



Sweet as Sugar

Love and romance are key ingredients for a happy wedding. Add some sunshine, a fully dressed reception venue and a live performance by the legendary Four Tops and you have a truly unforgettable celebration...

Stephen Symington and Sian McLaughlin met at Queens University when they were both studying accountancy. After being friends for a number of years they started dating in their final year and Stephen proposed in April 2008.

"Stephen was incredibly romantic," reveals Sian. "He whisked me off to Venice for the weekend as a complete surprise. It was luxury from the second we stepped off the plane, we were met by a private speed boat which took us to the door of our hotel and we spent a lovely afternoon walking round Venice and sipping cocktails in Harry's bar. As we relaxed after dinner, Stephen took me outside onto the balcony of our room to show me the Grand Canal – I still didn't guess what he had up his sleeve!!"

Describing planning the wedding as "great fun" Sian and Stephen researched endless wedding magazines and had endless chats about favours, flowers and so on, but although they made all the decisions together, they can't take all the credit as Sian explains: "Our wedding planner Leo Callow was always one step ahead of us, booking bands, co-ordinating florists, stationery etc. We really couldn't have done it without him!"

The couple married on the 2nd May in Bangor Elim and held their wedding reception at the Culloden Hotel. Sian wore a romantic Vera Wang gown in duchess satin.

"The bodice was sculpted to my hips and then flowed into three delicate layers of hand embroidered lace with a beautiful hand tied bow at the back. The dress was amazing and I truly felt like a Princess," she enthuses.

Having decided on a black tie wedding Stephen's outfit choice was limited but style was still important as he reveals: "We spent weeks searching the province and finally found the perfect suits, waist coats and ties in Debonair in Lisburn. Debonair were extremely helpful and gave us the suits a week before the wedding which gave us plenty of time to exchange parts which no longer fitted as a few of us lost a pound or two before the wedding." Custom made Eterna shirts to match the colour of Sian's dress completed the look.

Despite having chosen a traditional black tie theme, Sian and Stephen wanted their wedding reception to have a modern flair to it and they called on the expertise of florist Vicky Gault from Reids Florists to help achieve that: "Vicky and Kirsty did a fabulous job at really making our vision come alive. The church remained very simplistic with two large strelitzia (Bird of Paradise) arrangements at the front but the reception was a little more extravagant with half the tables arranged with strelitzia and protea and the other half with tight bunches of cherry brandy roses."

Sian continues: "The top table was my favourite with individual vases of varying

shapes and heights with different flowers in each including; protea, freesia, tulips, calla lily's etc. Vicky threw in a few surprises on the day with matching flowers on the canapé trays and champagne fountains."

Overall, the effect in the reception was breath-taking. "We couldn't believe it when we stepped into our little dream-world! Sarah B and her team had worked all night to transform the Stewart Suite with cream drapes and lanterns. It really was a fairytale setting."

The entertainment line-up for the day was left to Sian's parents and they did a fantastic job. Guests were greeted at the church and

“Not many couples get to dance their first dance to The Four Tops, but Sian and Stephen wanted to make the most of their star performers

later at the champagne reception by Arco String Quartet; Tony Price entertained guests during dinner with his array of magic tricks and Incognito kicked the evening off with an amazing opera performance. But the best was still to come as Sian reveals: "For

our evening reception we couldn't believe it! Mum and Dad, with a little help from Leo had organised The American Four Tops to play! They were followed by local band "the Untouchables" who played into the early hours. It was the most fantastic evening, it was so great to see all our friends as they congo'ed round the dance floor!"

Not many couples get to dance their first dance to The Four Tops, but Sian and Stephen wanted to make the most of their star performers: "We thought it would be a nice touch to have them perform one of their hits live for our first dance. We wanted an up tempo number rather than the usual wedding slow dance, so we chose 'Sugar Pie, Honey Bun'. We had a few dance lessons before the big day with First Dance NI, but our guests were a bit too excitable and before we were one minute into the song it was elbow room only on the dance floor," Stephen laughs.

Discussing personal highlights of the day Stephen recalls the ceremony; "Our pastor Gary Beattie was fantastic and kept me very relaxed while Sian was a fashionable 40 minutes late, but as they say good things come to those who wait... wj



CREATE THE LOOK:

Venue:

Culloden Hotel, Cultra, Co. Down

Dress:

Vera Wang, The Wedding Shop, Brown Thomas, Dublin

Bridesmaids:

Sian's' best friend Karen wore a bridesmaid dress from Vera Wang, The Wedding Shop, Brown Thomas, Dublin. "We have been best friends ever since we were five and I couldn't have imagined walking down the aisle without her."

Groom:

Suits by Debonair, shirts by Bill McCotter

Flowers:

Flowers by Reids, Queens Arcade, Belfast
www.flowersbyreids.com

Cake:

A spectacular hand painted cake which incorporated the antique gold from bridesmaid Karen's dress and the strelitzia from the flower arrangements by Sugarcraft Cakes. "It was two layers with box lids which we have kept to frame and put on our bedroom wall as a reminder of the day! The cake was truly spectacular, until we tried to cut it!"

Room dressing:

SBD Events www.sbdevents.co.uk

Wedding planner:

Leo Callow tel: 07775842488

Photographer:

Matt & Carrie Symons. "Instead of having a guest book, Matt and Carrie gathered our friends up individually and took photos of them holding a board with a personalised message on it."