

the ultimate guide to hosting a

HOUSE CONCERT



by Neil & Jennine Kristianson



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Are You Ready to Have Some Fun?

You're most likely reading *The Ultimate Guide to Hosting a House Concert* because you're considering hosting a house concert of your very own. A word of advice – do it!! It's an experience you won't forget. You'll make a new friendship with an independent artist, amaze your friends and have a blast in the process.

It's rewarding, but it's also a lot of work. *The Ultimate Guide to Hosting a House Concert* was written to help you plan your concert and give you some advice from house concert alumni so you can throw the *ultimate* house concert!



What's a House Concert?

Invite some friends over, serve some drinks, maybe serve some food, and add a super-talented independent artist to perform. Voila, instant house concert!

If you've never hosted a house concert it can sound a little intimidating. But at its core, a house concert is a party with a concert performance as the focus. You've hosted a party before, right? Then you have all the necessary skills to host a house concert!

Digging a little further, a house concert is an invitation-only performance in someone's home. Although the host may collect money to help pay for the show, the goal of the show is **not** for the host to make money; **it's to make fun!**

In broad, general terms, house concerts are:

- held on a Friday, Saturday or Sunday
- held in the afternoon or evening
- held in the host's living room, family room, backyard or garage
- attended by 20-60 people
- accompanied by food and beverage
- invitation-only, as invited by the host
- sometimes paid for by guest donations of \$10-\$25
- intimate
- unplugged or with minimal amplification
- awesome fun for musicians and fans alike!

It's Not a House Party

You may hear the terms house concert and house party used interchangeably. They're not the same. A house party is similar to the vibe you might expect to find in your local bar, club or frat house. Sure there is music playing, but most people are talking/shouting and generally not paying attention to the musician in the corner.

Contrarily, a house concert is a **concert** in your home. It's more like the experience you'd have at *The Chicago Theater* or *The Sydney Opera House*. But unlike these large venues, the purpose of a house concert is to **celebrate** and **promote** independent music.

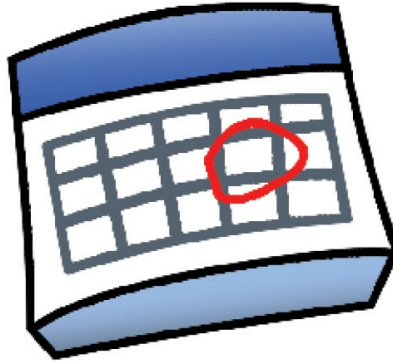
At your house concert, when it comes time for music, everyone's attention shifts to the performance. Your artist will entertain your friends as if they were seated in the front row of the local concert hall. Songs will be shared and stories will be told. If your friends are particularly enthusiastic, you might even get an encore or two!

Keep it Fun!

A house concert can be as simple or as complicated as you want it to be. Remember, artists just love to play and share their music. They don't need the most extensive setup or elaborate stage. It's all about people and music. You supply the people and your independent artist will supply the music.

It's easy to get carried away and put undue pressure on yourself. The ideas in this guide are intended to inspire you – not dictate what must be done. By no means do you need to do everything presented on these pages.

Schedule Your Show



Independent artists are generally a busy bunch. They're constantly juggling and shifting concert dates. To get the date you want, it's best to schedule and commit early. You should have the details of your event confirmed with the artist at least 8 weeks in advance. You need the time to plan your event and get your friends on board.

When selecting a date, keep in mind other events/holidays happening in your area. Watch out for conflicting local events such as your high school's homecoming, local festivals, or your town's NFL team. It's a great idea to bounce possible dates off a couple friends to make sure you're not missing something.

As tempting as it might be, refrain from combining your house concert with another event, like a birthday or anniversary party. It's not respectful of the artist performing to ask them to be the MC of your birthday party. Remember – it's a concert.

Pick Time of Day

Most house concerts are in the evening. A typical schedule is:

- 5pm – guests begin to arrive
- 5pm-6pm – serve some food/drinks
- 6:45 – assemble everyone for the show
- 7pm – concert begins
- 9pm – show wraps up and artist signs autographs and meets the audience
- 10pm – lights out!

Depending on your setting or number of guests, you might want to alter this schedule. Outdoor concerts are generally better in the afternoon/early evening while it's still light outside. If you invite a larger crowd, you may require more time for food or mingling prior to the start of the show. If you elect not to have food, then the time frame can be shortened. Whatever your choice, work with the artist to find a time that works for everyone.

