

HOUSE CONCERT HOW-TO

MATTHEW CLARK

All you need to know (and some
random things you don't) to
host a great house concert

MATTHEWCLARK.NET/HOUSECONCERTS



WELCOME

I can't tell you how much I love house concerts, and I'm so excited that you are interested in hosting one! It's been my experience that house concerts, more than any other venue, create a beautifully unique opportunity for connection through music and friendship. It never fails that after a house concert someone will remark to me how they had been longing to find something like this, but didn't know it existed!

This guide will take you step-by-step through the method I use to put together a fun, meaningful house show experience. Over the last 10 years of doing lots of house shows, I've learned that the simple things matter; let's walk through ways to run a show so it's the most enjoyable and successful event it can be.

By the end, if everything looks good to you, then I'll have a short list of questions that will help me get rolling on the booking process. House concerts have proven to be some of the most unforgettable and life-giving concert events for a lot of folks; now it's your turn! Ready?



I appreciate how Matthew's songs weave together earthly stories with spiritual truths – all the while combining the lyrics with beautiful, accessible music. I hope Matthew's music grows to be heard widely.

Sharon
Guest, Ohio



THE HOUSE

1. "The House"

Please take a moment to read this all the way through – even if you’ve hosted a house concert before – just to make sure we’re on the same page as we plan together.

I’ve played in back yards, big living rooms, little living rooms, condos, apartments, Sunday-school rooms and on patios. The “house” can be any space where your friends can gather, sit, and enjoy a concert. The only requirement is that everyone be able to be seated together in the same space for the entirety of the concert.

Hang out time before and after the concert need not all be in the same room, of course, but during the performance it’s best that everyone be together and seated. This allows folks to relax and focus in for a time of intimate music and storytelling that will provide a clear break from the clamor of daily life. I’ve found that table seating is distracting; rows of chairs are best.

If there aren’t enough chairs for everyone, that’s ok! Folks sitting on carpet or blankets can work great.





THE DATE

2. The Date

I will work with you to nail down a concert date. I'll be working around a whole bunch of folk's schedules, but it's really pretty fun to see it all come together!

It's likely that your concert could get scheduled on a weeknight (72% chance to be exact!). Don't let that worry you though, since house concerts are different from traditional concerts. Total event length is typically only around two hours (more on that later), so it's really perfect for weeknights.

The reality is, when there's a great event with a great group of folks, it's going to be great no matter whether it's a weekend or a weeknight. If you want a weekend date, I'll do my best to make it happen, but those days are obviously pretty limited. Thanks in advance for being flexible so there's room for everyone!



"I had no idea what to expect when I said I'd host, but I would do it again! I appreciate your humor and joy, and of course your music!"

A. from Minnesota



THE GUESTS



3. The Guests

To create the best possible house concert experience for everyone, I ask that you have a minimum of 20 adult guests in attendance. Fewer than 20 means the event doesn't feel as exciting and special as it should. Over the years, I've found the rule of thumb is that less than 1/2 of the people you invite will be able to make it. So it's helpful to remember that if you want 20 adults, invite 40 to 60; and so on. If you can't think of that many to invite, team up with a friend, co-host, and draw from more than one friend circle. Also, the default is that ticket sales are public, unless the host specifies they want the concert to be by invitation only. In that case it will be listed as private on my website.

By the way, 20 is just a minimum! Don't feel limited by that number. The more the merrier! You may dream up some unique alternative venue for a larger group, if so, I'm eager to hear your idea! A house concert can be 20 folks; it can be 200 folks.

Adults only (in general).

The essential nature of a house concert is that it is a focused time of listening for at least an hour. Kids often have a hard time with that, so I ask it be limited to adults.

Having said that, I love kids and there are kids who can sit still for an hour. Every child is different; I've found the age threshold is around 10 years old for when a kid begins to be able to sit still like a little adult during a house concert.

It's important on several levels to create an environment free from distraction where folks can relax, focus in, and get a break from being in charge of something or someone. Thanks for understanding and cooperation on this! *P.S. House concerts make great get-away date nights for parents.*

If you believe excluding kids will keep folks from attending, another possibility is to arrange for a babysitter or a willing adult to keep kids in a sonically and physically separate space during the entirety of the concert. Kids are welcome during the hang out times before and after the concert, of course.



