



My big idea

SARAH BALFOUR, FOUNDER OF *MUSIC BY ARRANGEMENT*

In April 2001, Sarah Balfour was playing a seven-hour piano set at the premiere party for *Bridget Jones's Diary*. 'It was a 1940s-film theme and I was dressed up in a white wig playing on a white baby grand,' she says. And, despite the diverting attraction of the film's star, Hugh Grant, 'it was then that I really began to notice all the details that make an event special, from the presentation of canapés to the lighting, flowers, props and room layout,' she says. Balfour made it her business to find out exactly who the people behind the scenes were, and her work as a session pianist for stars such as Charlotte Church and Seal, as well as holding down residences at hotels, meant attending parties and making contacts was virtually part of her job.

After graduating in music at Leeds University, Balfour, a concert pianist, released an album of popular and classical music, before working as a session artist in studios and on *Top of the Pops*, *CD:UK*



and *The National Lottery*, working her way around the UK and Europe. 'People would ask me to make recommendations for other musicians: violinists, jazz singers, all sorts,' says Balfour. And, fed up herself with lazy agents not paying adequately or on time, Music by Arrangement was born out of Balfour's conviction that a good agent and a great resource should work hand in hand. She began auditioning 60 musicians a week – 'simply by word of mouth,' she says. 'Musicians talk!'

From a small-business set-up – just a computer in her bedroom – Balfour, then 27, went full-time with the business in October 2003, supplying professional musicians and artists and arranging bespoke events with a musical twist. The first six months saw a turnover of £13,000; this year, it has exceeded £350,000. With clients whose requests range from a private party at Annabel's or a pub gig in Stanmore to *Parkinson*; and with more than 700 musicians on her books, the task of arranging a Mozart centenary party – as Balfour did last year – or sourcing a Chinese trio and ukulele player at a moment's notice won't even raise a sweat.

Music by Arrangement (020 8209 3430; www.musicbyarrangement.com).

