

# HOW TO

CREATE AN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE

# HOST

PEOPLE WILL REMEMBER FOREVER

# AN AMAZING HOUSE CONCERT

WRITTEN BY

# MICHAEL ECHLIN

GIGABLE PRESS

# **How to Host an Amazing House Concert**

By: Michael Echlin

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## Introduction

The house concert aka "living room concert" is not a new idea. Folk singers and the like have been playing homes and backyards across the country (and possibly) world since the 1970s. This guide is meant to help people plan and organize killer house concerts. The explosion of indie music has refueled the interest in house concerts. Hundreds of artists in many towns across the country are winning fans in groups of 25 or more!

Who am I and why am I qualified to write this guide?

My name is Mike Echlin and I'm a musician / music-fan and I've planned and attended many house concerts over the past several years. I've been playing gigs since 1984 in just about every type of venue. Full disclosure; I am also Co-Founder of Gigable, which is mentioned in this book.

## Why House Concerts?

One big problem with live music is that there aren't as many live music venues as there was 20 years ago and the good ones are in the big cities. If you don't live near the big city, you have to make big plans to go see live music. If you don't live near any venues, it's likely you are not seeing a lot of live music. Most traditional live music venues are also bars and set up for the ownership of the establishment. Bands and musicians are used as marketing to drive more patrons to the establishment. I have nothing against this fact since it's mostly a win-win for bands and the venue. Many of these places host a variety of music styles, but it really depends on the venue location and clientele. If you want to see a high-energy rock show, you will need to go to a rock club in your nearest biggest city. If you want to see some acoustic music, you will need to seek out a coffee house or other non-traditional venue which may be hard to find.

House concerts bring the live music experience right to your neighborhood.

The magic of a house concert is that any type of artist can put on a show and engage with a captive audience. That same artist can go on to plan several house concerts and never have to travel more than an hour in any direction. It's a totally different vibe than a bar or traditional music venue, mostly because - it's a house! And most homes have a comfortable setting and everyone feels open to talking to everyone. In a bar, it's a bunch of strangers in the same room. Most house concerts will have a group of people who are at least acquaintances, if not friends. Even total strangers at a house concert usually become acquaintances by the end of the night. It's a great social event with an opportunity to see an artist up close.

I've talked to a lot of people about hosting shows and I've hosted as well. The first thing people say when we talk about a house concert is how much work it must be to host! This couldn't be further from the truth. All it takes is a bit of planning and a little imagination. This guide has everything you need to host a great show with no hassles.

I've organized the guide in sections that correspond to the timeline in planning an actual concert.

## Choosing an artist

The first question you need to answer is; who do you want to see? Chances are you know of some local artists and that's a good place to start. If you are looking to discover new talent and help them win new fans, house concerts are a good way to accomplish that.

ReverbNation has tens of thousands of artists listed on their site and you can search based on your zip code. Take a listen to the song samples. Also, take a look at the artist ranking by genre and city. This is a good way to find some of the better talent that may be somewhat local.

Ask your friends/family who they are listening to. Post on Facebook that you would like to host a house concert and does anyone have suggestions for an artist.

I'm guessing if you are reading this guide, you probably have an artist(s) in mind already who you would like to host. Or maybe you are an artist or manager looking to get into the house concert circuit. If this is the case, post on social media you are open to playing house concerts and offer this guide to your potential hosts. Shannon Curtis has a great guide for artists on how to setup a house concert "tour." Search her name on Amazon.

# Planning

The first thing you will need to do is reach out to the artist and find out if they are open to playing house concerts. Since this concept is growing worldwide, it's very likely they will be open to the idea. Once connected to the artist, find out their availability and fee.

Let's talk about artist fees for a moment. There are a few variations:

- The artist will play for donations
- The artist will require a minimum fee
- The artist will ask for a per person fee (i.e. ticket)

My recommendation is that you start a campaign on [Gigable](#) and crowdfund the house concert. This is a really effective and fun way to raise money to pay the artist fee and provide more exposure for the artist to play more shows. Also, by creating "rewards" in the campaign (i.e. reserved seat+wine+appetizers), you can create a really full experience for all the guests. You and the artist can get creative and provide some really awesome rewards for your guests such as; signed CDs, t-shirts, stickers, etc. I've seen beer and whiskey tastings, full dinners and live recordings sent as mp3s after the actual show! I'll talk more about funding campaigns.

Another consideration before invites are sent out is the room for the actual concert. The best bet is to choose a room in your house where 20-30 people can gather. Most likely, this will be the family room or living room. You want to be able to set up seating for everyone - or as many as possible. It's important that people are comfortable and not standing in another room while the show is going on.





The ideal number of guests for a house concert is 20-25. Less than that and it feels too sparse and more than 25 it can be uncomfortable for the guests. 30+ guests may work if you have a big living room! Even if you have a big room, more than 30 can become distracting to the artist since guests will likely splinter off and have conversations during the show. It's not a party while the show is going. Very important to listen to the artist during the show and let the party flag fly afterwards.

I would recommend discussing with the artist that they play for an hour. No longer than 1.5 hours. This is an exclusive concert for 20 people! It should be prompt and tight. The guests have (likely) paid good money to be there and they deserve a thoughtful show. Go crazy after the set. The artist will probably (hopefully) want to mingle after the show and sign stuff. All good!

## Invites

Once you have started a discussion with the artist, you will need to choose a date. I've seen these things come together within a few weeks. Most likely you will choose a date a month or two out from first contacting the artist. If you choose a date too far in the future (several months), you will have a hard time engaging people to commit that far in advance.