Select a Venue



Even though it's called a house concert, not all house concerts are held in the home. If your home is small or you don't have an open floor plan that allows for everyone to gather in one room, you might consider having your show outside. If you decide to have your show outside, keep in mind weather may become a factor. It's always a good idea to have a backup plan – or a large tent!

Living rooms, basements, garages, back yards, tents in back yards, and community centers are all options for your show. Be creative. Remember, people plus music equals house concert. The venue is a distant third.

Avoid hosting your show in a space you can't control such as a bar or restaurant. You don't want uninvited guests wandering through your show or crashing your house concert. Not only are they a pain, but they also pose some unwanted legal liabilities.

A common misconception is "my house is too small to hold a house concert." Not so fast. Once you clear out some furniture and set up some chairs, your home may be a lot larger than it feels. You can comfortably fit 20 people and a performer in a room of only 320 square feet – and you'll need a lot less space if you get cozy on the couch and the floor!

How Many Guests to Invite

House concerts are best when 20-60 people make up the audience. Any less than 20 and the room won't have much energy. A small crowd lacks the excitement generally needed to bring the best out of an entertainer. Performers feed on the energy of a crowd.

On the other end of the spectrum, crowds over 60 people start to lose the special vibe a house concert can bring. It becomes hard for the artist to connect and interact with everyone in the crowd. You want your show to have the intimate feel house concerts are famous for.

Sound Equipment



Depending on the size of your audience, your artist may need amplification so everyone can hear the performance easily. Every artist is different, but most will want some assistance once your audience grows to more than 20 people.

For an audience of 20-40 people, a small public address (PA) system, consisting of one speaker, can do the job. Once your audience grows past 40 people you're going to need some more power.

Your artist will travel with their own gear to handle most house concert situations. In some cases, if he is traveling by plane or you have a large crowd, he may need your help in securing PA equipment. Most local music stores rent the equipment you need. Your performer can help you select the size and style needed for your show.

Inviting Your Friends



Assembling your guest list is going to take some thinking. Your close friends and family are a no brainer, but beyond that you might need to get creative.

Anytime you have a large gathering at your home it's always a good idea to invite your neighbors. It's hard for them to complain about noise or parking if they're at your show! Even if you don't think they're interested, invite them anyway. It's a great way to give them a heads up about your event.

Consider inviting work associates or clients. If you're a business owner or manager, inviting your employees or clients is a nice perk for them and hey, your house concert just became a business expense. Nice!

Keep some invitations in your car or desk at work. This way anytime you run into someone you think would be a good fit for your show, you can hand them an invite. It's like you planned to invite them the whole time.

Plan for RSVPs

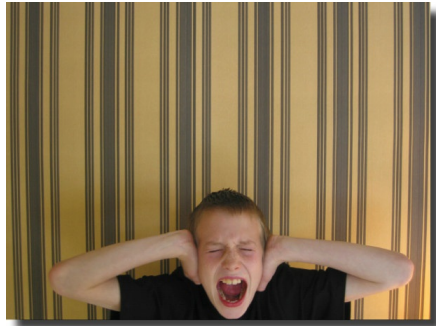
Your invitation should include a way for your guests to RSVP. Even if you're not planning on serving food, it's still important for you to know how many people will be attending your concert. Most independent artists have a minimum number of people they will perform for and you need to know how many chairs to set out.

Consider setting up an Eventbrite or Facebook event for your concert. [Eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com) * allows you to set up an event page on their site. You can then share your page via Facebook, Twitter or email. Your guests are able to RSVP through Eventbrite's platform so you always have a running total of attendees. If you plan to take donations for your house concert, Eventbrite can do that as well.

You're probably familiar with Facebook's events platform. It's very similar to Eventbrite but you can't collect money through Facebook. If neither of these options appeal to you, go the old-fashioned route and mail out paper invitations. Gasp!!

As a word of caution, keep your invitations private. Publically sharing your Facebook event could give the impression anyone can come to your show. If other fans of your independent artist find your event, you may find yourself in an awkward situation. A house full of strangers is unsettling and completely avoidable. It's your home. You control the guest list.

Not for the Younger Set



Your house concert invitation might include a “16 and over” or “18 and over” statement. Babies, toddlers and children can be distracting to your musician and guests. If you are considering children, check with your musician to make sure her material is kid-friendly and she is comfortable performing for a younger audience.

