

A Guide to Hosting HOUSE CONCERTS

House Concert (haus kahnsørt): a musical performance that is presented in someone's home or apartment, or a nearby small private space such as a barn, apartment rec room, lawn, or backyard. In my decades-long experience as a performer, house concerts have been — by far — the most fun, rewarding, and memorable performance experiences. I am excited that we may have an opportunity to share this with you.

This guide will take you step-by-step through the method by which we will organize all the house concerts on our house concert tours. Over the last several years, we have learned a lot about how to structure these shows to make them the most enjoyable and successful events they can be.

It is important that you read all the way through — even if you've hosted a house concert before — so that we are all on the same page as we start planning together.

At the end of reading through this guide, if everything feels right to you, there will be a short list of questions for you that we will use to pick a date for your house concert.

We hope this will inspire you to get excited for what is guaranteed to be one of the most unforgettable things we do all year. Ready?



#1: THE “HOUSE.”

We have staged house concerts in living rooms, backyards, porches, and back patios; in small houses, big houses, apartments, and condos; at wineries, brewpubs, art galleries, libraries, and at a local theater. The point is that the “house” can be any space you have access to where your friends can gather, sit, and enjoy a concert.

The only requirement for the space is that everyone in attendance must be able to gather in the same space, *seated*, for the entirety of the hour-long concert.

Pre- and post-concert mingling can, of course, spill into other rooms or areas of the property, but we ask that for concert time, **everyone be gathered close and seated**, together, directly in front of where I will be set up to perform. We have learned that



seating around tables for the concert undermines the creation of the intimate experience we aim to bring to the audience, so we ask that there be *no table seating* for the performance.

It's fine if there aren't enough chairs for everybody – carpet seating in a packed living room or blankets on the lawn in the backyard can work great as extra seating options.

#2: THE DATE.

We will work with you to pick a date for your house concert. This is fun and exciting, and it is also a bit hectic on our end, as we are juggling something like 60 different hosts' schedules to make things work for everyone as we move in a (hopefully somewhat) logical way around the US and Canada playing concerts almost every day of the week during the tours.

In a perfect world, every day would be the weekend, and then we could do every house concert on the weekend. However, a quick look at the calendar reminds us that, in fact, Friday and Saturday only account for about 28% of the week – but we

play shows nearly every night! In reality, this means that your concert will have a 72% chance of falling on a “school night.”

But, don’t despair! While weekend shows can certainly be a lot of fun, we have had some of our best shows on Tuesdays and Wednesdays!

The bottom line is that if you have a good group of people, you cannot stop the fun from happening, no matter what day of the week it is! And, this is not a particularly lengthy event; the time from guest arrival until the last note finishes ringing is typically only about two hours (more on this later), making this the perfect event for a unique, enjoyable, and memorable weekday evening get-together.

So, if you have your heart set on a weekend date, we will certainly try to make that work – but keep in mind that other people want one, too, and there are only two of those per week. **We thank you in advance for being flexible** so that we can accommodate as many potential hosts as possible.

So, if you have a vacation planned or a wedding to attend or a regular weekly event that would make you unavailable, we will want to know each of those dates to help us plan the tour.



At the end of this guide, one of the questions I will have for you is that you provide us with any dates in during the spring, summer and autumn that you will be unavailable to host.

#3: THE GUESTS.

To create the best possible scenario for a successful show, we ask that you have a **minimum of 20 to 30** adults in attendance.

There are two reasons we ask you to have this minimum number of people at the show:

1. With fewer than 20 people, the concert doesn't feel like the exciting event it could be, and
2. In our donation-based model, 20 or more adults contributing to the donations and purchasing merchandise is what starts making it a **financially viable** night for us.

In our experience, making sure there is a minimum of 20 people usually means that the host will need to invite a good deal more than 20 people. The typical scenario seems to be that about **half of those invited tend to show up** to the event.

So, invite double the number of people you would invite to have at the concert. If you're aiming for 20, invite 40, and so on.

If you aren't sure you will be able to get 20 adults to come on your own, we suggest that you consider co-hosting the show with a friend who also has a group of people to invite to increase your overall attendance.

