



# Medieval Jesters

Minstrels, Jugglers, Fire-Eaters, Magicians,  
Fortune Tellers, Actors and Puppeteers!

## The eight questions to ask performers

- 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 thirty years. Hopefully this information will be of use to you, and explains why some entertainers are so much cheaper than others!

These are the Key questions you need to be asking:

1. How good are they?
2. What guarantees do they offer?
3. Is their electrical equipment legal?
4. Are they insured?
5. Who are they working for?
6. Are they flexible?
7. Are they 'fun'?
8. Back up

### 1. How good are they?

I've met some frightening cases over the years – barn dance 'callers' who bully and belittle their audience, people in bands just because they are family members or own the sound system and/or van, 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. Our ground-breaking 'heavy weight' system was designed by the expert and sound guru Ian Warrener. Few bands spend 2,345.00 pounds just on their amplifier and speakers alone, or 645 pounds on a top of the range mixing desk! And for smaller events, we use state of the art systems designed to be up and running quickly and with minimum disruption.

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 - also ask them the following questions...

### 2. 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.

### **3. 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 - see the health & safety section on our 'Barndance' site for details, as well as examples of highly dangerous items I've found during testing.

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.

I recommend that it be agreed, 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.

### **4. 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 not insuring and 'M.O.T.'ing their vehicles, yet refuse to insure themselves or test their gear!

### **5. 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.

### **6. Are they flexible?**

Imagine a sunny summer's 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 the bridegroom was laying cutlery although 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.

## **7. 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.

## **8. 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 – whoever you decide to book it is better to be safe than sorry and get them under contract before someone else does!

[www.medieval-jesters.com](http://www.medieval-jesters.com)

[www.BarnDance.co.uk](http://www.BarnDance.co.uk)