

How to Host a House Concert

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The Canadian House Concert Network

**It's your place to listen
It's your place to play**

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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. House concerts are great fun, and if you have had a party in the past (or even if you haven't...) you can very likely host a very successful house concert.

Be ready to do some communicating! The key to any successful event is communication with your desired performer, and with your potential audience. Communication is a two way street; the potential performer has obligations too. Don't be shy, speak up.

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. (Although successful shows have certainly happened with fewer in the audience! The main thing is "communication" with your performer, he or she may be happy with a small audience, and a small financial reward, for getting a chance to play in such a venue) 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. (The term "general public" could mean anything from "friends of friends of friends" who hear by word of mouth, or people who contact you in response to promo posters.)

Alcohol: Do you want to allow alcohol in your private home? Be prepared to deal with its appropriate consumption. Be aware of the liabilities even if people bring their own alcohol. State clearly what your policies are. Supplying a non-alcoholic beverage (like a punch and of course, water) to guests is a smart gesture and alcohol is really not a necessity. Don't feel pressure to allow alcohol, as a house concert is about the music, first and foremost.

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. On the other hand, private parties (baby showers, cooking-ware parties, etc.) are usually tolerated in a normal neighbourhood and if you have very infrequent house concerts, there really should not be a difference, in my opinion!

SOCAN licensing fees: SOCAN (Society of Composers, Authors, and Music Publishers of Canada) collects licensing fees and pays out royalties to its members (most touring artists are SOCAN members, or if they are from another country, SOCAN has an agreement in place to collect royalties payable to these artists.) In the past there has been some confusion about whether SOCAN license fees were applicable to house concerts in private homes, but SOCAN has sent us their clear policies addressing this issue. Their policies are outlined in [http://www.acousticroof.ca/resources/printables/House concert.E \(SOCAN\).pdf](http://www.acousticroof.ca/resources/printables/House%20concert.E%20(SOCAN).pdf)

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 the degree of accessibility known. We all know people with physical challenges and if we can accommodate them and give them opportunities to enjoy music, everyone wins.

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 bigger the audience is likely to be. Give yourself one month to contact friends, neighbours, put up posters, etc.

The performer should also be promoting the show, or series of shows. Using myspace, facebook, their website, or any other promotional avenues, the performer can help a lot by listing your show in their itinerary. It can be a simple post - “house concert” Halifax area, and the date... or “house concert” contact xxx. Agree on how the show will be listed. You won't want your phone number on the Internet! One thing you could easily do is set up a hotmail or gmail account, just for your house concerts... johndoehouseconcerts @ gmail.com would work well. Sure, it could get spammed, but it's not a serious concern (or it wouldn't be to me!)

Decide on the “flavour” or mood of your concert venue. Is it to be a quiet “attentive listening” concert event? (That's what the site is generally intended to promote, but we don't have any kind of rules you have to follow!) Or do you want to create a “kitchen party” feel. Once again, communication with performer and audience is key...no one wants to be surprised on the day of the event. Some artists charge a set fee for a “kitchen party.” If there is to be “jamming” involved, we think of it as a kitchen party. A concert is really for a listening audience, there to hear a specific performer only.

Speaking of “specific performers” we have had a couple of opportunities for guests to request a chance to perform a song. Our performers of the day have been very gracious in allowing this, at the break, usually. It rarely happens, but once in a while there is a budding artist in our midst who gets brave about asking for the floor!

Choose an artist you really want to see perform. Your excitement about seeing the performance will be infectious as you go about promoting the event. You are “selling” something you love and believe in, and the results will be much better. Do not hesitate to say “no” to a performer who you are not interested having perform in your home. That is not to say that saying “no thanks” means you don't care for the artist. It could mean you are busy, over-booked or need a break from shows in your home. But what we mean is, if you are offering your home as a performance space, it would be best to love the music!

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 (also thought of as an admission price, but technically, this is an amount that the artist will get directly, less any administrative costs that you may have agreed upon. 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 in demand the artist is, this amount will vary. Remember, you may be able to negotiate the donation amount with the artist. In essence, this is a fund-raiser for the artist, and the use of the term “donation” is perfectly appropriate, as many events that raise funds have set prices.

What time will the performance begin? how long will it be, and what is the format for the performance? 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. Allow enough time, if you are having snacks, to give people a chance to grab a bite to eat, visit the washroom and maybe have a short opportunity to chat with the artist. (not everyone will want to chat, but some folks will!) A 10 minute break is too short, so think this through, and based on your projected audience, plan appropriately and talk to the artist.

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.

There are occasions when an agent or artist uses a “standard form” for all bookings, which can contain some clauses that might be directed more to commercial venues...such as needing a dozen bottles of water, particular food, etc. Remember that touring artists are on the road a lot and they need some clear guidelines so they can perform comfortably. If there are clauses that seem excessive, or that you don't understand, communicate with the agent and get clarification about what the performer expects at a house concert venue.

Some artists also require a deposit, so discuss all of these things, and don't take on any commitments that you are not comfortable with.

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 percentage and may have other small fees, so do your homework. Alternatively, some people can mail cheques. Whatever you decide to do, make your pricing 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. Ask your confirmed guests to notify you if they should have to cancel – this way you can at least fill the seats with people on a waiting list.

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. It is probably wise not to 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 proceeds. Discuss this with performers in advance.

Extra 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 and their artist mailing list info.

Your mailing list: Designate a spot where you can leave a mailing list sign-up sheet so guests can be notified of your future house concerts. This is especially important, since people you know will sometimes bring friends or family, and you want to have a way to contact these new folks later. Make it clear that the mailing list is for future concerts at your home.

Safety: Keep exit points from the room COMPLETELY clear of obstacles. Point out the fire exits (two is recommended). Make sure that the performance and seating area is clear of objects and breakables. Remove small mats, and avoid creating “bottlenecks” where people have to squeeze through to get at food, merchandise, etc. (merchandise does have to be safeguarded of course but perhaps someone can be designated to keep an eye on it, or the artist can cover it until the break.)

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. Give the money straight to the performer, or put the money in a safe place until you have a chance to do this. Some hosts use a jar near the performer to hold the donations.

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/cases, and other belongings. Provide a towel, facecloth and soap for their use.

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

Time allowance: When you are booking a concert in your home (or in any other venue, be sure to allow time after the show for the artist(s) to pack up, perhaps chat a bit, and go on their way.) (If you are billeting an artist, chances are you will want to chat a bit afterwards too...) My point is, give everyone time to get sorted – if you have another engagement, leave appropriate time in between. (This is particularly pertinent if it is an afternoon show...someone may have invited you for dinner later that day. Be realistic about how long things can take.)

One last thing...if you are running the water in the sink, just before the show, it's a good idea to turn off the tap before the sink overflows....

Check our archived newsletters for tips for hosts, artists and performers!