

WHAT IS A HOUSE CONCERT?

It's Easy to Host Your Own House Concert

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Music lovers are discovering the enchantment of these intimate gatherings

What's a House Concert?

A house concert is a concert in a living room. They're happening more frequently as artists find that 25 to 40 people can fit into a living room quite comfortably. There is much less overhead, no smoke, low or no amounts of alcohol to compete with, little or no advertising necessary, and cover charges can be whatever the artist and presenter want.

Before you start to think that this is something that only amateurs do, think again - you'd be amazed at the quality and notoriety of artists that do, or have done, house concerts, even when they were filling clubs and getting airplay. Often artists who play

house concerts will have a show at a coffeehouse or club the same week or weekend. Imagine seeing Dar Williams or Lyle Lovett in your living room the year before they were playing large halls. It happens.

HOW TO PRESENT YOUR OWN HOUSE CONCERT

Getting Started

It's best to start planning at least two months in advance, once you've started speaking with artists, though some folks do it in a month. Some people treat their concerts as an ongoing series and will book the artists a year in advance.

You'll want to ask yourself honest questions about how much time you'll want to spend presenting house concerts. If you have a difficult time with deadlines, the time to establish methods for overcoming this difficulty is **BEFORE** you book anyone.

Keep in mind that touring artists live by their performances. Take your commitment seriously - a low turnout is like showing up for work and having your boss inform you that today you're working for less than minimum wage. Not fun for anyone. That said, it's usually a good time for all concerned. Like many good things, sometimes a little work is involved.

Finding an artist

You probably already have some idea of who your favorite small time or independent artists are. You may have heard them on a community radio show, as a local opening act for a touring artist, at a fair or festival, or even at another house concert. Other sources for house concert artists are non-profit arts groups, web sites, or booking information on the back of a self produced CD.

Now that you're in contact with the artist and he/she/they are excited about doing a show in your living room, it's time to work out your arrangements regarding money, where will the artist be staying, food needs and how "public" you want the show to be. Make sure all of this is negotiated ahead of time with the artist, preferably in writing.

You may choose NOT to make the presentation of house concerts a business (Though that doesn't mean you are not business like - anywhere money is involved, it's best to keep things orderly). For most House Concert Hosts, presenting house concerts is a labor of love. They enjoy getting to know some of the artists they present and often offer a place to stay on their tour.

Some artists like being able to stay in homes as opposed to hotels. Home cooked meals, participating in the lives of the people who present you, and just the pleasure of knowing friends await you in the next town can be a positive aspect of being an artist on tour. It all depends on the people involved. Be flexible.

When to present / what to advertise

Some Hosts feel that Saturday nights are best, but other nights can work out well if things like rush hour, and work the next day are taken into account when it comes to deciding start times. Afternoons can be great too! The most important factor is that the show is advertised as a "sit down concert" - audience expectation will be the difference between having a party with some poor fool making barely audible noise in the corner, and having a concert that changes peoples lives.

Sample invitation

Invitations can be a mix between a postcard and a "party" invitation. You can put some kind of interesting graphic on the front with an inviting scenario and then the vital information on the inside in larger type.

Here's an example of a house concert invitation: (Some of the names have been changed for privacy issues.)



Lewis House Concert - Stone Harbor, N.J.

Imagine a cool summer evening,
The scent of fresh cut grass and resinous fir
You are led to a seat surrounded by cool stone and tall
trees.

Someone puts a latte in your hand.
The sun begins to set
And the music begins.

You are cordially invited to a
HOUSE CONCERT
BRUCE MANDEL
will perform
Saturday, July 18, 2009
7:00 - 9:00pm
(doors open at 6:30)
at the home of
Chris and Betsy Showmaker
Woodinville, Washington

Non-alcoholic punch, coffee and munchies will be
provided

Please feel free to bring food or beverages
There is no cover charge, but we will pass the hat
\$15 SUGGESTED DONATION
(More if you can, less if you can't)

Art doesn't happen until it passes between people.
Come and Participate!

Insert DETAILED directions here, with ADDRESS!

Please RSVP to Chris or Betsy at (206) 555-5555 and
let us know how many will be in your party.

Who to Invite

Make a list of your closest 50-100 friends and their addresses. Then make a list of another 50 people you know who you'd allow into your house who you think might want to see this particular artist. Experience is that you can expect a 20 to 25% turn out.

Little or no alcohol is recommended. People tend to not realize they're being loud when they're drunk.

When to mail and/or e-mail

Send your mailing out 3 weeks in advance (Two weeks in advance at the latest!) to the 100 to 150 people on the list. Getting the invitation into the homes of your audience with enough time to plan to attend is the most important aspect of the advertising!