If your concert is adults-only, don’t make exceptions. Allowing one child will most certainly cause hard feelings among the parents who hired a sitter.

Another option is to call Grandma over to supervise a kid-friendly room while the adults are watching the show. Turn your basement into the game room. The kids will have more fun than a “boring” concert and the adults will appreciate the quiet time.

Keep Your Hands Inside the Ride

Hold on, because you're in for a wild ride! Planning a house concert is sure to cause a whole range of emotions. On the one hand, meeting and working with your independent artist is a rush. If you've ever wanted to be 'in the biz,' now is your chance.

You're going to experience a world you've probably only dreamed about. Contracts, amplifiers and merch sales may all be new to you, but your artist will be there to show you the ropes. And you're going to have a blast sharing your artist and their music with your friends. No doubt about it!

On the other hand, planning a large event of any kind is hard work. At some point it's going to seem like you're running uphill in concrete shoes. And you may even question your sanity. Don't worry! It will all be worth it.



One of the challenges you may face, is acquainting people with house concerts. You could hear comments like "Who is he?" or "Why is he playing at your house?" Some people find the idea of a house concert completely foreign. It's probably something they've never heard of and won't fully get until the night of your show. Then they'll rave about it and ask when you're doing it again! Until then, be prepared to explain the concept.

Another issue could be assembling people for your show. If the goal for your concert is 20 people, it wouldn't be unusual to invite 40 people knowing only 50% will attend, especially if you're asking for donations. The higher the donation level the more people you'll need to invite to fill your room. Just like a real concert promoter, it's something to think about when setting your donation price.

Dealing with Low RSVPs

Most people will need to hear from you at least two times, and probably three, before they RSVP. Especially people who aren't planning on coming to your show. They will assume their silence is a 'no.' So plan on sending out your invitation followed by two reminders. You'll get a better response on the second and third mailing than you will on the first.

If you're still having problems getting a response from your invited guests, please don't just cancel your house concert. Your artist is planning on your show for her livelihood. Cancelling your show at the last minute doesn't give her the opportunity to find another gig to take its place.

Not being able to get as many confirmed guests as you thought is embarrassing, but reach out to your artist anyway and tell her what's happening. Let her help you with ideas to get more folks to your show. She may work with you to play a smaller show as opposed to cancelling the show altogether.

Tell Them What to Expect

In all your communications with your guests, always refer to your show as a ‘concert.’ Tell them there will be chairs and your independent artist will perform for two hours. Paint the picture in their mind of a real show. Don’t let them get the idea they’re attending a party. The focus of the night is music.

Also let them know the artist will have their CDs and other merchandise available for sale that night. They might want to bring some cash along so they can purchase a T-shirt or two.

Follow Up



As you get closer to the night of the show, send out reminder emails or cards to keep your show fresh in everyone's mind. People's lives are busy. They get caught up in the day-to-day and will forget all about your show. Reminding them will increase your attendance rate and build excitement leading up to your house concert. Think like a concert promoter!!

Suggested Donations

One of the biggest decisions to make about your show is whether or not to ask your guests for a donation. Just like any other venue, independent artists have a fee they charge to perform a house concert. This fee will vary based on the popularity of your artist, the distance they need to travel and how many people attend your show.

Most house concert hosts elect to ask for a donation to cover the cost of the artist's fee. Usually the cost can be covered by asking each guest for a \$10-\$25 donation. Of course this will depend on how many people attend and what you pay your performer.

The word 'donation' is not used here by accident. You're not running a business from your home. If you use words like 'charging' or 'cost' some powers that be will deem your house concert a business. You can get yourself into a whole bunch of trouble. Not only with your local municipality, but with performance rights organizations (the companies collecting money for use of copyrighted songs) and your own homeowner's insurance company.



Once you start charging for a show, even if you don't make money, essentially, you've just started running a business. So in all your communications, written or verbal, be sure you refer to any fee as a 'suggested donation.'

If you want to avoid all the hassle of collecting money you can always pay the fee yourself and treat your friends to a great show. Or you could ask one or two close friends to co-sponsor the house concert with you.

In general, people always take things more seriously if they pay for them. So asking for a donation might increase your turnout and increase the professional atmosphere.

