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Wedding Bands

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BY EVELYN WAUGH

YOUR WEDDING RECEPTION is a dream set to music—if the music's right. We're all still recovering from the "Electric Slide." Our advice to couples: leave it to the professionals. But are these professionals live musicians or DJs?

SOUL MAN

"Music is a big part of the energy, especial-

ly during the last two hours of the evening," says wedding planner Emily Hricko of **Emily Elizabeth Events**. She's convinced that a live band is a matrimony must-have for contagious dance moves.

Charles Brown, an icon in the Maine wedding band industry, isn't so sure, even though he's seen it all from every awkward father-daughter dance to rowdy great aunts. He started the **Red Light Revue** in 1986, a

rhythm-and-blues band that he fronted for four years. Then came **Papa Loves Mambo**, a "Caribbean-oriented powerhouse" which Brown started with Andrea Antognoni, his wife, in 1990. For ten years, they rocked hundreds of weddings all over the Northeast. But in his eyes, live wedding bands are being shoved (or maybe gently pushed) off stage. It's likely he can play any song from any playlist. But ever the jokester, he asks in

Wavelength keeps it moving with classics like James Brown's "I Feel Good" and modern hits from Lady Gaga.





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Cedric Jackson II of One Step Ahead Band connects with the audience at a wedding hosted at Abel's Boatyard on Mount Desert Island.

his website, "Do you want your parents and their friends to enjoy it as much as you do? We play a bouncy swing sound that boots everyone on the dance floor, nine to ninety. You say Uncle Don wants to get up and sing 'Danny Boy'? He's on next. It's party time. Problem solved."

"Most people don't use live music anymore," he says. "It's a generational thing—the Spotify Generation. They'd rather make a mix: exactly the tune they want, when they want it. If you have a band you like, you have to trust them, you know? And most people don't do that anymore."

HEY, MR. DJ

Rebecca Strout married last July in Hollis. She hired a DJ to "help with the flow of the night—directing people towards the reception, dinner, and first dances." Wedding planner Kathleen Pacella of **Fancy Figs** in Brunswick, says "the appeal of hiring a DJ or having a personal playlist is the cost savings, hearing the originals, and a wider range in music genres. DJs can often source recorded versions of songs that might be really challenging for a band to perform live."

Megan McKenna, a 2020 bride-to-be, lives in Portland and teaches dance. "I'm



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Favorite cover: "Wake Me Up" by Avicii.



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picky. I always wanted a DJ,” she says. “I like the idea that I can make a playlist and know exactly what I’ll be hearing.” She went to five weddings last year. All of them used DJs.

STAGE STUNNERS


Yet, there’s still something about a live band. The romance of a performance is unparalleled by even the most thought-out playlist. “Live bands infuse weddings with a ton of energy. They’re generally equipped to play all the current hits, and they can interact with guests in ways that a DJ cannot,” Pacella says.

Rachel Sisson of **R.L. Sisson Events**, Southwest Harbor, agrees. “Live bands tend to engage guests more and keep people on the dance floor. The dancing portion of the evening is often most important to many of my clients, so they hire a great band to keep the party going.” We don’t just want to dance. We want to be swept away.

The **Dapper Gents** have been rocking weddings from Portland to Tampa for six years. Their favorite part is the energy of the reception. “Celebrating with a room of like-minded people is always a blast,” Jacob McCurdy, lead singer, says. He recalls a reception so lively it belongs in the fraternity comedy *Animal House*. “Last summer we played at one of our favorite wedding venues, Caswell Farm. It was a serious party. The crowd was brimming with energy—at one point they lit 50 sparklers and surprised the bride and groom with massive bottles of Champagne and rosé. Minutes felt like hours while they tried to find a bottle opener. Eventually, once the bottle was opened, an impromptu limbo contest broke out. That’s the first time I managed to do the limbo while playing guitar.” Now that’s one way to ring in a happily ever after.



