

HOW TO ORGANIZE A SHOW

Step 1 – Figure out why you want a show

People book me for several reasons: the love of the music; increasing awareness around a community issue; fundraising, political support, promoting membership in an organization, educational programs, celebrations...

The House Concert: House concerts are a very popular venue and a favorite one of mine because of their intimacy. They often are preceded by a potluck; Or desserts at intermission. The importance of house concerts is that they provide a venue when there is not an established venue available. Many people open their living rooms up to me, entirely to support the music.

Conferences and conventions: When I am asked to play at conferences and conventions, my registration fee is waived and if not on my route, transportation is provided. When I fly, it is with Southwest because of their instrument policy. My music is often used to start the day, introduce panels and plenaries, close them, close the day, and usually have a time slot to do a set of songs. Please do not schedule me to sing as background or when something else is going on in the room. In the business this is called "throw away music."

Schools: When I am brought to colleges and high schools for concerts, teachers assign my shows to the curriculum. I have done concerts through collaboration with the following departments: international studies, sociology, anthropology, English, political science, history, economics, music, religious studies, ecology, journalism, linguistics, and education.

I also do a workshop called Music for Social Change. Sometimes we write songs. Sometimes we talk about how to use the arts to present social issues, to include race, class, gender, sexual orientation, media, health, etc,

I am also available to do residencies to teach musical theater or music as social history. I have a readers theater piece with music about labor history. It makes a good independent study project at either college or high school levels. It is a very moving and vibrant piece where students take on the roles of historical figures. The speaking roles are interspersed with songs.

Children: I do children's shows, but my satire is not a children's concert. The themes of my songs can be very sophisticated for a child. There is playfulness with sexuality, although probably nothing a nine year old hasn't heard, and for younger kids it is over their heads. I use only one FCC censored word which is "tit." Children running around are distracting. It is like talking. Other than my high school material, most of my children's music is in the 4-7 yo range.

Step 2 – Make sure the coast is clear; Choose the right venue

BEFORE setting the date, it is important to check the calendar to see if any other big events are happening on the dates you are considering. Be sure to choose a venue with

a clearly defined listening space. I avoid Restaurants, Cafes, and Bars for this reason, unless they have a designated listening room.

My concerts are interactive with audience participation, and distraction nullifies this connection. Having a quiet space for audience and performer should be a given and understood by all, but it isn't.

Step 3 – Publicize, publicize

Once the date is set, it is critical to ANNOUNCE it asap to community groups so that another group does not book a competing activity that same night. It may be the most important thing you do. You need to let people know, as early as possible. You can't wait until 3-4 weeks before the event. By then, other groups have made plans. The sooner it becomes a community event, the better the turnout will be. This is particularly important for fundraisers. The concerts are a great way to have fun, do outreach, build community, and raise money if you want to do a fund raiser.

When we set a date, the venue should be known. Venues include churches, schools, union halls, community centers, meeting houses, living rooms, coffeehouses, etc.

If you have a community radio or campus station, odds are they have someone with a program who will play my music and announce the show. I can send CDs to them, the earlier the better. I also regularly do phone interviews.

A very effective way to reach people is to announce the concert and/or circulate handbills/posters at other events and meetings preceding our event. Put up posters. Refer people to my website. Coffeehouses put their menu on the back side of a concert poster. I will send you a sample poster. Modify it and send it back to me for review, or develop your own if you have the graphic design skills. I will send it out to my contacts in your area who may not be on your mailing list

My music can be heard on Sound Click at <http://www.soundclick.com/tomneilson>.

Groups you should contact include peace and environment groups such as Sierra Club, anti-fracking, anti-incineration, nukes, mountain top removal, Quakers, Unitarians, Humanists, Ethical Society, AAUP, Alliance for Democracy, labor unions, AFSC, Jobs with Justice, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Truth Out, Code Pink, Veterans for Peace, United Nations Association, progressive student organizations on college campuses, Raging Grannies, etc.

Most communities have local ministers, imams, rabbis, humanists, etc. and/or congregations with a Peace and Social Justice group.