More About Donations

The night of the show, it's a good idea to have a donation box or jar on hand. It doesn't need to be fancy. You can use a shoe box or a mason jar. It's easier to ask guests to put their donations in a jar than it is to physically collect money. The night of your show you're going to be busy so letting guests take care of it themselves is less taxing on you.

A low-pressure way to get everyone's donation is to simply point out where the donation box is located as your guests arrive. "Hey welcome, food is in the kitchen, drinks are on the patio and the donation box is in the living room. Thanks so much for coming!"

It's still a good idea to remind everyone about the donation during the show. Let them know the money is being used to pay your artist and not for your vacation. People will be more willing to pay if they know the money is going to the artist.

Another idea to increase your donations? Tie the donations to a local charity. Tell your audience any money you collect above and beyond the artist's fee will be donated to the local homeless shelter or food bank. This will ease people's fears that you're making money on this deal and help to open their wallets.

A Note about Insurance



About six weeks before your house concert, contact your homeowner's insurance agent. Let them know you'll be hosting a concert. Alerting them up front and getting their blessing will keep you out of hot water later if an accident should happen during your show. Most insurance companies will be fine with your show as long as you are not charging admission.

Your independent artist may request that you add them as additional insured on your homeowner's policy. This is a simple procedure and shouldn't cost you anything except a little time. Call your agent and request the additional insured. They'll need your artist's name and mailing address.

An additional insured adds the artist as a beneficiary of your homeowner's policy. The artist will also be sent a copy of your coverage (known as a certificate of insurance) directly from your insurance company. This step will ensure the artist is covered by your policy if one of your guests gets injured. Better safe than sorry.

Contracts

Some musicians may ask you to sign a contract for your house concert. Don't panic. It's not a bad thing. It's actually a good sign!

Using a contract indicates your musician is organized and professional. He's taking your show seriously and wants to ensure solid communication on both sides. His contract should spell out all the expectations you have for his performance as well as confirm dates and times. Read it carefully to make sure you understand all he is expecting from you.

Artist Comforts



If an independent artist is performing house concerts, chances are she's pretty down-to-earth and friendly. It's not likely she's going to include any off-the-wall requests in her contract like a bowl of M&Ms with all the red ones removed. Or a fresh vase of plum-colored lilies. However, there are some things she'll require the night of your show.

Performing artists need some down time. Walking into your home and being 'on' for three to six hours straight is tough. Most musicians want a quiet place to prepare for their show. Mingling with your guests for an hour before they perform is taxing mentally and on their vocal cords. Offer them a den or bedroom away from the action where they can relax.

Don't forget to feed and water your artist before the show! As part of her pre-show ritual she'd probably like something to eat and drink. You don't want her to run out of energy halfway through the first set. Also plan on having water, or other beverages, available for her during the show.

Selling the Merchandise

A large part of your performer's compensation for the evening will come from sales of his CDs, T-shirts or other products. Have a table available for him to display his merchandise. Make sure the table is in an obvious place so everyone will see it. Mention to your guests there are CDs and T-shirts available for sale. The artist might even ask you to help sell while he's busy talking with your guests. You're a roadie!!

An Overnight Guest



If your performer is traveling a long distance to get to your home, chances are they need to stay in your area for the night. As part of their compensation, many artists ask for room and board for one night.

Having them as a guest in your home increases your fun factor three fold! You'll get the chance to entertain and share your world with your performer. It's great fun to learn a little more about them and what it's really like to live the life of a musician.

Make sure you get all the details before they arrive regarding accommodations. Some artists travel with a spouse, significant other or bandmate. You'll want to clarify how many beds/couches or mats they'll need to sleep the whole gang. Artists are a fairly low-maintenance group. They're used to crashing with friends as they crisscross the country. You don't need to provide 5 star meals or breakfast in bed – just a bed, a shower, a little food and some good company.

Artist Communication

A couple weeks prior to your house concert reach out to the artist and touch base on a couple of important items. Make sure you both have the same date and time for your show. It would be a sad day if you threw a house concert and nobody came – especially the performer!

Give them directions to your house. Everybody may have Google maps, but they're not always right. Also swap emergency contact information. If you need to cancel at the last moment due to a family emergency or some other tragedy, you'll need a way to reach them.

Lastly, put in any special song requests you have for them to play at your show. Don't hit your performer cold while she's in the middle of her set. Give her some advanced warning of any songs you want to hear. Musicians are not a jukebox; even with their own tunes.

