

The Background Harpist

How to be one,
how to survive as one,
all you need to know....

	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	02
The basics	03
Important points	04
Finding work	05
How to take a booking	06
Before and on the day	08
Etiquette at the venue	09
What to wear	10
THE MUSIC	11
Commonly requested songs	12
Your repertoire	13
Building your repertoire	14
Types of music to use	15
Useful chord symbols	16
Happy Birthday arrangement/lead sheets	17
7th Chords	20
Introductions	21
Endings	22
How can I make a piece longer?	23
And finally...	24

*Dedicated to Gill,
for being an amazing teacher, mentor and friend.*



how to take a booking

Lots of people find this section nerve racking and uncomfortable. It's always easier to deal with clients via emails as you can think it over rather than being put on the spot for a fee. In this case, know your fees and be confident when discussing them.

When taking bookings there are quite a few different approaches:

Some like to work by time and others by sections.

I tend to work in 'sections' (i.e. ceremony, drinks, meal) for weddings and hours for all other events. Weddings are quite unique as they often run over time and there is nothing worse than a harpist packing up half way through a reception...it looks like the meter has run out. I know events can go on for hours and can be quite frustrating when the photographer has taken over or the hotel isn't ready on time.

BUT you are there to do a job and you are being paid, so, be grateful for the work! **NEVER** forget this or lose sight of how lucky you are to be working!

(Even when your fingers are blistered and your stomach is rumbling and the hours can't go quickly enough... Keep the positive thoughts and repeat it as a mantra... Alternatively, you can daydream about the new shoes/golf clubs you will be able to buy and this will bring a new-found energy in those tired moments.)

Back to quoting for your booking...

- When quoting, work out a fee that you think is fair for the section requested.
- Try to avoid extra costs incurred on the day for extra time. Try and sort this out at the time of booking. Ask the right questions!
- Ask if it is a church or civil ceremony...church ceremonies are approximately 1.5 hours and civil ceremonies 1 hour (including the half-hour before when you play for the guests arriving).
- Drinks last approximately 1.5 – 2 hours and the wedding breakfast approximately 2 hours up until coffee is served.
- The first section will be the most expensive for the client as it will include travel (if it is not a local function).

Approximately cost the travel involved i.e. what the petrol will actually cost, rather than charging per mile which can be astronomical and off-putting if it is far away.

- Make your fees reasonable and competitive and clear to the client. If you are new to gigging, you will have to build up your name and your fees. Contact the Musicians Union for advice or ask fellow harpists.
- Take a deposit and arrange for the balance to be cleared BEFORE the event. Clients have been known to forget payment if left to the day and it can look very unprofessional hunting around for the person with the cheque, which has often been forgotten or misplaced.
- Arrange parking at the venue and make sure the costs are covered in the price.

NB *Be prepared for anything. Some people don't realise the difference between a background gig and a solo performance where people are listening quietly. Make sure you have some party pieces from memory just in case you are ever in this situation. I've been there on a few occasions and 'La Source' and 'Around the clock Suite' have saved the day. Also, as long as you smile and play with passion and confidence, they will love you!*