
THE SIMPLE GUIDE TO HOUSE CONCERTS



Matthew Moran, playing a house concert in Chicago

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The Simple Guide To House Concerts

This Guide:

This guide provides you some basic tools and ideas to help you organize, promote, and put on a successful and enjoyable house concert. If this is new to you, you might be surprised at how simple it is.

I am going to update this guide with links to the relevant websites and other tools you can use to help make putting on a house concert a stress-free and enjoyable experience.

If you have never heard of house concerts or are not sure what they are, read the section below, **What is a house concert?**

An Overview

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. 30-80 people get a chance to hear original music in a setting that is quiet, intimate, and comfortable. Most house concerts are low to no alcohol. They are not the two-kegger parties you remember (*or don't remember*) from college.

Typically, people bring their own refreshments – although the host might provide some cookies, cheese and crackers, etc. It is really up to the host.

Due to commerce laws, most house concerts do not “charge” a ticket price but do suggest a donation of \$15-\$20 per attendee. Some people may donate more, some less – for instance, a couple might donate \$25 where an individual may donate the full \$15. Minus any expenses (*travel, printing and mailing of promotional materials, etc.*) the donations are given to the artist.

Additionally, the artist might have CD's and other merchandise that attendees can purchase.

Summary of Steps:

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
8. Repeat next year ;)

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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.

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.

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 – and let the artist know how many people have RSVP'd or that you believe will attend.

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The out of town venue

If booking an artist for an out of town venue the host will often make and pay for travel arrangements. This could be airfare to and from the host's city and a ride to and from the airport. 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 are paid to the host out of donations received from attendees.

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.

Which brings us to the first step – determining/guestimating 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.

Once you've determined that, then you can determine your venue.

Points to consider about 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?

Book the date

Historically, Saturday evening 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 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.

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I provide a basic color and black and white invitation template you may use. If you book me for a house concert, just ask and I will email it to you. If you have the details, I will fill it in before sending it.

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 and those incurred if you plan on providing some basic snacks, etc.

Additionally, consider using a service like EventBrite.com to track attendees.

Eventbrite and other online services allow your invitees to RSVP and can send out reminders prior to the event.

I can help you with both printed invitations and online invitations. As a performer, I am more than happy to do this to ensure a successful and well-attended show for both the host and myself.

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.

Staying in touch with everyone as the day of the event approaches is a great way to guarantee that the evening is a success.

Prepare the venue

Some chairs, a table with some snacks, a table for CD's and t-shirts, and a basket, bucket, or box for donations, that's it.

If it is an outdoor event, be prepared in case the weather turns bad. If you pull furniture out of a living room quickly, it is amazing how many people can actually fit comfortably. Most of all make any adjustments without stress – this is meant to be a fun and unique event; Matt will roll easily with changes and your attendees will too – as long as you take it in stride.

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 (that's me) with 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 don't charge a ticket price but do ask that you consider supporting his work with a donation of \$15. Less if you cannot afford it and more if you can. If you were to go see a show in a stadium you might pay \$50, \$60, or a

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\$100 – and that would be for bad seats. Here we get a much closer and more intimate experience.

That's it for the "hard-sell". Finally, and most importantly, enjoy!!"

** Note: It is, as a general rule, better for the host to remind visitors about donations and make the case that a live, intimate concert is worth something.*

Repeat next year ;)

And spread the word.