"Loved the concert! I appreciated the storytelling... southerners know how to tell a story. The songs were peaceful, true, and lovely. Thanks!"
Lori from Nebraska





WHAT ABOUT TICKETS?

I use Eventbrite.com to sell tickets. It's a very easy platform to use and share online with friends, but you don't have to set anything up for that. I will create the Eventbrite tickets and a Facebook Event. Those links will be emailed to you, once we've set a date and I've received your booking deposit of \$50. I'll also embed the event on my website's "Tour" page with a link to purchase tickets. The event is public by default, unless the host requests otherwise.

Tickets are \$10 ahead and \$15 at the door. Ticket sales go toward the host's costs up to \$500. That means that if ticket sales reach \$500, you, as the host, pay nothing! If ticket sales total \$200, for instance, you'd only owe the difference: \$300. My hope is that this way benefits everyone involved. For me, it relieves the anxiety of unpredictable income. For the host, it makes hosting more affordable. For the guests it provides a special evening of live music for less than the price of movie!

I've been asked whether it's rude to require your friends to pay to come to a concert at your house. It's a great question. In my experience, selling tickets does several good things: it helps clearly communicate the nature of the event: it is a real concert. Selling tickets makes it more exciting for the guests and cues them in to what kind of evening to expect, which makes participation more comfortable for your guests. Ultimately, tickets communicate value, they really communicate that you value your guests enough to host a quality special concert for them.

...TICKETS COMMUNICATE VALUE, THEY REALLY COMMUNICATE THAT YOU VALUE YOUR GUESTS ENOUGH TO HOST A QUALITY SPECIAL CONCERT FOR THEM.



"I absolutely loved it! Great stories, beautiful songs, vulnerable lyrics. Heart-touching and a great fresh breath to everyone."

Darcy from Colorado



INVITATIONS

On Invitations: Make it personal...

In keeping with the intimate nature of a house concert, it's worth taking the time to personally invite people. Share like crazy on social media, but keep in mind that people always prefer personal contact over computer contact. Pick up the phone or drop a postcard in the mail - house concerts are all about being with people in a more tangible, genuine way.

**The more personal and tangible the invitation;
the more personal and tangible the response.**

On Snacks

If you decide to, you may want to let guests know you'll be providing drinks and snacks, or you may like to invite folks to bring something to share 'pot-luck'. Neither is a requirement for hosting; it's entirely up to you.



I've observed over the years that an hour of arrival time is perfect.

Since most people don't like to be the first to show up, the majority of guests will be around 30 minutes late.

It's a comfort thing, so communicate the event's start time as one hour prior to whatever time the music itself will actually begin.

THE CONCERT

5. The Concert

OK. So you've got folks invited, tickets are sold, and you're ready for showtime! Here's what that looks like:

- 1.** I'll arrive one hour before guests are slated to show up. I'll set up my equipment, merchandise, and have time to settle a bit.
- 2.** Guests will arrive at the time you and I have worked out. Usually it's evening, but depending on the day we can configure it differently. As guests arrive, we'll have about an hour to mingle and get comfortable.
- 3.** After an hour of pre-concert visiting, everyone gathers in the performance space, people get settled in their seats, the host (super-cool you!) gives a brief welcome and introduction, and then I perform for about a little over an hour.
- 4.** After that, I'll head to the merchandise table and everyone hangs out till they start heading home.

THE CONCERT, CON'T

A bit more on the flow of the evening...

I've found that the pre-show mingling time is best right at about an hour. If it's shorter, people don't have enough time to arrive and get comfortable; if it's longer than an hour, the focus of the event gets fuzzy.

Different from a "house party"...

House concerts are incredibly fun, and it's fundamentally important to keep in mind this isn't a 'house party' with music in the background – it's a concert. Guests always feel more comfortable in a new situation when they know what to expect, so don't hesitate to communicate any info that helps them get oriented well to the evening.

Example Schedule

Let's say you want the performance to begin at 7:30pm. In that case, this is what the evening would look like:

5:30 – I arrive and set up
6:30 – Guests arrive
7:30 – Concert begins
8:45 – Concert ends

After that, folks can hang out as long as you like! It's that easy to host a great house concert!



"Matthew's music touches on the story that we all want to be a part of. He delves into the epic, as well as the minute."

