

DAVID & the fire guild BURCHFIELD

House Concert Host Guide



Hey! First of all, we're so excited that you're interested in hosting a house concert. In our experience as performers, house concerts have been by far the most fun, rewarding, and memorable concerts we've ever been a part of. I'm so happy we have an opportunity to experience this together.

This guide will take you step-by-step through the method by which we organize all of our house concerts. In the process of doing house concerts over the past several years, we've learned a lot about how to structure these shows to make them the most enjoyable and successful events that they can be.

It's important that you read this all the way through - even if you've hosted a house concert before - So that we're all on the same page as we start planning together.

At the end of reading through the guide, if all the parameters seem good to you, then I'll have a short list of questions for you that we'll use to pick a date for your house concert.

I hope this will inspire you and get you excited 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, on back patios; In small houses, big houses, condos, and apartments; at warehouses, studios, theaters, and even a park shelter. 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, preferably 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 is gathered close, together, directly** in front of where we’ll be set-up to perform. We’ve learned that seating around tables for the concert works against 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’s also a bit hectic on our end, as we are juggling something like 60 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.

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! **This means that in reality your concert will have about 72% chance of falling on a “school night.”**

But don’t despair! While weekend show can certainly be a lot of fun, we’ve had some of our best shows on weeknights. The bottom line is that if you have a good group of people, you can’t stop the fun from happening, no matter the day. Often, the time from guest arrival until the music is done is typically only about two hours (more on this in a minute) - making this the perfect event for a unique weekday evening get-together.

So, if you want a weekend date, we will certainly try to make that work - but keep in mind that other people will want one too and there only two per week. Thanks in advance for being flexible so that we can accommodate as many potential hosts as possible.

At the end of this guide, one of the questions we’ll have for you is to provide us with any dates that you will be unavailable to host your concert. So if you have a vacation planned, or a wedding to attend, or a regular weekly event that makes you unavailable, we’ll want to know each of those things to help us plan the tour.

#3: The Guests

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



There are two reasons we ask you to have this minimum number of people at the show: 1) Fewer than 20 people and the concert doesn't feel like the exciting event it should be; and 2) in our donation-based concert model, 20 or more adults contributing 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 there usually means that the host will need to invite a good deal more than 20. The typical scenario seems to be that about half of those invited tend to actually come to the event.

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

If you aren't sure you'll be able to get 20 adults to come on your own, you might "co-host" the show with a friend who also has a group of people to invite, and 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, we can absolutely do it, and we're eager to hear what you have in mind. We've done house concerts with as few as 20 and as many as 200 people in attendance and have loved every one of them.

Adults only, please

Because the show has a lot of quiet parts, and because it's essential that we're able to create and maintain an uninterrupted focus on the performance for the whole concert, we ask that there be no kids in attendance during the concert. That said, if it's that rare kid who can sit silently and listen to music for an uninterrupted hour like a little grown-up, that's okay. Every child is different, but we've found that age 10 generally seems to be a rough line dividing those able to display good concert etiquette from those who may end up causing a distraction.

If you're in doubt, it's best to err on the side of caution. Having someone create a disturbance mid-show can significantly affect the audience's experience, which can in turn significantly affect our income. As much as we love kids (SO MUCH), this is my job. Thanks for your understanding and cooperation with this detail!

If you have kids, or if you have friends who want to come but who would be unable to come if their small kids couldn't come along, we ask that you arrange to have a responsible adult take care of the kids in a physically and acoustically separate space during the concert.

This could be a babysitter or a parent willing to volunteer for the duty, and they should take the kids to another room in the house - a place that is sonically isolated from the performance space - and keep them there for the entirety of the concert portion of the event. This works great, and of course the kids are more than welcome to hang out with everyone before and after the performance!

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

#4: The Invitation

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

"This is a donation-based concert"

The Language we'll 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 firm suggested donation amount for our house concerts. Although we typically depend on \$10-25 per person, it is important to us that if you have a friend who is cash-poor but a lover of music 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.



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 fine, and we've done both ways many times. If this approach interests you, please let us know, and we'll 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'd like to ask everyone to bring a little somethings to share. This 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 invitation.