Food



A house concert makes a perfect pairing with a pot luck dinner. Invite all your guests to bring a dish to pass. Give them a little guidance and assign some roles so not everyone brings potato salad! Or fire up the grill and make a stack of hamburgers and hot dogs to share.

Serving food is not necessary to hold a memorable event. In fact, food can distract from the music and add a lot of stress for the planning of your show. If you want the food without the stress, consider hiring a caterer or delegating the food portion of the evening to a friend. Allow plenty of time prior to the concert for everyone to eat and mingle. It takes longer than you think for everyone to arrive, eat and chat. It's best to have the food all wrapped up before the start of the concert.

Alcohol

Not only does alcohol add to the expense of your event, it also adds to the responsibility. Serving alcohol at your house concert can be a giant liability. Even still, most people will have some beer and wine on hand or allow their guests to BYOB. You know your friends better than most, so make an intelligent decision here. No drunk heckling the performer, please!

You might institute a designated driver policy for your show, only allowing alcohol for those who aren't driving. Or collecting keys at the start of the evening and returning them only after you're satisfied the owner is safe to drive. Be aware serving alcohol adds a level of legal responsibility to your house concert.

Take Plenty of Pictures

The night will go by fast! You've waited in anticipation for the artist to come to your house for two months now. And it will all be over in a matter of hours. So snap away! Get pictures of you and the artist, your friends and the artist, the artist performing and your friends watching the artist perform. You won't regret having too many once tomorrow comes. Just remember to stay in the moment and enjoy yourself. Enlist the help of friends to take photos so it doesn't all fall on you.



Grab Your Pen

Have plenty of Sharpies on hand. Buy a variety pack of several colors. Your performer will bring merchandise to sell and most likely will be signing these items for your guests. Having a choice of colors will make sure no matter what they buy your artist can sign it legibly.

Ultimate Souvenir



Make something for your performer to sign for your guests. Popular ideas for mementos are concert posters with the artist's picture and the date of your show, laminated backstage passes with the date or postcards. You can design any of these on your computer and have a local print shop make them up for you. You can even find lanyards for backstage passes at most office supply stores.

You're the MC

It's your house concert, so by default you're the MC unless you delegate the task to someone else. Whatever your choice, don't leave the introductions to the artist himself. Your show is a concert. Treat it like you're going to see Paul McCartney at *The Hollywood Bowl*. Paul wouldn't wander out and say "I'm Paul McCartney." No! Someone would announce him to great fanfare and excitement. You need to do the same.

As part of your introduction tell the audience when you first heard his music. Talk about how much you admire him, or what draws you to his music. Tell them about other shows he has played or TV shows his music has been on. Make your audience feel privileged to be seeing this amazing talent!



Before you begin the introduction ask everyone to silence their cell phones and make any other necessary announcements about restrooms or food. Let your audience know what to expect for the remainder of the evening. Tell them there will be two 45 minute sets with a 20 minute intermission, or whatever the case may be.

At the end of the set, get up and thank the artist. Ask him what merchandise he has for sale. It's hard for many artists to brag on and promote themselves. So help your artist sell his CDs by offering a personal testimonial of your favorite CD. Again, remind everyone about the donation jar and that the artist is being paid by their donations.

Keep the energy going! When it's time to start the next set, get back up and re-introduce him. Brag on him some more. Build the excitement one last time and then sit back and enjoy. Oh, and remember to breathe!



Wrapping it Up

When the last note has been played and the crowd is cheering, it's time to get up one last time and thank the independent artist for playing. Thank your guests for coming and remind them they can still get merchandise or an autograph.

At this point, most performers are fairly amped up. Chances are he'll want to hang out with your guests for a bit signing autographs, posing for photos and chatting. Don't let this go on all night. Artists don't like to be rude and rush out, but that's not to say he wouldn't like to get to bed sometime! Help him make a graceful exit. It's hard. You'd like him to stay for hours.

The Day After

The next morning you will suffer a major hangover regardless of how much or how little you had to drink. This is known as House Concert Withdrawl (HCW). It's perfectly normal, but that doesn't make it any easier.

You've just spent the last two months planning and anticipating one of the greatest events in your memory. Your friends were all super impressed and the music was amazing. It's going to be hard to top anything like this ever again! Hopefully you took a lot of pictures and got plenty of autographs.

There's only one way to completely cure HCW...host another House Concert!!





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