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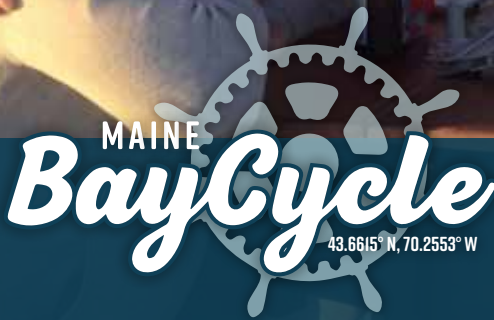
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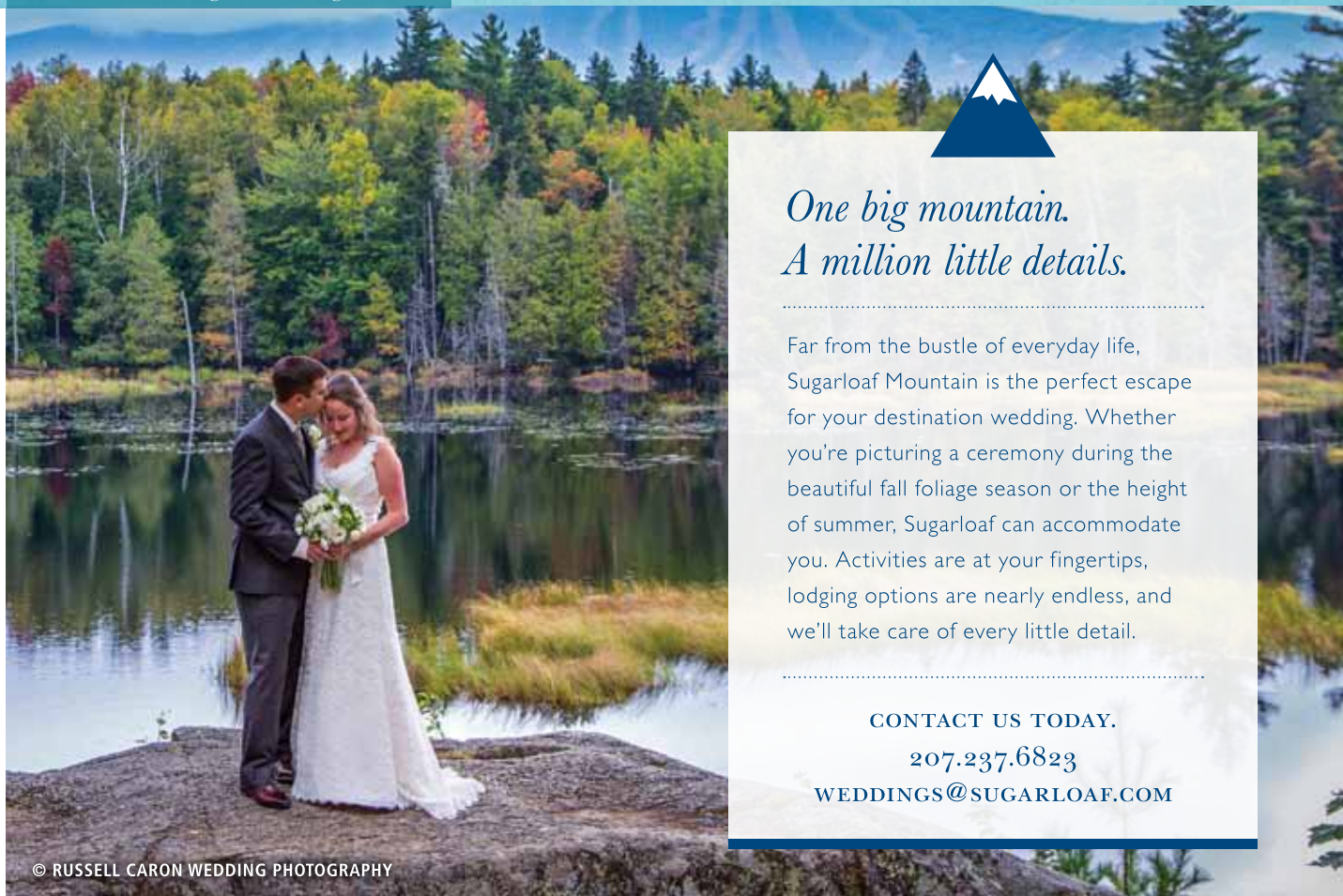