Tom, Minnesota

All of these planning details – from invitations, to ticket sales, to the set-up, to the welcome point to the ultimate focus for this event:

To create with you a truly unique and special night: an intimate concert experience, where sweet memories and deep connections with your community will be nourished through songs and storytelling.

This is going to be great!

A few questions for you...

Those are the nuts and bolts of a house concert! If you'd like to host, all that's left is for you to answer the following list of questions and email me your reply (matthewclarknet@gmail.com). Touch base and I'll get your name on the hosting list - remember spots are limited.

Please answer all six of the following questions. Thanks!

1. In what city and state do you live?
2. What is the space you have in mind for the concert? (e.g. inside your house, patio, etc.)
3. What is the total number of people you expect to come?
4. If you expect children to attend, will you be able to provide for a separate, supervised, sonically isolated space for them to be for the entirety of the performance?
5. What is the best email address and phone number to reach you?

How does the tour work?

As soon as I have enough hosts in hand for a certain region, I'll plot a route and let you know a possible date for your house concert! We'll discuss it and you'll pay a \$50 non-refundable deposit to reserve that date.

I can't wait to put on a house concert with you!

Thanks!
Matthew

Contact

Email: matthewclarknet@gmail.com
Cell: 662-801-5306
Web: www.matthewclark.net
Instagram: /matthewclarknet
Facebook: /matthewclarkmusic
Youtube: /matthewclarknet

"Matthew's storytelling between songs is as good as his songs... which are beautiful, touching and thought-provoking."

Erika
Guest, Tennessee



Miscellaneous Pro-Tips...

On Invitations: I recommend that you don't include the concert start time, but only include the event start time. I've discovered that people, understandably, find comfort in showing up late to an unfamiliar event (especially introverts like me!). It's a rare breed that likes to be the first one on the scene! So it's important to include only the event start time or folks will show up half way through the concert (or after the concert - *yes, that's happened!*).

On 'sitting' a good example: As the host, folks are getting a feel from you for how they should feel about their environment. Don't let that scare you though! It just means that you have the privilege of showing great hospitality. One way to do this is to sit on the front row and during the concert let go of whatever else you feel obligated to attend to. When folks see you seated, relaxed, and attentive they will find it easier to enter into the atmosphere of hospitality you are modeling.

On Seat-cards: Another little thing that I do is put mailing list sign-up cards in the seats before guests arrive. Sometimes I even have guests turn in their cards and I'll draw one for a free gift at the end of the night. This invites people to be a part of my work, share comments about their experience, and it's just kind of fun!

On artist accommodations: I travel in my camper van called Vandalf (Can you tell I'm a Tolkien nerd?). That means that I carry my tiny home around with me like a turtle. I may ask to borrow your water hose to fill up my onboard tank or an outside electrical outlet to charge my battery. So as a host, there's no pressure to house me. However, it's fine to offer! I do enjoy getting to stay with folks both to get a break from sleeping in an RV and to get to know new friends on the road. In case I'm super-exhausted from too much extrovert time, I may still sleep in my familiar RV and meet you for coffee the following morning!

On promotional materials: If you need promo stuff, there's a bio and quotes on my website and I can email a printable poster, photos, etc. Include my website (www.matthewclark.net) on whatever you send out, and please visit my Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube pages where you can grab links for sharing audio, video, and images with your guests to build excitement in the weeks and days leading up to your house concert!

On "a listening environment": House Concerts are often confused with House Parties, since they may be a new experience for a lot of folks. House concerts differ because the goal is to create a habitat where guests can enter into a focused time of shared listening. When the purpose of the evening is confused or unfocused by having too many components, it makes it harder for guests to relax because they don't know what's expected of them.

On Merchandise: I will bring a small merchandise setup. I'll need an internet connection and a little space close to the concert area to place all that. Also, if you, as the host, can stand at the merchandise table with me. Since I'll be talking with guests and managing sales simultaneously, it's a huge help if the host is there to take someone's payment while I help another person, for example.

Random things about me: I'm an introvert who loves to be around people, but sometimes retreats to recharge. I love coffee (I'm a home-roaster hobbyist). I like spicy food (Indian especially). No major allergies. I love books. Favorite authors include: Tolkien, Lewis, Chesterton, MacDonald, Nouwen, etc. Cooking relieves stress for me. I really like nutmeg on vanilla ice cream. I floss occasionally.

More questions? Just ask! matthewclarknet@gmail.com