



TRACY SPRING

PERFORMING SONGWRITER

HOUSE CONCERT FAQs FOR HOSTS

WHAT IS A HOUSE CONCERT?

Music, dance or theater performed at a private residence or outbuilding (such as a barn, yurt or gallery), attended by a gathering of family, friends and your extended community. House concerts can be held on weekends, weekdays or even a Sunday afternoon! Touring musicians often have free weekdays in between festival and venue gigs, which are more likely to fall on weekends.

WHAT'S NEEDED TO PUT ON A HOUSE CONCERT?

The basics are very simple: 1. a willing artist or group, 2. a sufficient listening environment that will accommodate 20 or more people plus the performer(s), and 3. effort to get the word out (see below.) The artist will probably need accommodations (a room with a door), and coffee in the morning. It might also be nice to offer dinner, which is already covered if the host offers a potluck beforehand. Ask attendees to bring low, camp style or other folding chairs or pillows to sit on. Goodies for the break between sets are a nice touch. A potluck before or jam session after the concert are optional, but a wonderful addition. It is customary for the host to MC the show.

HOW DO WE GET THE WORD OUT?

Word of mouth, the artist's e-mailing or mailing list, the host's e-mail or mailing list, social network with the artist's and host's extended circle of friends via the many current options ...facebook, myspace, twitter, church and other community bulletins, posters, and local media publications e.g. entertainment guides. Invite your women's group, your men's group, your coworkers, your soccer or bridge team, book club, hiking club, cooking club, knitting group, coffee klatch. You get the idea. Think twice about inviting your 3-year-old's playgroup unless you are hosting a children's music artist or their parents need a date night. How widely a house concert is advertised depends on how broadly the host wants to cast the net or explore degrees of separation.

HOW IS THE ARTIST REMUNERATED?

First of all, ask the artist what they need to make to make it worth their effort and expenses. Some towns require permits to charge admission. An easy remedy for that is to not charge admission, but rather suggest a donation at the door e.g. "Suggested Donation: \$10 Suggested donations usually run between \$10 and \$25. Some artists and hosts prefer to use a sliding scale to accommodate cash challenged music lovers e.g. Suggested Donation (sliding scale) \$5-\$25. In my experience, those that CAN pay more will do so and it all evens out. My friend TR Ritchie, who does many house concerts in a year, averaged \$350-\$400 per house concert the year he tallied it up.



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Incidentally, if you'd like his very good and much more detailed take on house concert mechanics, he's posted a great piece on his website. Visit www.tritchie.com). (He's also a wonderful performer and loves doing house concerts, so contact him to see when he'll be in your neck of the woods!) If you'd like to be reimbursed for expenses incurred for putting on the concert (printing costs, break goodies etc.) just save your receipts (some artists collect them for tax purposes), and those expenses can be reimbursed from the proceeds.

WILL WE NEED A SOUND SYSTEM?

Probably not. However, a sound system may be needed if you are hosting a large number of people in a cavernous space, or in a large space out-of-doors. Discuss your space with the artist and see what they prefer. One of the reasons house concerts are attractive to artists is the intimate setting and very little barrier between themselves and the audience. However, the fun factor goes down if the artist has to work too hard to be heard. If a sound system is needed, don't be intimidated. It may be an opportunity to partner with someone who has an appropriate-sized system. Also, many musicians tour with their own gear.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT HOUSE CONCERTS THAT'S SO AWESOME?

For starters, there is very little overhead involved for host and artist. In these economic doldrums, many people are looking for creative ways to share entertainment and build community. Ah yes, building community! What better way to do that than draw together various circles of friends around their common love of music and art? Some hosts include the added communal dimension of potluck supper before hand. This is a particularly good thing to consider for earlier weekday concert start times...i.e. potluck at 6, music starts at 7 or 7:30. It may help with the after-work-time-crunch factor if people don't have to cook but can simply stop by the store on the way to the house concert. Other great things about house concerts have been mentioned above: the opportunity to hear great music up close and personal, usually no need for sound reinforcement, a win for the musicians to add dates to their tour, a win for the community to come together. It's a win-win!

HOW DO WE FIND MUSICIANS WHO LIKE TO PLAY HOUSE CONCERTS?

One way is to get in touch with other people who host house concerts and find out who they've hosted and adored. Chances are, the artist will pass this way again. Look at the websites of artists who post their gig dates. If you see house concerts listed, contact them and let them know you're open to hosting them sometime when it works into their itinerary. And if you see an artist who's playing a gig a hundred miles down the road with two blank dates and then another gig and you are in the middle, it's worth contacting them to see if they'd like to fill one of those dates.

Note: There has been some recent discussion by music lovers/movers/shakers about developing a west coast house concert circuit, a sort of underground railroad through which artists are lovingly passed from haven to haven.

It could happen. Stay tuned and visit www.tracyspring.com for updates!