



**Your Guide to having
successful house concerts**



Welcome to our house

Like you, we're nuts about live music.

House specialises in bringing awesome live performance to you. We do that in two ways.

We create house concerts at your place.

A house concert connects you and your friends with musicians in your own home. It's an up close and personal encounter with those making the music in an informal setting. You host your very own gig. It's easy to have live music at the most comfortable venue in town - your place!

We provide live music that's just right for your event or occasion.

Whatever the occasion, live performance adds a magic, energy and uniqueness to the gathering. **House** supplies live music that is made to measure for your event or occasion wherever it's happening.

About this guide

This guide contains all the information you need to have successful house concerts. We work with you to provide the music and make it easy.

Contact us

House: Live music at yours

Karen Clarke & Alan Waites

P.O. Box 14

Paraparaumu

0274 421 632

04 2992330

www.livemusicatyours.co.nz

house@livemusicatyours.co.nz

house@karenclarke.co.nz

Table of contents

| | |
|--|----------|
| What is a house concert? | 3 |
| Where, when and who? | 3 |
| Inviting your guests | 5 |
| Suggested donations | 5 |
| As the concert date approaches | 5 |
| Two days before the show | 6 |
| The day of the house concert | 6 |
| Showtime | 7 |
| Greeting & setting expectations | 7 |
| Turning a crowd into an audience | 7 |
| Introduce the artist | 7 |
| Sample invitation | 8 |



What is a house concert?

A house concert is an invitation-only concert given at your house. You and your friends enjoy a hassle free music performance in the relaxed setting of your home.

This new venue, the intimate setting of your home, brings musicians to you. You bring the audience (your circle of family, friends and acquaintances) and the artist together to experience the music close up at your place.

Most house concerts are:

- held indoors or in a sheltered outdoor setting like a deck or spot in the garden
- held on weekends mostly or occasionally a week night if you can draw your audience
- attended by 15-40 people depending on the size of the home
- attended by the host's friends, neighbours, co-workers, and maybe a few friends of the artist
- paid for by a donation per guest for the performance
- known to include BYO refreshments if the host prefers
- performed by solo acts, duos and small bands because that works well in the space available for this intimate event
- performed with a very small sound system or no amplification depending on setting
- very intimate as audiences sit close and are attentive as the artist shares the music and themselves
- performed in two 45 minute sets with a 20 minute break to encourage people to move, refresh themselves and mingle with the artists
- an opportunity for artists to present their merchandise for sale i.e. CD's etc.

Each house concert is a unique collaboration between an artist, a host/presenter, and their friends and supporters. What will yours be like?



Where, when and who?

These are the first three decisions you'll make regarding your house concerts.

Where?

Choosing your location

Although similar results can be achieved in different locations, this type of concert takes place in a home with a host. When the weather is reliably good, some hosts do deck, garden, or backyard shows, but you always need a backup space inside in case the weather doesn't cooperate. Indoors, the living room is usually the best choice, often providing a balance between a cozy spot and the opportunity to stretch into an adjoining area. A window or fireplace can make a nice background scene for the performer.

Remember to allow at least a 2 meter square area for the performer — more if it's a duo or group. Having a coloured mat to mark the "stage" can help visualise the concert space.

Seating

You'll probably need to re-arrange some furniture, like removing the coffee table and pushing the couches to the side of the room. You'll most likely use every chair in the house (dining room chairs, office chairs, etc and barstools for a back row.) You may want to borrow some chairs from a friend or neighbours (they are coming over anyway, aren't they) or ask people to bring a folding seat. Many people enjoy sitting on the floor up close so a few cushions can encourage this.

Don't feel obligated to overdo it — just make the room comfortable and accessible. You don't have to recreate The Michael Fowler Centre in your home. Relax ... it's a house concert.

If you are not sure how many people can be seated in your living room have a test run. Clear the middle of the room and arrange the available chairs to get an idea of number of people your space could hold. Once you've set up a few rows, it's easy to imagine how the rest of it would fall into place.

When?

