

THE MODERN



M. MUSIC.

Your bar's atmosphere has its own tempo, the drinks menu is rocking – how do you create a music playlist that forms the right backdrop? **Hamish Smith** investigates

We've all been there: the five-star hotel bar that gets everything right apart from the Euro-dance soundtrack, or the restaurant-bar with such banging music guests are sucked into their phones. It might sound obvious, but when you're making playlists, don't just think about what works for you, but what works for your bar.

"Getting music right is like the temperature of wine, when it's really wrong you complain or vote with your feet. When it's fine you put up with it, without comment. When it's perfect you get excited and feel fuzzy." These are the words of Mal Evans, owner of the Mojo chain, for which the judicious use of music has been the bedrock of success.

Put simply: music means money. Mikey Vettrano, co-owner of MAV Music (a music solutions company), says research shows "79% of consumers say the right music will make them stay longer and spend more". He adds: "The increase in sales can be as much as 39% when playing the right music for your customers". So what is right for your bar?

When brought in on a project, Vettrano measures up the space like a tailor for a suit. How large is it and how is it shaped? Are the furnishings soft or hard? Is it bums on seats or fast turnover? Is the mood music-led or should music be just present in the background? "Create mood boards," he says, as this will keep you on concept.

The bar's history, concept or style are the bases from which most build. If the hotel is 1930s, perhaps play swing. If you want to go up-tempo, swing house will do that without leaving genre. But as Vettrano says: "Try to avoid creating a theme show." Knowing the difference between what complements and what is clichéd is the hard part.

If you want to be known for old-school hip-hop and laid-back cocktails in a neighbourhood bar, stick to that and create a playlist that delivers what people expect. Sometimes a little

variation on the theme is good, but normally the connection should be visible. There are times when juxtaposition can work - but you have to turn it into your USP. Inexplicably, sherry and disco works at Sack in London.

"All sherry bars previously just

played the Gypsy Kings on repeat," says Barry Wilson, joint owner. "It's the equivalent of having a Scottish bar and playing nothing but The Proclaimers."

Find one song that defines what you want and let it take you on a journey. "The hero track I based it on was *Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood* by Santa Esmeralda," says Wilson. "It's basically the Gypsy Kings in hot pants. Disco is such a rich genre that you cannot help but get sucked in. It really sets the tempo for the bar as we want to knock the cobwebs off sherry."

So how many songs do you need? "It's easy to come up with thousands of songs for a venue - the trick is to choose good ones," says Vettrano. So while you want to keep things tight, you don't want regulars hearing the same music every time they come in. Vettrano starts with 800 for his clients and updates every quarter. If you're taking a DIY approach, that's a lot, so take it slowly, see what works and keep evolving.

It's important the music changes with the bar's journey through the night. At Mojo, "playlists are created but generally only referred to in blocks of eight", says Evans. Vettrano commonly breaks his lists into three sets: daytime, evening and night. The important thing is to match the mood of the music to the mood of the customer.

"People who visit Mojo on a Wednesday early doors have a different experience to those who visit at 2am on a Saturday. As the bars get busy so does the pace of the music and the volume," says Evans. Pace and volume are at your disposal and if your bar doesn't have a specialist concept, a change of genre too. "You won't hear *Rage Against the Machine* early doors no matter how much you beg," says Evans.

No one can tell you exactly what to play, but remember music has the power to change atmosphere at the touch of a button. Classic pop can work (think London Cocktail Club) but bubble gum pop must be avoided like the plague. You might be a big indie fan, but mostly it isn't upbeat enough to make the atmosphere zip. Rock music can work, but too light and the mood can sink, too heavy and you'll scare people off. Dance is named so for a reason.

Many bars go down the classic route. Nineties and early 2000s hip-hop works - but steer clear of the tracks that are brazenly homophobic and sexist (here's a playlist we prepared earlier on Spotify: [ClassClassicBeats](#)). Period funk and soul are genres that work well in a sitting space (Spotify: [ClassFunk&Soul](#)) and reggae has its place - as Evans attests: "The best rule ever is if it all kicks off stick Bob Marley on. No one can be aggressive while Bob's on." ©

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