A Guide for Hosting a House Concert

This guide is to help anyone who is considering hosting a house concert with answers to frequently asked question and information. It is not necessarily addressing all issues and should be considered a tool and not anything binding, legal, or otherwise.

What is a House Concert?

A House Concert is when a performer comes to your home (or home-owner's rec room, backyard, etc.) to play a private concert for you and your friends. Generally based on the space, a house concert offers a smaller group of people (i.e. 30-80) a chance to hear original music in a setting that is quiet, intimate, and comfortable. House concerts are about the music and not usually a rockin' party like the kegger parties you might remember from our younger days.

Typically, people bring their own refreshments as asked by the host. You can ask folks to bring their own beverages, food, and snacks. Some hosts will often provide some sodas and water but leave any alcohol beverages to the attendees.

Some hosts provide some food all the way from complete meals or just entrees with guests bringing the appetizers, salads, desserts to share. It is really up to the host to make these determinations.

Due to commerce laws, most house concerts do not "charge" a ticket price but rather suggest a donation of $15-$20 per attendee that goes to the artist. Other artist expenses such as travel, accommodations, promotion, etc. for the artist are usually negotiated between the house concert hosts and the artist. It is important to establish these details up front before committing to a house concert so no one is surprised later.

Additionally, most house concerts afford the artist the opportunity to sell CD's and other merchandise that attendees can purchase.

Is there a charity component to this event? You should discuss this with the artist as they may have a favorite charity they would like to support.

Summary of Steps to hosting a house concert:

1. Assess the commitment
2. Determine the venue
3. Book the date
4. Start inviting/promoting
5. Continue inviting/promoting
6. Prepare venue
7. Enjoy a unique and rewarding cultural/artistic experience.

The Simple Guide To House Concerts

Step 1:
Assess the commitment

Make no mistake about it, putting on a house concert is a commitment. It is a commitment for a number of reasons.

First, it is a commitment to the artist. You are indicating not just that you will provide a place to play – and if the show is out of town – a place to stay and the means to get there (see travel below) but also that you will get bodies there as well. You are indicating that this will be a good opportunity for the artist and his or her manager; which is usually the same person for the independent artist.

Second, it is a commitment to those you invite. You are promising an event that is worth them taking time out of their schedule. You are promising a unique experience with friends and acquaintances who share a love for the live music.

Third, it is a commitment to you. Undertaking this endeavor puts you in the role of being a host – both for attendees and for the artist and an event planner, marketer, and PR person. You had better be doing it because you have a passion for songwriting, the arts, excellence, and particularly in supporting artists with time and sweat of the brow labor. Those who do so, feel it is well-worth the effort.

Step 2:
The Money Commitment:

Talking money is a sensitive subject – usually because it is not talked about with enough candor.

Most performers love what they do enough that they would gladly play to a willing and passionate audience for free. In fact, they often do. With that said, however, they are craftsmen and women who are not playing to 20,000 people a night and selling a million CDs. They need to – and if they are providing good entertainment, deserve to – make something for their efforts.

When booking a house concert, you are telling the artist that you will have enough people there to make the event a success both in atmosphere and income. How many people are needed to make that the case? That depends. Factors like travel time, schedule, and other opportunities can make a house-concert with 25 attendees a very worthwhile use of an artist's and host's time.

Work out the numbers:

For instance, an event an hour from the artist home, with 30 attendees averaging a $15 donation is $450 dollars. If the artist sells some merchandise and CDs and adds to his or her fan base, that could be a good night of playing music.

On the other hand, the same event that requires a 4 hour plane ride, overnight stay, and has, with travel, expenses of $320 might be less attractive.

The most important thing you can do is have the money discussion early to clarify what you are agreeing to pay for and what the artist is covering. Is the artist expecting a minimum amount to play your house concert? Is the artist inviting guests? If so, are those guests making the donation or getting in the concert for free?

Most performers will have a minimum number of attendees as a requirement to ensure a profit can be pre-planned, as most of the performers are full-time musicians and this is their livelihood.

Are you willing to open the event to folks you don't know? This can happen if the artist announces the event on their webpage and doesn't clearly indicate if the event is private or available to anyone interested. Sometimes people will just show up if they hear music, too.

Some hosts have made their house concerts available to folks they don't know, but will require those people to contact them directly to get on an invite list so they can keep a head count.

It is important to let the artist know how many people have RSVP'd or that you believe will attend. It is also important to let the artist know if there are other potential house concerts in the area which could make their travel worthwhile. For PHoPS, we typically try to find at least two house concerts: one north of Seattle and one south of Seattle to enable more people to hear out-of-area artists and make their travel more worthwhile.

You may also want to consider getting extra liability coverage or rider under your homeowner's insurance to cover any accidents or incidents that may happen on your property.

The out of town venue

If booking an artist for an out of town venue, the host needs to discuss with the artist who is making and paying for travel arrangements. This will usually involve airfare to and from the host's city and a ride to and from the airport. Some folks in the club that live closer to the airport may be willing to get the artist to and from the airport if they are asked to do so. Of course, if the artist is doing a driving tour and playing in several cities and towns along the way, the arrangement will be different.

Of course, any travel expenses that those host is responsible for can be paid out of donations received from attendees. It's up to the host and artist to figure this out.