The date/day/time of your house concert

4-6 weeks is a sensible amount of planning time to promote your house concert. However, if you plan on hosting house concerts on a regular basis, it can be helpful to choose a consistent schedule that makes it easier to plan and build a strong repeat audience. For example, you could decide to host events on the first Thursday of every month, except for the winter months. That would give you 8 or 9 shows per year.

Confirming the musician(s) is the first thing to do then it's on to rallying your audience.

For most people, hosting weekend shows (Saturdays are very popular) makes it easier to draw a larger crowd. It also keeps them from having to pull things together quickly at the end of a long day at work. However, choosing other times (Sunday afternoon, Thursday evenings) can work if people are available.

Be aware of local events, major sports finals and celebrations in your area that could interfere with the audience turnout of your event. Avoid dates that are likely to clash.

It's also very challenging to keep a concert/listening atmosphere if you combine your house concerts with birthday celebrations. In a house concert you'll want to keep your guests focused on listening to the music. Alternatively if you do want to party where socialising is the main focus, get us to book a band for you that will get the crowd rocking.

A house concert is not a party although anything can happen afterwards! You need to give a clear message about the occasion so everyone has the same expectations.

Who?

Choose the performer/group

Choose a favourite artist or a type of music you enjoy. There is so much fantastic talent available!

Think about:

Genre:

What style of artist and music would you like to feature at your house concert – jazz, blues, country, folk, funk, roots, dub, rock, classics, kiwiana or acapella? Do you have thirty friends that would be into this kind of music?

Fresh sounds or familiar tunes?

The groundswell of kiwi music in recent years has produced a vast array of original music in many styles. Its music you can't hear anywhere else on the planet usually so it makes the encounter with original musicians pretty special. On the other hand you might prefer a mix of tunes you grew up with or can hear on the radio.

Act size:

If the space for music in your house is not large (30 or less people), you'll probably want to stick with solo and duos acts, since larger groups will take up valuable seating space and limit the size (and comfort) of the audience. Drum kits and horn sections take up space and bring the volume way up and are better suited to outdoor settings or save them for party night. Less can be more.

Energy level and content:

There are some fantastic artists that are very low-key and rely on the power of their words to connect with the audience. If you and your friends need an act with more physical energy and liveliness, you should keep that in mind.

Are sound systems necessary for house concerts?

If your room is small and has good acoustics (hardwood floors, tall ceilings) and your audience is fewer than 30 people, it's quite possible your events would be better without a sound system. It's certainly easier and more ambient.

Every performer is different, however, and it's common for them to want at least a little sound reinforcement. If so, make sure there is access to electricity near the performing area.

Inviting your guests

One of the first steps to take as a house concert host is to compile a list of as many invitees as possible.

Attendance, for many hosts, is the most challenging part of hosting house concerts. For some people, throwing a party and getting people to attend is second-nature. They have tons of acquaintances, are involved with many clubs or social groups. For most of us, however, it takes a bit of planning. No trouble – it will be worth it!

A full room adds so much to the feeling of a concert — whether that number is 30 or 300. Performer's sense and feed off the energy in a room when they play. Empty seats, however, suck the energy out of any event. Whatever the size of your space, do your best to avoid empty seats (especially up front) even if you have to hide some chairs till needed! There's a common expression in music — “the crowd make the show,” and you'll see it happen first-hand when you host your event.

Don't just limit your invitations to people you see consistently or who you know really well. This will seriously limit your crowd. List everyone you could invite. Even if you don't think they'll be into it. Time and time again the biggest compliments come from people who thought a house concert wasn't their kind of thing, who then were blown away by the quality and fun-factor of the show. Your invitations will provide information and links to the artist's music, and let people decide for themselves if they want to come. Finally, your invitation list will always be a work in progress. **A sample invitation is included on page 8.**

Make up an email list for the event.

Suggested donations

Although technically house concerts are free in so much as you are not “selling tickets” the spirit of giving is central to a successful house concert. **The performer gives a great performance and the audience gives their attention and appreciation.** The best way to make that point to those who would be concerned is to have a “suggested donation.”

