Paul, we just wanted to say thank you to yourself & all the entertainers who were at our wedding at Lympne Castle. It was the most wonderful day, which was helped by all the minstrels, jesters, Lord Chamberlain, Lord of the Manor and musicians who took part."

"All the music, barn dance & play were exactly as we wanted it. And so many people commented on how good you all were. Once again thank you so much you all added to make our wedding magical."

"So many of our guests complimented you and your band - amazed at both the length and quality of the performance. The minstrels during the day and the barn dance in the evening were perfect and a good time was had by all."

"Dear Paul, just wanted to drop you a quick note to say thank you for the fantastic entertainment you provided at my wedding. It really was the icing on the cake. Loads of people have commented on how much they enjoyed the day, the music, the songs, the banter, then the barn dancing in the evening. It really was a day to remember!! Many thanks again."

"Dear Paul. Thank you so much for a fantastic evening. Everybody who I have spoken to since thoroughly enjoyed themselves. The involvement was perfect and the children really enjoyed themselves. I would like to say a special thank you to the Lord Chamberlain, who played his part especially well. Many thanks to you as well for all the help that you have given me in booking this. I will be in touch should I ever need you help again. All best wishes."

"It is difficult to express how grateful Paul and I are to you regarding the part you played in making this years event, probably, the most successful we have held so far. Thursday evening's entertainment was totally different to anything we have previously done and its success due largely to your watchful eye over the audience. We have received numerous

complimentary letters from our clients, both from those who participated and those fortunate enough not to be singled out for a forfeit. Paul has been spotted as a must for the next series of 'Stars in Their Eyes!!'"

"On a serious note, we are both sincerely grateful to yourself and your very talented friends who helped make the evening very special and particularly memorable. We have made a note of the murder/mystery theme!"

The different parts of the day:

First Impressions

As your guest arrive background music can really enhance the atmosphere - Create a stunning first impression - choose from minstrels, jugglers and fire-eaters as well as a jester and lord chamberlain to meet and greet them and 'break the ice' - all in full period costume.

Arrival of the Bride

It is not unusual to have a Highland piper playing for the arrival of the Bride. We can arrange this for you, or alternatively, how about one, or even two pipers playing the English medieval bagpipes!? These are less strident than the more modern Highland pipes. Or, how about a trumpet fanfare?! Demonstration CDs are available...

During the Ceremony

Another medieval instrument, the hurdy gurdy has three sets of strings which provide the melody, a drone accompaniment and rhythm to give it a unique sound. Either on its own, or blended with another instrument it is a stunning choice to entertain whilst you sign the register.

Also available are classical guitar, harp, flute and opera, classical or traditional singers amongst others.

The Husband and Wife Leave the Ceremony
Again, the perfect opportunity for a piper

During The Photographs

It can be hard to strike the right balance for this part of the day - it is good to have some interesting background music when the photographs are being taken, whilst avoiding anything too loud or intrusive.

In the right venue a group of minstrels can be out of the way, playing period and traditional tunes on a wide range of instruments. Time and time again guests have commented on how enjoyable the music was, without being intrusive - some couples have even joined in with the music for their photographs!

For variety, traditional jazz is another 'upbeat' option, or a brass quartet or quintet instead of the now very common string quartet.

Before The Meal

If there is going to be a break before your wedding breakfast or banquet you could have a short play - perhaps some scenes from 'Shakespeare's Lovers? Or you could arrange a display of falconry, magic, juggling or fire eating - even a Punch and Judy show, or puppets for the children.

During The Meal

From a conventional toastmaster to a Lord Chamberlain or other historical character, you can select your choice to be a Master of Ceremonies. Minstrels can play you into the feast or breakfast, sing or play between courses, and a magician can delight all by working his way round the tables if there will be a delay as guests wait for a buffet.

After The Meal

Time to start unwinding? How about having a performance by some 'strolling players' - anything from the bawdy 'Miller's Tale' by Chaucer, or a comedy 'murder mystery' play written especially for your day.

Alternatively, perhaps some background music whilst you relax with coffee. If you have moved to another area for this whilst the main area is cleared and prepared for the evening, would you enjoy leading the procession back with minstrels playing pipes and drums?

The Evening Guests Arrive

It can be a bit embarrassing if a wedding is running late (and most do!) if the evening guests are left out 'in the cold', listening to the laughter from inside the main room during the speeches, and feeling very much that they are the 'poor relations'. At several weddings, we have arranged to have some of the band playing background music for them in a different room. The rest of the guests can then join them, whilst the main room is cleared ready for the dancing to take place.

The Evening

There are now fortunately many live music alternatives available rather than the normal option of a disco. Because of the wide range of ages often found at any family gathering, it can be an impossible choice for the DJ to find music that will appeal to all, and no matter how good they are as a presenter, nothing can match the ambience and excitement of having your own musicians for the evening.

You could enjoy a jazz/blues group, or else a 'covers' band playing anything from the 60's to modern day music. All of the bands we offer will be happy to play your own CDs - either for the first dance, during any breaks or at the end of the evening.

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As an agent since the mid 90's (and a musician since the 70's) I've found that few forms of entertainment can match a barn dance or ceilidh in breaking the ice and getting guests up and dancing quickly - even if it is only for an hour or two before a disco, or 'covers' band.

The Bride and Groom Leave

Options include leading a last dance, or going up the middle of an arch formed by your guests, saying goodnight to them all.

What Can We Do For You?

We'll do our best to find the right performers for you, not just the first group who are available - from solo piper or minstrel to full evening of entertainment with caller, sound system, floor spots and, if required, sound engineer and lighting rig.

Over the years we have weeded out the unreliable, the temperamental and the simply bad. To help you feel confident in booking a band through us we now offer a 100% guarantee - If you are unhappy with a performance, there will be no charge on the day and your deposit will be refunded in full!

Please feel free to 'phone or email and discuss what you want, the advice is free of charge. Blues to bluegrass, classical to jazz. Barn dance to banquet. All within budget and on a 'no find - no fee' basis.

We can also decorate your venue with flags, bunting and lighting to create a special atmosphere, helping your event get off to a flying start.

There is nothing to pay until you decide to book a group, and then a deposit will secure them for your event.

These notes have been produced by someone who has spent the last twenty years, man and pimply youth, playing traditional music at various events. You may therefore detect more than a modicum of bias in his view that a traditional style dance can offer a valid alternative to other ways of spending a Saturday night. It is sincerely hoped that this guide is of some use to you, please feel free to pass on any comments and observations.

**Whatever you decide to do,
please have a great event!**



www.barndance.co.uk

0800 195 4442

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