What about sound equipment? The club has a sound system that is okay; however, there are club members that have better equipment that they may be willing to loan to you. The artist may have their own equipment, too. Make sure you discuss what is available and who is bringing what and when. Many artists prefer to use their own microphone.

Determine the venue

If you are living in a 2 bedroom apartment and you expect that you will get 80 people to show up to your house concert, there could be an issue.

This brings us to the first step – determining/estimating the number of attendees.
There is no hard-fast rule on this – it really is a guess. However, if you tend to be well connected to people who like to get together for more than going to a movie, and if you will be inviting not just your friends but their friends as well, you can start to piece together an idea.

You could, prior to booking a date or venue, put out a feeler; ask some people if they would attend. Tell them what you are planning, that you need accurate numbers and need their "honest" feedback.

If you are considering an outside or backyard house concert, it is a good idea to invite your neighbors, too, to encourage their participation and to keep the peace.

Once you have an idea about how many attendees you'll have, you need to determine your venue.

Points to consider about the venue/home:

- Is there ample parking?
- Is there room for chairs and an area where the songwriter can perform and be seen and heard by everyone who attends?
- Are there adequate facilities – restrooms – for the number of people who will attend?
- Does the city or county where you live have noise ordinances that would preclude you from having a house concert or limit the times to do so? Many places have a noise ordinance that requires residents to be quiet after 9 or 10 pm which will factor into the hours of your event. Some places will not allow amplified music outside in private homes, etc.

Book the date

Historically, Saturday afternoons or evenings works best; however, you can get other nights to work as well. Here are some tips to help you pick the best day and time.

• Think at least two months out for planning and promotion.

• Consider things like our area traffic/rush hour and work schedules for concerts Mon-Fri. For instance, you could pretty easily book a house concert for 6pm on a Saturday or even a Sunday afternoon but mid-week you probably can't get everyone there before 7pm.

Start Inviting/Promoting

You can start inviting people via a simple email; using Evite; Facebook, EventBrite, etc. If you want your house concert be available to PHoPS members, please send the details to the Communications Director who will add the event to the Hump Day News that goes out weekly, the club website, newsletter and all forms of communication that the club uses.

You need to provide all of the details so your artist and invitees know what to expect. Be sure to include the date; time the venue opens and when the music starts; address of venue; donations amounts to go to artist; what to bring- such as any food (what type), beverages, chairs, charity items etc. Also provide any details such as if the event is open to kids, dogs, or not. Is there a maximum number of invitees? Again, you are trying to set out expectations and avoid surprises to yourself, the artist, and the invitees.

If you are printing and mailing invitations, keep track of your expenses. It is fair for you to be reimbursed for your out-of-pocket expenses when putting on a house concert; printing and mailing expenses as agreed to with the artist.

Some artists will provide with a promotional flyer to use or ask you to make one up that they can put on their website. Again, this is a topic to discuss with the artist to ensure who is doing what to promote the event.

Continue Inviting/promoting

Let's face it, you are asking people to come out and see a performer who they may or may not know. They will love it when they are there but people have the tendency to allow their schedules to fill up with other things.

As the event approaches, continue promoting/inviting/reminding those who have expressed an interest. Continue to ask them to invite others they believe may enjoy the event.

If you have a limit, it is important to communicate how close you are to getting to the maximum number and if you are full how to get on a waiting list. People will call or email as late as the night before or day of for popular artists trying to get into your event.

Staying in touch with everyone as the day of the event approaches is a great way to guarantee that the evening is a success, especially if there are any changes due to weather, timing, artist schedule changes, etc.

Prepare the venue

Set up any chairs you want to be available and make space if folks are bringing their own chairs; tables for food and beverages; garbage and recycling areas; a table for the artists CDs and merchandise; and basket, bucket, or box for donations.

Set up the sound early, too, so the artist can do a sound check before all of the attendees show up. Many artists will try to schedule their arrival just before or when the house opens up to give time for sound equipment set-up and checking in the event something is wrong with the equipment a Plan "B" can be implemented.

Set up whatever the artist needs. Many prefer to have a carpet underneath their stage area, some prefer a stool or other seat. Check with the artist for their food and beverage preferences. Some Hosts will often provide artists with their own cooler full of water and preferred beverages. The artist may need shade to perform comfortably outside.

If it is an outdoor event, be prepared in case the weather turns bad. There are folks in PHoPS quite willing to loan you pop-up covers if you need them, but you need to ask so they can be sure to bring them. If needed, you can pull furniture out of a living room quickly, it is amazing how many people can actually fit comfortably.

Most of the artists hosted by PHoPS members are easy going and willing to adjust to any changes needed at the least minute. If there is any doubt, stay in touch with artist to ensure everyone is on the same page.

Enjoy a unique and rewarding cultural/artistic experience

Let people mingle a little bit and then call people to the listening area.

Announce the artist something like…

"Thanks for coming out to our house concert. We are very happy to have [**Artist Name**], a singer/songwriter from [**City, State**]. We are asking everyone to please donate $20, $25, [`whatever the amount] towards the artist and have a box, bucket, etc. marked for that purpose. If you haven't made your donation yet, please do so now.

Finally, and most importantly, enjoy the show!!"