How much should you suggest?

\$10-25 per person cash donation is the usual range, depending on the caliber of the artist, the comfort level of your guests and the individuals means to pay. You can choose a fixed number like \$10 per person, or provide a range (\$10-15) to guide donations. In some situations you might not specify an amount preferring to suggest guests give a koha (offering) instead. Alternatively the host may want to shout everyone and pay the artist fully themselves if it's a special occasion.

It needs to be clearly understood by all your guests that their donations are how the artist is being paid. You might announce before you introduce the artist, “If you can't afford the suggested donation this evening, that's O.K., but please pull me aside and tell me some time tonight so that I can make up the difference in the donations jar.” That'll get the point across.

As the house concert date approaches

Keep track of who's coming

Use a simple list or spreadsheet to keep track of RSVPs. Be aware that history suggests 10-20 % of the people who say they will attend may not show up. You may want to accept more RSVPs than you can seat. It's a good idea to send a reminder email 2-3 days before the show to confirm everyone.

Check in with the artist

Check in with the artist and take care of any logistical arrangements. What time will they arrive? Do they have accurate directions to your place? Do you have each other's cell phones in case of last minute delays or emergencies?

Worried about numbers?

If you are having trouble getting RSVPs, and sense that the turnout could disappoint, talk to us so we can find ways to lift the numbers. Don't just cancel as the artist will have organised their plans. It's possible that some of your guests will RSVP late, and for an artist sometimes a low-turnout house concert is better than none at all. .

Two days before the show

Send out reminders

Send out a reminder to ensure people haven't forgotten. Let your RSVP'd guests know that they are expected, and remind them how special this event will be. If they have doubts about attending, now is the time for them to tell you so that you can try to find someone else to fill their seat. You might say something like "We're so excited to have such a great artist playing in our living room, it's very important we give him/her a full house."

What should I provide?

Some hosts like to have a pot-luck dinner before the show, and others find it to be a distraction. You may want to offer a cup of tea or other refreshments or you may not. Many of your invitees will ask if they can bring refreshments. It's your home therefore it's up to you to decide what's ok for your concert.

Many hosts are comfortable with their guests bringing a bottle of wine and glasses. If you do have alcohol at your house concerts, make sure that people's focus is still on the music.

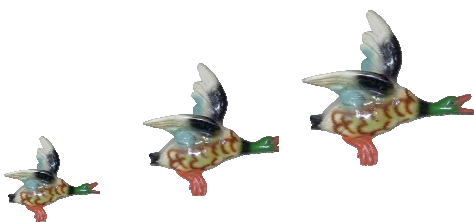
Ensure you have everything you might need on hand well before the day of the concert.

Make up signs for the event

It can be helpful to have a few simple signs to guide guests. For example

- "Suggested Donation: \$10-15 per person"
- "Additional bathroom downstairs"
- "Don't let the cat out."
- For the front door... "Please come in quietly if the show has already started."

We can help with these too,



The day of the concert

Prepare the concert space

- Arrange the seating
- Leave enough room for the performer and speakers if needed!
- Make sure there's an aisle to the performing area
- Check the plug works if its needed
- Use the shortest chairs down front, taller chairs and barstools in the back
- Try to face all chairs toward the performer
- Try to aim some light toward the performer and have the rest of the room a bit darker. A desk-lamp or similar will help create a warm ambience for the gathering.

Prepare a warm up space for the artist

Many artists enjoy having a secluded place to warm-up and relax before the show. Making available a space for this such as a bedroom or office for some uninterrupted time will often help the artist perform at their best.

Service snacks

If you are providing snacks and beverages for your guests, you'll want to have that set up ahead of time. Make it easy for people to serve themselves.

Merchandise table

Make sure the artist has a small high visibility table/area for their CDs if they wish.

Property and your property

Although you'll be acquainted with most of the people who attend, it's still good to take a few precautions. Any low lying valuables and breakables could be stashed and safety hazards addressed. Check outside lights and the loo paper! You get the idea.