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Jenny Lou Drew of **Jenny Lou & Something Blue** recalls the start of her own happily-ever-after: "After playing a wedding at Stone Mountain Arts Center, my husband (Scott Morgan) and I had our dream wedding at Stone Mountain." So it began. Drew and Morgan, who is also Something Blue's guitarist, energized weddings from 2006 to 2018. Now, she says, "we're on a wedding hiatus while we focus on personal work, like the upcoming release of our Americana album, *Rockbiter*. We plan to be back at the wedding band thing in 2020. Weddings are a joy to be a part of because the people are alight with love and happiness. When you play clubs, it's a mixed bag of mostly strangers. But the crowd at a wedding is friends and family, and they're there for a night to remember."

"I'll never forget when we played my friend's wedding and her husband got on the drums for 'Wild Thing.' The bridesmaids held her up in the air in front of the stage while she fanned herself with a paper fan—I wish I'd gotten that one on video!"

OFF THE CHARTS, ON THE FLOOR

So how do you keep the party going all night? "We play run-to-the-dance-floor classics like 'Play that Funky Music' and 'Jesse's Girl,'" says **Time Pilots** frontman Jon Goodman. "You recognize [them] the second you hear them, and they just make you want to dance!"

"I've done so many weddings. Let me reflect," says Cedric Jackson II, former singer in **One Step Ahead Band**. Bassist David Lebleu says it's all about reading the audience. "We try to have fun ourselves, and we play the songs that get people up and moving around. Sometimes during the first set, during dinner, we can get away with songs that we love as musicians. It's about finding songs that you love playing and that people recognize."

Johnna Dionne, manager of **Wavelength**, says, "We play an energetic and diverse song list that brings everybody to their feet." She says the band is "versatile, comfortable per-

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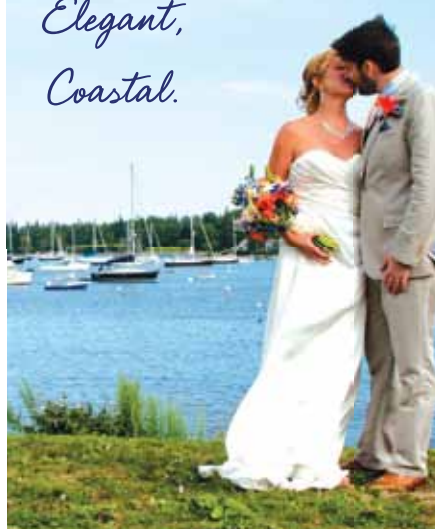


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And that’s quite the job when dealing with a few Maine relatives who’ve been dancing closely with our dear friend Geary most of the night. “Occasionally, well-meaning guests ask us to play a song the couple specifically asked us to avoid,” Goodman cringes. “Think ‘Chicken Dance.’”

Any of these bands will make your big day a blast. Sounds like you can have your cake and eat it, too. As for Charles Brown, wedding singer extraordinaire and Spotify cynic, you aren’t likely to find him singing at a ceremony anytime soon, but you can hear him every third Monday at **Blue** with Andrea Re starting at 6 p.m.—“Geriatric hours,” he says. ■

