This note is one of a series placed in the Clerks' Almanac by the Livery Committee. Most are written by its chairman, of whom you may read more at the foot of the <u>Contact page</u>. They are intended to be of guidance to livery clerks, especially new ones, or those seeking advice on a particular topic. They are not prescriptive, and how individual companies choose to conduct their affairs is, of course, entirely up to them.

#### **Music at Dinners**

Of course, the playing of music at livery dinners is a matter of taste, and some masters may have their own enthusiasms, and some companies particular traditions. This note simply serves to set out a few thoughts and guidelines on the subject, for there are pitfalls.

The music at a livery dinner may be divided into four different parts:

Before dinner

During dinner

Accompaniment to sung grace, national anthem, loving cup

After dinner entertainment.

The same single pianist might perform all four functions, but this would be unusual. There is no need for any or all of these, though music certainly adds to the atmosphere.

### **Before dinner**

Typically a pianist or string trio/quartet will play in the background during the pre dinner reception. It may be considered something of a luxury, and reserved for the grander banquets. Bear in mind that if a pianist is also to play during dinner, the location of the piano may present a problem.

## **During dinner**

Sung grace etc (see below) is best accomplished with musical accompaniment. Hence if you are to have a pianist (or other musicians) present for that purpose, there may be an argument for asking them to also play in the background during dinner.

If the choice is a more substantial band or small orchestra (probably only practical in Guildhall, Mansion House, or the largest livery halls) then beware of their impact on conversation for the diners placed near them. It is a frequent criticism at large dinners "the music was too loud" (only countered by those at the other end of the room "We couldn't hear the band").

## Accompaniment to sung grace, national anthem, loving cup

This area is a minefield for the inexperienced (at livery dinners) musician, and they will need to be fully briefed (even rehearsed) by the Clerk. Laudi Spirituali played too slow sounds like a dirge, but played well is a great help to guests unfamiliar with the tune. Sung grace without accompaniment is high risk!

For guidance on the playing and singing of the National Anthem before the loyal toast, please read the note at this website on Toasts.

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#### After dinner entertainment

Another area with scope for things to go wrong. Good manners dictate that guests will shut up and listen during such a performance. However not all will be musically minded, and the entertainment provided will need to be sufficiently good and appropriate to retain everyone's attention. Few things are more embarrassing at a dinner than the guests losing interest in the "cabaret" and reverting to chat. It can be avoided with a little care and forethought. The size of the hall is relevant to the style of the music. A string quartet playing serious classical music, or similarly a concert pianist, may not work in a large hall, though it might in a more intimate venue. Middle of the road "songs from the shows" may sound safe, but unless performed with real style, prove little more than time filling. "Verdi's Greatest Hits" (of which this writer is a fan) can become overly familiar and predictable.

Encores. The audience may like to think an encore is within their gift (by the level of their applause and shouts). It is not. It will either have been planned as part of the programme (and time allowed for). Or if not, but then demanded "encore", the performers should be briefed to turn, only, to the clerk for guidance – yes or no. Only he/she will know the timings, and may judge the true level of enthusiasm. In summary, any after dinner entertainment needs some thought!

# **Sung Grace**

(Laudi Spirituali, AD 1545)

For these and all Thy mercies given, We bless and praise thy Name O Lord: May we receive them with thanksgiving, Ever trusting in Thy word; To Thee alone be honour, glory; Now and henceforth for evermore.

#### The music is at

http://www.plumberscompany.org.uk/assets/file/laudi\_spirituali\_melody.pdf

#### Costs

Clearly the musicians will usually need to be paid. Students from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama are "cheap" and welcome the opportunity to practice in front of a live audience. GMSD have a contact person who facilitates all this. If your company are sponsoring a student, then it may be appropriate to invite them to perform.

They will also need to be fed. A single pianist could join the outmess – larger groups may have different arrangements (eg sandwiches).

Piano – some halls may charge for the use of their piano (assuming they have one – not all halls do). A concert pianist may require it to be tuned.

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Nigel R Pullman Livery Committee

27th March 2015

Was this note helpful? Do you have comment? Email nrpullman@btinternet.com