

# MARRIAGE is coming. WEDDINGS are here.



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While we may have a ways to go yet before same sex couples begin lining up at Tennessee courthouses, LGBT couples across the state are already affirming the depth of their relationships in public events. Same sex marriage is coming, but the same sex wedding is already here.

You don't even have to leave Nashville to hold your dream wedding, even if you want an event on a grand scale, as the December 13, 2014, wedding of Josh "Sparkles" Johnson and Michael Popham demonstrates. Johnson is most widely known for his time on HGTV's *\*Design Star\**, but his career encompasses design, music, and modeling. He shares his passion for music and his religion with Popham, who works in Corporate Trust Services at US Bank in Nashville.

For many of the people who made this massive production of a wedding possible, it was a first same sex marriage. And yet at the end of the day, it was like any other wedding: Two people in love, swearing themselves to a partner, in a ceremony that required herculean strength and patience to plan and execute!

For Johnson, a design expert who is extremely detail oriented, planning the wedding from L.A., where he's been living and working the last six years, was a significant challenge. "I really was utilizing everyone I knew in Nashville," Johnson said, "who had expertise to pull this off!" Popham helped as he was able, but he said, "Josh is the design and event person and I'm a numbers person. I just did

as I was told," he added with a laugh. "Thankfully he's so talented and organized that, in the end, this fabulous event, which was the best night of our lives, came together beautifully."

Johnson credits advanced planning with its success. "We had chosen the event years in advance for its personal significance, and also because of the date: 12/13/14!" Josh said. "Long before I even got into locating vendors, I began to design the event on my own. And with events of this size, you start with the venue...."

Given how important music is to both of us, the Country Music Hall of Fame was a natural choice.

The Hall of Fame had many strengths, besides its symbolic value to the two local music lovers. "We had plenty of guests coming in from out of town, so we definitely wanted a place that could host both the service and the reception. We didn't want to make people go out in the cold and move across town. With the hotel attached, and the catering done in-house, we could do everything in one space."

There is something meaningful for the city about having one of the most extravagant LGBT weddings Nashville has seen at the Hall of Fame. "There's so much Christian and Gospel music heritage in that space," Johnson said, "and for them to have a same sex marriage in that space definitely opened a lot of people's eyes. It was a first for a lot of people involved at the Hall of Fame."

"We were a first for a lot of people, though," Johnson reflected. "I think we were the first LGBT wedding for our photographers, the McClellans, but we were such big fans of their portfolio! And they jumped right in, and we never got the feeling working with us seemed foreign to them."

Perhaps most notable of all firsts, the wedding was expertly officiated by Rev. Stan Mitchell of GracePointe Church, Franklin, Tennessee. GracePointe was catapulted into the national spotlight in 2012 by church member Carrie Underwood's courageous comments about her church being gay friendly. The church and its minister have taken the lead among

evangelical churches, recently making a trailblazing announcement of full affirmation of its LGBT members. Johnson and Popham were honored and moved that theirs was the first same-sex wedding performed by their friend and minister in Nashville. "The timing of our wedding," Popham said, "with the national evolution on the same-sex marriage issue and the affirmation of our personal friend and GracePointe Church was undoubtedly more than just coincidental."

Some of the most visible and memorable elements of the wedding were provided by local celebrities. The person Johnson worked with most was Johnathan Kayne, the Nashville fashion designer who appeared on Bravo's *\*Project Runway\**. "I've been a friend of his for fifteen years," Johnson said. "He produced all the wedding couture for me and all the girls, and both mothers! He was behind the scenes working to the last minute. Ten minutes before the wedding he was there making sure everything was perfect."

The wedding cake was made by Jay Qualls, Nashville's star baker, who has appeared on ABC's *\*The Taste\** and TLC's *\*Next Great Baker\**. "I met with him, and we brainstormed and designed the cake together," Johnson reported. "He executed the whole vision, and I trusted him a lot."

Behind the scenes was a veritable army of other vendors, organized by wedding planner Angela Proffitt. "She coordinated the event, and all the vendors," Johnson said. "She's Nashville based but works with large events around the country, so she was

very skilled and was very instrumental in everything."

Lighting was very important to achieving Johnson's vision, given the challenges of the spaces at the Hall of Fame. "There was a time when people didn't pay attention to lighting at a wedding, but now it's a huge thing, because it creates an ambience and beauty in the space," Nashville Event Lighting implemented the lighting design. Johnson selected all the fabrics, as well as the holiday décor, that filled the space with such ambience, and Visual Elements executed his vision, constructing structures and frames for the decorations. Southern Events and Liberty Party Rentals provided linens and other essentials.

Johnson advises anyone planning a wedding, no matter the size, "If you are detail oriented, or a perfectionist, make sure that the people that you work for are as well," he said with a laugh. "When things don't come through as you pictured, or at all, it can be heartbreaking." But, he adds, focus on what's most important to you. "For us the beauty of the event and making it memorable was more important than the menu, for instance. We wanted to create a visual memory for people who had been on our journey with us."

Most importantly, remember your wedding lasts an evening, and it really is about you! "Make sure you're enjoying it: 'Everything is so emotionally charged because you are in the presence of everyone who's most important to you, people who will never be together in the same place at the same time again, and they're there to celebrate you.' So be sure to make some memories."



*"IT'S NOT ONLY LITTLE GIRLS WHO DREAM ABOUT THEIR WEDDING DAYS,"* Johnson said. *"LITTLE BOYS DO, TOO!"*