We've discovered that when guests are asked to RSVP, there is a much better turnout rate as opposed to a "come by if you can" approach.

#5: The Concert

So you've invited everyone, RSVPs are in, and you're ready for the show - here's how it goes down!

- We will arrive one hour before guests are scheduled to start arriving in order to set up our equipment and do a soundcheck.
- Guests arrive at the time we have decided together that the event will begin. This is usually in the evening - but it could also be the afternoon if it's a weekend. As guests arrive, **we all hang out and mingle for about an hour.**



- Then, after an hour of pre-concert hanging out, everyone gathers in the performance space, people find their seats, the host (that's you!) gives a brief introduction, and then we **perform for about an hour.**

- As soon as I've played the last note of the concert, you get up front next to me with a vase or basket or box of some kind to make the **donation announcement**. It should go something like this:

"Thank you all for coming tonight. I hope you enjoyed this as much as I did. I want to remind you that this a donation-based concert. Your donations tonight will all directly benefit our artist, and will show them our appreciation for this amazing experience they brought us tonight. I'm going to pass this vessel around and I encourage you to give generously. Thanks again!"

After that, we all hang out some more until the guests start heading home. A note on the donations It's really important to us that we're able to make is so these concerts are possible for anyone to host, and the way we do that is by doing the shows on a donation basis. But since the donations are how we earn our living and pay our expenses while we're on tour, it's obviously super important that we have our host's full enthusiasm behind that aspect of the event.

David is really good at coaching hosts on their donation speech, and he will make a point of going over this with you as we're getting set up on the day of the concert. We'll even give you a little cheat sheet of things to remember to say in case you get nervous and forget in the moment.

We've discovered that the success of the donations has a direct relationship to the enthusiasm of the speech the host gives at the conclusion of the concert.

We've also discovered that guests are always really receptive and super happy to be a part of supporting the unique and memorable event they're just experienced. It's kind of a big love-fest by the end of the night.

A note on the flow of the event, and an example schedule

We've found that it's really important that the pre-show mingling time is really right about an hour . If it's shorter than an hour, then people don't have enough time to get comfortable; and if it's longer than an hour, then the focus of the event starts to get fuzzy.

It's one of the most fun nights of the year to be sure, but it's important to remember that

fundamentally this isn't a party; it's a concert. Let's say you want the performance to start at 7:30. In that example, here's how the schedule would go:



5:30 - we arrive and do our setup

6:30 - guests arrive

7:30 - concert begins

8:30-8:45 - concert ends

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

... and that's how we organize an awesome house concert.

All these details - from the invitations, to the set-up, to the flow of the event - serve the singular goal we have for this event:

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.

It's going to be awesome.

Questions for you

If all of the parameters we've outlined in this house concert host guide seem good to you, and you'd like to host a house concert on our House Concert Tour, then the next step for you is to answer the list of questions on this page.

We'll need you to reply to each of these asap in order to factor your house into the routing for the House Concert Tour. It would be helpful if you could return your replies asap. Please answer ALL seven questions completely. 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, an outdoor space, etc.)
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'll be able to get a minimum of 20-30 adults to come?
b) If you can't gather than many guests on your own, is there a co-host you have in mind?
c) What is the total number of people you might expect to come?
5. a) Do you anticipate there will be children at the event?
b) If yes, will you be able to provide for a separate, supervised, sonically isolated space for them to go to for the entirety of the performance?
6. Please list any dates that you will be unavailable to host a house concert. (Vacation plans, a wedding to attend, recurring weekly commitments, etc. - we need to know about all of these dates so we can avoid scheduling your concert on them.)
7. What is the best email address and phone number which to reach you?

Over the next couple of weeks, we'll be compiling this information from dozens of hosts all over North America, then using everyone's location and availability to stitch together a route that works for as many people as possible. We should have all of this data compiled and a route planned out by the end of the month (if not sooner), if everyone is prompt in their communication.



As soon as we have a date of a list of possible dates selected for your house concert, we'll get back in touch to let you know what those are. If the date looks good to you then we'll book and confirm your house concert! Very exciting. **We can't wait to do a house concert with you.**

- David Burchfield (& the Fire Guild)