

How to Host a House Concert

*Bringing Live Music
to a Living Room near you...*



acousticroof.ca
Canadian House Concerts

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Things to Consider Before Hosting a Concert

Make sure that you're comfortable with the idea. Be sure that you are comfortable opening your home to performers and audiences.

Do you have enough seating room? You should have at least 20 seats in your home to host a house concert; the more, the better. These seats can include anything from chairs and couches, to pillows and carpets; just be up front with your guests about the type of seating that is available. Chances are if you don't have enough seats the performer will not make a decent wage. Also, decide if you would like to make seats available for only a close group of friends, or the general public.

Alcohol: Do you want to allow alcohol in your private home? Be prepared to deal with its appropriate consumption.

What is your smoking policy? If you allow smoking, be clear as to where it is permitted (outside, garage, etc.). Most people will expect a smoke free space in which to enjoy the music they have paid to see.

Zoning: You may want to talk to your municipality about zoning by-laws and restrictions on your home. As you can imagine, if you have 50 guests coming for a house concert, parking, etc. may become an issue with your neighbours and/or the municipality. This may not be such a large problem where guests can carpool or take the bus to your concert.

SOCAN licensing fees: SOCAN (Society of Composers, Authors, and Music Publishers of Canada) collects licensing fees for its members when public venues host live performances. If you are a private home owner hosting a house concert, these license fees do not apply to you. If you are holding a house concert at a public venue, you may want to contact SOCAN to license your venue (http://www.socan.ca/jsp/en/music_users/how_it_works.jsp).

Ensure that you have adequate parking for performers and guests. Make parking instructions clear in your communications with guests.

Is your home accessible? If you have an accessible or somewhat accessible home, make it known. We all know people with physical challenges and if we can accommodate them and give them opportunities to enjoy music, it can add so much to these events.

Make sure you have time to promote the concert properly. This is a crucial topic that is often overlooked. The harder that you work on behalf of the artist, the more tickets you will sell. Give yourself one month to contact friends, neighbours, put up posters, etc.

Decide on the “flavour” or mood of your concert venue. Is it to be a quiet “attentive listening” concert event? Or do you want to create a “kitchen party” feel? Discuss this with the artists and post your concert with full details for interested patrons.

Choose an artist you want to see perform. Your excitement about seeing the performance will be infectious as you go about promoting the event; you'll do a much better job. Do not hesitate to say “no” to a performer who you are not interested having perform in your home.

Now You're Ready to Book a Performer

When you contact the performer or the performers booking agent, there are a number of details that you should discuss. You may be able to negotiate with the performer on some of these details:

Confirm the performance date. Will the concert be during the week, or on a weekend? Weekends are usually best, but many successful concerts are held during the week.

How many seats does your venue have? The number of seats that your venue has will help the artist make decisions such as, whether they can do the show, or at what amount they will need to set the suggested donation price for guests attending the show.

Performance space: How much room is there for the performer? If the act is a three-piece or a four-piece, then they will need significantly more floor space than a solo performer to set up their equipment and perform. Even more floor space will be required to accommodate sound equipment, if needed.

Set a suggested donation amount. You need to establish a suggested donation amount so that you can start advertising, and/or collecting donations in advance. Depending on how established, well known, and demanded the artist is, this amount will vary. Remember, you may be able to negotiate the donation amount with the artist. When setting a donation amount also consider whether the artist will receive the full proceeds from the donations, or whether you will keep a part of the proceeds to cover your personal expenses for hosting the concert.

What time will the performance be? This is a good time to ask the performer about breaks, and length of sets. Some performers like to play straight through, but most will play two 45 minute sets. A performance lasts between 1.5 hours and 2 hours on average.

Clarify sound equipment and electrical needs. Depending on the music artists, the show may be entirely acoustic or they may use sound equipment for amplification. Some artists travel with their own sound equipment. The most common sound equipment needs of performers include XLR cables, quarter inch cables, vocal microphones (58's), instrument microphones (57's), microphone stands, speakers, speaker cables, and an amplifier/mixer with phantom power. The bottom line is that it is your home, so if you feel strongly about having a strictly acoustic show then make sure that this is discussed with the artist.

Cancellation policies: What are your cancellation policies should you not have an adequate number of seats reserved for the concert? Is the performer willing to play for a small audience?

Meals and lodging: Will you be providing a meal for the performers before or after the event? Let them know well ahead of time before they make travel and meal plans. Can you offer a nights lodging for the performer if the need should arise?

Contracts: Don't be surprised if a performer or their booking agent asks you to sign a contract. Contracts are commonly used for bookings by both parties involved. This is simply an opportunity for both parties to have important details in writing. This helps prevent surprise issues from arising.

Ongoing Details to Consider

Promoting your house concert: If you are planning to have 30 friends to a private house concert and no one else, then your promotion is partially done. Of course, this isn't always the case. Either way, your seats are not going to fill themselves. There is a lot of hard work behind a successful concert. The first thing that you can do to help sell tickets for your concert is register your house concert on line at www.acousticroof.ca/venue_submit.asp. Next, submit your house concert listing at www.acousticroof.ca/concert_submit.asp. Give yourself one month to contact friends, neighbours, put up posters, etc. Download our free posters and logos at www.acousticroof.ca/resources.asp to use for your own posters, flyers, etc. Remember, the sky is the limit in terms of how you would like to promote your venue and sell tickets. Don't hesitate to use any of the other resources offered on our site.

Reserving seats/donation payments: Some venue hosts will simply reserve seats for guests if they confirm by email or phone. Other hosts may want to collect donations prior to the show. Advanced seat reservations are a sure bet. PayPal is available to those who wish to set it up – it can be used to receive donations in advance (www.PayPal.ca). PayPal acts something like a bank account; however, PayPal does take a small portion of your donations (~9%) and charges you 50 cents to take funds of less than \$150 out of your account. Alternatively, some people can mail cheques. Whatever you decide to do, make your ticket information available to guests so that they can reserve seats and/or pay their donations in advance. Keep a running list of who has pre-paid and/or reserved seats. Your goal is to pre-sell every seat for the concert.

Directions to your house concert: Be sure to give clear directions to both your guest and the performer well in advance. The best way to do this is by email. It is a good idea to also provide a phone number. Do not disclose the exact location of your event until people have made sincere bookings.

Would you like guests to provide food and drink? Some hosts advertise a potluck style concert; guests bring a small dish to share. Finger foods and desserts are a good idea because they reduce preparation work and clean-up. Some venue hosts may choose to arrange the snacks for the event and recoup these expenses by taking a small cut of the ticket proceeds. Discuss this with performers in advance. Usually, guests will have a snack at intermission. Alcohol consumption is another area that you will have to address.

Seating: You may want to ask guests to bring folding chairs or cushions as needed.

Last Minute Details

Food: Designate a table for food and drinks.

Sound/electrical needs: Set up any sound equipment as required. Make sure that the performance space is near a power source, if required by the artist.

Merchandise: Designate a table that performers can use to display their merchandise.

Mailing list: Designate a spot where you can leave a mailing list sign-up sheet for guests. This will help you inform guests in the future about your house concerts.

Safety: Make sure that the performance and seating area is clear of objects and breakables.

Guest donations: You will be busy, so have a friend collect donations from those who haven't paid, and check them off a list. It wouldn't hurt to have a small float handy to provide change for guests. Put the money in a safe place until you give it to the performer.

Have a space (as private as possible) for the artists to prepare for the gig. They may need to change clothes, and/or store luggage, instruments, and other belongings.

Guest's things: Designate a spot for guests to leave their coats, shoes, etc. when they arrive. Signage can help with this task.