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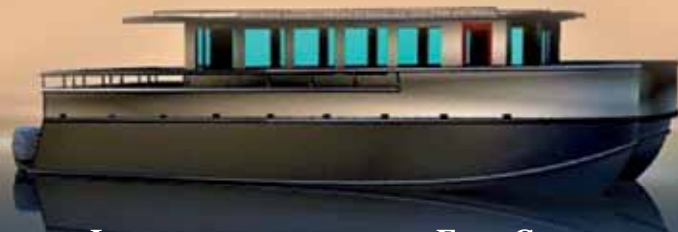
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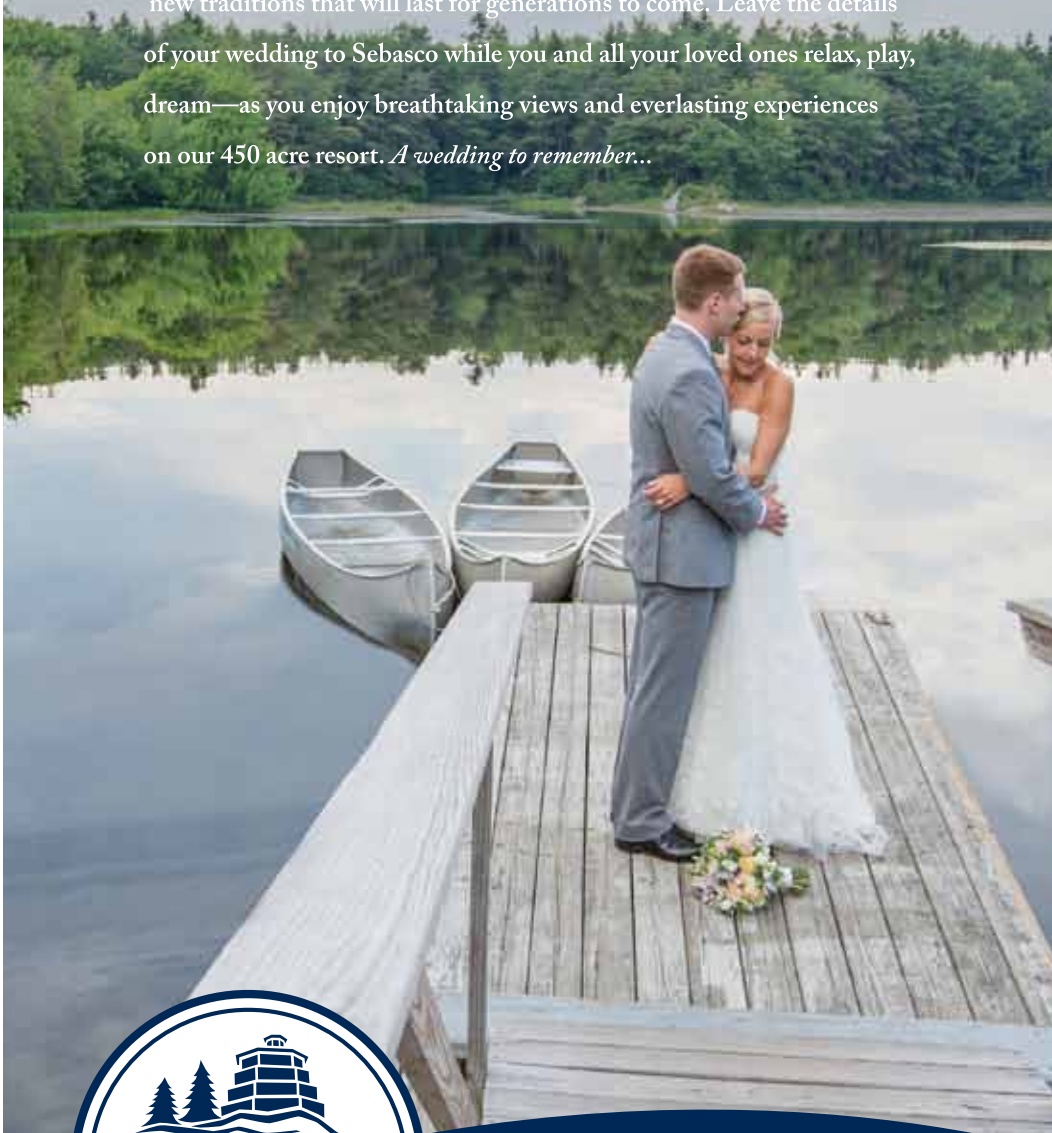


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