Step 4 – Financial arrangements

When you book me for a show, you are making a commitment and so am I. I will turn away other invitations to play on that date. Depending on the distance traveled and other expenses, I may ask to work with a written contract. Some organizations prefer

this arrangement. The organizer/organization bringing me in assumes all costs of obtaining and using a venue.

Woody Guthrie was once asked to play at a fund raiser and he asked the organizer what he could pay him. The organizer responded that they thought he would play for free because it was a good cause. Woody replied that he only played for good causes. I have done hundreds and hundreds of benefits and raised several thousands of dollars for groups. I can't travel and perform if I am not paid for playing. One anti-war group coordinator in NY abruptly called me a war-profiteer because I make money by writing and performing music for social justice. An unfortunate fact of life is I need to make money from my music or I can't travel with it.

Some groups like to do advance ticket sales, e.g. \$12 advance or \$15 at the door; or \$15 and \$20. My range is usually between \$15-20 dollars. Some venues are not allowed to "charge" admission so we say there is a "donation" of \$15, etc. If people know it is a fund raiser, they are often willing to kick in more money for admission, but you know what the going rate is for a show in your area. If you make the admission too low, say \$5, people attribute less value and maybe think it not worthwhile to come. Plus, you won't make any money. And neither will I. A sliding scale works. I also will put "Or Pay What You Are Able," as another option, on the poster.

Union scale for colleges is \$500. College fees run from \$500-\$1000. Otherwise fees for concerts generally range from \$450-\$500, depending on resources. At fundraisers, some groups prefer to split the gate. Splits range from 80 (for me) 20 (for the host) to 75-25, 70-30. I can work off the split or the fee, whichever you choose. Again, depending on the situation and my overhead in getting to the venue, I may ask for a minimum guarantee.

One church decided to have a Fair (before the show) as a fund raiser with food, games, and tables from different community organizations. One church had an open mic for members of the congregation to perform before the show.

Step 5 – Showtime

I usually do two 45 minute sets. But it is up to you if you want to lengthen or shorten. An intro helps to start the show. Please have someone who can work the stage to intro the first set and bring me back for the second. It is also important to have someone close the show. Sometimes the audience is clapping for an encore. A performer likes to be brought back by an MC. It can be awkward for a performer to bring him/herself back on stage. Especially when a second encore is requested, which has happened.

****Reminder****: The concert may not be recorded without the permission of the performer.

CONCERT NEEDS

Setup: Barring transportation snafus, I like to arrive 1½ to 2 hours before the show. I need a table for my CDs and literature. A card table will suffice, but a six foot table is

much better, as I have literature, shirts, and other paraphernalia. It should be in an area that can be lit and accessible during intermission and after the show.

Stage needs: I know it is not always possible, but is nice to have a quiet room to tune and prepare. I need a chair with a flat surface or small table or stool to put my picks, capos, other props, and a glass of water.

Sound: When sound support is required, it is the sole responsibility of the host to provide. The venue provides the engineer to set up and run the equipment. If there is cost, it is assumed by the venue. It does not come from the performer's share of the gate if that is how I am being paid. If we are using sound support, I require 2 mics. 3 mics are necessary if I have a back up vocalist, but we will know that well before the show. The sound check should be done before the audience arrives, one to 1 1/2 hrs before the start time. ***Note***: Outdoor concerts require sound support!!! There are birds, dogs barking, cars, lawnmowers, frogs, mosquitos, and the great outdoors that carry sound away. Mosquitoes are very bothersome to the audience and often carry them away.

Lodging: Necessary. I am not fussy. When I'm in my truck, I travel with a mat that I can put in the back of the truck. I have a sleeping bag. A bed is more than enough. This ole bod can still sleep just about anywhere. No smoking please; cats and dogs ok. Noise at night is un-desirable. Wi-fi internet access is becoming more necessary as I manage booking activity from the road.

THANK YOU so much for your support! It is you who keeps the music alive and our (I speak for all my road musician friends) gratitude goes out to you. This will be a lot of fun.