If your space can hold more people and you want to have more, then great, the more, the merrier! If you have an idea for something bigger, let's talk about it! We are eager to hear what you have in mind. We have done house concerts with as few as 20 and as many as 200 people in attendance, and we have loved every one of them.



A Note about Children and Pets

Because the show has a lot of quiet parts and because it is essential that we be able to create and maintain an uninterrupted focus on the performance during the whole concert, we ask that kids have something else they can fully enjoy during the music performance part of the evening (just an hour). Also, if the host has a companion animal who might be unnerved and unable to enjoy the music (and the company), we ask that hosts make sure their companion animals have a quiet place to feel safe.

Every child is different, of course, and some children (usually around the age of 10 and up) can sit quietly and enjoy listening to music for an uninterrupted hour. We ask that parents ask themselves if their child is one who can enjoy the music and observe good concert etiquette, *as much for the child's enjoyment as it is for that of the audience's*.

If you have kids, or if you have friends who want to come but who would be unable to come if their kids couldn't come along, consider arranging to have a responsible adult take charge of the kids in a *physically and acoustically separate*, but enjoyable space during the one-hour performance time.

If there's any doubt at all, it is best to err on the side of caution. *A disturbance mid-show can significantly affect the audience's experience* (trust me on this!), and that can, in turn, significantly affect the financial viability of the show. As much as I love, love, love children, *please understand that this is my job. Thank you for understanding and cooperating with this important detail.*

A babysitter or an engaging parent to hang out with the kids could be perfect for this job, and they could bring the kids to another room in the house – *a place that is as sonically isolated from the performance space as possible* – for the entirety of the one-hour performance-portion of the evening. This works well for everyone, and of course, kids are delightful to hang out with before and after the concert!

Many hosts come up with a fun, focused (and quiet) activity or a special movie for the kids to enjoy during the concert, and that has worked beautifully! *Win-Win-Win!*

Also, if you think you'll have some sitting-quietly-and-listening kids in attendance, we have still found that a minimum of 20 adults is what makes for a viable event, so make sure to count the young'uns as "extras" when doing your head count.

#4: THE INVITATION.

Invite a bunch of your friends! **We will provide you with some precise language that we will need you to include in your invitations;** but besides that, we want you to enjoy the experience of telling your friends why you want them to come to the awesome and unique event you'll be hosting.

"This is a donation-based concert."

The language we will send you to use in the invitations will read something like this:

**"This will be a donation-based concert.
Please come prepared to make a donation to
the artist at the conclusion of the show."**

We do **not** specify a suggested donation amount for our house concerts. The reasons for this are two-fold:

1. In our experience, we do better financially at shows where people can donate what they are moved to in the moment, without any previous expectations.
2. Perhaps more importantly, if you have a friend who is cash-poor but a lover of music, it is important to us that they be able to enjoy the evening without feeling any pressure. While it is true that this is how we make our living, *sharing music with people is the most important thing to us.*

Occasionally, we have hosts who prefer not to ask their guests for donations and prefer instead to pay an up-front guarantee for the show. Either way is cool, and we have done it both ways many times. If this approach appeals to you, please let us know, and we will discuss the fee structure for scheduling a non-donation show.

Other Invitation Items

You may want to let your guests know you'll have drinks and snacks for them if that will be the case, or perhaps you would like to ask everyone to bring a little something

to share. *Whether to offer snacks or food is entirely up to you and is **not** a requirement for hosting a house concert.*

Please be sure to ask your guests to RSVP in your invitations!

We have discovered that when guests are asked to RSVP, there is a much better turnout rate as opposed to a “just come on by if you can” approach.



#5: THE CONCERT.

So, you’ve invited everyone, the RSVPs are in, and you’re ready for the show! Here’s how the event will go.

- Alfredo and I will get to your house an hour before the guests are scheduled to start arriving to set up our equipment and run a soundcheck.
- Guests arrive at the time you and I have decided together that the event will begin, usually in the evening – but it could be the afternoon if it’s a weekend. As the guests arrive, we will all hang out and mingle for about an hour.
- Then, after an hour of pre-concert hanging out, everyone will gather in the performance space. People will find their seats, and the

host (that’s you!) will give a brief introduction. Then, I will perform for about an hour.