Generally Hosts find that if they send the invitation too early, (more than three weeks in advance) people tend to forget about the show. Too late (less than two weeks before the show) and people have made other plans. Take delivery time into account. A piece of mail in town may take from one to three days to be delivered. Assume the longest. Of course, e-mail is quicker!

A mailing doesn't have to be fancy - a 4"x5" postcard with the essential information will do. This expense can be taken from the hat or can be given as your donation. Think about how much you might spend on party - people often spend fifty dollars on alcohol alone.

Be sure to include directions to your house/apartment, your phone number, the date and time of the show, information about food, the amount of donation you expect, artists names, "IN CONCERT" etc. It is generally found that providing drinkables and some munchies before the show with a potluck AFTER works best for feeding people and making the

"Reminiscent of the singer/songwriters who penned the soundtrack of the '60s and '70s, Bruce Mandel brews up a coffeehouse sound that's espresso rich in inspiration and experience. As a vocalist, Bruce comes across as smooth, comfortable and quite likable. As songwriter, he's a storyteller. —
Singer & Musician Magazine
December 2008

music happen.

If there is an intermission, people will grab food then as well. Keep the food simple and cheap. The focus should be the music.

If you're short on chairs, request that people bring folding chairs or pillows. You might consider a half circle of devoted (and limber!) fans at the feet of their favorite artist.

Creating a stage

You might create a stage in the corner of your living room by putting a guitar stand there in a way that says, "This is the performance space." Think of setting the stage as if the musicians are storytellers (they often are, they just sing their stories) and they deserve the same amount of attention as if we were sitting in a theatre about to see a play.

THIS STUFF IS NOT BACKGROUND MUSIC - IT'S THE FOCUS OF THE EVENING!

Handling money - getting the folks to give

You might want to set things up so that the donation/contribution is collected at the door as the guests arrive. You should encourage your guests to pay in advance to guarantee their place, giving you an idea of attendance, and they a reason to remember the event. Despite good intentions, time can sneak by. Alternately, you can set a hat or basket out with a sign clearly designating the hat or basket as the place for guests to put their suggested donation/contribution.



One method that seems to work well (and it's not the only way by any means) if you are not charging a "cover" is to suggest a donation of \$15 dollars in the mailing (more if you can, less if you can't) and pass the hat just before the fourth song before intermission or the end of the show if there is only one long set.

It's vital to do this during the first set - you want to make sure that everyone who comes has the opportunity and encouragement to give what they can.

It's important that the MC (that usually means YOU the presenter) gets up, SEEDED hat or basket in hand and announce that the artist(s) who has given us so much this evening lives by his/her (their) art, and that if we want to see more of these events we need to give in return financially.

You might remind people of the last time they saw a show with some "name" artist, they probably paid \$35 dollars or more, and that our artist is as good or better, and you saw them so up close you can shake their hand.

Keep it short, try not to get in the way of the artist, but get the cash flowing.

As performers, we've often made more money on house concerts than at coffee house shows with the same number of attendees. That allows for people who may not have money to attend, and for people with money who want to contribute more to participate at their level.

People give more when they are excited. Have a jar placed strategically for stragglers, people who need change and check writers. The hat or jar should have a sign suggesting a donation of at least \$15.

Also provide a place for the artist to sell their CDs and merchandise and to place their e-mailing sign up list.

As an artist doing house concerts, I'm often asked by folks who have shared and enjoyed that day's performance, if I'd like to come play a House Concert at their home. It's a great way to build an audience.

After the concert, enjoy good food and conversation! Encourage folks to buy CDs and get on the e-mailing list.

SUPPORT INDEPENDENT ARTISTS!

"What a beautiful collection of songs produced ever so gently with sweet harmonies, arrangements, and great playing. Reminds me of a cross between the folkier side of early (Glyn Johns /Bernie Leadon era) Eagles, with the crystal bell tones of Bruce's voice falling somewhere between Don Henley and Glenn Frey.

These songs also harken back to great '70s folk music like Paul Simon's "Still Crazy", Jim Croce, or James Taylor's "Gorilla" album. Nice job Bruce!"

— **Adam Michael Rothberg, musician, songwriter, producer** on
"Between Dreams and Regrets"

Taken in
Stockbridge,
MA for
Bruce's
"Between
Dreams And
Regrets" CD
photo shoot
by Michael
Lavin Flower



bringing the magic of music into
your home...

Acoustic guitar, a keen lyrical
ear, intimate and honest vocals...
delight your guests with a personal
and memorable musical experience.

Available for house concerts and
intimate gatherings. For details on
booking arrangements & appearances
visit: www.brucemandel.com
or call **413.269.7229**

BRUCE MANDEL

SINGER/SONGWRITER, HOME & CONCERT PERFORMER

photo courtesy of:
Michael Lavin Flower

CONTEMPORARY FOLK, AMERICANA, BLUEGRASS, FOLK ROCK