Greet guests, collect donations, re-establish expectations

Welcome guests as they arrive. Have your RSVP list handy as the guests arrive, and have the donations jar/hat in an obvious place where you can direct them. "Hi Grant. Welcome. Refreshments are in the kitchen – please help yourself. Can we take care of your donation on the way past first? Thanks."

Showtime!

Turning a crowd into an audience

As a house concert host, it is your responsibility to educate your invitees, and to manage their expectations. This is especially true for your first event. Set the right expectations with the first email. Reinforce the “house concert” message with every conversation and every invitation. It should be part of the show’s introduction and the intermission.

It’s a CONCERT. Emphasize the word. Don’t let anyone get the impression that on this particular occasion it’s a party with music.

Accomplish this, and your guests will behave like an audience. Remember, you’ll ask them to bring a spouse or some friends, so be clear and consistent to help them explain it to others. Even the most seasoned performer can lose their spark when they have to work to get the crowd’s attention. Instead of playing music, being warm and comfortable, they start spotting audience problems and plotting solutions and things can go downhill.

If it gets to a point that you need to ask for people to hush up and be respectful, no one wins. The artist will not be relaxed or sell as many CDs, and your audience will have missed the opportunity for a truly inspiring experience. Some may not come back next time. Make sure your flyers, invitations, and emails say “concert” and not “party.”

Even though house concerts can turn into very festive events (with certain performers) let that be the surprise.

As people arrive (or ahead of time) pull a few of your friends aside and ask them to take seats in the front row when the time comes. Unless the artist is well-known, new audience members have a tendency to select seats cautiously.

Twenty minutes before the show, make an announcement like this...

“Hi everyone. In about 10-15 minutes we’ll need to have everyone seated to start the concert. If you want to use the bathroom, or refill your drink, please do that in the next few minutes.”

Five minutes before the show...

“O.K. everyone, please find a seat as we’re about to start the show. The first set will be about 45 minutes, and then you’ll have a break to stretch your legs, use the bathroom or get a refill. Please help us keep distractions to a minimum, turn off your phones, and get comfortable.”

Dim the lights and wait for people to settle.

Introduce the artist to start the show

“Hi everyone. Thanks so much for joining us at our (first?) house concert. I’m Mary. Tonight we’re pleased to bring you, all the way from Taihape, the Gumboot Tossers. Welcome everybody and we hope you enjoy the show.”

Best to keep this short and sweet – just enough to settle people and get them quiet for the show. If you are not comfortable doing this ask a confident friend with a strong and clear voice to take this role on your behalf. Tell them what to say and share the spotlight. Remember, keep it short and sweet.

During the break

Check if the artist needs anything.

Encourage CD Sales

During the break the performer will refresh themselves and mingle. They may also sell merchandise during the break as they do at the end of the show. Encourage this if you can. Very rock and roll!

Starting the Second Set

After 15-20 minutes, dim the lights and ask people to come back in their seats for the second half of the concert. Let the artist take it from there.

After the Show

Thank people for coming. Encourage them to stay and relax if that’s what you want. Remind guests about the contact list because we’d love to keep them informed what else is coming up if they so wish.

Relax and enjoy the post-show glow and chat with the guests and the artist ... who may well be ready to share a drink with you!

A sample house concert invitation



Mary Smith in association with House Music invites you to a house concert featuring



BARRY SAUNDERS

www.barrysaunders.co.nz www.warratahs.co.nz

www.myspace.com/barrysaundersmusic

Saturday 24 July 2010

Please arrive at 7:30pm for 8pm

172 Northumbria Street, Khandallah, Wellington

Donation \$25 (cash please)

Bookings are essential as space is limited. Sadly there will be no door sales so first in, first seated

BYO refreshments, cushion or folding chair

Carparking available on the street or in the Khandallah Park carpark opposite.

Please contact Mary Smith to book 04 419 5631, 021 6811 215, mary.smith@xtra.co.nz

Please pass this invitation on to anyone else who will be as keen as you are to attend.