- As soon as I have played the last note of the concert, the host will get up front next to me with a vase or a basket or box of some kind to make the donation announcement while everyone is still seated. It can go something like this:
“Thank you all for coming tonight! I hope you enjoyed this show as much as I did. I want to remind you that this is a donation-based concert. Your donations tonight will directly benefit our artist and will show her our appreciation for this amazing experience she brought us tonight. I’m going to leave this ____ (vase, box, etc.) right here, and I encourage you to give as generously as you feel moved to. Thanks again!”

We have learned that the success of the donations has a direct relationship to the *enthusiasm* of the speech the host gives at the conclusion of the performance.

- After that, we will all hang out some more until the guests start heading home.

A Note on the Donations

It is really important to us that we can make these concerts possible for *anyone* to host, and the way we do that is by offering these shows on a donation basis. But, since the donations are how we earn our living and pay our expenses while we are on tour, it’s obviously extremely important that we have our *hosts’ full enthusiasm* behind that aspect of the event.

Alfredo is quite good at coaching hosts on their donation speech (I’m no slouch, either), and he or I will make a point of going over this with you as we are getting set up on the day of the concert. We will even give you a little cheat sheet of things to remember to say, in case you get nervous and forget in the moment.

We have also discovered that the guests are *very receptive and more than happy* to be part of supporting this unique and memorable event they have just



experienced, with everyone's cup overflowing with good feelings and connection.

A Note on the Flow of the Event and an Example Schedule

We have found that keeping the **pre-show mingling time to about an hour** is essential. If it's shorter than an hour, people don't have enough time to relax and get comfortable. But, if it's much longer than an hour, the focus of the event starts to get a little fuzzy.

It's one of the most fun nights of the year, to be sure, but it's important to remember that fundamentally, ***this is not a party***. It's a concert.

So, let's say you want the performance to start at 7:30 pm. In that example, here is how the schedule would go:

5:30 pm: We arrive and set up for the concert

6:30 pm: Guests arrive

7:30 pm: Concert begins

8:30 pm: Concert ends

And then, of course, we can all hang out afterward for as long as you would like!

...And, that is how we organize an awesome, fun, fulfilling house concert!

Each one of these details—from the invitations to the setup to the flow of the event—serves the singular goal we have:

To create—with you—a truly unique and special night—an intimate concert experience, where magical memories and meaningful connections with your community will be made through music.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU.

If all of the parameters we have outlined in this house concert hosts' guide seem workable and feel good to you and you'd like to host a concert on our house concert

tour, then the next step for you is to answer the list of questions below. We need you to reply with your answers as soon as possible so we can factor your house into the routing for our next tour.

The sooner you return this, the better. *Please be sure to answer all seven questions completely and return them by email to marjimusic@gmail.com.* Or, feel free to telephone me (845-532-8269) and give your responses over the phone. Thank you!

1. What's your address, including the city and state?
2. What is the space you have in mind for the concert? (e.g., inside your house, outdoor space, etc. Be as specific as you can)
3. Do you want to host a **donation-based concert**, as described above, or do you want information about paying a guarantee for the show instead?
4. a) Do you think you will be able to get a minimum of 20-30 adults to come?
b) What is the total number of people you might expect to come?
5. a) Do you anticipate that there will be children at the event?
b) If yes, will you be able to provide a separate, supervised, sonically isolated space for them to enjoy for the entirety of the one-hour music performance?
6. Please list any dates during the spring, summer and autumn that you will be **unavailable** to host a house concert, i.e., vacation plans, weddings to attend, recurring weekly commitments, etc. *We need to know about all of these dates so we can avoid scheduling your concert on a date that conflicts for you.*
7. Let us know the best **email address** and **phone number** at which to reach you efficiently. (Our mobile number is **845-532-8269**, so you recognize it.)
8. **Bonus question:** Do you have any questions for us? Need clarification on anything? Let us know your questions or concerns in your return email.



We compile this information from dozens of hosts all over North America. Then, using everyone's location and availability, we will stitch together tour routes that work for as many people as possible.

As soon as we have a date or a list of possible dates selected for your house concert, we will get back in touch with you to let you know what those are. If the date looks good to you, then we will book and confirm your house concert. VERY EXCITING!!!



We can't wait to do a house concert with you!

With gratitude and excitement,

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