



HOSTING A HOUSE CONCERT FOR THE MILES TO GO TRIO

A House Concert is where someone (generally a music lover or fan) turns a space in their house (usually their living room though it could be an outdoor space weather permitting) into an informal concert venue for a performance. We've now done a fair few of these – and now a large proportion of our shows are house concerts.

One of the best descriptions we've heard is that a house concert is "like a party with a concert in the middle".

It's said that before he found international fame as a bluesman, Muddy Waters became a local identity by turning his Mississippi Delta cabin into a raucous juke joint for music and moonshine (though we're not suggesting that you need to set up your own still to host a concert for us!)

WHO ARE THE 'MILES TO GO TRIO' AND HOW LONG DO WE PLAY FOR?

The trio is Miles To Go band leader David Hyams, joined by various other players (sometimes depends on which part of the world we're in) including Jenny M Thomas on fiddle and Melanie Robinson on cello - in WA the line up usually consists of Stuart Paterson on flute and Anna Sarcich on cello. As the name would suggest though, its only 3 of us at the one time.

We generally play 2 x 45-50 minute sets - with a break in the middle for 20 to 30mins (or however long it takes for your guests to eat drink, socialise etc).

WHY A HOUSE CONCERT?

House concerts have been around for a while and these days are becoming extremely popular, with some musicians now doing entire tours of only house concerts. We think this is because people want to see good music at reasonable prices in venues where they can really listen to the performers. The Internet means presenters can now share information and promote shows without cost, which has hugely helped the house concert revival.

Some reasons why you might consider a house concert:

- You can experience a favourite performer, in an intimate setting;
- Most people have never been to a private concert in someone's home, so your guests are usually intrigued – and feel they are part of something special;
- It's a great alternative to noisy, crowded pubs or other venues where the music is often secondary to alcohol sales;
- House concerts are well suited for smaller, closely connected communities where most promotion can be simply done by word of mouth;
- In some rural and suburban communities, it's sometimes the only option for hearing live music locally;
- It's a great addition to the itinerary of a touring act (we can vouch for that - and we've also made long lasting friends with some of our hosts!);
- the neighbours will be green with envy when they find out you're the first in your street to host a concert!

WHAT DOES HOSTING A HOUSE CONCERT INVOLVE?

You provide the venue - a good size living room will certainly help. Of course balmy summer nights can make for a great outdoor concert in the backyard - or on a decent sized verandah.

You'll need to get some friends along. Sometimes hosts will ask guests to bring a plate of food to share. You may like to lighten the load by enlisting a friend or 2 to help out.

The concert usually begins with an introduction by the host. You can also tell people important stuff like where the bathroom is!

The 'Miles To Go' trio plays for two 45-50 minute sets, with a break for snacks and drinks, socialising and CD-selling. You might want to have such things as coffee, tea, cakes, dip, available for guests.

Your only expenses will be optional ones – food and drink, renting chairs if needed, and copying fliers.

HOW DO WE GET PAID?

People are asked to make a 'donation' so that the musicians can get paid. Generally, it's suggested at \$15 or \$20 dollars.

The Miles To Go trio would ideally be receiving at least \$600 for a house concert – that is, you would need 30 people at \$20 per head - or 40 at \$15 a head. If you think this will be difficult, we can chat about that beforehand.

Most hosts pass the donations on to the act. Some will take some money out to cover any expenses. That part is up to you to decide.

We suggest you take bookings by phone (and/or email) and keep a record of numbers. You may also wish to accept pre-payments.

There are some advantages to pre sales/advance tickets:

- People who have already bought tickets are less likely to change their minds at the last minute.
- You'll know exactly how many people to expect so saving any uncertainty about seating and refreshment needs
- Someone who has already bought a ticket is more likely to bring friends etc.

In our experience, there are always some "no shows" where a reservation system is used. So we suggest that, even though you may have limited space, you continue to accept reservations (paid or unpaid) until you have the money-in-hand to confirm a sell-out show. If people are reluctant to commit to pre-sales, you can explain that it's a "first-come, first-served" situation and that the only way they'll be guaranteed a seat is by pre-buying before the show.

PROMOTING A HOUSE CONCERT?

Your audience will be mostly people you know or their friends. So word of mouth is probably the best way. Tell relatives, work colleagues, neighbours... As house concerts are still relatively rare in Australia, the idea of turning your home into a venue can be an enticing factor for first timers.

Whether you call people or send written invitations, the personal contact is crucial. In addition to this, you may also want to advertise (whether by a poster at the office/shops/school, note in a newsletter etc).

How we can help with promotion

- We can provide promotional material, including an emailable flyer and a write-up that you can send out;
- We can also provide links to our website/myspace so interested friends can listen to some of the music;
- We can use our email list for the area, to reach our own fans (generally good and honest people - we think your silverware will be safe...)

SETTING UP THE ROOM

You'll need to create a 'stage' area for us in your 'concert room' and arrange the seats/couches/cushions around the stage.

Some lighting will help – nothing fancy or too powerful - just a floor lamp, a reading lamp on a table - or you could arrange to fix some clamping lights (or portafloods) so that they light the stage area.

SEATING – We've seen many different ways of seating 40-50 people in a living room! You could ask everyone to bring a folding chair or a cushion; borrow chairs from friends and neighbours. You can always rent folding chairs as a last resort, but the idea is to keep the costs to a minimum.

DO YOU NEED A SOUND SYSTEM?

No. We can generally play acoustically, though sometimes we may bring a small amplifier to balance the guitar in quieter pieces. If it's a particularly large space – or if you're expecting more than 40 people, we may need to talk about bringing a small PA system in.

FEEDBACK FROM HOUSE CONCERT HOSTS

"I would just like to say thank you for the great night you gave us here. Everyone especially me, loved the music...."

Paula – Old Albion guesthouse, York, WA (we're going back for our 3rd show here in 2010)

WORKSHOPS?

We sometimes do workshops around our concerts. Mine are generally on songwriting, guitar stuff or making albums. Jenny, Mel, Anna and Stuart are also happy to do workshops on their particular instruments.

If you want to find out more on my workshops please contact us to discuss. They are generally for a couple of hours though we're happy to tailor them to the particular needs of you and your friends/colleagues.