

Booking a string quartet to play during your ceremony or reception can add a memorable dimension to your special day. Infinitely portable, they don't need any extra amplification or complicated equipment, and you can choose from a host of musical styles – with many quartets these days offering everything from traditional classical through to heavy metal.

So how far in advance do I need to book?
String quartets can be booked even years in advance, so it really is best to plan well ahead. Having said that, many quartets may be able to find a space in their diary at the last minute, although your choice of music will probably be confined to their existing repertoire.

What should a couple look for?
Most quartets will be made up of professional musicians who will have a lot of experience playing for functions, with an encyclopaedic knowledge of different pieces to help create the ambiance you are looking for. If you'd like something dramatic, romantic, peaceful or downright funky, they should be able to put together a programme of music tailor made to your request. If you have a particular favourite piece of classical music that isn't listed in their repertoire, many quartets will gladly source and prepare it for you.
It's also a good idea to chat to someone from the quartet about your ideas, see if they're happy to accommodate any favourite pieces or to liaise with you to get the programme of music exactly to your tastes. Even if your knowledge of classical music is fairly limited, most musicians will be more than happy to help explain the different feel certain pieces will add and the meaning behind them. The fee you pay for your quartet doesn't just cover them playing on the day, it should include all the preparation and rehearsal of your programme – you may as well pick their brains on what music conveys the right sentiment.
Another advantage of a string quartet is the ability to arrange virtually any piece of your favourite music, whether it's Abba or Dido. With advance notice it's perfectly possible to walk down the aisle to your favourite chart topping hit – making your wedding music very personalised, and your guests will love it!

What are the warning signs of a bad quartet? 

There are hundreds of quartets out there – you can hear samples of their music on their websites, or ask to hear a demo CD to check the quality of their playing. Even to a non musical person, after comparing a few samples, the really good ones will stand out. Compare the size of repertoire that different quartets offer and their willingness to source and rehearse any music that isn't listed. If you're looking to have modern music, find a quartet who are happy to arrange pop and rock and whose 'modern' selection does not stop at Scott Joplin and Gershwin.

Do I need to provide them with any special equipment?
Usually a string quartet do not need any amplification, they can play softly or loud enough to fill an auditorium. You will need to provide four chairs without arms and they will bring their own

music stands. Many string players have incredibly old, valuable instruments that need to be kept protected from hot sun or rain – so if your reception is outside, consider erecting a gazebo to shade them.
You aren't usually obliged to feed your quartet, but if they are working hard for the entire afternoon, a few soft drinks and a plate of sandwiches are always welcome.

How much does hiring a String Quartet cost?
Really this does boil down to quality – if you are looking for a top class string quartet with a vast repertoire and players of exceptional standard, naturally this will cost more. Costs also vary greatly depending on how long you want them to play for, if there are any periods of waiting around, if they have had to travel far or prepare any special requests. Most quartets will take all this into consideration before quoting you a price.
One way to reduce the cost of your quartet is to downsize to just a string trio or even duo. In our experience there are specific works written for duo that sound lovely, particularly violin /viola or two violins. For trio, the repertoire is far smaller and once you get into the realms of adapting an arrangement that was originally intended for other combinations, it can sound a little bit empty – as if you've got a quartet with a member missing.

Do you have any funny or unusual anecdotes?
We were playing a particularly serene piece in a wedding service, all the guests were spellbound in a hushed silence. As the last chord was floating upwards, the verger (who was standing right next to the vicars microphone) was heard to utter 'what time are you clocking off here Derek?' – it was amplified all over the church and the congregation burst out laughing!

Can I really have any piece of music I want?
Yes – even if sheet music is not available, some quartets may be happy to arrange it for you. There really is no reason to get stuck with the same wedding music as everyone else, but do allow quite a bit of advance notice as arranging music takes many hours of skilled labour. Asking for 'I should be so Lucky' on the morning of your wedding might be a fairly apt description!