

Arts & Humanities Conference, Honolulu 8 – 10 January 2012

Salon Concerts

audience development by invitation, reservation, capacity, and revenue management

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15 December 2011

Abstract

Following the work of an earlier paper “House concerts for art music: multiple stakeholders, audience development, and sustainability” presented at a cultural economics conference in 2010, the author surveyed successful and less successful methods to maximize revenue for house concerts and salon concerts in the USA via a 5.5 week concert tour. These results were compared with those in the Netherlands and Spain. A bespoke concert booking and reservation system (High Note Live) was used for two concerts organized to incorporate results from the tour. Some findings include the proliferation of social network media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter) vs traditional e-mails as alternative means to cast a wider net. Due to the stickiness (high return rate) of such events, it’s found that emailing a large mailing list provides a higher hit rate. Recommendations from the earlier paper were put into practice at these two concerts. This paper discusses differences among the different house or salon concerts in terms of approach, location, audience base, objective, and frequency.

The aim of this paper is to examine the results of 5.5-weeks of concert touring in the USA, comparing best practices of producing new, one-off house concerts with more established house concert series and expanding the concept and structure of house concerts beyond live music performance. This work builds on an earlier paper introducing house concerts as a possible way for musicians to perform for audiences in smaller and more intimate spaces with less formal restrictions and shorter lead times to concert realization.

The author presented the first paper on this subject at an economics conference in 2010. It gave an overview of house concerts in the Netherlands, Spain, and the USA, as a revival of that 19th century European salon tradition in private space. The main purpose is to interest and coach new concert producers with access to space for concertizing as well as share experiences among existing concert producers with regard to common concerns. The guidelines at the end of the 14-page paper provided newcomers with ways of tackling issues every concert producer faces. The author was primarily motivated by the idea of turning audience and fans into concert producers. By doing so, musicians will have more opportunities to perform. As the production of a successful concert requires high transaction costs, such a survey of best practices would deem useful for all concert producers. Research in this area could potentially extend to job and funding opportunities.

Definitions and raison d'être

No doubt performing artists need to perform (in front of an audience) just as composers want their works performed. Performance not only serves as a kind of validation but also the end of a long road of preparation, the process of finalizing a piece of work. Whether it stands the test of time is another matter. Needless to say, the difference between performing in front of an audience whether it's one person or a thousand or whether it's just a microphone for recording purposes and having no audience is huge.

The Oxford University dictionary defines **concert** as “a musical performance given in public, typically by several performers or of several compositions.”

Interestingly, the verb **concert** originates from French *concerter*, from Italian *concertare* 'harmonize' in the late 16th century (in the sense 'unite').

Wikipedia defines a **house concert** or **home concert** as “a musical concert or performance art that is presented in someone's home or apartment, or a nearby small private space such as a barn, apartment rec room, lawn, or back yard.”

The logistics of a holding a concert in a 21st century home can be complicated, depending on a number of factors. These considerations include venue capacity management, reservations, collecting cash or donations, whether the proceeds will be split with the host, marketing and whether to publicize the venue, the equipment or sound system, to provide refreshments or to hold a potluck, whether to have one show or present a series, and the choice of musician.

Common in the historical past, but now unusual in the age of large concert arenas, a house concert is almost invariably described as an "intimate" experience not only because of the small space but also the private nature of the venue.

The words “house concert” and “salon concert” are often used to describe live music performances outside of public concert halls. It helps to clarify the origins of salon.

According to Wikipedia, a **salon** is a gathering of people under the roof of an inspiring host, held partly to amuse one another and partly to refine taste and increase their knowledge of the participants through conversation. These gatherings often consciously followed Horace's definition of the aims of poetry, "either to please or to educate.” Commonly associated with French literary and philosophical movements of the 17th and 18th centuries, salons were carried on until quite recently, in urban settings, among like-minded people. Thus a salon concert refers to a salon gathering with live foreground music i.e. live performance.

In Dutch, the word *huis* (pronounced house) stands for the home. Thus *huisconcert* is a home concert. Google “huisconcert” to see the prevalence of this phenomenon.

Nowadays in the USA, house concerts generally refer to live music performances organized by fans of and for performers of music of all genres although primarily non-classical. Meanwhile, salon concerts are more typically classical. In this paper, we use the words house concert and salon concert interchangeably.

Criteria for success

In general, a successful concert is considered one which meets the expectations of each stakeholder: performer, host, and audience. We evaluate the concerts organized for my piano guitar duo on the basis of the following success criteria: cost coverage and reduction or removal of risk. A sold-out concert BEFORE the event means removal of financial risk. An encore means the audience wants more.

At the minimum, a successful concert covers all financial costs. Such costs include fees to performers, costs of tuning instruments, logistics, publicity, and resources (time, expertise, materials, venue) to make the event happen. Requests for repeat performance indicate success, whether it's an encore or invitation for a return in the future.

At the maximum or more optimal level, after costs are covered, a successful concert reaps profit which can be invested in another concert. Naturally a successful concert has other spin-offs besides repeat performances or future concerts. People connect at concerts, and new opportunities for collaboration arise.

The rest of the paper covers the following topics.

The learning curve: first-time concert producers (virgin) vs seasoned concert producers

One-off versus house concert series

House concert series: ad hoc versus regular

- Regular: concert frequency or dates set in advance
- Ad hoc: no commitment to regularity

Private vs public venues (church, school or university, art gallery, hospital, nursing home)

The lead time to a concert: impromptu vs planned concerts

Free vs paid (audience and performers)

Suggested donation vs ticket sales

Collaboration, in-kind donation or reciprocation (tit for tat)

Sponsorship

Publicity effort:

- Length (history) of concert production and length of mailing list
- Effectiveness of publicity efforts: bring out the desired outcome (getting people to come to concerts)
- Invitation vs announcement
- Personal vs mass e-mail (bcc)
- Poster: visibility in public spaces
- Website: self-service, search engine optimization, “foundability”
- E-mail management
- Social media: linkedin, facebook, twitter, blogging
- Word of mouth
- Telephone
- Face to face

Reservation method:

- E-mail reply
- Advanced payment
- High Note Live: a proprietary bespoke Internet browser-based concert management and reservation system

Capacity management, revenue management, audience development

The experience of Monument House Series in Utrecht:

Started with live music but now we’ve added chef-catered meal, wine tasting or sommelier, panel discussions, fund-raising for a cause (raffle prizes, silent auctions, sales), and other bells & whistles.

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