Once the date is selected, you will need to send out the first wave of invites. Another benefit to using Gigable for planning the show is that you will get firm commitments from your guests.

If you send out an email that just invites people over without a firm commitment, you will only get about 50% of the people who said they would come show up. After throwing many parties, I've landed on this figure and it's always the same. By crowdfunding the show, your potential guests are pledging their attendance with their credit card. This is very effective for quickly getting to actual guest list. Any other type of invite, e-vite, Facebook event, will not tell you who will actually show up. This is an extremely important fact that is crucial to planning a successful house concert.

You should consider breaking out the invites into 3 groups. The first group is the people who you really want to be there. These are your close friends, music-lovers, other musicians, etc. In your invite, you should highlight that fact that you are only allowing 20 people at the show. There needs to be a *sense of urgency* so they know exactly how much time they have to decide to attend. Another benefit to crowdfunding is that they can jump on early and you can see who is really serious.

A few days later you can send out the 2nd wave of invites. This wave should be enough people to get you to 20 guests. Send the same message with the sense of urgency - nicely of course. So, if you want 20 guests, both waves together should contain 40 people.

Give it a few days and send a reminder to both.

If at this point, you don't have 20 people confirmed, you can send the 3rd wave of invites.

If you get a ton of responses and somehow go way over 20, don't fret. It's first come, first served and if you get to 25, you are still in the zone. The beauty of this concept is that you can always host another house concert! And if you are using Gigable, you can limit the number of tickets available. Once all 20 are pledged (sold), it will show as "sold out" - the most beautiful two words that any artist can hear.

Once you host the first one, you will surely be excited to do another (since I showed you how to do it right!)

**POWER TIP:** Create a group in your email program so that you can quickly send group email to all the guests. This will also come in handy after the show.



## Funding

If you choose to use crowdfunding for your house concert, you will want to set the length of campaign to 2-3 weeks. The campaign should be set to end about 3-4 weeks prior to the actual show. This is important so that in the rare case that your guests aren't stepping up, you can give the artist enough notice that the show won't happen. It's important that you aren't overcommitted and end up with a room of 5 people and you owe the artist \$300. A successful house concert is a win-win for everyone and should be an awesome experience. Even if you choose to pay an artist their fee and they play to 5 people, it won't have the impact.

If you choose to sell tickets another way, you should use the same timeframes. Once you have reached your goal for the artist fee or all your guests are paid, you should send the artist 50% of their fee. This sends a great message to the artist and gets everything started off on the right foot.

If you have chosen to include food and drink with the price of the ticket, make sure your budget makes sense divided by 20. People will really love the fact that for \$25 they can see some live music up close and all the wine and appetizers are included! You may even be able to find a local caterer or friend who likes to cook to provide the food. Simply include their fees in the price of the ticket. Don't be too worried if the ticket price gets close to \$40/person. People spend that much on a decent dinner just about anywhere. You will be providing a night they'll never forget for \$40!

## Week of show

The week prior to the show, you should reach out to the artist and confirm the details. I'll talk about show times in the next section. Also make sure the artist knows they need to provide their own sound system. They have likely asked about this already, but just be sure. The artist should know this is your house and doesn't need a sound system used at festivals. If the artist is talking about an elaborate setup, chances are they aren't the right choice for a house concert.

Confirm that your food and drink is purchased and stored safely. Best to have everything ready to go prior to day of show so you don't have to run to stores at the last minute.

Appoint someone as the official photographer if possible. However, these days with smartphones, everyone is the photographer.

## Day of show

A quick tip is that if you feel the need to set up the room with a theme or change it to do all that *the night before the show*. The day of the show should be relatively quiet until the music starts!

Setting up some soft lighting will really add a lot to the whole experience and highly recommended. Candles, etc.. White Christmas lights always look great! Avoid fluorescent lighting. Create a warm, cozy space. This will put everyone in a great mood when they arrive.



Here is a sample timeline for the day of show:

4pm - prepare food and drink

5pm - artist arrives and sets up and soundchecks

7pm - guests arrive and food/drink is served / meet and greet artist

8pm - showtime

9pm - post show mingling with artist (sign CDs)

10pm - ? HAVE FUN!

Have a small table or counter-space available for the artist to set up their merch table and mailing list signup sheet.

When showtime is about to start, it's always a great idea to introduce the artist. Thank

everyone for coming and show your excitement for the event. If you are up to it, give a little background on the artist and then let them start playing. It's best to have the artist in ready-mode - guitar on, keyboard or whatever, while you are introducing them.

Take photos and video and share on social media. Here's a fun tip: try the new app called "Meerkat" and stream a few minutes of the show on Twitter! **Be sure the artist is OK with any live streaming activity in case they are playing unreleased material.**

Once the show is over, get back up there and thank the artist for a great show. Remind everyone of the merch area and encourage the artist to hang around and sign some CDs.

## Post-show

Once the smoke has cleared and everyone is back in their routines, it's a good idea to send a thank you email 2-3 days later. Ask the artist to send you a quick little thank you quote that you can include in your email.

Have people send you photos of the show and create an album on your Facebook page.

Rinse and repeat!

I hope this creates a picture in your mind of how simple hosting a house concert can be. It doesn't have to be elaborate and complicated. Find the talent, invite live music-lovers, set the mood and enjoy!

Find more resources and sample invites at: <http://gigable.net/blog>

